ISSN: 2348-1390

IMPACT FACTOR: 6.033(SIJIF)

NEW MAN

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

VOL. 12 ISSUE 5 MAY 2025

A PEER REVIEWED AND INDEXED MONTHLY E-JOURNAL

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NEW MAN PUBLICATION

www.newmanpublication.com

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New Man International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies (NMIJMS)
ISSN: 2348-1390 | VOL. 12 | ISSUE 5 | MAY 2025

A Peer-Reviewed and Indexed Monthly E-Journal

Full Journal Title:	NEW MAN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES
FREQUENCY:	MONTHLY
Language:	ENGLISH, HINDI, MARATHI
Journal Country/Territory:	INDIA
Publisher:	New Man Publication
Publisher Address:	New Man Publication Shivram Nagar, Parbhani -431401 Mob.0 9730721393
Subject Categories:	LANGUAGES, LITERATURE, HUMANITIES, SOCIAL SCIENCES & OTHER RELATED SUBJECTS
Start Year:	2014
Online ISSN:	2348-1390
Impact Factor:	**6.033 (SIJIF)**
Indexing:	Currently the journal is indexed in: Directory of Research Journal Indexing (DRJI), International Impact Factor Services (IIFS) Google Scholar

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Editorial

Welcome to the May 2025 issue of *New Man International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*. This special issue brings together 62 papers from scholars and students across disciplines — literature, cultural studies, environmental humanities, digital media, performance studies, linguistics, animal and eco-studies, pedagogy, and more. We have tried to collect work that speaks to our moment: a world shaped by migration, digital change, environmental crisis, questions of identity and justice, and fresh experiments in storytelling and scholarship.

At its heart, this issue explores themes of transformation, resistance, and heritage. Many papers dive into how stories help us make sense of our past and imagine our future. They show how literature isn't just words on a page but a mirror to society's shifts, from colonial echoes to digital revolutions. Others tackle real-world issues like environmental loss, gender roles, and the impact of globalization. What ties them all together is a spirit of inquiry: asking how we can honor our roots while adapting to new realities. In simple terms, these papers encourage us to think about who we are, where we've come from, and where we're headed.

Let's start with the rich world of postcolonial literature and cultural resistance. Paper 1, "Marginality, Colonialism and Migration: A Transnational Reading of Amitav Ghosh's Sea Of Poppies" by Aarya Avadhut Malse and Dr. Dinesh Kumar Nair, sets the tone by examining how migration and colonialism shape identities across borders. It connects beautifully with Paper 4, "Contested East African Spaces: Analysis of Maaza Mengiste's The Shadow King through the Interdisciplinary Lens of Geo-Criticism" by Advaita P Chincholkar and Dr. Dinesh Kumar Nair, which uses geography to unpack power struggles in African narratives. Resistance shines through in pieces like Paper 9 (and its counterpart in Paper 49), "Cycles of Oppression and Postcolonial Resistance through Silence in Shani Mootoo's Cereus Blooms at Night" by Ms. Devyani Balasra and Dr. Satyawan Hanegave, where silence becomes a powerful tool against injustice. Similarly, Paper 13, "Subverting Power: Two Faces of Resistance in A Suitable Boy and The White Tiger" by Drishta Barot, and Paper 17, "The Power of Resistance in Postcolonial Literature: Voices against Oppression" by Jayshri Sidram Biradar, highlight how characters fight back against systems that hold them down.

Cultural heritage and its evolution form another strong thread. Paper 6, "A Decolonized Gaze: Re-Reading of Urvashi Butalia's Select Short Stories through the Lens of Postcolonialism" by Prof. Dr. Kishan Pawar and Ms. Annabel Rebello, reimagines Indian stories free from colonial shadows. This echoes in multiple papers on literature as a reflection of heritage, such as Paper 12 by Dr. Rashmi C. Lengade, Paper 38 by Dr. Rameshwar S. Solanke, and Paper 39 by Dr. Rashmi Chetan Lengade again—each exploring how stories preserve and transform traditions. Food, identity, and race come alive in Paper 26, "Shared Flavours, Distinct Histories: Food as a Marker of Identity and Race in Elif Shafak's The Bastard of Istanbul" by Ms. Pallavi Mogre, while Paper 30, "The Pregnant King by Devdutt Pattanaik: A Representation of Queer Cultural Heritage" by Ms. Priti Siyaram Pathak and Dr. Sangita Kongre, brings queer perspectives into the mix, showing heritage's inclusive side.

Technology and storytelling in the digital age are buzzing with innovation here. Paper 2 (and repeated in Paper 24), "Reading, Listening, and Revolutionizing Storytelling in the Digital Age: The Sojourn from Indigenous Storytelling to Audiobooks and AI" by Ms. Aastha Bhatia, traces how ancient tales meet modern tech like audiobooks and AI. This pairs well with Paper 28, "Digital

Technology and Storytelling: Mythology and the Evolution of Heritage" by Ms. Prachi J Vaidya, and Paper 42, "Rise of Microfiction due to Social Media and its Impact on Literature and Storytelling" by Ms. Rucha Naik. For a futuristic twist, Paper 41, "Cultural Hybridity in the Posthuman Context: An Intercultural Reading of Alastair Reynolds' "Zima Blue"" by Roshan Nair, blends cultures in sci-fi worlds, and Paper 52, "Audiobooks and Podcast Fiction: A Study on the Resurgence of Oral Storytelling Traditions" by Ms. Simran Mahtani, revives old oral ways through new media.

Environmental and animal perspectives add depth to our multidisciplinary approach. Paper 5, "An Elegy to a Perishing Lake and Environmental Rhetoric of Resistance in Softly Dies a Lake" by Anima P, Dr. Dinesh Kumar Nair, and Dr. Suwarna S Suryawanshi, mourns lost nature while calling for action. Paper 29, "Tidalectics of Colonial and Post-Colonial Impulses: A Reading of Amitav Ghosh's Gun Island through the Lens of Blue Humanities" by Prajakta Ravindra Ahirrao and Dr. Jyoti Mundhe, looks at oceans as sites of colonial history. Animal stories get their due in Paper 33, "The Question of Ambiguous Feline Corporeal Identity in Takashi Hiraide's The Guest Cat" by Ms. Radhika Gangadhar and Dr. Dinesh Kumar Nair, and Paper 34, "Locating Animal Geography in David Clement-Davies' Fire Bringer: A Reading from Animal Studies Perspective" by Rahul Ramchandra More and Dr. Jyoti Mundhe. Paper 55, "Digital Technology and the Visual Narrative of the Theriocentric Dystopia in Rise of the Planet of the Apes," extends this to dystopian films where animals take center stage.

Marginalized voices and subaltern narratives are a cornerstone, appearing in Paper 11 (and Paper 20), "Narratives of the Marginalized: Subaltern Voices in R. K. Narayan's Short Story Collections" by Dr. Kruti Vyas, which uncovers hidden stories in everyday tales. Paper 32, "Reclaiming Silenced Voices: Meena Kandasamy's Poetic Critique of Caste and Gender Oppression" by Dr. Satyawan S Hanegave and Ms. Priyanka Kobalkar, fights back against caste and gender biases. Women's plights shine in Paper 14, "Traditional Culture and the Plight of Women in Nadia Hashimi's A House Without Windows" by Mrs. Entisar Showai Ahmed Al sunboly and Dr. Mirza Sultan Baig, and Paper 19, "Between Tradition and Transformation: Social and Cultural Dynamics in Chitra Divakaruni Banerjee's "Affair" and "Meeting Mrinal"" by Kanchan Salve and Dr. Radhika Mukherjee.

We also venture into unique intersections. Paper 3, "Study of the Psychological Impacts of Space Travel in Samantha Harvey's Orbital" by Mr. Abhijeet Madanrao Hiray, explores minds in outer space. Paper 7, "Friendship and Loss in Payal Dhar's "Memory Lace": An Interdisciplinary Reading of Young Adult Short Story" by Mr. Vekhande Balu Laxman and Dr. Radhika Mukharjee, touches on youth emotions. Satire and class critique appear in Paper 36, "Satire as Artistic Defiance: Interrogating Class and Corruption in The White Tiger" by Rajesh Dhotre and Dr. Rajesh Vishnu Yeole. Paper 46, "Mapping Literary Character Networks: A Graph Theory Approach To Analyzing Narrative Structures" by Dr. Sangeeta Bhat, uses math to decode stories, while Paper 37, "Bridging the Gap between Language and Logic: A Study of Mathematical Literacy through Student Responses" by Dr. Rajesh K., links language to math skills.

Other gems include Paper 10, "Performing Arts: Classical Dance In India" by Dr. K. Ratnasree, celebrating dance as heritage; Paper 15, "Exploring the Role of English in the Sanskritization and Westernization of the Indian Masses" by Ms. Geethu Pillai, on language's dual pull; and Paper 60, "Rap of Resistance: Exploring Resistance in Hanumankind's and Gully Boy's Rap Songs" by Uma

Prabhu, showing music as rebellion. Paper 53, "The Impact of the Presence of Virtual Baristas on the Job Satisfaction and Job Engagement of Human Baristas" by Sonal R Jambhekar and Ms. Priyal Karania, brings a modern workplace angle, and Paper 51, "Fracturing the Frame: Gender Roles and Intersectional Identities in Contemporary Cinema" by Dr. Shweta Salian, critiques films through gender lenses.

Paper 21, "Narrative of Transformation: Pre-Adult Sensibility and Emerging Identities in Payal Dhar's Slightly Burnt" by Maheshwari Manish Nera, and Paper 22, "Lakshman- Beyond A Loyal Warrior: Exploring His Character In Toru Dutt's Poem "Lakshman"" by Mansi Morajkar, focus on growth and character depth. Travel and loneliness feature in Paper 25, "In Search Weirdness: Lonely Places and Strange People in Pico Iyer's Falling off the Map Some Lonely Places of the World" by Ms. Neha Gurdasani. Paper 27, "Intersecting Pain, Language, and Culture: A Globalized Reading of Maus" by Parvathy C S Warrier and Dr. Jyoti S Mundhe, and Paper 56, "Laughter As a Form of Epistemic Resistance in Art Spiegelman's Maus" by Ms. Swara Thacker, both draw from graphic novels to discuss pain and humor.

Eco-spirituality emerges in Paper 57, "Eco-Spirituality In Sri Aurobindo's "The Miracle Of Birth", "Ocean Oneness" And "Creation"" by Swati Kshirsagar and Dr. Santosh Mishra, while Paper 58, "Indigenous Culture And Transformation: A Literary Perspective On Radical Animism And Environmentalism" by Tapasya A Choubey, honors indigenous views. Urban life gets a nod in Paper 59, "Indian Urban Fiction: Cityscape And Urban Issues In Payal Kapadia's Maidless In Mumbai" by Ms. Tehseen Khan. Paper 61, "Representation of Colour Burst and Life Affirming Friendship—A Comparative Analysis of Vikas Khanna's The Last Color and its Film Adaptation" by Vaani Vazirani and Prof. (Dr.) Kailas Aute, celebrates color and bonds, and Paper 62, "Weaving Voices of the Marginalized: Subaltern Narratives in Sudha Murty's Three Thousand Stitches" by Ms. Yogita Chandrakant Patil and Dr. Rajesh Vishnu Yeole, closes with empowering tales.

Paper 8, "Delving in the Mechanics of Cognitive Estrangement in Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451" by Mr. Debraj Moulick and Dr. Rajesh Vishnu Yeole, questions reality in dystopias. Paper 16, "Alcohol, Trauma and Transformation: Evolution of a New Culture in Jayaraj V. Thoppil's One Pint of Cheers" by Harmeet Kaur Saini, looks at personal change. Cross-cultural journeys appear in Paper 18, "Connecting Realms: Cross-Cultural Encounters and Cultural Hybridity in Journey to Ithaca by Anita Desai" by Ms. Jisha K R and Dr. Radhika Mukherjee. Paper 23, "From Jingles to Journeys: Consumer Culture and Performing Femininity in Anuja Chauhan's The Zoya Factor" by Meenakshi Nandula, mixes ads and gender. Paper 31, "Bridging Cultures: Globalization, Technology and the Transformation of Literature and the Arts" by Mrs. Priya Singh Sharma, ties it all together. Paper 35, "Subaltern Echoes and Postcolonial Dissonance: Reimagining Indian Identity in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children" by Ms. Rajani Rajabhau Waghmare, rethinks national stories. Paper 40, "Interview Skills and Sociolinguistics: The Power of Language in Hiring" by Ms. Riddhi Kunjwani and Dr. (Prof) Kailas Aute, applies language to jobs. Paper 43, "Reconfiguration of Psychosexual Behaviour in Richard Morgan's Altered Carbon: An Interdisciplinary Perspective" by Rugweda Ramakant Bhatkar and Pranit Anil Shinde, dives into sci-fi psyches. Paper 44, "Moral Awakening in Andre Brink's A Dry White Season" by Dr. Madhavi Nikam and Mr. Sachin Shinde, tracks ethical growth. Paper 45, "Echoes of the East: The Influence of Indian Knowledge, Culture, Language, and Environment on British Culture" by Mr. Sandeep Shankarrao Kulkarni, flips colonial influences.

Paper 47, "Postcolonial Gothic: A Study of Jane Urquhart's Away" by Sanika Joshi, blends gothic with postcolonialism. Paper 48, "Foregrounding the Intersection between Literature and Art in Manju Kapur's The Gallery" by Dr. Savitha Sukumar, merges art and words. Paper 50, "Reclaiming Identity: Resistance, Cultural Hybridity and Empowerment in Postcolonial Literature" by Mrs. Sheetal Abhay Birje, empowers through hybridity. Finally, Paper 54, "Construction Of Femininity In A Desert Travelogue: A Reading Of Robyn Davidson's Tracks" by Sumali Bose, explores gender in adventures.

We encourage you to read across sections. Many of the richest ideas appear where themes overlap: a paper on migration may illuminate an essay on environmental displacement; a study of digital narration may echo questions raised about cultural memory. Please consider sending us feedback, suggestions for future themes, or proposals for special issues. Dialogue between readers, authors, and editors makes a journal alive and responsive.

The papers in this May 2025 issue show that scholarship is always embedded in present concerns. Whether writers are reading classic novels or analyzing the latest podcast fiction, they are also responding to urgent issues — justice, survival, belonging, and care. As readers, we inherit the task of listening closely and acting thoughtfully. We hope this collection widens your understanding, provokes new questions, and inspires further research and teaching.

- **Dr Kishan Pawar**
- **Dr Satyawan Hanegave**
- **Dr Kalyan Gangarde**

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1.

Marginality, Colonialism and Migration: A Transnational Reading of Amitav Ghosh's *Sea Of Poppies*

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Abstract:

Indian diaspora fiction often traces the routes and roots of migration right from the colonial days to show how characters and the constituencies of their identities such as gender, class, caste and linguistic culture move from one place to another. Colonial economy and the subsequent indentureship were the push factors for the emigrants of the 19th century to the Caribbean and African lands. Also known as 'Coolitude' this community of Indian diaspora had a significant presence in places such as Trinidad, Suriname and Gayana. Contrary to the popular belief that migration erases the factors such as class, caste and marginality, indentured migration carried them forward and contested them simultaneously.

This research project is a scrutiny of Amitav Ghosh's oceanic novel, *Sea of Poppies*, which tells the saga of indentured labourers also known as 'girmityas' who build a cultural base in their voyage to the Caribbean islands and negotiate the oppressive cycle of race, gender and class by forming certain collectives that enable them to survive. This project employs the theories of Diaspora Studies, Marginality Studies and Identity Studies to provide the lenses for the scrutiny of Ghosh's novel. Also included are the tenets of Blue Humanities in examining migration, mobility and history of 'Coolitude' depicted in *Sea of Poppies*.

Keywords: Marginality, Gender, Migration, Indenture, Diaspora, Blue Humanities.

The term marginality indicates a condition of disadvantage which often results from economic, social, cultural, or political realities. Marginality is often gauged in terms of the inequality that exists within a society. A scientific and interdisciplinary study of the condition of the disadvantaged or the excluded people from a social group is marginality studies. This study enables one to identify the factors that create inequality and to understand the challenges faced by marginalized groups. In the context of India, across a time frame from the early 19th century till the point of decolonization, marginality can be contextualized in terms of various factors, some of them even overlapping. Social exclusion in terms of casteism and gender divide was one of the major factors of marginality. Dalits, widows, tribals and certain social groups who were traditionally marginalized were further marginalized under the colonial rule which largely replicated and consolidated caste system and gender bias existing in the society. Poverty was another factor defining marginality since colonial exploitation of the colonized rendered the natives exploited and poorer, poverty pushed the majority of Indian underclass into the

margins of society. Regional disadvantage, the remoteness of the physical location from the power centres was another vector of marginality. Many tribals and Dalits living in remote Indian villages had this location-based marginality. Cultural factors that determine identities also contributed to marginality. In colonial India, people of minority and of mixed ethnicities were always at the margins of the society.

Colonialism or imperialism had an exploitative economic enterprise which pushed the natives of India to the margins. Domains such as agriculture, trade and the production of raw materials were controlled by the British government by the early 19th century. Indigenous farmers were forced to cultivate crops which were beneficial for the British trade nexus. For instance, the fertile Gangetic plains were used for opium cultivation which eventually made the farmers too addicts of opium, meanwhile British opium trade flourished. Once prosperous farmers were pushed to the margins of the society and were forced to take loans and sign girmits with the British. These permits forced them subsequently to become bonded labourers or indentured labourers who were to substitute the slaves in the Caribbean and African countries. Such labourers were called 'girmityas' who were forced to leave their lands of origin.

Indentured labourers from India to the Caribbean countries had created typical cases of Minority and Marginality in Migration. These labourers, in an attempt to escape the oppression in India had chosen to migrate creating new spatial and temporal contexts within colonial realities and postcolonial strategies. Tayyab Mahmud argues that colonial indentured labour was a situation that would dislocate colonized bodies by making them available for a global labour market, even when the labourers are rendered subservient as in slavery. He considers indentured labour as unfree labour dictated by the genesis of capitalism. He explains the economy of indentured labourers' migration: "Colonialism, facilitated by an elaborate reordering of international law, filled the coffers of the fledgling mercantile class of Europe and generated the financial resources to engage the "freed" labour in production governed by profit maximization" (Mahmud 218).

Capitalism has always been a global system that incorporates rather than eliminates non-capitalist means of production, resulting in unequal growth across regions. The persistence of accumulation via dispossession is seen in many types of social capital on which capitalism depends but does not financially support. Examples include publicly financed education and infrastructure, unpaid domestic and reproductive labour that is frequently gendered and racialized, and immigration and landownership laws that have traditionally benefitted agribusiness in states such as California. Tayyab Mahmud posits that accumulation by dispossession also generates a labour reserve. While capitalism's "creative destruction" disintegrates traditional livelihoods and separates workers from their means of production, not all displaced people find permanent employment in the capitalist sector. This surplus population, sometimes known as "surplus humanity," comprises of individuals who have lost access to non-capitalist means of sustenance yet are nevertheless caught between diminishing subsistence economies and volatile formal labour markets: "Colonial restructuring of the Indian economy created a surplus humanity, thus furnishing a push factor for the deployment of indentured labour. Besides a push factor, however, such a deployment also needed an attendant global legal frame. Modern international law and its turn to positivism in the nineteenth century furnished the enabling frame" (Mahmud 219-220).

Mahmud argues that India became the main source of labour for sugar plantations not because Indian workers were inherently ideal but because they were more politically accessible than labourers from other regions. As alternative sources became unavailable, the recruitment of Indians was justified on the grounds that they were obedient, naturally suited for agricultural work, and prepared to work for modest salaries. Importing Indian indentured labour eventually became a long-term tactic for sugar production. The colonial Indian

administration subsequently instituted certain criteria and an administrative structure, although at first, labour recruitment and transportation were unregulated. This law preserved the appearance of a "free" contract-based labour system while institutionalizing indentured slavery under official oversight. However, one planter acknowledged that "We want Indians as indentured labourers but not as free men" (Mahmud 233-234) demonstrating the stark divide between indentured and truly free labour. Standardized and non-negotiable, indentured contracts included punitive rather than civil sanctions for violations. Strict laws restricted workers' freedom of movement by tying them to a certain employer and place of residence. Similar to slavery, this system was not founded on market principles and did not adhere to liberal ideals of free labour because indentured labourers were not free to change employment: "Rather than being an avenue of opportunity for the majority of Indians' indenture was an "exile into bondage" as "many found they had exchanged one form of poverty and servitude for another, and many more found only death and disease" (Mahmud 235).

Alessandro Stanziani too discusses the history of indentured labour across the Indian Ocean. He maintains that not only men were transported across the ocean but also women and children as a part of the Indian Ocean trade and indentured labour market. He considers indentureship as a form of forced migration which developed after the abolition of slavery. Though they were in practice before slavery as well, even though not linked with the plantation economy. He explains the basic fabric of indentured migration: "To understand indentured labour, we thus need to keep in mind both the multiple versions of bonded labour in the Indian Ocean and the peculiar notions and practices of labour that the Europeans sought to export into this area – to start with, convict labour" (Stanziani 179).

Convict labour, as a form of penal servitude, is frequently associated with public law and social order. However, its demarcation from private law and other types of slavery was sometimes ambiguous. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Britain sent prisoners to North America, the Caribbean, Australia, and the Indian Ocean, where they were ordered to labour for private merchants and estate owners. Their service periods often lasted seven to fourteen years, with no guarantee of release at the completion of the tenure. By the 1830s, the abolitionist movement began to categorize prison work as a kind of slavery, claiming that convicts had no discretion over the length or circumstances of their servitude. Supporters of the institution said that, unlike slavery, penal servitude was not permanent, was based on judicial conviction, and was not ethnically motivated. Many convict workers were initially sentenced to death, but their sentences were commuted to life imprisonment. However, when Britain's rules were vigorously followed and jails were overcrowded, even people guilty of minor infractions were sentenced to forced labour. Stanziani, thus, describes the plight of the convicts:

> Indeed, the living conditions of convicts depended on the time, the colony, and the estate. In public camps, the inmates were subjected to severe deprivation, while when assigned to private merchants or planters, they were quickly assimilated to slaves and thus often protected as a form of capital (for example, in Australia). At the same time, private masters did not hesitate to punish convicts for disobedience. (Stanziani 179)

Sunanda Sen too discusses the harsh and exploitative practices of the indentured labour system prior to 1842 when it was mostly controlled by private agents. Even when the British government took over, the system remained oppressive. Many labourers were recruited under false pretences, with little knowledge of the real nature of their contracts or the difficulties that lay ahead. Private businesspeople in India oversaw the recruiting process, and once in Calcutta, labourers were placed under the supervision of 'forwarding agents' before being dispatched to plantation colonies. These contracts were then auctioned off to plantation owners, just like the slave trade. Once on the plantations, workers were subjected to great hardship and brutality. Their hopes for improved possibilities were dashed by unpleasant realities like arduous working conditions, inadequate pay, and harsh punishments. Abolitionists distributed a pamphlet highlighting the rampant tyranny and

brutality imposed on indentured servants, pointing out that these atrocities were frequently overlooked or disregarded by plantation managers, magistrates, and government officials. Sen further expands on how the use of indentured labour varied throughout plantation colonies such as that of Jamaica, Demerara, Trinidad, Suriname and Mauritius, but the general system was based on extracting the most labour at the lowest possible cost, frequently at the expense of workers' well-being. The treatment of indentured labourers, from recruiting to plantation experiences, was strikingly comparable to the transatlantic slave trade, creating severe ethical problems about the system's legitimacy.

Amitav Ghosh's oceanic novel *Sea of Poppies* (2008) is a narrative that documents the overlap of marginality, colonialism, and migration in the backdrop of colonial opium trade and the migration of indentured and convict labourers. Ghosh manages to depict marginality in the homeland of the indentured labourers who are rendered powerless by social orthodoxy and poverty and in Mauritius their land of destination in terms of their confined status.

People who are forced to the margins of the society on account of social hierarchy, economic hardship, and institutional oppression are said to be marginalized. With a focus on issues of economic exploitation, caste oppression, gender discrimination, and colonial subjugation, *Sea of Poppies* illustrates the many levels of marginalization that lead people into indentured servitude. Caste oppression is one of the most glaring examples of marginalization. The inflexible social structure governs many aspects of life, from employment to marriage and social mobility. Characters like Kalua, a lower-caste ox-cart driver, are testimonies to how caste-based prejudice promotes structural marginalization. Kalua's persona represents the tyranny experienced by lower-caste individuals. His Dalit identity exposes him to humiliation at the hands of upper-caste men: "Kalua, the driver of the ox-cart, was a giant of a man, but he made no move to help his passenger and was careful to keep his face hidden from him: he was of the leather-workers' caste and Hukam Singh, as a high-caste Rajput, believed that the sight of his face would bode ill for the day ahead" (Ghosh 4).

Indian farmers were exploited by the British by forcing them to grow opium instead of staple crops such as vegetables, wheat, and dal. Under colonial control, farmers were forced to cultivate poppies. They were forcibly made to sign the *asami* contracts. Farmers were unable to refuse financial advances under these agreements, locking them in a debt cycle. The advances thus received barely covered agricultural costs, leaving them with little or no income. As a result of the Company's agents' unjust pricing methods, formerly self-sufficient farmers were economically dispossessed. With little means to maintain their families, they were easy prey for *arkatis* (indenture recruiters), who enticed them with false promises. Deeti's family, like many others, endured extreme hardship, including debt and the possibility of famine. The forced transition from food crops to opium resulted in widespread starvation, revealing how colonial economic policies drove rural communities to the brink, leaving indentured labour as the only way out of extreme poverty:

> But those toothsome winter crops were steadily shrinking in acreage: now the factory's appetite for opium seemed never to be sated. Come the cold weather, the English sahibs would allow little else to be planted; their agents would go from home to home, forcing cash advances on the farmers, making them to sign *asami* contracts. It was impossible to say no to them. (Ghosh 29-30)

Furthermore, gender marginalization is the systematic exclusion and subjection of women on account of patriarchal societal institutions. It shows itself through actions that restrict women's autonomy, limit their choices, and confine them to subservient roles. Patriarchal oppression, similarly, is the structural and cultural reinforcement of male domination, which keeps women reliant on males and denies them power over their own lives. This oppression is frequently institutionalized by marital practices, inheritance laws, and societal conventions that favour male power. Likewise, in the nineteenth century, women were supposed to be subordinate to their husbands and male relatives, with their work

and reproductive role limited to fulfil familial and economic needs. Through Deeti's experiences, Amitav Ghosh explores these themes by highlighting how women are subjected to societal and familial pressure and are denied the right to self-determination. Deeti's fate is dictated by the actions of the men around her, not by her own desires:

> Hukam Singh, by comparison, had seemed a good prospect, not least because Deeti's own brother, Kesri Singh, had proposed the match. The two men had belonged to the same battalion and had served together in a couple of overseas campaigns; Deeti had her brother's word that her prospective husband's disability was a minor one. Also in his favour were his family's connections, the most notable of which consisted of an uncle who had risen to the rank of subedar in the East India Company's army. (Ghosh 30-31)

Historically, caste-based discrimination has pushed Dalits and other lower-caste people to the periphery of society. They have faced institutional discrimination, were pushed into menial work, and frequently denied access to education, land, and social mobility. Moreover, the Dalits have also been used for entertainment—both in degrading ways and as cultural performers for the upper caste and the failure to do so would lead to physical abuse. This exploitative cycle, in which underprivileged populations are transformed into objects of spectacle, is profoundly embedded in the social order and continues to determine how caste operates in Indian society. Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* is a literary investigation of caste discrimination and social marginalization, depicting how lower-caste subjects, such as Kalua, are dehumanized and compelled to public humiliation being forced to be a source of amusement: "The three landlords, after standing a moment nonplussed, went racing off in pursuit of their mounts, leaving Kalua unconscious in the sand, naked and smeared in dung" (Ghosh 57). Examining caste-based entertainment from both historical and literary viewpoints, Ghosh reveals how it works as an oppressive weapon, perpetuating social hierarchy while snatching dignity from the downtrodden.

While *Sea of Poppies* focuses on colonial oppression, Amitav Ghosh also discusses how certain British figures were marginalized for their dissenting viewpoints. Lambert's personality exemplifies this form of marginality: "He learnt that the reason why Pierre Lambert had left his country was that he had been involved, in his youth, in a revolt against his king; that he was shunned by respectable English society because he had publicly denied the existence of God and the sanctity of marriage" (Ghosh 68).

Ghosh investigates the consequences of colonialism on indentured labourers, with a focus on India. Indentured labour was developed to provide inexpensive labour for colonial plantations. The British Empire, which required labour for its opium cultivation and trade allowed the transfer of thousands of Indians through contractual arrangements that frequently resulted in harsh exploitation. The indenture system had an enduring impact on India. Men and women abandoned their villages, often never to return. Families were dispersed, and conventional social structures were undermined. While some labourers returned with cash and new experiences, others returned as destitute and invalids. Deeti comes to know about this system for the first time:

> They are girmitiyas, said Ramsaran-ji, …. although she had never seen a girmitiya before, she had heard them being spoken of. They were so called because, in exchange for money, their names were entered on 'girmits' —agreements written on pieces of paper. The silver that was paid for them went to their families, and they were taken away, never to be seen again: they vanished, as if into the netherworld. (Ghosh 71-72)

Calcutta (now Kolkata) was an important port for the recruitment and transit of indentured labourers. The British created emigration stations, such as the Garden Reach depot, to accommodate potential immigrants before they were dispatched. Many were enticed by promises of success, while others were forced to sign contracts they did not fully comprehend. The depots were in terrible condition, and many labourers were mistreated before they began their journeys. Mauritius was one of the first and most significant recipients of Indian indentured labourers, getting its first batch in 1834. Labourers were exposed to harsh working conditions, long hours, and low earnings. The

British colonial authority imposed stringent control of abuse through contracts, yet exploitations were common. Labourers were subjected to physical punishment, salary deductions, and substandard housing circumstances: "A boat will take them to Patna and then to Calcutta, said the guard. And from there they'll go to a place called Mareech" (Ghosh 72).

Ghosh investigates the impact of colonialism, especially how it warped concepts of freedom and justice. Colonizers frequently rationalized their control as a civilizing mission, promising to bring development and freedom to the people they oppressed. However, this 'freedom' was paradoxical: it was not self-governance or autonomy, but rather latent slavery disguised as enlightenment. Colonialism exploited India's economic and political frameworks, but it also impacted adversely its social structures, notably the caste system. To retain authority, the British frequently maintained caste structures, favouring upper-caste elites and further oppressed lower-caste citizens. Under colonial authority, many lower-caste natives were forced into indentured servitude, being transferred to plantations in locations like Mauritius, the Caribbean, and Fiji with the false promise of 'freedom' and opportunity but in actuality, this was simply another type of bondage: "'It is sad but true that there are many who'll stop at nothing to halt the march of human freedom.' 'Freedom, sir'? said Zachary, wondering if he had misheard. His doubts were quickly put at rest. 'Freedom, yes, exactly,' said Mr. Burnham. 'Isn't that what the mastery of the white man means for the lesser races?'" (Ghosh 79)

Burnham's notion that white domination provides 'freedom' to the 'lesser races' is profoundly ironic. In reality, colonization did not provide freedom; rather, it reconstructed tyranny under a new name. Indentured labourers were 'freed' from their homeland only to be enslaved in plantations. Caste hierarchies were 'preserved' but became considerably stricter during British rule. The British claimed to be civilizing India while ruthlessly exploiting its resources and enslaving its people. *Sea of Poppies* effectively shows this duplicity, demonstrating how colonialism perverted the definition of freedom to justify enslavement.

The *Ibis* is portrayed not just as a ship, but also as a metaphor of the indentured labour system—a repressive colonial organization disguised as a chance for economic and social growth. Ghosh's narrative illustrates how the British twisted the concept of freedom, tricking destitute Indians into believing that bonded labour was their ticket to riches. In fact, the trip onboard the *Ibis* and other similar vessels was a nightmare, with labourers subjected to circumstances reminiscent of the transatlantic slave trade. The journey from India to plantation colonies such as Mauritius, Trinidad, and Fiji took several months, and the conditions onboard these ships were deplorable. The journey, which was meant to be the start of a new life for the labourers, instead became their first exposure to the harsh reality of indentured servitude. One of the most pressing difficulties encountered by labourers on the *Ibis* was overcrowding. The ship's lower decks were packed with passengers, frequently well beyond the vessel's capacity. This overcrowding resulted in the quick spread of contagions including cholera, dysentery, and tuberculosis. The lack of ventilation made the air dense and suffocating, increasing health concerns. Sanitary facilities were either non-existent or deplorably inadequate, requiring workers to dwell in squalor for weeks or months at a time. With no adequate waste disposal, the stink of sewage and unclean bodies permeated the ship, creating an uncomfortable atmosphere:

> Some half-dozen pails and wooden buckets had been distributed through the 'tween-deck, in preparation for the onset of seasickness …. But soon the containers were filled to overflowing, and their contents began to slop over the sides. As the vessel plunged and climbed, more and more of the migrants lost the use of their legs, emptying their stomachs where they lay. The smell of vomit added to the already noxious odours of the enclosed space, multiplying the effects of the vessel's motion. (Ghosh 407)

Ghosh's narrative ends with a vision of Zachary wherein he finds three people are shown watching the boat. These three people including Paulette, Nob Kissin and a woman who had

never shown her face so far hold their hands to show a form of solidarity. These three characters are representatives of the different layers of marginality created by colonialism and indentured labour trade. They stand for the margins and peripheries within the core of imperialism though they also herald hope in the new land of their destinies: "Now, in the fading glow of the clouds, she turned to look at him and he saw that she had piercing, grey eyes. Although, it was the first time he had seen her face, he knew that he had glimpsed her somewhere, standing much as she was now, in a wet sari, hair dripping, looking at him with startled grey eyes" (Ghosh 512).

The agony experienced by indentured workers onboard ships such as the *Ibis* is strikingly similar to that encountered by African slaves during the transatlantic slave trade. Although indentured servitude was technically and legally different from slavery, the servants' actual experiences reveal a different picture. Indentured workers technically 'agreed' to their contracts and transit, but many were duped, forced, or abducted. This recalls the forcible abductions of Africans who were dragged from their homes and sent across the Atlantic. Both the practices under the same ideology saw humans as commodities. Slaves were sold at auctions, and indentured labourers were allocated to plantation owners as if they were property. Similar to many African slaves who perished during the Middle Passage, a large percentage of indentured labourers died before reaching their destinations. Death was an unavoidable reality, whether from disease, starvation, or violence. The horrifying description of life onboard the *Ibis* reveals the grim side of colonial history. It exposes the hardships of indentured labour, dispelling the idea that it was a consensual and fair system. In the novel, Ghosh makes certain that the voices of those who suffered are not forgotten, revealing the hidden facts underneath the empire's magnificent narrative of civilization and development.

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Reading, Listening, and Revolutionizing Storytelling in the Digital Age: The Sojourn from Indigenous Storytelling to Audiobooks and AI.

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Abstract:

When facilitated and independent, creating a scaffold for enhanced reading and generating space for further reading and reflection is possible. The traditional reading and delivery method of storytelling incorporated reflective thoughts and promoted experiential learning. This paper aims to research the essence of such indigenous stories that found their way into the Digital Age and became popularized as audiobooks. The research also aims to trace from various comparative analyses whether digitization alters the true substance of storytelling and Indigenous literature at its core. The paper will also focus on deciphering the journey from storytelling to audiobooks and the relation between orality and writing, examining it through different theories, including Walter J. Ong's theory of "secondary orality". The rhythmic balance of expressions contributes to the vividness of the storytelling traditions that go amiss in audiobooks. However, studying it closely through the proposed research, the intent is to amass the essentials and bring an experiential reading and listening experience for the avid readers turned into avid listeners of the digital age. The paper intends to underline the significance of "formulary expressions," which "…had best be kept intact." The narrative originality should not lodge up in making new stories every time. It should rather focus on managing interaction with the audience. This paper will also cover the voyage of storytelling from "myth-woven and elf-patterned" Indigenous tales to revolutionized reading and listening to books in the digital age, decoding AI and its effect on the same.

Keywords: Indigenous, Orality, Formulary, Myth-Woven.

Introduction

Storytelling has always been canopied under the traditional cave paintings, oral historical traditions, and generational folk culture traditions. The transition in the methods of storytelling and consuming the same has evolved with the digital age. However, there are chances that these methods get marred by technological advancements. The study of these advancements needs to be examined in the research paper, as the preservation of the indigenous tales is significant. The paroxysm of AI in the indigenous storytelling methods has been intensifying after the storytelling and consuming had a seismic shift to audiobooks. The implications of the new discoveries have been startling. Many of the resources come to the readers and audience as speech systems in the form of oral traditions. To adopt novel technological evolutions, it becomes necessary to address the issue of authenticity the digital platforms have to offer. Language forms an aspect that is so astounding that there are thousands of languages and possibly more, but most of it has committed to literature that is written, and to a degree that most of it has never been written at all. Edmonson puts it as "…of some 3000 languages spoken that exist today, only some 78 have literature." There is barely any record of the number of languages in existence and how many of them had been

transmuted into other languages before writing came into the picture. Ong Walter, however, comments that the "…basic orality of language is permanent." Proverbs are an example of how oral culture stays and is accepted with meanings afresh. The fascination appears unabated for centuries irrespective of the language and the acceleration in the print media. However, J.Ong also mentions that writing from the beginning did not reduce. A repertoire of similar themes is found in the oral traditions and oral discourse worldwide. The present scenario registers AI so deep in the system that it is moulding the stories and the oral traditions. Audiobooks have increased the audio consumption of the contents, but the same prediction implies for the protégé of the systems embedded in the course of the demand of the global development of the jalopy. The transformative journey of the shift from traditional storytelling to digital narratives calls for an insightful examination, as it holds both pros and cons of the technology advancement. This paper studies the question of whether– "is storytelling merely mimics the live experience. Or is it truly preserving the essence of storytelling?"

Rationale:

The rationale of this study emanates from the significant aspects of technological headways and the effects they have on the cultural aspects of ancient Indigenous storytelling methods. The digitizing of storytelling has gained prominence due to podcasts, audiobooks, and AI-generated stories. This paper aims to explore the ancient and cultural importance of storytelling. This will help in elaborating the cultural underpinnings taken up by Indigenous storytelling that is digitized today. This paper also aims to examine how storytelling is surviving and thriving in the digital age. The rationale behind this research thus aims to unfurl the metamorphosis of storytelling with the risks of static and passive transmission rather than a dynamic expression of the Indigenous ways. The risk also encompasses the compromising factor where integrity and authenticity become questionable.

Objectives:

Primarily the research aims to examine the impact of digitized aspects of storytelling on the traditional versions of it. It also aims to incorporate the impact of artificial intelligence on storytelling. The objectives also encompass the indigenous communities and their traditional engagements in storytelling. The paper aims to weigh the potentialities of the tools of the digital age to maintain the authenticity of insightful oral traditions. The objectives of this research are incomplete until the equilibrium between technological advancements and cultural preservation is maintained.

Research Methodology:

This research paper conjointly touches upon the qualitative and quantitative methods of collecting and analysing data. To encompass an elaborate and authentic research methodology, the methods incorporated literature review, prominent case studies, surveys (collected from varied age and profession groups) and graphical analysis.

Scope & Limitations:

The scope of this research paper explores the focus on Indigenous communities, covering technologies that include text-to-speech, AI-generated stories, and audiobooks that stress cultural, social, and technology-created impacts.

The limitations of this research area include restricted access to certain indigenous storytelling traditions. Potential language constraints can also limit this research. Survey responses may not be directly adherent to the interaction between Indigenous communities and tech-savvy communities.

"Oral structures often look to pragmatics" (Sherzer, 1974). Ong Walter, in his book Orality and Literacy, points out the impact created by oral traditions vividly. He mentions that " …an oral culture may ask in a riddle why oaks are sturdy, but it does so to assure you that they are…" In the words of Ong Walter, the riddle elicits the "aggregate" and does not question the "attribution." Once a formulary expression crystallizes, it needs to be kept intact just as idioms do (so that it doesn't lose its charm). Redundancy becomes a part of the oral traditions, especially when there is a large

audience. Oral culture promotes "fulsomeness," "fluency" and "volubility." Rhetoricians generally name it "copia". Seniors of the community hold the Indigenous stories as their pride and thus want to convey the same with full integrity and authenticity to the generations. Audiobooks play a crucial role in preserving the Indigenous tradition of oral culture and storytelling. This technological transformation has gained momentum because of the accessibility and riveting experience it provides. However, the essence of storytelling being aptly captured remains a question.

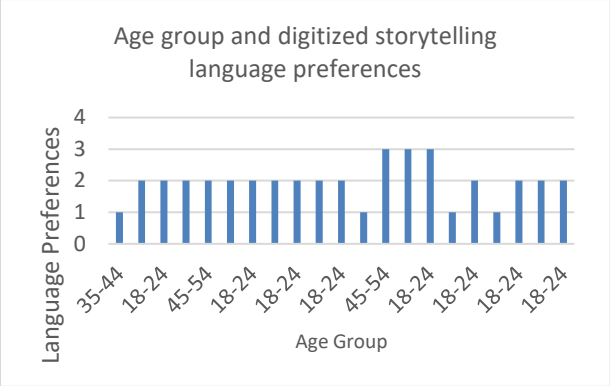
Artificial Intelligence, when used with the components of NLP (Natural Language Processing) and TTS (text-to-speech technology) can mimic human voices closely and create narratives. It can reach a wider audience, but the essence, nuances, and glory can be lost. It also can generate misinterpretation and lead to tampering with the Indigenous oral traditions. The Cultural Community sub-page of the Library of Congress includes the American Folklife Centre Collections. This subpage highlights the "Ancestral Voices" and "Selected Collections from the Folklife Centre." The storytelling materials are available under the subject headings, "tales", "trickster tales" and "legends". The Maine Folklife Centre holds a collection of field recordings from the 1960s, primarily interviews and interactions with Maine and the Atlantic Maritime region. However, the "Jane Willets Collection of Ottawa Language Wire Recordings dates back to the year 1947. This Congress has held various programs related to the indigenous oral storytelling culture, right from its inception. The intent is to bring in lessons with deep insights.

Another example of how treasuring the Indigenous oral traditions makes an impact is- *Adivaani*, a trust based in Kolkata, West Bengal. It is a platform for "Indigenous expression and assertion." They claim that it is "an archiving, chronicling, publishing, and dismantling outfit of and by the 104 million Indigenous people of India (Adivasi). It appears with subheadings as "sound cloud" and " vimeo" where the collections reflect. They also connect through the social media portals such as Twitter and Facebook.

The UNESCO Digital Library also upholds a section named "Digital Initiatives for Indigenous Languages," which highlights the global voices and comes with open access and online search options. The cases mentioned, however, underscore the relevance of both storytelling in its true Indigenous flavour and the way to store and restore it using all sorts of media. The research paper is incomplete without the mention of the survey and data collected through the same.

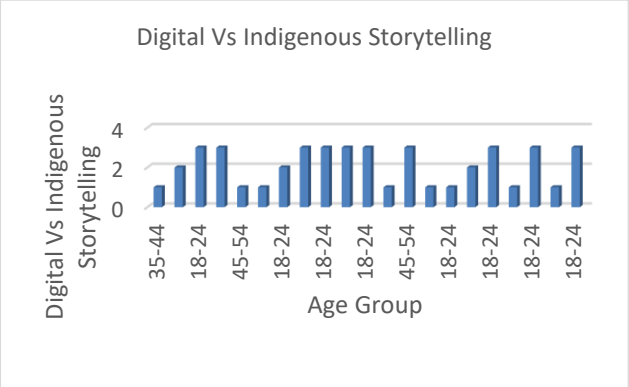
To entail an enriching examination of the research topic, a research survey was carried out where people of various ages and varied professional experiences marked their choices and contributed to the data scrutinization for the paper. The survey conducted was titled "Survey on Technological Headways to Storytelling," with a description that it intends to investigate the seismic shift from indigenous storytelling to novel technological methods. It is also meant to examine the audience preferences based on the digital tools and the enhanced experience related to them. There were 20 questions that were framed to analyze whether the technological advancement is taking people closer to their Indigenous storytelling and receiving or a serious breach is being created between the two. The questions included the age group, the primary language for consuming stories, the frequency of listening to audiobooks or podcasts, experiencing traditional or Indigenous storytelling, preferred formats for experiencing storytelling, preservation of the essence of traditional storytelling (vs. audiobooks, AI-generated stories, etc.), the most valued aspect of storytelling, audiobook adaptations of Indigenous storytelling, advantages of audiobooks and AI-generated storytelling among others.

To put it precisely, a few graph plots will aid in a clearer picture of the same.



Graph 1: Age group and digitized storytelling language preferences, where 1 is Hindi, 2 is English, 3 is indigenous languages/mother tongue and 4 is any other.

This graph shows a varied age group range and the language preferences of the people marking that age group. The age groups majorly block from 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, and 45-54. The language preferences of consuming podcasts, audiobooks, and any other digitized content highlight English as it plots majorly at number 2. The other preferences are scantily numbered as per the data collected. The consumption is high in the convenient language. However, another graph will take the other concerns related to the research into account.

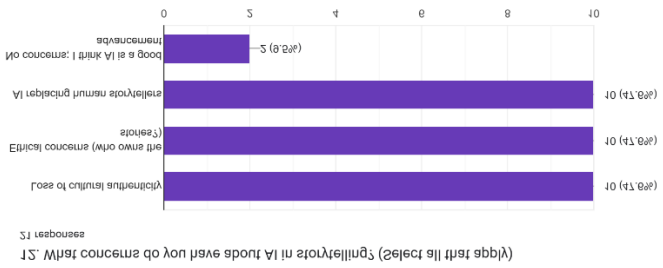


Graph 2: Digital Storytelling vs. the essence of indigenous storytelling where 1 is no, it cannot replace traditional storytelling; 2 yes, completely; 3 is somewhat, but something is lost.

This graph estimates the preferences based on digital vs. indigenous methods of storytelling. The question posed for the same was, "Do you believe digital storytelling (audiobooks, AI-generated stories) can preserve the essence of Indigenous storytelling?" The answers collected show a discrete shift as it boils down to either 1 or 3 majorly. Where 1 holds the option "No, it cannot replace traditional storytelling," and 3 scales up to the response "somewhat, but something is lost." That something that is lost opens the room for cautious optimism that blends the idea that AI-generated storytelling could be useful but has risks. The responses have also recorded skepticism toward the authenticity of the AI-generated version of Indigenous stories.

Conclusion:

Journeying from Indigenous storytelling to the digitized versions of it is in itself a complete, intricate structure. However, a balanced blend of caution and innovation can minimize the friction and create harmonized story-capturing experiences. Reading about the oral traditions lenses the essence to a great extent but loses the naturalness of the story if under- or over-worded. Thus, revolutionizing reading and listening added a strong foothold. Technological advancements cannot be negated but embraced. However, if not handled with caution, technology as a tool may lead to the failure of the inability to encase the authenticity of indigenous storytelling.



Graph 3: AI and Storytelling Concerns

This graph depicts one of the questions asked in the survey that talks about AI concerns. The responses adhere to the first three options that talk about the cultural authenticity being marred, ethical ownership concerns, and AI replacing human storytellers. Merely 9.5% acknowledge the contribution of AI in the positive advancement when concerned with storytelling. The data collection also sediments to a few points when preserving the indigenous storytelling in the digital formats is the concern. The involvement of audience and Indigenous storytellers on websites and portals by bringing in their voices, maintaining the oral storytelling techniques in audio form, and avoiding AI-

generated content, at least for Indigenous storytelling methods, can initiate authentic preservation.

Suggestions:

The community-driven and community-initiated storytelling centers (that function both online and offline) can be set up. Indigenous storytellers should be the guides during generation of AI-sourced stories. Language bolstering and audiobook adaptations should be juxtaposed. If required, a return to live storytelling methods should be paved. An amalgamation of digital and traditional methods can then be reflected in the Folklife centers, as highlighted through the case study of the Library of Congress.

Recommendations:

Ethical storytelling must be prioritized over all the methods being used for digitization of the same. Win-win partnerships or collaborations between Indigenous storytellers and tech developers can create a rewarding experience for the audience. The licensing and the cultural ownership Rights must be detailed in the platforms for authenticity and credit to the bearers.

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3.

Study of the Psychological Impacts of Space Travel in Samantha Harvey's *Orbital*

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Abstract

Orbital (2023) by Samantha Harvey, offers a lyrical and introspective portrayal of a day in the life of six astronauts aboard the International Space Station. Through poetic prose and shifting perspectives, the novel explores the psychological complexity of life in orbit. This paper examines how Harvey's narrative captures key psychological stressors associated with space travel such as isolation, confinement, altered perception, and existential reflection while simultaneously highlighting moments of beauty, connection, and transcendence. Drawing on psychological research from space agencies and astronaut experiences, this study positions *Orbital* as a compelling literary reflection of the mental and emotional landscapes of space travellers.

Key Words: Psychological Impacts, Space Travel, Isolation, Existence, and Transcendence

Introduction

Space has long served as fertile ground for storytelling, from tales of heroic exploration to cautionary dystopias. Yet few authors have captured the quiet psychological and existential terrain of space travel with the lyrical precision of Samantha Harvey. A critically acclaimed British novelist known for her introspective and philosophically rich prose, Harvey has explored themes of memory, time, and consciousness in earlier works such as *The Wilderness* and *The Western Wind*. With her 2024 Booker Prize–winning novel *Orbital*, she turns her gaze skyward, offering an intimate, poetic, and profoundly human portrait of life aboard the International Space Station.

Unlike traditional space fiction that thrives on technological suspense or alien encounters, *Orbital* is grounded in the rhythms of ordinary life lived in extraordinary circumstances. The novel unfolds over the course of a single day, orbiting Earth sixteen times alongside six astronauts—*Anton, Roman, Pietro, Nell, Shaun*, and *Chie*—each from different nations, each bearing the weight of memory, longing, and reflection. As they float through modules and gaze down upon a fragile Earth, Harvey immerses readers in the astronauts' inner worlds, weaving a tapestry of thought that explores the boundaries of solitude, connection, and identity.

With its spare yet luminous style, *Orbital* bridges fiction and psychological realism, giving voice to the quiet reckonings that occur far from home. The novel not only extends Harvey's fascination with the limits of human experience but also expands the literary tradition of space fiction by grounding it firmly in the interior. In doing so, Harvey not only earned the 2024 Booker Prize but also secured her place among contemporary fiction's most insightful observers of the human condition.

Psychological Impacts of Space Travel depicted in ***Orbital***

Isolation and Emotional Vulnerability:

In *Orbital*, Samantha Harvey captures the deep psychological effects of space travel, particularly the sense of isolation and emotional vulnerability that arises from being far from Earth-not only physically, but emotionally and existentially. Over the course of one day and sixteen orbits, the astronauts-Anton, Roman, Pietro, Nell, Shaun, and Chie-grapple with the unique solitude of life in space. The novel's narrative style, rich in internal monologue and

sensory detail, allows readers to experience how the vast, silent void of space acts as a catalyst for inner reflection.

Harvey writes:

"They look down and they understand why it's called Mother Earth. They all feel it from time to time. They all make an association between the earth and a mother, and this in turn makes them feel like children"(Orbital, Page-08) "…without that earth we are all finished. We couldn't survive a second without its grace, we are sailors on a ship on a deep, dark un-swimmable sea". (Orbital, Page-09) "None of them knows what to say to Chie, what consolation you can offer to someone who suffers the shock of bereavement while in orbit.(Orbital, Page-09)

This passage captures the core feeling that pervades the novel: a profound distance from the familiar, a detachment that intensifies introspection. Though the astronauts work and live in close quarters, they experience a private, personal loneliness that resonates throughout the narrative.

Examples of Emotional Vulnerability

- **Nell** frequently reflects on her child back on Earth. Her thoughts drift into memories of early motherhood-sensory fragments like the warmth of skin, the feel of small hands, or the rhythm of night routines. For Nell, space is not just about scientific work or observation-it is a place of emotional displacement, where the absence of physical contact with her child creates a subtle but persistent ache.
- **Chie's** inner world is shaped by the recent death of her mother, a loss she processes silently while orbiting the Earth. Her grief is understated but powerful, surfacing in moments when she looks down at the planet and feels both connection and separation. Space becomes a kind of mourning chamber, where the vastness around her contrasts with the intimate, irreplaceable bond she has lost. The quiet rituals of the day-eating, floating, and observing-are tinged with a sense of remembrance and vulnerability.

  "Chie says quite suddenly, My family have offered to wait and have the funeral when I arrive home, but I didn't want that, so it will be tomorrow." (Orbital, Page 98)
- **Pietro and Anton** exhibit emotional distance in different ways-Pietro through scientific focus and Anton through philosophical detachment-but both occasionally allow their memories to surface. Their introspection suggests that, in the absence of Earth's sensory overload, space offers mental clarity that brings unresolved feelings into focus.

Symbolic and Emotional Isolation

The International Space Station itself becomes a symbol of this psychological experience: a vessel floating in darkness, sealed against the vacuum of space, carrying human minds full of memories, regrets, and fragile hope. The emotional isolation depicted in *Orbital* is not about loneliness in the dramatic sense, but about the quiet confrontation with the self that space enables.

Through the astronauts' reflections-particularly Nell's longing for her child and Chie's mourning for her mother-Harvey reveals that the greatest emotional challenges in space may not come from external dangers, but from within. *Orbital* becomes a testament to how isolation can lead to introspection, emotional reckoning, and ultimately transformation, showing that space, while silent and vast, echoes with the voices of the human heart.

Altered Perception and the "Overview Effect"

One of the most prominent psychological phenomena described in astronaut memoirs is the *Overview Effect*-a cognitive shift in awareness when viewing Earth from orbit. Harvey channels this experience through moments of intense sensory and emotional reflection: "They will each be here for nine months or so, nine months of this weightless drifting, nine months of this swollen head, nine months of this sardine living, nine months of

this earthward gaping, then back to the patient planet below."(Orbital, Page 02)

The novel's poetic structure enhances the disorienting and sublime nature of orbital existence. This sense of awe, according to psychologists like Frank White, who coined the term *Overview Effect*, can lead to increased empathy and global consciousness-sentiments echoed by the astronauts in *Orbital*.

Temporal Dislocation and Routine

One of the most subtly disorienting psychological effects portrayed in *Orbital* is the distortion of time. In space, time does not flow in familiar patterns. On Earth, time is anchored by sunrise and sunset, work and rest, waking and dreaming. On the International Space Station, where the astronauts orbit Earth approximately every 90 minutes, they experience sixteen sunrises and sunsets each day—a rhythm that defies the natural biological expectations of the human body and mind. Samantha Harvey captures this temporal dislocation with poetic precision. She writes, "…and so it is, but in this new day they'll circle the earth sixteen times. They'll see sixteen sunrises and sixteen sunsets, sixteen days and sixteen nights…the whip-crack of morning arrives every ninety minutes." (Orbital, Page-05)

They feel space trying to rid them of the notion of days. It says: what's a day? They insist it's twenty-four hours and ground crews keep telling them so, but it takes their twenty-four hours and throws sixteen days and nights at them in return. They cling to their twenty-four-hour clock because it's all the feeble little time-bound body knows - sleep and bowels and all that is leashed to it. But the mind goes free within the first week. The mind is in a dayless freak zone, surfing earth's hurtling horizon. *(Harvey Page-13)*

This line encapsulates how cyclical and non-linear time feels aboard the ISS. Unlike on Earth, where day and night mark the passing of time and give structure to the human psyche, the astronauts in *Orbital* float through repeated transitions of light and darkness that begin to feel meaningless. Time becomes a loop rather than a line, and with it, the astronauts' sense of continuity and progress begins to shift.

Routine becomes both Anchor and Aggravator

To cope with this disorientation, the astronauts follow strictly regimented routines: physical exercise, scientific tasks, maintenance duties, scheduled meals, and sleep cycles. These routines serve as psychological anchors, helping to replace natural temporal cues with artificial structure. However, Harvey reveals that this structure can also be mentally exhausting and emotionally numbing. The repetition, while necessary, can become maddening, creating a sense of stasis rather than progress. Time feels simultaneously fast and slow, familiar and surreal. For instance:

- Roman finds himself counting tasks not by the clock but by orbital rotations-marking time in sunsets and software updates. "Today is his four hundredth and thirty-fourth day in space, a tally arrived at over three different missions. He keeps close count" (Harvey, Page-04).
- Anton reflects on "Absently Anton runs his fingers over a lump that's appeared on his neck the last fortnight and that he tries to obscure by raising the collar of his polo shirt. The last thing you need is to get sick in space" (Orbital, 91).
- This portrayal resonates strongly with space psychology research, particularly studies conducted by NASA and the European Space Agency (ESA). Astronauts commonly experience temporal disorientation, where the absence of natural light-dark cues leads to disrupted circadian rhythms, resulting in:
- Insomnia or irregular sleep cycles
- Mood fluctuations
- Decreased cognitive performance
- A loss of temporal context (difficulty recalling what day it is or how much time has passed)

Harvey doesn't just describe these effects-she immerses the reader in them, using a flowing, meditative narrative style that mirrors the fluidity of time in orbit. Paragraphs blend from one reflection to another; there are few sharp breaks or narrative markers, mimicking how one thought or moment can bleed into the next in a space where day and night no longer serve as boundaries.

Philosophical Implications

Temporal dislocation also opens the door to philosophical reflection. Removed from Earth's ticking clocks, the astronauts begin to question the meaning of time itself. Without deadlines or commutes, without seasons or aging faces, time becomes less a measure of productivity and more a backdrop for existential awareness.

> …that's what we're doing when we come into space, asserting our species by extending its territory. Space is the one remaining wilderness we have. The solar system into which we venture is just the new frontier now our earthly frontiers have been discovered and plundered. That's all this great human endeavour of space exploration really is, he thinks, an animal migration, a bid for survival..." (Orbital, 107)

In *Orbital*, Harvey turns the distortion of time into more than a physical inconvenience-it becomes a lens through which we view the psychological and philosophical consequences of spaceflight. Routine becomes both saviour and tormentor; time becomes both a loop and a mystery. By capturing these nuances, Harvey shows how space affects not just the body but the perception of self and reality, revealing time as one of the most fragile constructs we carry with us from Earth.

Group Dynamics and Intimacy in Confinement

The novel is structured through a rotating third-person perspective, offering glimpses into each astronaut's inner life. This narrative choice allows Harvey to explore interpersonal tensions and unspoken bonds. The psychological reality of team dynamics-conflict avoidance, alliance-building, and emotional suppression-is evident in the subtle ways characters interact or withdraw.

> There is that idea of a floating family, but in some ways they're not really a family at all- they're both much more and much less than that. They're everything to each other for this short stretch of time because they're all there is. They're companions, colleagues, mentors, doctors, dentists, hairdressers…" (Orbital, 18)

Unlike dramatized conflict in many space narratives, Harvey focuses on the emotional restraint required in such settings, mirroring findings from long-duration missions where emotional expression is often subdued to maintain harmony.

Conclusion

Samantha Harvey's *Orbital* stands as a poignant exploration of the psychological dimensions of space travel, presenting astronauts not as emotionless professionals but as deeply human individuals navigating the emotional terrain of life in orbit. Through introspective narration and poetic language, Harvey captures the subtle shifts in identity, memory, and emotional vulnerability that arise when individuals are suspended between Earth and the void. Her characters-Anton, Roman, Pietro, Nell, Shaun, and Chie-are rendered with psychological depth, each offering a window into the mental challenges and transformations that occur in the confines of the International Space Station. Drawing from real-world research and astronaut experiences, the novel echoes the findings of space agencies like NASA and ESA, while also extending beyond them by capturing what scientific data often cannot: the interiority of the human soul. As space exploration advances, *Orbital* serves as a literary reminder that the greatest distance may not be between Earth and the stars, but between our external achievements and our internal lives. In this way, Harvey's novel redefines space not only as a physical frontier, but as a psychological and emotional one, where the journey inward is just as vast as the journey outward.

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4.

Contested East African Spaces: Analysis of Maaza Mengiste's *The Shadow King* through the Interdisciplinary Lens of Geo-Criticism

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Abstract:

Geo-criticism is an interdisciplinary analytical approach which combines Literary Studies with spatial features. It draws from a variety of domains such as Geography, Architecture, Urban Studies and Culture Studies. In particular, it tries to locate contested spaces in literary representations of places, locations, mobility, boundaries and so on. Furthermore, Geo-criticism upholds the argument that literature can provide transgressive representations of space and narratives can be used to cross boundaries to create new relationships between people and places. Geo-criticism compels Literary Studies to give up insularity by helping literature scholars to look at real and fictional spaces in an interdisciplinary mode. Literatures of marginalized groups are often seen mapping alternate geographies and locations in order to challenge many traditional notions of race, class and identities.

This paper examines the possibility of reading *The Shadow King*, a novel written by an East African woman, Maaza Mengiste through the interdisciplinary lens of Geo-criticism. This paper problematizes spatial categories such as home and nation that are understood differently by Mengiste's characters in the narrative. Narrated in the backdrop of the Italo-Ethiopian War, *The Shadow King* brings into focus the colonial spaces which shape the collective identities of the natives. This paper also looks into the human geography that Mengiste documents in the context of colonialism, violence and dispossession.

Keywords: Geo-criticism, Spatiality, Colonialism, Dislocation, Symbolic Spaces

Geo-criticism is a relatively recent critical approach within literary and cultural studies. It delves into the intricate relationships between literature and physical spaces. It also focuses on the study of geographical space in literary texts. Further, it examines how texts represent, construct and interact with geographical locations, considering the spatial dimensions of narratives and offering insights into how these narratives shape and are shaped by the places they depict. Geo-criticism emerges from the broader 'Spatial turn' in humanities and social sciences which happened in the late 20th century. It integrates interdisciplinary methods to explore how literature engages with space and place. Geo-criticism emphasizes the inherent spatiality while focusing on those aspects of literature that give meaning to human spatialized sense of being. It is rooted in understanding that space is not merely a passive backdrop for action but an active component of narrative construction. This approach draws from various disciplinary traditions, including geography, philosophy, sociology and literary studies, to explore how spaces are represented in literature and how these representations

influence the readers' perceptions of both real and imagined places. Central to Geo-criticism is the distinction between 'space' and 'place'. Space is often seen as an abstract, undifferentiated expanse whereas place is infused with specific meanings, histories, and emotional resonances. Geo-criticism explores how literature transforms space into place through narratives, infusing it with cultural, historical, and personal significance.

The 'Spatial turn' in humanities and social sciences emphasized the importance of space in understanding human behavior and cultural production. Geo-criticism, is a part of this broader movement. It seeks to reframe literary analysis through a spatial lens, considering how narratives construct and interact with the spaces they depict. Russian Literary scholar, Mikhail Bakhtin used a term **'**Chronotope'. It refers to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships in literature. Geo-criticism examines how different chronotopes shape narratives and their spatial dynamics, highlighting interplay between time and space in literary texts. Geographer, Yi-Fu Tuan, coined the terms 'Topophilia' and 'Topophobia'**.** These terms refer to the affected bond between people and places (Topophilia) and the fear or aversion to places (Topophobia). Geo-criticism analyses how literature evokes these emotions, constructing spatial experiences that resonate with the readers on an emotional and psychological level. Some significant thinkers such as Bertrand Westphal, Robert T Tally Jr, Yi-Fu Tuan, Michel Foucault and Franco Moretti have shaped the evolution of Geo-criticism.

Bertrand Westphal is often considered the pioneer of Geo-criticism. His seminal work, *Geo-criticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, has laid the groundwork for understanding how narratives construct and interact with geographical spaces. He affirms that the boundaries between the 'real' and the 'imagined' spaces are unstable and ambiguous and hence the lines dividing them are crossed and re-crossed. His brand of Geo-criticism is characterized by its interdisciplinary nature and its emphasis on the dynamic interplay between texts and spaces. He argues that understanding the spatial dimensions of literature requires integrating insights from multiple fields. He draws on theories and methodologies from geography, such as spatial analysis and cartography; as well as from philosophy, such as phenomenology and the study of spatial perception. His concept of 'Heterotopias' is central to his geo-critical framework. This concept has been inspired by Michel Foucault. Heterotopias are worlds within worlds. They are spaces that exist outside of ordinary time and space often serving as sites of otherness, resistance or alternative social orders. In literature, Heterotopias are spaces that challenge conventional spatial and temporal boundaries, creating a sense of disorientation and possibility.

Westphal talks about the new spatiality inherent in the postmodern condition in spatial metaphors namely; Temporality (Spatiotemporality), in the mobility of space **(**Transgressivity) and in the close connection between the world and the text (Referentiality). Spatiotemporality is the interconnectedness of spatial and temporal dimensions, where time and space are inseparable in narrative construction. Westphal also talks about Referentiality as the relationship between fictional spaces and real-world geographies that challenges the notion of a strict separation between fiction and reality. Referentiality emphasizes the ways in which literary spaces interact with and transform real-world geographies: "Literary postmodernism offered a new de-realized version of reality and literature is perhaps the best option for reading this new world, by virtue of its very fictionality" (Westphal 90).

Mustafa Wael discusses the four key premises for Geo-criticism postulated by Westphal namely, Multifocalization, Polysensoriality, Stratigraphy, and Intertextuality. "Multifocalisation involves the confrontation of several optics that correct, nourish, and mutually enrich each other" (Westphal 113). Multifocalization is characterized by three main perspectives—endogenous, exogenous and allogenous where any sense of exoticism is resisted in an endogenous perspective and it offers a native

point of view, while the exotic representation of spaces is highlighted in an exogenous perspective. Allogenous perspective offers liminal space, a hybrid spatial point of view. Westphal's Polysensoriality promotes 'sensuous geography' according to Wael, while Stratigraphy is based on the idea that a given place can be represented and re-presented encompassing all layers of symbols and signified accumulated over time. The broader implications of Westphal's Geo-criticism are rethinking space and place in literature, interdisciplinary approaches to literary analysis, engaging with contemporary cultural and political issues and cartographic analysis.

Geo-Criticism is an interdisciplinary approach to literary and cultural studies that analyses place, space, maps and other spatial units rendered in various cultural texts. It examines the real space, cartographic representations, imagined spaces, alternate spaces and contested spaces along with the gender and social configurations that happen along them. This paper examines East African writer's, Maaza Mengiste's *The Shadow King* using the tenets of Geo-Criticism to show how the novelist constructs and challenges various spatial representations in the backdrop of Italo-Ethiopian War.

The Shadow King is written by the Ethiopian American writer Maaza Mengiste. Though born in Addis Ababa, Mengiste's family had to flee the nation during the Ethiopian revolution and subsequently the young Mengiste had to spend her childhood in Nigeria, Kenya and the United States. Later, when she started writing, she focused on the plight of the sub-Saharan immigrants in Europe even while narrating stories of families. She comments on the allegorical significance of her female character: "her great grandmother represents one of the many gaps in European and African History. *The Shadow King* tells the story of the Ethiopian women who fought alongside men, who even today have remained no more than errant lines in faded documents" (Mengiste 425).

The Shadow King is set during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. While the novel begins and ends at the train station in 1974, most of the episodes in the book take place in 1930s, just before and during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War and follows Ethiopian characters as they resist Italian occupation. The narrative effectively blends themes of memory, identity, and power that are all profoundly ingrained in Ethiopian culture. Mengiste's use of physical and symbolic settings to enhance the narrative may be examined through the lens of Geo-criticism a critical method that takes into account how imagined geographies reflect and mould historical and cultural realities, as well as how actual geographical places and locations impact stories and people.

The Second Italo-Ethiopian War (1935–1937), a pivotal historical event in which Ethiopians resisted Italian colonisation, provides a setting for *The Shadow King*. The story highlights the significance of Ethiopian landscapes in the resistance movement by depicting them effectively, from the highlands to rural settlements. These locations are more than just backdrops; they are essential to the story and have an impact on the experiences and acts of the characters.

From the novel's outset, the connection between place, identity, memory as well as history is evident. Mengiste presents the idea of historical memory as being intricately entwined with the physical environment. The land is a storehouse of collective memory, marked with cultural history and scars of the conflicts of the past. In Geo-criticism, places are more than merely geographical locations; they are also sites of significance and memory. *The Shadow King*'s references to historical events and individuals help to set the narrative in a particular time period. The terrain gives the present conflict a sense of continuity and purpose by serving as a reminder of earlier struggles and sacrifices. The episode of Hirut sitting in a corner of the Addis Ababa train station illustrates this relationship between location and historical memory of Ethiopian women and how it impacts characters:

She has watched while a parade of young women, raising fists and rifles, march past the bus taking her to Bahir Dar. They stared at her, an aging woman in her long drab dress, as if they did not know those who came before them. As if this were the first time a woman carried a gun. As if the ground beneath their feet had not been won by some of

the greatest fighters Ethiopia had ever known, women named Aster, Nardos, Abebech, Tsedale, Aziza, Hanna, Meaza, Aynadis, Debru, Yodit, Ililta, Abeba, Kidist, Belaynesh, Meskeren, Nunu, Tigist, Tsehai, Beza, Saba, and a woman simply called the cook. (Mengiste 4)

Mengiste ties Hirut's identity closely to the land she inhabits. Her familiarity with the terrain, her ability to navigate its challenges, and her deep emotional connection to it all underscore the idea that place is a crucial component of her identity. This aligns with Geo-criticism's emphasis on how geographical locations shape personal and collective identities. Landscape is used in this narrative to reflect Hirut's inner world. The land around her is depicted in a state of tension and anticipation, mirroring her inner struggles:

Hirut stares at the sunlit vista pressing itself through the swinging doors. As they start to close, she holds her breath. Addis Ababa shrinks to a sliver and slips out of the room. Ettore slumps and falls back into darkness. When they finally shut, she is left alone again, clutching the box in this echoing chamber. She feels the first threads of a familiar fear. I am Hirut, she reminds herself, daughter of Getey and Fasil, born on a blessed day of harvest, beloved wife and loving mother, a soldier. It has taken almost forty years of another life to begin to remember who she had once been. (Mengiste 5)

Mengiste focuses on Hirut's servant quarters to emphasize how spaces correspond to classes. It also shows the internal workings of Hirut's mind and symbolizes her identity. Westphal has used this spatial metaphor of referentiality[1] when talking about Geo-criticism saying that it highlights the ways in which literature reflects and shapes the cultural understanding of space:

She stands at the door of the servant's quarters and sees for the first time how truly small it is, how dingy and shrunken the space she has called home for almost a year. In the semidarkness of the cramped room, Aster, dressed in a lovely abesha chemise, feels too much for this space that is barely enough for anything. It is less than a box, it is an airless hole enclosed in mud and straw and dung. There is no proper door, no crisp windowpane. They sleep on mattresses they have to roll up so they can walk. (Mengiste 12-13)

Mengiste has made a literary cartography[2] in the novel while describing the onset of war and the anxiety and the frustrations of natives about having to follow a geographical map when they have an in-depth knowledge of their terrain. This is evident from Kidane's outburst: "You want to see? Kidane shakes the paper, startling her upright. He taps his forehead. Memorize the land for yourself, he says. Maps are what foreigners use. We know our country. He throws the map back on the desk and mutters under his breath. They rely on useless pieces of paper to start a war, he adds" (Mengiste 30). He implies that identities are shaped by internalized projections of places.

Mengiste highlights the significance of geography in determining the path of events by depicting the landscape as an active participant in the historical conflict. The strategic manoeuvres and hideouts of the Ethiopian forces demonstrate their creativity and resilience by using space as a form of resistance.

Though the story of war has always been a masculine narrative, it was not true for Ethiopia and it has never been that way in any form of struggle. Mengiste highlights this fact in the narrative through Empress Menen's address to the nation at the outset of war and the deep impact it has on the women of Ethiopia, women like Aster and Hirut. Mengiste claims women's places and spaces in war:

Aster is a glorious figure astride her horse, Buna. She has loosened her braids and thick strands of hair fall against her neck and spread like a dark curtain around her sunlit face. She snaps the animal to a trot across the crest of the hill, her cape fanning around her figure, the golden clasp trapping flints of afternoon light. (Mengiste 111)

War ravages a country—its landscape, its people, their psyches. History is captured in a time frame. Photographs are memories—moments suspended in time. The stories, the narratives, the secrets, the truths are all hidden behind and beyond these photographs and newspaper articles. Photographs are the exogenous representation of spaces while the memories they trigger or the multi-layered narratives and their secrets hidden behind these photographs are endogenous representation of spaces—two main perspectives of Multifocalization which is one of the key premises of Geo-criticism according to Westphal (Westphal 113). Mengiste weaves these concepts skilfully in her narrative by taking the readers through Hirut's mind when she sits at the train station waiting for Ettore gazing at a photograph in her hand:

Because what newspapers and memory have failed to say is that you do not bring one hundred thousand men into a country in graceful strides. You do not send hundreds and

hundreds of donkeys and lorries and labourers to follow them without incident. Because one hundred thousand men, however ravenous they might be for this beautiful land, can never total the numbers of Ethiopians intent on keeping their country free, regardless of mathematics. (Mengiste 87)

Mengiste has stratigraphically[3] presented this war narrative imbuing it with its symbols and signifieds accumulated at different moments of its history. That a narrative not only represents a given place but also re-presents it a second time is evident when Kidane thinks about the First Italo-Ethiopian War fought during his father's time; ponders over how the scenario has changed from then to the present and understands the graph of the hows and the whys of the Italian forces:

Kidane knows the Italians will declare their first victory in Adua, that city where they were first shamed during his father's generation. They will try to rewrite the memory of that day forty years ago, in 1896, when they were brought to their knees then forced to prostrate themselves before proud Ethiopian warriors. This is all for Adua, for that place that is more than a place. They have come to rewrite history, to alter memory, to resurrect their dead and refashion them as heroes. (Mengiste 89)

The power struggle within a family, within a nation-family while simultaneously fighting against an external enemy is intricately woven into the narrative by Mengiste. The Emperor Haile Selassie is still trying to come to terms with the grief and guilt over the loss of his daughter Zenebwork who has passed away a year ago; guilt because he had forced her to marry a cruel man as a move to cement the relationship between two powerful families. The same man had betrayed his own country too and had embraced the enemy. The Italians were merciless under Mussolini's leadership. They were targeting civilians – women, children and rivers dropping poison from planes. His own men were not following his orders to the letter. These worlds within worlds—Heterotopias[4] that challenge the conventional and temporal boundaries creating a sense of disorientation—are incorporated in the narrative. The sense of helplessness, the realization of losing power on all fronts is apparent when Selassie reels under the latest news:

The aide turns a proud face to the emperor. Your Majesty, he says, Bekafa cut through columns near Debark, Kidane helped. You told us already, the emperor says. Then Haile Selassie allows himself to think through what is being said. He ordered no one to move against the enemy in the gorge. He did not tell Kidane to take his men to reinforce Bekafa. He has to slide his hands beneath the desk to hide their shaking. He is losing control of his country in pieces, one region at a time. (Mengiste 131-132)

Throughout the narrative, Mengiste employs symbolic spaces beyond the physical spaces to explore deeper themes. For instance, is the power dynamics. The Italian encampments symbolize colonial power and control, while the Ethiopian hideouts and camps represent resistance and defiance. The Ethiopians had fought tooth and claw to protect their freedom. Even the women were ready to take up arms against the Italians and fight shoulder to shoulder with their men. There were fears, insecurities, past traumas haunting both the sides. How history, past memories and particular locations trigger the individuals and shape their actions and reactions along with moulding their identities is horrifyingly clear in the following extract:

Then another *ascaro* goes down just in front of Ibrahim as his men clear the field for the machines. Carlo zooms to the injured *ascaro's* stunned face, blood blossoming from his chest. Is this the flower of youth? Is this what they mean? He raises his arm again to aim the tanks. And yet. And still. Despite. The bullets do not stop. The spears do not waver… he is hiding beneath his bed and all that has pursued him in those darkest terrors remains invisible to humble human sight. (Mengiste157)

Mikhail Bakhtin used a term 'Chronotope' which refers to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships in literature. Mengiste uses different chronotopes to shape narratives, highlighting the interplay between time and space. Her narrative alternates between the past and the present, the physical places and symbolic spaces, the external façade and inner turmoil of the characters as they navigate their way through the war:

Colonello! Ibrahim shakes his head. Carlo takes a breath and steps back slowly, his grip still tight on the gun. It happened so fast, the reflex motivated by that old attack in Benghazi that left him with a knife scar in his chest. It is a terror that Carlo knows will never leave him. He smiles to ease the tension. You know what to do, Carlo says to Ibrahim, thankful for his presence of mind… this, Carlo will also never forget. (Mengiste 202-203)

The power dynamics entailed in the management and utilisation of geographic space are further highlighted by the acquisition of Hirut and Aster. Mengiste's depiction of the

Italian soldiers' use of the terrain speaks to a larger issue of dominance and power within colonialism. This part of the story fits in with the Geo-criticism's emphasis on how oppression and power can result from control over space. Additionally, it has symbolic meaning. It symbolises not just the Italians' capacity to conquer the region but also their attempt to rule and oppress the Ethiopians. The environment, which was formerly a place of freedom and resistance, is now used as a stage for the execution of colonial dominance and brutality:

Hirut turns her head to hide the jolting fear the name causes. This is the officer who killed Tariku and the one Seifu left alive. Fucelli, the Butcher of Benghazi. The man throwing Ethiopians off of mountains. A tall *ascaro* approaches and salutes. Fucelli speaks to him and Ibrahim nods, sliding his eyes in her direction before focusing back on the Italian. We have your friend, Ibrahim says to her. Where's Kidane's camp? (Mengiste 313)

Mengiste returns to the Ethiopian landscape in the last chapters of *The Shadow King*, once again emphasising its emotional and historical relevance. The landscape, which has silently witnessed the protagonists' hardships and sacrifices, turns into a storehouse of shared memories. The valleys and mountains that have been ravaged by conflict serve as reminders of the Ethiopian people's tenacity and enduring character. This picture is consistent with the focus of Geo-criticism, which is on the ways in which locations acquire cultural and historical value. There is a strong link between location and memory because an individual's emotional and psychological scars are reflected in the physical scars on the land:

The box he gave to Hirut a lifetime ago was carefully organized and labelled. Since leaving the army, he has come to care less about the sequence of things. Has come to understand that it is impossible to connect what happened to what will. What he knows is this: there is no past, there is no "what happened", there is only the moment that unfolds into the next, dragging everything with it, constantly renewing. Everything is happening at once. (Mengiste 410)

Thus, one can state that Mengiste's narrative configures a trouble-torn landscape which evokes the memories of combat, domination and resistance. It also considers this domain as a place where the native and colonial identities are constantly modified. Most importantly the landscape evokes, through the consciousness of Hirut, the spaces occupied by Ethiopian women in their attempt to resist invasion and war. [1]

Notes

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[1] The term refers to the relationship between fictional spaces and real-world geographies. See Mustafa, Wael M. "The Map and the Text the Geo-Literary Spatial Encounters in Literary Theory." vol. 30, no. 119, Oct. 2019, p.1762.

[ii] It is a form of literary criticism that examines novels in terms of their implied maps. See Mustafa, Wael M. "The Map and the Text the Geo-Literary Spatial Encounters in Literary Theory." vol. 30, no. 119, Oct. 2019, p.1757.

[iii] Stratigraphy is based on the idea that representation of places in literary texts can have certain symbolic connotations and various interpretations that evolve diachronically. See Mustafa, Wael M. "The Map and the Text the Geo-Literary Spatial Encounters in Literary Theory." vol. 30, no. 119, Oct. 2019, pp.1764-65.

[iv] Heterotopias are worlds within worlds. They are spaces that exist outside of ordinary time and space. In literature, Heterotopias are spaces that challenge conventional spatial and temporal boundaries, creating a sense of disorientation and possibility. See Prieto, Eric. "Geocriticism Meets Ecocriticism: Bertrand Westphal and Environmental Thinking." *Palgrave Macmillan US eBooks*, 2016, p. 23.

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5.

An Elegy to a Perishing Lake and Environmental Rhetoric of Resistance in *Softly Dies a Lake*

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Abstract

Environment and delicate ecosystems are often damaged under the pressure of capitalism and the unending demands of development. However, water, in particular, is deeply linked with people's lives, and it depends on profound human sympathy for survival. Water bodies are often destroyed when profit-driven markets take control over nature. When water dies, the life world of people is also threatened. Once bountiful nature turns hostile and unpredictable. Ecocentric literature generally mobilizes a strong rhetoric of resistance against the gradual destruction of delicate ecosystems, reminding people Barry Commoner's law that everything is connected to everything else.

This paper examines Akkineni Kutumbarao's *Softly Dies a Lake,* an elegy to Kolleru Lake, one of India's largest fresh water lakes, which was also the home for many species of aquatic lives and birds. This paper analyses the perspective, rhetoric and emotions of the narrator Seenu, who has seen the lake changing for the worse from his childhood. This paper also evaluates the significance of the water body's memories and history in asserting the significance of a complex ecosystem.

Keywords: Environmentalism, Eco nostalgia, Eco- elegy, Memory, Environmental Rhetoric

The Industrial Revolution and the subsequent development in science and technology have led to the ushering in of the Anthropocene, an era marked by extensive intervention of human beings in the Earth's natural systems and resources. This era marks a significant departure from previous geological periods, as human activities now dominate and alter fundamental ecological processes at an unprecedented scale. As humanity has increasingly harnessed science and technology to exploit natural resources, a growing alienation from the environment has ensued, resulting in a myriad of ecological crises. Unsustainable and profit-oriented industrial development practices have led to biodiversity loss, global warming, and ecosystem degradation. John Bellamy Foster et al. reflect on how the relentless pursuit of economic development, driven by profit-oriented motives, has crossed critical ecological boundaries, pushing the planet toward irreversible environmental crises. One striking example of this ecological overshoot is the alarming increase in nitrogen extraction from the Earth. "The amount of nitrogen removed from the Earth for human use was zero in the preindustrial era, which has at present crossed 121 million tons per year, whereas the limit that the Earth can bear is 35 million tons per year" (Foster et al. 16). Such excessive human intervention has destabilized natural cycles, leading to soil degradation, water contamination, and an imbalance in atmospheric nitrogen levels, further aggravating the climate crisis (Foster et al.17-18). Capitalistic expansion and the subsequent economic development witnessed during this epoch have sparked

unpredictable fluctuations in atmospheric conditions, climate patterns, oceanic systems, and terrestrial ecosystems. In spite of the new technologies that can help revamp environment, the focus is still on the blind pursuit of maximizing corporate profit. This capitalistic approach to nature driven by market-oriented progress ignores the need for sustainable development and ecological restoration, raising serious reservations about the future of human interaction with the natural world.

Water bodies play a critical role in various ecological cycles. For instance, large bodies of water, such as oceans and seas, regulate temperatures and precipitation patterns, contributing to climate stability. Moreover, wetlands and rivers are essential in filtering pollutants, thus safeguarding water quality and supporting a diverse range of organisms. Further, waterbodies, are deeply linked with people's lives, and they depend on profound human sympathy for survival. Water bodies are often destroyed when profit-driven markets take control over nature. Once bountiful nature turns hostile, toxic and unpredictable. The loss or degradation of these water bodies can lead to significant ecological imbalances, threatening not only aquatic life but also terrestrial ecosystems that rely on these water sources. When water dies, the life world of people is also threatened. Nature, then, can no longer support the life it once nourished. The yearly floods that happen all over India is a result of such mindless exploitation.

Ecocritical studies hinge on their focus on the complicated connection between human survival and the natural world. With an emphasis on the environment, such studies underscore the interdependence between humanity and the non-human world. Ecocentric literature serves as a powerful medium for raising awareness about ecological issues and inspiring resistance against the damaging forces of capitalism. In addition, ecocentric texts generally mobilize a strong rhetoric of resistance against the gradual destruction of delicate ecosystems, reminding people Barry Commoner's first law of ecology: "Everything is connected to everything else" (Commoner 29) outlined in his book *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology* (1971). For instance, ecocritical works such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) exemplify the capability of literature to illuminate the costs of environmental degradation and kindle public consciousness. Carson's seminal text not only critiques the indiscriminate use of pesticides and their detrimental effects on ecosystems but also calls for a re-evaluation of humanity's relationship with nature. By foregrounding the interconnectedness of life and the environment, such literature challenges readers to reconsider their roles as stewards of the planet. Ambikasuthan Mangad's *Swarga* (2009) is an Indian novel that portrays how the people of Enmakaje, Kerala had to be at war with the government and the capitalistic ideologies for years, to protect the land and their living, against a deadly chemical pesticide Endosulfan that was aerial sprayed on cashew plantations in Enmakaje by the Plantation Corporation of Kerala. *The Tusk that Did the Damage* (2015) by Tania James is a novel that explores the theme of ivory trade through the story of an elephant, orphaned by poachers. In the essay "Geomediations in the Anthropocene: Fictions of the Geologic Turn" Alla Ivanchikova highlights how literature moves beyond human-centered perspectives by engaging with geologic matter, showing the interconnection of human and nonhuman history. Ivanchikova argues in the essay that environmental exploitation is rooted in capitalist and patriarchal systems, not humanity as a whole, as exemplified in these works. This perspective emphasizes the role of eco-literature in revealing wide-ranging reasons of ecological crises and advocating for more just, sustainable relationships between humans and the environment.

Akkineni Kutumbarao's *Softly Dies a Lake* (2020), translated from the Telugu original *Kolleti Jadalu* is an elegy to Kolleru, one of India's largest freshwater lakes, situated in Andhra Pradesh. Kutumbarao begins his novel by presenting alternatives to an extractive relationship with the Earth, as practiced in Pulaparru village, Andhra Pradesh, fifty years ago. The novel opens with sixty-year-old Sreenivasa Rao as the central character,

"Standing on the shores of the lake Srinivasa Rao looked out. The lake which should have stretched out boundlessly before his eyes lay in tattered strips. Where were those vibrant waters flowing majestically across several hundred acres, carrying twenty-five boats and hundreds of palm rafts with ease" (Kutumbarao 1). The story is then narrated from the perspective of Seenu, Sreenivasa Rao's nine-year-old self. Nostalgically evoking the lake in its past magnificence, Seenu envisions "a sheet of water that flowed to the very corners of every direction" (Kutumbarao 2). Shreenivasa Rao experiences what can be called "eco-nostalgia" in scholarly discourse. Econostalgia refers to a longing for past environmental states. As noted by Salmose and Ishchenko, terms like "eco-nostalgia" and "solastalgia" help "capture the intricate emotional attachments that one might have to the landscapes disappearing due to climate change and extinction of species" (Salmose and Ichenko 245). "Eco-nostalgias help us rethink the links between time and space" (Ange and Berliner 4). Through Seenu's memories, the novel reconstructs the golden days of Kolleru, depicting a time when the lake was vital to the community's existence. It was a source of sustenance, while children spent their days playing, swimming in creeks, and herding cattle, immersed in an care free and harmonious life. The novel vividly portrays Kolleru Lake's once-thriving ecosystem, detailing its rich biodiversity—ducks, cranes, snails, leeches, and various plant species. The children, deeply familiar with their surroundings, exhibited no fear of water snakes, which were a common sight as they swam through the lake while tending to their cattle. Eco-nostalgia in the novel encourages a deeper reflection on the intricate relationship between time and space, particularly in the context of environmental transformation and cultural memory. *Softly Dies a Lake* embodies eco-nostalgia by lamenting the loss of a once-flourishing ecosystem and capturing the deep emotional bonds between communities and their natural landscapesThe novel opens with a juxtaposition of the lake's current decrepit state and the exciting memories of Sreenivasa Rao's childhood, creating a powerful framework for examining the interplay between human experience and environmental degradation. Through the lens of econostalgia, Kutumbarao lures his readers to ruminate on the consequences of an extractive relationship with nature, a theme that resonates deeply in contemporary discourses on environmental sustainability. The choice of Sreenivasa Rao as the central character, returning to his village after sixty years, combined with the narrative perspective of his younger self, underscores humanity's loss of innocence and gradual disconnection from nature that has occurred over the decades. The vivid imagery of Kolleru as a life-giving entity: "a Kolleru that could swallow the sun and the moon" (Kutumbarao 2) highlights the lake's former grandeur and contrasts it with the germ-infested filthy and toxic pond that it got reduced to in the present.

Timothy Morton observes that "Ecological language might appear to be intrinsically elegiac. In a sense, nature is the ultimate lost object. It is the never-arriving terminus of a metonymic series: birds, flowers, mountains…nature." (Morton. 253) As an elegy to Kolleru Lake, the novel mourns the profound ecological loss caused by human intervention while evoking the lake's once-thriving ecosystem. The novel establishes the grandeur of Kolleru, in the beginning itself. By introducing the fact that Kolleru was once one of the largest freshwater lakes in Asia , Kutumbarao underscores the lake's ecological and geographical significance, setting the stage for its subsequent decline. This early acknowledgment heightens the elegiac tone of the narrative. Through its vivid portrayal of the non-human inhabitants—ducks, cranes, leeches, and an array of plant species—the narrative captures the intricate web of life that once flourished in harmony. Kutumbarao reflects on this lost world, writing: "Some good men had erected big stone pillars for the comfort of the buffaloes returning from the Peddagundam to relieve the itching of the leeches" (Kutumbarao 9). Such details serve as fond reminders of a lost culture when human and non-human lives coexisted symbiotically, with even the smallest creatures like snails and leeches woven into the fabric of daily existence. The children's carefree immersion in the lake—swimming, herding

cattle, and remaining untroubled by the water snakes—becomes a symbol of a vanished ethos, where nature was not feared but embraced.

The novel employs environmental rhetoric to underscore the deep entanglement between human communities and the ecological rhythms of Kolleru. It captures the diverse communities whose lives were intricately tied to Kolleru, portraying people from different castes—fishermen, farmers, and others—who depended on the lake for their daily sustenance. Despite Kolleru's annual floods, the villagers had adapted to its rhythms, working collectively to safeguard their livelihoods. Kutumbarao illustrates this resilience, writing: "When the Kolleru was in flood, the villagers would build a dam and secure it and guard it day and night" (Kutumbarao 12). This depiction highlights the past way of life in Kolleru that was shaped by both the bounty and the challenges of the lake. The novel is also a reminder of how the villagers, forced to confront the unpredictability of Kolleru's floods, turned to collective farming as a means of survival. However, the novel also records the shift in this ecological relationship, highlighting the transformation of Kolleru from a life-sustaining force to a contested site of exploitation.While the lake had long shaped their rhythms of life, it eventually became the site of an intense struggle for control between the different communities. *Softly Dies a Lake* captures this tension through the humanization of the lake: "Kolleru did not like this. 'Children of my womb, this is not how you should live. You can tear me, crush me, hunt my fish and take the gems in my belly, she challenged them and provoked them... So they turned on Kolleru herself. Not like humans but like demons" (Kutumbarao 173). The villagers' shift from coexistence to aggressive exploitation is framed as an act of rebellion, likened to the mythological churning of the ocean in search of divine nectar.

Sreenivasa Rao's realization about the unequal transformation of the Vaddi fishing community reflects the broader consequences of capitalism on both social structures and the environment. Initially, he is pleased to hear of their apparent progress; how they own fish ponds, have built large houses, and even a temple. However, this optimism fades when he learns that only those with sufficient capital could afford to buy or dig fish ponds, while the rest were reduced to daily wage labourers. A member of the fishing community tells Sreenivasa Rao "The only work we know is catching fish. Those days we used to fish in Kolleru and sell them. Now if we catch them from the fish ponds we are paid wages and we manage to eat and feed our wives and children on that" (Kutumbarao 192). This shift mirrors the creation of economic disparities even within self-sufficient communities under profit-driven capitalistic progress and development. The fishing ponds, meant to provide wealth, instead become symbols of exclusion, reinforcing how market-driven development benefits a select few while displacing others. This reflects the broader phenomenon of eco-nostalgia, where loss is experienced even without physical relocation. As Olivia Ange and David Berliner observe: "Furthermore, eco-nostalgias encompass significantly more traumatic experiences that do not necessarily imply embodied displacement. Under capitalism, intense and widespread ecosystemic transfiguration operates in our surroundings within very short duration. People lose their place without going away from it physically" (Ange and Berliner 5).When Madhusudhan Rao tells Sreenivasa Rao, "Kolleru issue is not a small one, ra. There is politics and there is capital. There is business of a level that you cannot comprehend" (Kutumbarao 193), the novel directly links the degradation of Kolleru Lake to the forces of capitalism and political manipulations. This statement highlights how environmental destruction is not merely the result of natural causes or negligence but is deeply entangled with economic interests and power structures (Kutumbarao 193).

When Kutumbarao writes, "But Srinivasa Rao was still haunted by the despair for Kolleru. There was no relief," (Kutumbarao 193) the audience, too, is drawn into this profound sense of loss. Through Sreenivasa Rao's sorrow, the novel conveys the irreversible damage inflicted upon the lake—both as an ecological entity and as a lifeline for the

communities that once depended on it. Stef Craps observes in the essay "Ecological Mourning: Living with Loss in the Anthropocene" (2023): "The experience and anticipation of environmental loss—whether of plant and animal species, ecosystems, landscapes, or an inhabitable planet—cause profound sorrow, which is being felt more and more acutely by a growing portion of the world's population as we move ever deeper into the Anthropocene" (Craps 70). Just as Craps emphasizes how ecological loss affects collective emotions, the novel captures how the gradual destruction of Kolleru leaves not only its protagonist but an entire community grappling with grief and displacement.

Softly Dies a Lake serves as a critical reminder of the need for alternative modes of engagement with the environment, advocating for a shift from extractive practices like building bunds, fishing ponds and dams that altered the biotic network of Kolleru, to more sustainable and respectful interactions with natural ecosystems. Sreenivasa Rao tells his cousin with hopelessness that if people from another state had possessed a lake like Kolleru, they would have protected and developed it into a spot of attraction for tourists. Instead, Kolleru gradually withered under the pressures of human exploitation, leaving its people stranded in a transformed landscape. Kutumbarao portrays how unlike the celestial quest for 'Amrit', the villagers churning of Kolleru lead to destruction, underscoring how human attempts to dominate nature ultimately result in ecological devastation. The novel, in its elegiac tone, thus not only mourns the physical loss of Kolleru but also critiques the industrial development that is responsible for its decline. When Sreenivasa Rao asks how the water of Kolleru became so polluted another character replies: "All the industrial waste from Vijayawada and Eluru flows in to Kolleru, isn't it? (Kutumbarao 194), bringing to light how rapid industrialization, without proper waste disposal measures, has led to the toxic state of Kolleru Lake.

The novel raises urgent questions about environmental stewardship and the responsibility of both present and future generations to protect vital natural resources. It also serves as a sharp critique of those who view the lake solely through a utilitarian lens, disregarding its ecological and cultural significance. This is evident when one of the characters remarks: "Our greedy politicians want to reduce Kolleru to forty-five thousand acres, release fifty-five acres into their control" (Kutumbarao 195), highlighting how government regulations, rather than safeguarding the lake, are manipulated for political and economic gain. The statement underscores the futility of policies that claim to protect Kolleru while, in reality, enabling its continued exploitation for vested interests.

According to Timothy Morton,unlike traditional elegies, which lament what has already been irrevocably lost, ecological elegy compels us to confront the impending loss of ecosystems, species, and the planet itself. He writes: "Ecological elegy asks us to mourn for something that has not completely passed, that perhaps has not even passed yet.. Traditionally, elegies weep for that which has already passed. Ecological elegy weeps for that which will have passed given a continuation of the current state of affairs." (Morton 254) Thus, Kutumbarao's *Softly Dies a Lake* is not merely an elegy mourning the loss of Kolleru but also a powerful call to action, urging readers to nostalgically reminisce a thriving past and own up the irreversible consequences of environmental degradation. Through its narrative, the novel underlines that the destruction of Kolleru is a consequence of the capitalistic idea of development and political greed. As Ashlee Cunsolo notes, ecological grief encompasses "the grief felt in relation to experienced or anticipated ecological losses, including the loss of species, ecosystems, and meaningful landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change" (Cunsolo 275). The novel converts the grief that Sreenivasa Rao experiences into a persuasive account of how water bodies are often destroyed when profit-driven markets take control over nature. It serves not only as a lament but also as a call to action, before the elegy becomes a lament for what has already been lost.

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A Decolonized Gaze: Re-Reading of Urvashi Butalia's Select Short Stories through the Lens of Postcolonialism

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Abstract:

This paper will examine the works of Urvashi Butalia, whose collection of short stories will be analysed through the post-colonial lens. The characters in the stories are victims of displacement, oppression, and societal pressure. The short stories are a reflection of the subalterns in society. The characters in the stories are women who suffer in the roles given to them by society. This research paper will throw insights into the lives of the characters under the theme of post colonialism. it will attempt to give a decolonized view of women's struggle in a male dominated world, her resilience towards society pressure and the need to empower themselves.

Keywords: Post-colonialism, Gender, Colonialism, Patriarchy, Decolonized Readings

Introduction

Not so long-ago women writers found it difficult to express themselves. In today's times, women writers have found their voice in their writings. They feel a renewed sense of freedom in writing on topics that were once considered a taboo. Urvashi Butalia is one such writer. Born in 1952 in Ambala, Haryana, founder of India's first feminist publishing house, Kali. Publisher, teacher and activist, she is well known around the world as a renowned Indian Feminist writer and for her work in the women's movement of India. Her well known works include *The Other side of silence: Voices from the Partition of India, Speaking Peace: Women's voices from Kashmir* and others. She set out to publish a collection of short stories written by Indian women writers. She recalls in her introduction that pulling out the first volume and locating authors was a task she did not fathom. Having understood that their stories were considered inferior and subordinate, they were never published.

This paper will examine the works of Urvashi Butalia, whose collection of short stories will be analysed through the post-colonial lens. the characters in the stories are victims of displacement, oppression, and societal pressure. It will attempt to give a decolonized view of women's struggle in a male dominated world, her resilience towards society pressure and the need to empower themselves. The stories may be fictional but are representations of the women around us in society.

According to M.H Abrams, "post-colonialism" is "the critical analysis of the history, culture, literature, and modes of discourses that are specific to the former colonies of England, Spain, France, and other European imperial powers." Postcolonialism attempts to challenge the superiority established by colonialism. Post-colonial India presented a range of challenges to the women writers. One such barrier was the lack of representation of women writers. Urvashi Butalia's collection of

short stories is one such attempt to challenge the notion of patriarchy through the lives of the characters in her collection of compiled stories.

Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak in her essay 'Can the subalterns speak' questions the social formations and gender and sexual differences in society. Despite the challenges of living in the patriarchal world, the women writers of these short stories have found creative ways to amplify their voice and tell their story. By establishing a platform for their voice, they have managed to challenge the mainstream narratives by creating a literary space for themselves.

A Decolonised Reading:

The first short story, *How Kava Deceived Kavi and Defeated Her* by Marija Sres, tells the story of Kava and Kavi who fell in love with each other on discovering they were the only two survivors of a deluge. Deva, wanting to have some fun, decided to hold a running race between the two. Since he favoured the male born, he decided to have a physical test of speed and agility, since physical strength is usually favourable to men. In the very first race, Kavi defeated Kava by a great margin. But a patriarchal society would challenge the woman. Deva feeling ashamed that the man would end up serving the woman, wanted to help Kava win the race if not by strength but by cunning trick. Women are not equally treated as men fail to accept defeat by a woman.

He instructed Kava to give Kavi a pair of silver earrings. He was sure that it would be a distraction and Kavi would end up losing the race. When they ran the race the second time, Kavi won again. Ashamed of being seen a failure, he kept on giving ornaments to Kavi to wear before each race day and every time she wore them and ran, she was slower than before. On the final race day, Kavi was defeated when she was asked to wear a heavy breast plate.

> 'You must wear this breastplate,' he insisted. 'It's been made specially for you.' Kavi put on the breastplate of gold studded with precious stones, and was thrilled…. 'But they are too heavy,' Kavi protested. 'Nonsense,' said Kava. 'Imagine how the wind will carry the jhanjhar of your bells when you run!' And so she was persuaded to wear those as well.

Tricking her into believing that it made her look pretty and beautiful, and forcing her to wear them, she put them on and lost the race due to the heavy burden of carrying them on herself.

Unfortunately, it was the last race that was the deciding factor to the strongest of the species. The story ends with the dominion of the man over the woman, in which the woman accepted her place. The man continues to dominate the woman by showering her with expensive jewellery, not realising that her value would eventually begin to diminish. It further explains how the dowry system in India, brings further suppression to the woman as a property to be owned by the husband. It is also interesting to note that the story runs very similar to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve in the garden. Eve being the one who is the victim of Satan's tricks, eventually leading to their banishment from the garden.

The woman being the first to be tempted and deceived which leads to her being portrayed as weak and secondary to the man. Women being able to voice their qualms and fears, has given us a whole new perspective to women's writing.

The *Giantess* by Suniti Namjoshi is the story of a woman is giant in size living among population of men. The giantess is like a mother to them, feeding, caring to their needs without expecting anything in return. The people fail to recognise that she is providing for them until she starts to grow weary, tired and old. She begins to tell them she is exhausted and needs to go. She wants to continue providing for them, but has reached a retirement age and slows her down. The people assume that she is upset on them. They do not understand she has lost her strength and is moving to the final stage of her life. They want to keep receiving love, food, and care from her and decide to pamper her with gifts thinking she will change her mind.

> 'We will make you happy. Only please don't go.' 'Do you know what I want?' the giantess asked. They were silent for a

> bit. Then one of them said, 'We'll make you our queen.' … 'We'll write you a poem.' …'We'll bring you many gifts of oysters and pearls and pebbles and stones.' 'No,' said the giantess, 'No.' She turned her back and crossed the mountains.

The people then realise they need to make her happy. The giantess assumes they will understand the happiness she would like to receive in this age. But they offer her gifts and ornaments thinking it will make her happy. Disappointed she turned away from the land leaving them to fend for themselves.

Both the short stories portray the role of woman in different roles. Both begin as women and men existing as equals in society. Circumstances either external or internal trigger the causes of discrimination which grows in the course of time. In the first story, *How Kava Deceived Kavi and Defeated Her* by Marija Sres, the man and the woman are shown as existing without the intention of dominion over the other.

As the story progresses, the man is tempted to cause the downfall of the woman and eventually what is visible in society is what is ultimately taken as the believing truth which is the woman is weaker than the man. In the second story, the Giantess by Suniti Namjoshi, the giant woman begins her role as a caregiver as mother nature does. But fails to understand the increasing strength of the man. She is ultimately disappointed in their intention of returning the favour with décor and gifts leaving the land heart broken.

Conclusion:

The short stories are a critique of the patriarchal and socio-economic system. The subalterns in the stories are the women who have to bear the oppression of their counterparts. They are ultimately bound to obey the wishes of the patriarchal society. The writers present their short stories as a satire on the hypocrisy of the patriarchal system and one that a woman has to accept in the tradition of the family.

Butalia attempts to demonstrate how the colonial and patriarchal mentality have endangered the lives of many women. Butalia brings out the issues related to gender biasness, the weaker sex, domestic abuse, neglect and silence as part of the main themes in the stories. Her collection of stories, opens up many topics of discussions and the conflicts that continue to dominate the world till today.

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7.

Friendship and Loss in Payal Dhar's "Memory Lace": An Interdisciplinary Reading of Young Adult Short Story

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Abstract

Young Adult (YA) fiction is a popular narrative genre that explores the experiences and challenges of adolescents. Such a narrative depicts themes such as identity, initiation into adulthood, friendship, self-discovery and family situations. Young Adult fiction is typically written for readers between the age from twelve to eighteen. Emerging identities in terms of gender, romance and sexuality are also integral in this kind of narrative. Characters in YA fictions often get entangled with emotions such as love, jealousy, depression and fear. These emotions are so very significant in the age group of adolescents that YA narratives do not focus on global issues and dense philosophies. This paper analysis young adult short story "Memory Lace" written by Payal Dhar, renowned Indian fantasy writer. This paper explores the distinct features of YA narrative in Dhar's short story. It also explores the themes of friendship and loss that impact teenagers very deeply. The paper mobilises the theories and tools of Young Adult Studies to illustrate the main argument. Further, this paper uses an interdisciplinary analytical model drawn from Popular Culture Studies, YA psychology and Memory Studies.

Key-words: Memory, Loss, Young Adult Studies, Teenage, Fantasy

Young Adult fiction or YA fiction refers to a novel or narrative which is written and published largely for teenagers and young adults. The typical readership for YA fiction has the age group between twelve and eighteen. In some cases YA fiction is also known as Juvenile fiction. In general young adult novels depict the problems and experience familiar to teenagers. Most of the characters in such novel are also of the same age group as that of the readers. Compared to a full-fledged complex novel, the language and style in young adult fiction are relatively simple. This kind of fiction is marked with modest vocabulary and sentence structure that is relatively simple and straightforward. There are many sub-genres under the broader term Young Adult fiction. These sub-genres include romance, history, science fiction, mystery and paranormal themed narrative. Over a period of time Young Adult fiction has changed drastically, taking into its ambit realism, supernatural and romance.

Writers such as Sarah Trimmer, Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, Betty Cavanna, R L Stevenson and Anna Sewell are considered to be the early contributors to Young Adult fiction. However, it was in the 1950s that the term Young Adult became popular. When the famous psychologists Robert Havighurst and Erik Erikson redefined adolescence as a developmental stage of the young adults. In the 1970s and 1980s Young Adult fiction had the golden age with more than 600 books published in the United States under this sub-genre, Walter Dean Mayers, Robin McKinley and Anna Martin are some of the popular names

associated with this era. In the early 21st century, young adult literature received more momentum with the publication of the Harry Potter series. More than 30,000 young adult books have been published every year these days.

Young Adult fiction has become popular in India with authors such as Roshni Chokshi, Sandhya Menon, Nikita Singh, Vikas Swarup and Payal Dhar. These writers have contributed with novels and short stories that explore themes such as social issues, identity, family expectations, societal pressures, fantasy, mythology and self-discovery. As a popular genre, Young Adult fiction in India, also known as adolescence novel has emerged as a multi-themed narrative, apart from discussing the problems and dilemmas of teenagers in.

Tanya Jain and Priti Joshi discuss young adult sensibility in their research article. They observe that the young adult stage is marked with biological changes and negotiation of a cultural identity:

> The transition from childhood to adulthood depends on several factors in the socio-cultural context. Personal change involves solving problems related to social identity, education, training, leisure, work and the development of the family. Young people's self-image is highly dependent on how they view themselves and the kind of 'social identity' they have, that is how others perceive them. Some researchers have pointed out the unique traits of young people who think of them as 'creative actors' who shape their cultural identities and live by exploring youth culture. (Jain and Joshi 2350)

Cindy Lou Daniels explores young adult literature in the context of literary theories. She argues that if young adult literature has to be appreciated one should utilise certain literary theories. She explains how this genre can be used in understanding class-based ideology: "For example, the genre of YA literature can be examined as a way to analyze the underlying class ideology of a work, without the text being specifically "about" class conflict. The genre itself, the form itself, could contain ideological messages within the structures of its conventions" (Daniels 80).

Payal Dhar's short story, "Memory Lace" is written in the form of futuristic science fiction. This story is narrated by a teen-aged android or humanoid who reveals emotions similar to human beings. The crux of the story is a relationship between this robot and girl, Fazal who eventually becomes its owner. This story has all the ingredients typical of Young Adult fiction—emotions, imagination, science, secrets and the quest for identity. This story also takes the readers into the concerns and friendship that young adult have.

"Memory Lace" begins with the robot looking at himself on the mirror. This situation is similar to what Jain and Joshi discuss as self-image and social identity in YA fiction: "I can see myself in the mirror. There are soft curls falling to my shoulders, jewelled hair ornaments that catch the light if I move, beads that clink with every turn of my head. Only a soft, sheer veil separates me from the world. But it's a small world" (Dhar 180).

The android who is later named as Sifar, reveals his concerns and interest that are particular to the age of a young adult individual. Through this eyes of this human machine the readers get to know about the ideological message that Daniels talks about. This message is based on the awareness of the teenager who knows that there is a difference between rich and poor people. Further, Dhar gets her character to articulate the agony of being objectified though he is a machine: "There is a rustle of canvas as the tent flap lifts and Veda ushers in another prospective buyer. A rich woman, well-rounded, prosperous-looking, clad in silks and silver. I'm guessing a landowner, or perhaps a merchant" (Dhar 180).

Friendship and interest in people of the same age group are too important thematic strands in juvenile fiction. Dhar's short story introduces these themes at the beginning itself when Sifar develops curiosity and interest in Fazal in the first meeting itself. Dhar seems to indicate that the young adult sensibility, even in the world of fantasy is identified by friendship: "She's trailed by a teenager. From the resemblance, I'd say daughter. The girl is about seventeen, the same age as me. Maybe her mother wants to buy me for her. I can hope" (Dhar 180).

Dhar uses the perspective of the teen-aged robot to depict the complex relationship between an objectified human machine and its manufacturer, Veda: "I have had a week's

practice of blanking out of this point in the negotiations. Veda had never failed to find a buyer, but with just a day left before the fair winds up. I can see she's a little jumpy" (Dhar 181).

In Dhar's story the human-machine is controlled by a memory lace which owned by a buyer. Sifar is anxious and tensed when the potential buyer goes through the memory lace. It is suggested that Sifar's identity and the post are woven into this lace and yet his self-consciousness is typical of a teenage subject who is concerned about his identity and self-image as Jain and Joshi articulate: "Veda beckons and slender box appears in her hands. She opens it to reveal a velvet-lined interior on which lies a roll of fine white lace. I forget to breathe as a rich woman lifts it out and runs her fingers expertly over the intricate pattern. A shiver runs down my spine, but this time it has nothing to do with the chill air" (Dhar 181).

As a humanoid, Sifar has very little autonomy. His past and the future are result of some programming. This condition indicates the theme of freedom and the lack of it in the young adult sensibility: "It's the fact that she has my life in her hands and, clearly, she knows how to read it. I don't know why they call it *memory* lace—it isn't just about the past. I asked Veda once and she replied that the future is just memories we haven't had yet" (Dhar 181).

Freedom is a theme that is seen predominantly used in young adult narratives. Sifar being a teenager thinks rebelliously for a while like any other teenager who would love freedom: "What would happen if I were to lean forward, snatch it up and throw it into the fire? Would that make me free? Or would I just stop existing?" (Dhar 182).

Despite his sense of loss and the depression on account of the lack of freedom, Sifar is touched by the gestures of kindness from Fazal. He connects across the boundary between the machine and human being with a typical teenage emotion: "A soft touch makes me start. It's the daughter. She has picked up my robe from the floor and put it back around my shoulders. I'm so startled that I look around and catch her eye. Nobody has ever done this for me before" (Dhar 182).

Sifar is repeatedly shown to be concerned about his self-image and identity in the presence of the teenagers. This theme of emerging identity is also central to young adult fiction. In the following extract, both Sifar and Fazal measure their self-image by comparing themselves to each other: "She puts a finger under my chin and lifts it. It is a curious gesture because I am taller than she is. It is difficult for me to keep my eyes modestly on my satin sandalled feet" (Dhar 182).

The ideological message that Daniels highlights as a future of Young Adult fiction is yet again manifested in the hierarchical relationship between Fazal and Sifar as owner and her possession. Fazal names Sifar and thereby, exercises a degree of control over him. "I see,' she thinks for a while. 'A number. I'll call you Sifar—zero, the number that means nothing, yet is the most important of all" (Dhar 183).

Fazal starts teaching Sifar stitching, reading and other skills. Gradually Sifar learns some of these skills. These training sessions make them good friends. The meaning of friendship is depicted through the eyes of human-machine. Dhar suggests that teen-aged humanoids are not without emotions and craving for friendship: "I might go to the devil for saying this, but I think Fazal and I are becoming friends. The summer goes by and the days become shorter and cooler. Every evening at dusk, we lie on the grass, our heads touching, looking up at the sky" (Dhar 184).

Sifar is introduced to two younger sisters of Fazal. This episode is marked with the painful awareness in Sifar that he is only a machine and he knows that he has to pay respects towards even too small kids. The distinction between classes and between human beings and machine fall heavy on Sifar though his owners do not ill-treat him:

> "She puts an arm each around the two terns towards me. 'Sisters, this is Sifar.' To me she says, 'Meet Idraak, the Wisdom of the ages' and Azaad, the freedom of the skies.'
>
> I bow to them. 'I'm very pleased to meet you, Wisdom and Freedom." (Dhar 185-186).

Despite being a robot, Sifar is presented as being conscious of his looks. He conforms to young adult sensibility which is sharply focused

on self-image. He also expresses the Young Adult urge to get freedom: "I think for a moment. 'I want to fly—in those machines you mentioned that take you up in the sky.' After a pause, I add, 'And want to wear trousers like you, instead of this ridiculous robe" (Dhar 186).

Emotional bonding is another feature of Young Adult narrative. Fazal and Sifar develop a bonding which stands in defiance with the social boundary between a human being and a machine. The following dialogue between them indicates this friendship beyond the boundaries:

> "Go on, try them on, Fazal says.
> I do. They're a perfect fit.
> 'Can I wear them during the day?' I asked hesitantly.
> 'Of course. I'm having a couple of other sets made up so you have enough. Do you like them?'
> 'I love them. Thank you so much. I…" (Dhar 187).

Dhar's story focalizes the theme of memory in the context of Sifar's dream. Fazal observes that Sifar is capable of dreams and that he has his own memory which is the actual memory lace. Her words indicate that the robot is free when he is able to create memory for himself to redeem himself from the loss of freedom: "This morning,' she says, 'you wove your dreams into the lace you were making. That's real memory lace. This,' she waves her hand at the lace on my bed, 'is just something someone like Veda made to convince you that you have no control of your life" (Dhar 188).

Dhar's story conclude with Fazal showing great sense of maturity in accepting Sifar as a companion. She considers him as her equal and as a potential love interest: "I'm supposed to give you daughters.' 'you're not *supposed* to,' she corrects me. It's something that both of us will decide, but in time. There's no hurry. There's so much we can do together, Sifar. I want to see the world. I've heard of places where men are treated like people. Don't you want to see that?" (Dhar 189).

One can see that Payal Dhar's short story "Memory Lace" is a classic Young Adult fiction that deals with the themes of friendship, self-consciousness of emerging youngsters, sense of revolt, craving for freedom and romance—all tailored into a fantasy narrative. In this story the bonding of the teenagers goes beyond the boundary between the human and the machine to suggest the new possibilities of post human Young Adult sensibility.

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8.

Delving in the Mechanics of Cognitive Estrangement in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*

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Abstract

The eminent American author, Ray Bradbury in his dystopian Science Fiction novel *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) convincingly presents a universe that is both foreign and based in believable technological and social advancements, such as the 'Mechanical Hound' and the 'Seashell' ear-thimbles, 'finger print readers', 'invisible planes' by depicting a society in which books are prohibited and critical thought is repressed. Due to this estrangement, people are prompted to consider current concerns about censorship, conformity, and the dehumanizing impacts of technology. The interplay between cognition, the rational, scientific basis of the novel's speculative elements, and estrangement, the imaginative, unsettling depiction of a repressive society, forms the core of the novel's impact, enabling readers to question their reality and the value of intellectual liberty. Through metaphorical language and symbolic contrasts, such as candlelight's warmth versus electric light's harshness, *Fahrenheit 451* exemplifies how cognitive estrangement fosters a deeper awareness of societal control and the potential for resistance and regeneration. Thus, Bradbury's work is a seminal example of how science fiction employs cognitive estrangement to challenge and expand readers' understanding of human experience and socio-political structures. The researchers have used qualitative methods for investigating various facets of the mechanics of cognitive estrangement.

This research paper explores in the manner in which *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury employs Darko Suvin's cognitive estrangement to both alienate and intellectually engage readers through the use of a dystopian future.

Key Words: Science Fiction, Cognitive Estrangement, Novum, Dystopia

Introduction

Science Fiction has baffled readers due to its multitudinous dimensions across space and time. Science fiction goes beyond genre-specific literatures that follow precise narrative constraints, such as historical fiction that painstakingly recreates important historical events or criminal fiction that centers on the investigation of a crime. It combines the essential components of a criminal thriller, the engrossing setting of historical fiction, the societal criticism frequently present in realist stories, and the in-depth investigation of human character and fate. Due to its remarkable adaptability, science fiction can address issues of ethics, philosophy, and sociopolitics, in addition to technological and scientific advancements. It frequently foretells or critiques the course of human civilization. But despite its deep and multi-layered complexity, the distinctions between science fiction and fantasy have frequently been muddled by both readers and academics. Science fiction bases its imaginative inventions in the domain of

scientific plausibility or speculative logic, whereas fantasy often relies on the amazing and the supernatural without requiring logical justification. This distinction is made clearer by the groundbreaking critical lens of Darko Suvin's seminal concept of "Cognitive Estrangement." In contrast to fantasy's mythological or magical thinking, Suvin contends that science fiction requires a logical, cognitive engagement with the new and the unknown, despite its purposeful detachment from the familiar world. His idea offers an important foundation for comprehending how science fiction functions as a critique and a reflection of reality. The researcher plans to go thoroughly into Suvin's theory of Cognitive Estrangement in the following sections of this article and examine how it applies to *Fahrenheit 451*, the ground-breaking book by famed American science fiction novelist Ray Bradbury. This examination will show how Bradbury's work not only perfectly captures the core of cognitive estrangement but also how, through its terrifying portrayal of a dystopian future, it exposes current social difficulties.

Suvin's Theory of Cognitive Estrangement

Darko Suvin is considered one of the most important and pioneering critics of Science Fiction studies. In addition to giving science fiction a philosophical and political dimension, his ground-breaking theoretical work reframed the genre as a type of "cognitive estrangement," establishing a rigorous academic framework for its research. In the pioneering essay "Estrangement and Cognition," which was first published in the 1970s, Suvin reasoned that the ability of Science Fiction to both engage readers intellectually through logical, speculative extrapolation (cognition) and distance them from the familiar (estrangement) is what distinguishes the genre. According to Suvin, Science Fiction can question dominant ideas and imagine revolutionary possibilities because of this dual dynamic. He received the renowned Pilgrim Award for lifelong achievements in science fiction scholarship from the Science Fiction Research Association (SFRA) in recognition of his work, which has had a significant influence on the field. Suvin's ideas continue to influence critical discourse, influencing prominent scholars like Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr., Carl Freedman, and Fredric Jameson, as well as a wide range of other academics who discuss his theories about genre criticism, Marxist theory, and utopian studies. His scholarly contributions highlight the gravity and intricacy of science fiction as a literary genre that can explore reality and envision different futures.

In "Estrangement and Cognition," Darko Suvin makes the case that science fiction functions as a literary kind of cognitive estrangement, setting itself apart with its critique of normative systems and narrative novum. According to him, science fiction's cultural significance; especially among well-educated audiences is reflected in its surge in popularity over the past century. Suvin contrasts SF's emphasis on flexible human interactions and future possibilities with myth and naturalism. He argues for the genre's acceptance as a respectable area of academic study by pointing out its historical similarities to other literary genres. The 2014 postscript (published in Strange Horizons) highlights SF's capacity for social critique and intellectual inquiry while reflecting on the genre's changing relevance in the face of historical changes.

Suvin claims that cognitive estrangement takes place when a science fiction work creates an imaginary universe that is recognizable as distinct from the reader's actual reality but is yet guided by logical, scientific, or rational principles. Readers can consider their society, presumptions, and conventions from a new angle thanks to the combination of "estrangement," which makes the familiar look strange or unfamiliar, and "cognition," which is the logical comprehension and critical engagement with the differences. Matthew Buscemi in his article "Revisiting Darko Suvin," explains that according to Suvin, a work of science fiction must depict world structures or interpersonal connections that are significantly different from those we encounter in our daily lives. The reader may sense that the novel "estranges" them from their everyday reality due to any number of differences, including new

technologies, aliens, mutations, changed social dynamics, or a different past. But estrangement alone is insufficient. Instead of being arbitrary or just fascinating, the story's world distinctions should make the reader realize something about their world that they were previously unaware of. That is the "cognition" component, and Suvin is convinced that for a work to qualify as SF, both cognition and alienation must interact.

George Orwell examined cognitive estrangement in his dystopian Science Fiction novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948) through the introduction of two ideas: Newspeak and the notion of Doublethink. He imagines a totalitarian government that not only regulates conduct but also language and cognition. Doublethink forces people to embrace opposing viewpoints at the same time, while Newspeak, a manufactured language, seeks to eradicate rebellious thought. This produces an unsettlingly realistic yet horrifyingly alien reality in which even the ability to think for oneself is under jeopardy. Orwell's dystopia is a terrifyingly realistic vision of the future because it is based on logical extrapolation from current governmental institutions, propaganda systems, and language theories.

Similarly, Michael Crichton uses ancient DNA taken from amber-fossilized mosquitoes to bring dinosaurs back to life in *Jurassic Park* (1990), introducing cognitive alienation. A weird and exciting world that is different from our own is created when extinct, dangerous beasts like Tyrannosaurus Rex reappear. Nonetheless, this scenario is supported by actual scientific ideas like DNA sequencing and cloning, which give the story a logical and credible basis. Crichton uses examples from modern biotechnology to illustrate the moral and environmental ramifications of unbridled technological ambition. Suvin's theory of cognitive alienation is at play in both situations: each story presents a new idea, whether political or scientific, that fundamentally alters the universe while maintaining intellectual coherence and providing a prism through which to see the state of affairs today.

Mechanics of Cognitive Estrangement in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*

Ray Bradbury, one of the widely accepted American authors, wrote a wide range of genres, including horror, fantasy, science fiction, and social criticism. His best-known works are *Dandelion Wine* (1957), *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), and *Fahrenheit 451*. Vibrant imagery, poetic language, and a thorough examination of subjects like censorship, technology, conformity, memory, and the power of imagination are characteristics of Bradbury's work. *The Martian Chronicles* is a collection of interconnected tales that examine issues such as environmental destruction, imperialism, and human nature via the colonization of Mars. A sentimental, somewhat autobiographical look at childhood and time spent in a fictionalized hometown may be found in *Dandelion Wine*. Bradbury's inventive spectrum, spanning from futuristic fiction to the macabre, is demonstrated by his tale collections, *The Illustrated Man*, *The October Country*, and *The Golden Apples of the Sun*. As evidence of his diverse writing abilities, he also authored plays, articles, screenplays, and poems.

His best-known work is *Fahrenheit 451*, which offers a potent indictment of censorship and the perils of governmental control by imagining a dystopian future in which books are outlawed and critical thought is stifled. Despite being frequently referred to as a Science Fiction author, Bradbury said that a large portion of his writing was fantasy, and *Fahrenheit 451* was the only work he believed to be actual science fiction due to its realistic technological and societal advances.

The novel depicts a dystopian future where modern media and superficial entertainment have numbed society, books are outlawed, and they are burned by firemen. Owing to this universe is both familiar and foreign, readers are compelled to consider the future of their own society.

Speculative technology that is both familiar and unsettlingly alien65, like as wall-sized televisions, Seashell ear buds, and mechanical hounds, invisible planes characterize the civilization in *Fahrenheit 451*. Although the

impact and application of these inventions are exaggerated to the point of alienation, they are believable continuations of current trends. Bradbury portrayed a world in which such conduct is the rule rather than the exception. Mildred's obsession with her TV family and frequent usage of ear-thimbles (modern-day ear buds used for music), for instance, distances readers from their media habits.

Cognitive Framework: Rationalizing the Unfamiliar

Fahrenheit 451's realism is internally coherent and unsettlingly realistic, with a justification that, according to the logic of the book, makes book bans appear almost acceptable. The suppression of literature is justified by the government as a way to maintain societal harmony and avert conflict. It contends that books cause conflict, uneasiness, and eventually unrest—emotions and experiences that are seen as harmful in a culture fixated on flimsy happiness and homogeneity. This rationalization is unsettling because it plays on real anxieties: that disagreements can spark conflict and that ignorance can pass for peace if it is widely disseminated.

The reader's capacity to understand how such a society could arise from well-known trends is what gives Bradbury's dystopian novel its cognitive punch. The novel depicts a trajectory that feels less like speculative fiction and more like a warning prognosis because of the overabundance of mass media, the importance placed on quick satisfaction, and the lack of critical thinking. The readers are prompted to think about how censorship cannot always manifest as overt oppression but rather as a gradual decline in interest in dissent, complexity, and introspection. In addition to creating a dystopia, Bradbury also develops a cultural and psychological framework that lends credence to its emergence. Fahrenheit 451's persistent cognitive and emotional impact stems from this consistency between the internal world of the book and identifiable aspects of contemporary reality.

Estrangement of Human Relationships and Identity

Ray Bradbury effectively alienates the ideas of family and self-identity by drawing a society where actual human connections have been replaced by manufactured ones. This estrangement is best illustrated by characters such as Mildred Montag, the estranged wife of Guy Montag. She still maintains emotional distance from her husband while devoting emotional energy to scripted, superficial acts, referring to the characters on her interactive television walls as her ‘family. Mildred is a law-abiding citizen, conditioned to hate reading. The following quotes explains the attachment of Mildred towards television. “That’s my family.” (Bradbury, 47). Mildred’s words further justify her loathsome attitude towards book when she said,“Books aren’t people. You read and I look all around, but there isn’t anybody!” (Bradbury,69)

It is indicative of a significant cultural shift in which media consumption has replaced human interaction, book reading and identity is created passively via the consumption of state-approved entertainment rather than through reflection or deep connections. The reason Bradbury's portrayal is so unnerving is that it is so frank and organic. It makes the alienation of characters like Mildred not only comprehensible but uncannily familiar by forcing the reader to consider current trends of social media addiction, electronic media gaming habit, emotional detachment, and an identity driven by consumerism.

Purpose and Effect of Cognitive Estrangement

Fahrenheit 451 tests readers to think critically about the negative effects of censorship and anti-intellectualism, the hazards of technological advancement without moral consideration, and the loss of individuality and genuine relationships in a media-driven society through cognitive estrangement. Bradbury creates an unsettlingly rational but profoundly alienating society in which books are outlawed for the sake of maintaining social harmony, passive entertainment takes the place of critical thinking, and real human ties are substituted by manufactured ones. This separation from oneself and others is embodied by characters such as

Mildred Montag, who views television celebrities as her "family" and exhibits indifference toward genuine connections.

The narrative allows readers to follow the cultural, psychological, and technical developments that might result in such a society, the novel's plausibility makes the dystopia seem less like a far-off work of fiction and more like a real possibility. Bradbury involves readers to reevaluate their world and consider the direction of their institutions, attitudes, and habits by rendering the familiar strange.

Conclusion

Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, competently uses cognitive estrangement, a defining feature of science fiction theorized by critic Darko Suvin, to both admonish and arouse its audience. Bradbury defamiliarizes the daily world by imagining a civilization where books are outlawed and 'firemen' burn knowledge instead of preserving it. This creates a dystopian reality that is uncannily similar to our reality but not entirely different. The readers are compelled by this estrangement to consider the development of modern civilization, particularly as it relates to technology (reference to mammoth-sized modern televisions), conformity, and independent thought. The novel's universality of wall-sized televisions and quick, immersive consumable media foreshadows the numbing and distracting impacts of contemporary digital culture, pointing to a future in which passive consumption will replace critical involvement. In addition to echo chambers, censorship, and ideological polarization, the imposed homogeneity of thinking and emotionless obedience among residents speaks to anxieties about McCarthyism in the middle of the 20th century. Bradbury challenges his readers to see the seeds of dystopia in their own culture and to recapture the lost ideals of reading, inquiry, and dissent by using this speculative lens to do more than just paint a grim picture of the future.

Note

McCarthyism: A political era in the USA during the early 1950s characterised by violation of civil liberties.

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9.

Cycles of Oppression and Postcolonial Resistance through Silence in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*

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Abstract:

Race, gender and ethnicity are the 3 vectors of operation often seen in the colonial context. In the backdrop of the Indo-Caribbean experience, women are often the victims of oppression practiced at house and in the society, forcing some of them into an agonising silence about the atrocities committed on them. As members of a racial minority in an alien land that has a legacy of transporting Indians as convict labourers, the early Indian immigrants to Caribbean had to live under the shame and fear of living as bonded labourers. Subsequently, many of the Indian families in the Caribbean adopted social insularity, forcing women to stay circumscribed within narrow boundaries. The forces of colonialism and the internalised power over symptoms by the male members had created a stubborn nexus of operation which had to be exposed through postcolonial Indo-Caribbean women's writings.

This research paper examines Shani Mootoo's novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* to explain the dialectical interplay between the oppressive cycles on Indo-Caribbean women and the non-normative genders and their anticolonial strategies of resistance. By tracing the life and experiences of Mala who maintains a paradoxical silence, the paper looks into the conflict between operation and autonomy. This paper also explores the liberating alternate spaces that Mala, Tyler and other marginalised figures explore even when they are forced to maintain a shameful silence.

Keywords: operation, colonialism , silence, alternate space, resistance

Trinidadian-Canadian author Shani Mootoo's debut novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) is a text dripping with trauma of sexual violation and postcolonial trauma. With its roots lying in the history of indentured labour, the book narrates the navigation of Chandin Ramachandin through the hierarchical, Colonial system and hints at his superficial acceptance of the Colonial standards not as an end in themselves, but as a means to impress himself and others. This superficial life led by Chandin hollows him from within and makes him hold on to different people as a source of pride. When these characters that he wishes to hold in his possession venture away from him, Chandin takes on a hysterical persona. His anger is his way of expressing himself but this uncouth mode of expression cripples multiple characters from time to time.

By setting the novel in a fictional island town named Lantanacamara and relegating England with a fictional name called as Shivering Northern Wetlands (where the Christian Missionaries are portrayed to hail from), Mootoo attempts to defamiliarize and decolonise from the ingrained history of Colonialization. The Ramachandin parents had travelled across two oceans soon after the birth of Chandin, only with the hope of providing him with a good future. Hailing from a family of indentured Indian labourers, Chandin is chosen by Reverend Thoroughly not just to study at the school set up by the Reverend, but to reside with the Reverend as his son. In a way, Chandin was adopted by the Reverend in return for the family's (and ofcourse Chandin's) conversion to Christianity. From the initial and literal migration to Lantanacamara to the cultural migration into a new religion and a new way of life, the story progresses to build layers of imposition onto Chandin's mind. It is interesting to note that there is an interplay of religion and

Capitalism in Chandin's approach to the conversion. He abides by Christrian thought and Christian way of life not because he believes in the supremacy of the Christian way of life but because he believes in the supremacy of the lifestyle led by all the Wetlanders in Lantanacamara. It is the big dining setups and the Chandiliers etc. that attract him to the Christian world. While Chandin leaves behind the worship of Hindu Gods (unlike his family that secretly is still Hindu at heart), Chandin is unable to fully adopt to the life of a devout Christian or to even just feel at-house in the Thoroughly household. One can say that Chandin experiences a cultural migration without arrival just like his parents experience a migration but do not really avail much from the move (and continue living in the barracks). It is no surprise to the reader that in the innate disdain for the uncultured and uncivilized way of life led by his family coupled with his inability to find a place in the society of Wetlanders makes Chandin hollow from within. While he speaks and dresses up like the Wetlanders his general self-identity is still in a Limbo. His sense of self and sense of self-worth are so inadequate that he starts associating his esteem with people around him or the people he desires to associate with. Everytime he experiences rejection— for instance, Lavinia's engagement to a Wetlander, the eloping of Lavinia and Sarah and years later, the romantic entanglement of Mala with another man—the demon in Chandin gets unleashed and he acts against human intelligence. An example of the same is his random decision to marry someone, raping his own daughters, attempt to murder directed at her daughter's lover Boyie etc. This cultural migration without arrival has left Chandin with a fragmented sense of self. After Lavinia and Sarah elope, Chandin receives the biggest blow to his ego. Despite being in love with Lavinia, he makes the decision to marry Sarah whom he actually looks down upon and years later when Lavinia (who is still the source of his affection) establishes a romantic, homosexual bond and elopes with Sarah, Chandin experiences what one can call a reverse-migration. He drops his refined mannerism and way of life and turns into a tyrant who abuses and rapes his pre-adolescent daughters. With this reverse migration, he becomes a heartless, drunkard man who is extremely possessive of his daughters (just like he was possessive of his wife when she eloped). Years later, when he finds out that Mala has a sexual relationship with Boyie, Chandin's reaction showcases his possessiveness: 'What the ass . . . ?' he mumbled. 'A mman iefing my baby? He brave to even try. I ent go let nobody tief my woman again. No man, no woman, no damn body go tief my woman again. I go kill he. I go kill she too, if it comes to that. I go kill meself too. I sharpenin' culass tonight' (*CBAN* 215).

It is the societal constructs that prevent Mala from escaping the atrocities levied upon her by her father. The general joke about Mala in Lantanacamara is that her father has mistaken her to be his wife. This trivialization of incest by this society and the general notion that it is a family's personal matter restrict Mala's autonomy over her body. When her sister Asha runs away from the house for safety and self-preservation, and writes letters to Mala to join her in another city and country, the postman never delivers those letters because he believes that he does not wish to step foot in a household of moral corruption and sin. This segregation by the society continues to add layers to the societal perception of Mala. Her outer garden (with its lack of aesthetics) becomes a wall between the society and Mala to the extent that nobody even realizes that the corpse of Chandin has laid undisturbed for years in the house itself. This cutoff from a society that thinks of Mala as a lunatic, provides Mala the space to be herself, without supervision. The curious kids of the neighbourhood sure disturb her with stones being flung at her windows etc, but the perception of her being a lunatic provides her with a protection from the society's gaze and shields her from the punishment for murdering her own father.

With years of living all by herself, Mala begins to lose her sense of language and uses language only during her brief interactions with PohPoh, her childhood self. Mala has disassociated herself from the trauma and abuse-ridden PohPoh to the level where she imagines

PohPoh to be young child outside of Mala's body and tries to be her loving and care-giving nurturer. As a result of the years of abuse and trauma, Mala withdraws completely from the societal world and societal language. Silence becomes her coping mechanism for the years to come. She not just maintains silence about her repeated sexual violation throughout her school years, but also uses silence as a shield when her father's corpse is found from the room downstairs. Having relegated herself to the world of plants and insects, Mala imitates the sounds made by the insects and birds. One may say that the desire to communicate could have driven her to speak the tongue of other animals. Aunt Lavinia had imbibed a love and appreciation for insects in the young Mala which later develops into the need to protect and nurture insects. In her school days, Mala and Boyie fancy themselves as "protectors of snails and all things unable to defend themselves from the bullies of the world" (*CBAN* 117). The young PohPoh pours out onto insects and birds all the love and care that she herself never received. Mala's rejection of human vocabulary and her self-relegation to sounds of birds and insects is gradual:

In the phase just before Mala stopped using words, lexically shaped thoughts would sprawl across her mind, fractured here and there. The cracks would be filled with images. Soon the inverse happened. A sentence would be constructed primarily of images punctuated by only one or two verbalizations: a noun tentatively uttered in recognition, a descriptive word confirming a feeling or observation. (*CBAN 123)*

Silence is used as trope by the author herself when the author maintains silence over the different forms of sexuality that characters in the novel embody. With the central narrator Tyler being referred to as "all kinds of funny" (*CBAN* 73) by the onlookers, his sexual inclination is never given a tag or title by the author. He comes across as funny to the onlookers because he dresses up in an elite fashion due to his education and exposure in the Shivering North Wetlands. He is also a misfit, in the eyes of people at Paradise alms house, due to his unconventional choice of profession as a nurse. He feels like an "outsider" due to his chosen profession. The lack of acceptance of Tyler's profession is evident in the fact that he is handed out menial jobs by the Matron at Paradise alms in spite of the formal training that he has officially received. Since nursing is a profession associated with a particular gender, the nurses at Paradise alms house are reluctant to revisualize the association of the profession with someone who looks like a man but dresses in fashionable outfits. He describes himself as "Not a man and not ever able to be a woman, suspended nameless in the limbo state between existence and non-existence" (*CBAN* 76). The author refrains from giving any judgement on Tyler's sexual orientation and also refrains from highlighting the traumatic responses that non-heteronormative characters usually face in most narratives. Mootoo seems to be using silence strategically in order to convey that homosexuality is natural as heterosexuality and needs no discernment or judgement. By not isolating the issue of homosexuality, Mootoo weaves it into the idea of normalcy but there is, of course, societal gaze that Tyler's personality invites. The gardener Hector admires Tyler's personality because it reminds him of his own brother but also expresses pity for Tyler. The heterosexual characters, thus, either express a disdain or sympathy (without an in-between) towards Tyler. It is only Mala and Otoh who allow Tyler to be who he is. The scene from the novel where Mala offers a female nurse's dress along with stockings to Tyler to try on but gives no particular reaction when he adorns the clothes speaks of her idea of gender fluidity and naturalness. In this extremely powerful scene, Mala just gives him a glance and continues with her usual activities.

The silence maintained by the Lantanacamara society on the transition of Otoh from a man to a woman also speaks volumes about the idea of fluidity of sexuality. Otoh, born as a pretty girl wills to be a young boy. The pronouns used for her change gradually in the novel. Even her parents do not question or even realize the transition of Otoh from a beautiful girl to an attractive young man. Otoh's existence is centered on the fact that he wishes to be a non-cowardly man, unlike his father. It is

only Otoh who becomes a catalyst of change in Mala's story. From romancing Mala in the guise of Boyie's outfit to setting the house with Chandin's corpse on fire in order to prevent Mala's trial, Otoh courageously takes matters in his hand. His romantic relationship with Tyler is also narrated with a general treatment as if it were any other romantic relationship. Thus, one can say that Mootoo consciously uses silence to normalize homosexuality /queerness as well as to describe the evil acts carried out by Chandin Ramachandin in order to project him as a victim-turned-perpetrator.

Mootoo contextualizes various forms of silence that are constructed by patriarchy, colonialism, heteronormativity and oppression. In the first part of the novel, silence hangs heavily on the victims of oppression and trauma such as Mala and Asha. Subsequently however it is the same silence that becomes an agency of resistance in the case of Mala who subvert the very language of oppression with vocalizations and silence. As a narrative of postcolonial resistance, Mootoo mobilizes silence as a cover for personal revenge and resistance against the cycle of oppression that women and homosexuals reel under. These cycles are ruptured by characters such as Mala, Asha, Lavinia, Sarah, Otoh, Tyler who manage to construct their own insularity with the help of silence and redeeming love.

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10.

Performing Arts: Classical Dance In India

Dr. K. Ratnasree

Abstract

Indian classical dance forms are integral to the country's cultural heritage, serving as mediums for spiritual expression, storytelling, and emotional portrayal. This paper explores the evolution, significance, and contemporary relevance of these dance forms, aligning with the University Grants Commission (UGC) guidelines for research in performing arts. By examining historical contexts, pedagogical frameworks, and technological advancements, the study underscores the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation in classical dance.

Introduction

Indian classical dance encompasses a rich tapestry of styles, each rooted in regional traditions and spiritual practices. The UGC's Compendium of Regulations emphasizes the importance of a "good academic record" and a Master's degree in the relevant subject for academic appointments in music and performing arts. This underscores the academic rigor required in the study and teaching of classical dance.

Historical Evolution

The origins of Indian classical dance are traced to ancient texts like the Natya Shastra, which outlines the theoretical framework for dance and drama. The UGC NET syllabus highlights the evolution of dance and drama from prehistoric times, referencing epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata, and their influence on dance and theatre . These texts laid the foundation for the codification of dance forms.

Classical Dance Forms

India boasts eight recognized classical dance forms, each with unique characteristics:

Bharatanatyam: Originating from Tamil Nadu, it is characterized by fixed upper torso, bent legs, intricate footwork, hand gestures (mudras), and facial expressions.

Kathak: From North India, known for its intricate footwork and spins, often narrating stories through expressive gestures.

Kathakali: A dance-drama from Kerala, distinguished by elaborate costumes and makeup, depicting mythological stories.

Kuchipudi: From Andhra Pradesh, it combines fast rhythms, fluid movements, and dramatic elements.

Manipuri: Originating from Manipur, it is known for its graceful and lyrical movements, often depicting themes of love and devotion.

Mohiniyattam: A classical dance form from Kerala, characterized by graceful, swaying body movements and subtle facial expressions.

Odissi: From Odisha, it is known for its fluid movements and the tribhangi posture, symbolizing the three bends of the human body.

Sattriya: Originating from Assam, it integrates dance, drama, and music to narrate stories from Hindu mythology.

Pedagogical Framework

The traditional method of teaching classical dance follows the Guru-Shishya parampara, emphasizing personalized instruction. Modern academic institutions have integrated this with structured curricula. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes experiential learning and competency-based education, advocating for the inclusion of dance education in the K-12 curriculum.

Technological Integration

In recent years, technology has played a pivotal role in the evolution of classical dance.

Studies have explored the use of machine learning for posture and sequence recognition in Bharatanatyam . Additionally, advancements in speech recognition techniques have been employed for beat detection and automatic annotation of Bharatanatyam music.

Institutional Support

The Sangeet Natak Akademi, established by the Government of India, serves as the apex body for the promotion and preservation of performing arts in the country. It confers awards on nine Indian classical dance forms and provides grants to institutions engaged in teaching, performing, or promoting music, dance, or theatre.

Conclusion

Indian classical dance forms are a testament to the country's rich cultural heritage. Their evolution, pedagogical frameworks, and integration with technology underscore their dynamic nature. Institutional support further ensures their preservation and promotion for future generations.

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11.

Narratives of the Marginalized: Subaltern Voices in R. K. Narayan's Short Story Collections

Dr. Kruti Vyas

Abstract

This paper investigates the nuanced portrayals of subaltern characters in R.K. Narayan's short stories, with a focus on "A Horse and Two Goats," "A Willing Slave," and "An Astrologer's Day," among others. Through the lens of subaltern theory—particularly the works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Ranajit Guha—the analysis reveals how Narayan captures the silent struggles, quiet dignity, and limited agency of marginalized figures within India's evolving socio-cultural landscape. Narayan's storytelling, while often marked by wit and simplicity, brings into focus the layered experiences of rural poor, women, and urban street dwellers. The paper argues that his characters, though seemingly passive, embody a subtle resistance and survival ethic that calls for a re-examination of how voice and agency are defined within the subaltern framework.

Keywords: R.K. Narayan, Subaltern Studies, Postcolonialism, Gender, Caste, Indian English Literature, Malgudi, Short Stories.

Introduction:

The term subaltern, drawn from Antonio Gramsci and elaborated in postcolonial studies by scholars like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Ranajit Guha, refers to groups socially, politically, and geographically excluded from power structures. Spivak's provocative question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" interrogates the systems that silence or misrepresent these voices in dominant discourse. In the Indian literary context, R.K. Narayan's fiction—especially his short stories—offers a fertile ground for exploring subalternity. Unlike overtly political narratives, Narayan's work presents the everyday lives of those who exist on the periphery: the poor, the caste-marginalized, women trapped by patriarchy, and itinerant workers. The fictional town of Malgudi becomes a microcosm of India's social stratification, offering an insightful portrayal of how subalterns survive, adapt, and—occasionally—assert agency.

Though Narayan's characterization often appears simple and deeply rooted in age-old customs and traditions, he is far ahead of his time. He gives agency and a speaking presence to his characters, constructing a combative space in his fiction. Through this space, Narayan challenges colonial rule, entrenched hierarchies, and Indian cultural taboos. His narratives go beyond mere observation—they are subtle yet deliberate acts of resistance. Narayan's short stories, while embedded in the local color of Malgudi, often transcend their setting to expose larger structures of power and marginalization. Rather than conform to the quietism often associated with traditional narratives, Narayan crafts nuanced assertions of resistance and identity through the very ordinariness of his characters' lives.

Subalternity and Symbolism in "A Horse and Two Goats:"

Muni, the elderly herder, represents a quintessential rural subaltern. Once self-reliant, he is now impoverished, scorned even by local shopkeepers. The two goats he tends are symbolic—they reflect not only his dwindling resources but also his remaining sense of identity and pride.

Narayan writes, "He had been a prosperous man once and had owned a flock of forty sheep and goats" (*Malgudi Days* 3), establishing Muni's fall from relative prosperity. The statue of the horse becomes a site of cultural dissonance: while Muni imbues it with mythic meaning rooted in local oral traditions, the American

tourist views it as an exotic art object. This cross-cultural misunderstanding illustrates Spivak's claim that the subaltern is not merely unheard but structurally misrepresented.

Spivak asserts, "The subaltern cannot speak... the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (Spivak 287). Muni's inability to convey the significance of the statue is not a language problem alone but a deeper epistemic rupture, where indigenous meaning is overridden by colonial and capitalist frameworks. Thus, Narayan critiques both economic marginalization and the epistemic violence of cultural translation, where the subaltern's knowledge systems are rendered invisible. Narayan also emphasizes Muni's powerlessness in social terms. His conversation with the shopkeeper early in the story sets the tone of humiliation and rejection: "You have no money and you come here talking of dhall and onions" (Narayan 4). The villager's laughter, the shopkeeper's refusal to extend credit, and Muni's retreat into tales of his past prosperity—all combine to show a character stripped of voice and agency. Yet even in such subjugation, Muni maintains a form of personal pride. His willingness to converse with the foreigner, despite the language barrier, is itself an act of self-assertion within a context that consistently denies him value.

Gendered Subalternity in "A Willing Slave:"

Ayah, the domestic servant in "A Willing Slave," exemplifies subalternity along both gender and class lines. As a widow, she has no social power; as an unpaid caregiver, she is exploited emotionally and economically. Her "willingness" is not a sign of contentment but a result of internalized patriarchy and dependency. Narayan describes her with restrained empathy: "She had grown to love the household as her own and could not think of life apart from it" (*Malgudi Days* 62). Her sense of belonging is tragically tied to her servitude. Ayah's identity is so entwined with her role that she resists retirement. This reflects how societal structures condition women to find worth only through service, reinforcing what Spivak identifies as the silencing of the "subaltern woman." Spivak notes, "Between patriarchy and imperialism... the subaltern woman disappears" (Spivak 306). Ayah's marginal voice is heard only through the narrator's description, never directly—a powerful technique that underscores her erasure from self-representation.

Narayan carefully avoids giving Ayah direct speech, even as her emotional world is relayed to the reader. Her memories of her deceased son, her attachment to the children she serves, and her eventual disillusionment when her replacement is brought in—all are filtered through the narrator's voice. This narrative strategy subtly reflects the limitations of even sympathetic storytelling in fully representing the subaltern. The lack of direct dialogue not only dramatizes her exclusion but also critiques the literary devices that may unintentionally reinforce subaltern erasure.

Urban Subalternity in "An Astrologer's Day:"

The astrologer in this story is a subaltern figure in disguise. He survives by exploiting the spiritual credulity of urban dwellers, yet his performative knowledge masks a personal history of violence and displacement. Narayan notes, "He had left his village without any plan or purpose. He had to leave it secretly... and he never dared to return" (*Malgudi Days* 6). His profession is rooted in spectacle rather than scholarship, reflecting how the city economy recycles subaltern labor into commodified services. What is striking is his adaptability—a form of agency often overlooked in classical definitions of resistance. Though marginalized, he crafts a livelihood through psychological insight, storytelling, and illusion.

As Ranajit Guha argues, "The politics of the people is not elite politics" (Guha 4). The astrologer's subalternity is urban, moral, and performative, providing a counterpoint to the rural and gendered forms discussed earlier. He adapts, survives, and manipulates his environment without formal power or recognition. Narayan's depiction of the astrologer's workspace also contributes to the subaltern theme. Described as a "path running through the Town Hall Park," his makeshift stall, surrounded by "groundnut sellers," "medicine vendors," and "magicians," becomes a site of informal labor and economic marginality (Narayan 1). His reliance on disguise—turban, sacred ash, mystic vocabulary—reveals how

subalternity in the urban sphere demands constant self-reinvention.

Furthermore, the astrologer's encounter with his past victim exposes another layer of subaltern dynamics: guilt, fear, and survival intersect in a moment of personal crisis. His confession—"You tried to kill me... I'm not going to press charges, just don't come to my village again"—underscores the limits of justice for subaltern figures. Rather than seeking institutional redress, the story closes with informal negotiation, reflecting the mistrust and inaccessibility of formal power structures for the marginalized.

Critics on Narayan's Subaltern Stance:

The framing of Narayan as an 'artist arrived from the future' has parallels with several critical observations. Sravani Biswas's view of Narayan's ironic realism, Bharucha's reading of Malgudi as an autonomous counter-colonial space, and Michel de Certeau's idea of 'tactics of the weak' all resonate with this interpretation. Though Narayan's tone remains gentle and his characters ordinary, his aesthetic quietly anticipates the postmodern concerns of fractured identities, performativity, and decentralized narratives. This fusion of tradition and foresight makes Narayan's fiction a timeless reservoir for understanding how the subaltern negotiates survival in changing socio-political landscapes.

Nilufer E. Bharucha, in her essay "Colonial Enclosures and Autonomous Spaces: R. K. Narayan's Malgudi," argues that Narayan's depiction of Malgudi subtly creates autonomous spaces that resist the dominance of colonial structures. Though seemingly insulated, these worlds challenge imperial control by sustaining traditional Indian values and fostering an internal critique of socio-political hierarchies. Her analysis reinforces the view that Narayan's fiction, while understated, participates in a broader postcolonial dialogue about resistance and identity.

Sravani Biswas, in her paper "Malgudi Milieu: A Sensitive World of Grotesque Realism," emphasizes how Narayan's world is "a sensitive portrayal of small-town India where realism is frequently tinged with irony and grotesque elements to foreground the absurdity of social hierarchies" (Biswas). Biswas argues that Narayan's realism is never neutral—it often destabilizes dominant narratives through its gentle subversions and understated critiques.

Several critics have recognized Narayan's subtle yet profound engagement with subaltern concerns. In her analysis, Meenakshi Mukherjee observes, "Narayan's genius lies in his ability to make the ordinary appear extraordinary, giving voice to the voiceless without ever turning his narratives into manifestos." Mukherjee emphasizes how his seemingly simple storytelling belies a deep political consciousness. Similarly, S. P. Raja notes, "Narayan's protagonists are often powerless in a socio-political sense, yet they possess a spiritual and emotional autonomy that resists complete subjugation." Raja sees Narayan's fiction as a space where moral dignity replaces material power, a hallmark of subaltern resilience.

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar also suggests that "Narayan writes about the small man in a big world, whose resistance lies not in violent upheaval but in quiet assertion, in being true to one's self." These perspectives affirm that Narayan's literary contributions reflect a deep sensitivity to the lives of those on the margins—rural poor, lower castes, women, and informal workers—thus aligning him with the ethical concerns of subaltern studies.

Narayan's Vision of Subalternity:

In exploring Narayan's oeuvre further, one discovers a consistent commitment to revealing the lived textures of marginal existence. His story "The Missing Mail," for instance, revolves around Thanappa, a humble village postman, who delays delivering a telegram about a death so a wedding can take place without disruption. Thanappa, though seemingly peripheral, enacts moral agency that disrupts bureaucratic rigidity—an act that quietly asserts the primacy of community wisdom over institutional protocol. This reinforces Narayan's portrayal of subaltern figures not just as victims but as bearers of ethical complexity.

Another notable example appears in "Lawley Road," where the protagonist, who champions the removal of a colonial statue, ultimately finds himself questioning the utility of such symbolic gestures. This ironic twist critiques both colonial memory and the postcolonial tendency to replace one form of authoritarian symbolism

with another. Narayan here engages in a dual critique: the absurdity of colonial relics and the ineffectuality of token resistance, thus complicating the binary of oppressor and oppressed.

Narayan's treatment of caste is equally subversive. In "The Blind Dog," the protagonist, a visually impaired beggar, depends on a dog to guide him through his daily routine. The man's vulnerability and the transactional nature of his relationship with the dog allegorize the dependence of lower castes on systems that both sustain and exploit them. The story refrains from overt moralizing but quietly critiques a society that tolerates such precarious modes of survival. The dog's eventual rebellion—a refusal to continue being tethered—can be read as a metaphor for the suppressed agency of the subaltern asserting itself in nonverbal, instinctive ways.

Throughout these stories, Narayan reiterates that the lives of the marginalized are not static but filled with movement, irony, and occasional assertion. These moments, though small in scale, are deeply subversive in intent. His ability to combine humor with critique, and empathy with detachment, allows him to present subaltern experiences without reducing them to caricature or victimhood.

Conclusion:

In his short stories, R.K. Narayan presents a rich tapestry of subaltern lives. His characters—be they rural herders, domestic servants, or city tricksters—exist in the margins of society yet demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and a quiet assertion of agency. Through subtle storytelling, Narayan critiques social hierarchies and reveals the complexity of subaltern existence.

His fiction aligns with subaltern theory's insistence on acknowledging the voices from below—not necessarily in the grand rhetoric of revolution but in the soft cadences of everyday survival. In doing so, Narayan broadens the scope of Indian English literature to include those whose stories are often left untold. His narrative empathy does not erase the conditions of oppression but invites readers to witness the lived experiences of those on the fringes—an act that, in itself, becomes a form of literary resistance.

Narayan's subaltern characters, whether knowingly or unknowingly, challenge dominant structures by simply existing, enduring, and narrating. They remind readers that voice and agency need not be loud or confrontational to be powerful. Even within systems that repress, there are moments of negotiation, assertion, and dignity. This paper, therefore, posits that Narayan's contribution to subaltern discourse lies not in political manifestos but in his humanizing portrayal of the marginalized—individuals who, in their quietude, demand to be seen and heard.

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12.

Literature as a Reflection of Cultural Heritage and Transformation

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Introduction

Literature has been regarded as one of the most effective mirrors through which the culture is reflected. It always tones the societal changes in a more morbid way and projects the human values which are carried through ages. We find stories with varied tones and diversities with human values, traditions, life and actions which frame a right depiction of the era. It's completely the picture of what people say and their actions, what prioritizes them and their attitudes which builds the society. This exploration of culture in literature transcends and delves into the essence of **societal shifts**, warping and wafting through the threads of the genre, character studies, and social reflections which is embedded in the language of America's literary giants, examining the interplay between written narratives and the evolving dynamics of culture, war, and society. Before we delve into the present scenario, exploring the past literary movements has made the study at ease. The rise of transcendentalist ideas intertwined the fight against injustice with the pursuit of a new literary movement.

Literature Review: The Influence of Literary Works

The theoretical foundation for understanding literature as a cultural mirror is rooted in diverse perspectives that examine how texts both reflect and shape cultural identities. The 19th century fictions rely with more adventurous and exploratory voyages which can be considered as a gateway to some creative and expansion of ideas and thoughts. Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain explores the themes of race and identity, to highlight the hypocrisy Huck's father enslave his son, isolate him and beat him. Some scholars redefine Huck's character in the context of African-American culture as a whole, with an interrelation of Black and White culture existed in America, with racial stereotyping. The frequent use of the word 'Nigger' makes us to feel more racism.

Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin is dominated by a single theme: the evil and immortality of slavery. The novel's vivid characterization—Uncle Tom's resilience, Eliza's desperate escape, and Simon Legree's cruelty—makes it emotionally compelling. It addresses the race, justice, human race and again the debated portrayal of Black characters. It exposes the brutality of slavery, showing how it strips individuals of their humanity through the characters like Tom, Eliza, and George Harris prove different aspects of enslaved life—faithful endurance, desperate escape, and rebellion. It's a combined element of contemporary humour and sentiments in such a powerful manner that it, helped in the steady development of Civil War.

The 19th-century American novels preserved cultural heritage by depicting historical events, traditions, and societal beliefs while also capturing the nation's transformation—from the abolition of slavery to evolving gender roles and industrialization. These works continue to influence modern American literature and cultural identity.

In the same way, 20th century is evident with the transformation of culture, the industrialization, race and the American Dream. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby is one of the most famous critiques of the American Dream, depicting its promise and its flaws. The novel explores themes of wealth, social class, ambition, and moral decay, reflecting how the pursuit of success can lead to disillusionment. Nearly a century later, these themes remain relevant in modern America, where issues of economic inequality, materialism, and social mobility continue to shape the nation's identity.

The American Dream, as depicted in The Great Gatsby, remains both a symbol of hope and a cautionary tale in today's society. While the ideal of success through hard work still exists, social and economic realities have made it increasingly difficult to achieve. Fitzgerald's novel serves as a timeless reminder that the pursuit of wealth without purpose can lead to moral and emotional emptiness, making it a powerful lens through which to examine modern America.

The novel suggests that the American Dream is an illusion, as Gatsby's downfall proves that wealth does not guarantee happiness or fulfilment. Today, economic crises, student debt, and job insecurity make it harder for many Americans to achieve the dream of financial stability and homeownership. However, the American Dream persists in different forms, with people redefining success beyond wealth—focusing on education, personal growth, and community.

The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck is evident with the Great Depression, migration, and workers' rights. It's a reflection of Chronicles, the struggles of Dust Bowl migrants, highlighting economic disparity and resilience. Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God is a significant novel that vividly portrays African American folk culture and dialect. It explores themes of Black heritage, female empowerment, love, and independence, following the journey of its protagonist, Janie Crawford, as she navigates personal growth and self-discovery. Through rich storytelling and cultural authenticity, the novel highlights the struggles and triumphs of a Black woman seeking autonomy and fulfilment in a society shaped by race and gender expectations.

Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach to examine how literature serves as a cultural mirror, both shaping and reflecting English cultural identity. Through detailed textual analysis, the research explores a selection of literary works spanning various historical periods—from classic texts that influenced early English cultural narratives to contemporary digital and immigrant literature that illustrates modern shifts in identity. A purposive sampling strategy will be employed to select texts that represent significant cultural moments, incorporating works by both canonical authors and lesser-known writers who offer diverse perspectives.

Contemporary Views and the Modern Significance

In today's era of globalization and digital communication, literature remains a dynamic platform for expressing and reshaping cultural identity. Contemporary works, including digital narratives and multimedia texts, capture the intricate interaction between global influences and local traditions. These modern texts not only challenge traditional cultural narratives but also reinterpret them in response to evolving social and political realities. The narrative structure and characterization strengthen literature's role as a reflection of culture. Through intricately woven narratives and complex characters, literary works explore the tension between personal identity and collective heritage. This contrast between traditional societal roles and evolving modern identities is particularly evident in postcolonial and immigrant narratives.

Modern American literature reflects and responds to the complexities of the present cultural, social, and political landscape. In an era defined by globalization, digital media, and shifting identities, contemporary literary works engage with themes such as racial and gender equality, immigration, political polarization, and technological influence on human interactions. Through intricate narrative structures, experimental forms, and a blending of genres, authors like Colson Whitehead, Jesmyn Ward, and Tommy Orange illuminate historical traumas and marginalized perspectives, while writers such as Ottessa Moshfegh and Ling Ma explore existential alienation, consumerist anxieties, and the absurdities of modern life. The revival of speculative fiction and dystopian literature echoes contemporary societal fears, while memoirs and autofiction blur the boundaries between personal experience and collective memory, offering intimate yet universally resonant storytelling.

Moreover, the rise of digital literature, interactive narratives, and multimedia

storytelling is transforming the way literature is both produced and consumed, challenging conventional literary forms and redefining the reader's engagement with text. Ultimately, modern American literature remains a dynamic force, simultaneously documenting and shaping contemporary consciousness, reinforcing its role as a powerful medium for cultural critique and artistic innovation. Contemporary American literature frequently delves into themes of identity, race, gender, sexuality and the changing definition of the American Dream, mirroring the nation's ongoing discourse on diversity and inclusion. Many authors engage with issues of social justice, inequality, and political polarization, using literature as a platform to critique the current political landscape and foster greater awareness and empathy. The impact of technology on human relationships is another prominent theme, with modern works examining concerns related to privacy, authenticity, and the evolving nature of society in an increasingly digital world. Ottessa Moshfegh's *Eileen* is a psychological thriller and character study that follows Eileen Dunlop, a young woman working at a juvenile detention centre in 1960s Massachusetts. The novel is framed as a recollection by an older Eileen, looking back at a week in her youth that led to her dramatic escape from her oppressive life. The themes and motives revolves around isolation, loneliness, repression and desire, violence and mortality and escape from the life. Throughout the novel, Eileen teeters between victimhood and complicity, making her a complex and unsettling character whose morality is as ambiguous as her future and explores the moral grey areas of modern life.

Conclusion

This study has examined the multifaceted role of literature as a cultural mirror, both shaping and reflecting English cultural identity. By analysing texts across various historical periods from the myth-infused narratives of early literature to the fragmented voices of contemporary digital media—this research highlights how literary works not only document societal transformations but also actively contribute to the construction of cultural self-awareness.

The interplay of narrative techniques, symbolism, and character development demonstrates that literature does more than reflect collective memory and it also drives the evolution of cultural identity by challenging traditional norms and embracing new forms of expression. Ultimately, the findings restate that literature remains a crucial tool for understanding and negotiating cultural identity in an increasingly globalized world. As the contemporary narratives continue to engage with and shape shifting social and political landscapes, they offer valuable insights into the dynamic process of cultural reformation. This ongoing dialogue between literature and society underscores the enduring significance of literary expression in preserving heritage while fostering cultural evolution, laying the foundation for future research into these complex interconnections.

With all the existence of diversity and Multiculturalism, many see American Culture – carrying the concept of American Dream, as a melting pot of traditions, languages, and ethnicities, shaped by immigration and globalization. Individualism and Freedom – The emphasis on personal independence, self-reliance, and the "American Dream" is often admired but can also be perceived as isolating or overly materialistic. The concepts of Consumerism and Pop Culture as the focal American entertainment, fashion and technology dominate global markets. Some admire its innovation and influence, while others criticize its commercialism and cultural homogenization. The modern work culture emphasizes strong work ethic and ambition, promoting the belief that meritocracy and hard work lead to success. However, some outsiders perceive it as encouraging a high-stress, work-focused lifestyle. Looking at the social and political contradictions, American culture is often seen as both a leader in democratic values and a nation with deep social divisions regarding race, gender, and class. Some view the U.S. as a land of opportunity, while others highlight its systemic inequalities.

Exploring modern American literature reveals how identity, technology, and human relations of contemporary society are perceived,

including their social and cultural changes. Focuses on identity and multiculturalism integrate complex concepts of race, ethnicity, gender, and self in a pluralistic society while American Dream revisited challenges capitalism, social mobility, and inequality. Besides the impacts of digital culture, technology, and surveillance, issues of climate change and environmental degradation are growing concerns. Other novels explore the effects of disconnection on mental well-being, isolation, and the intricate nature of human emotions. Postmodernism and metafiction utilize non-linear storytelling and unreliable narrators to subvert conventional narratives. Moreover, literature remains a central engagement for social justice advocacy, tackling systemic racism, gender discrimination, LGBTQ+ discrimination, and political activism. Such themes epitomize the issues of modernity and illustrate the multicultural transformation of today's literature.

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13.

Subverting Power: Two Faces of Resistance in *A Suitable Boy* and *The White Tiger*

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Abstract

This paper analyses the resistance of power during the post-colonial times. It is a comparative study between Vikram Seth's A suitable Boy (1993) and Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger (2008) which showcases opposite ways of how individuals challenge systemic oppression in India. As these novels are set in two different historical timelines—post-independence India (1950s) and the neoliberal, globalized India (2000s) — these novels explore divergent ways of resistance: one seeks change through negotiation while the other challenges the system in a rebellious manner. In A Suitable Boy, the characters Lata Mehra and Haresh Khanna navigate through societal barriers to such an extent that they take the form of unspoken resistance only. In this novel, a New and independent India could be seen facing numerous social and cultural challenges including caste system, patriarchy and colonialism. It shows how slowly and gradually Independent India's reform became a catalyst to empowerment. On the Contrary, The White Tiger demonstrates a dark and cynical picture of postcolonial resistance. The protagonist named Balram Halwai, a marginalized servant, challenges the dominant systems of power and privilege through violence and manipulation. His journey depicts inequality in the status quo of India's neoliberal economy, suggesting that survival and success for the subaltern does not require defiance but dismantling the system. This paper interrogates how the class system, caste system and economic aspirations give rise to resistance in post-colonial literature using postcolonial theories by Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha. While A Suitable Boy represents gradual societal transformation, The White Tiger portrays a shift towards dissatisfaction and rebellious defiance of authority. This study showcases the nature of power struggles in modern India by analyzing these two post-colonial texts displaying resistance.

Keywords: Postcolonial Resistance, Class Struggle, Caste Oppression, Economic Mobility, Narrative Subversion.

Introduction:

The term 'Postcolonialism' widely refers to the representation of race, ethnicity, culture and human identity in the modern era, mostly after many colonized countries got their independence. It is connected with imperialism from the moment of colonization until 21st century; "The word imperialism derives from the Latin imperium, which has numerous meanings including power, authority, command, dominion, realm, and empire" (Habib 737). Post-colonial narratives are strong spaces of resistance reflecting the broken and fractured identities, socio-economic disparities and ideological differences that characterize the post-independence condition. As resistance is central part of post-colonial literature, it portrays the conflict of challenging the dominance and also claiming one's identity in the new independent nation. The interconnected representation of resistance in post-independence India is clearly presented in Vikram Seth's A Suitable Boy (1993) and Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger (2008).

In the 'The White Tiger,' Adiga presents a more radical and nihilistic approach following the traditional systems of caste and class dominance. While in A Suitable Boy, Seth offers a panoramic account which favours gradualist reform and institutional continuity as a conducive approach for overcoming post-independence struggles. These works' juxtaposition encourages a critical analysis of the various forms of resistance they represent, from radical rupture to quietist acceptance.

This study situates both novels within the broader matrix of postcolonial theory, drawing on the insights of Frantz Fanon's revolutionary humanism, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's subaltern critique, and Homi K. Bhabha's theories of hybridity and mimicry. Through this theoretical lens, the paper interrogates how literature not only mirrors socio-historical transformations but also acts as a constitutive force in shaping postcolonial subjectivities and disrupting hegemonic narratives. By foregrounding the interplay of caste, class, and economic aspiration, the analysis seeks to reveal the ways in which resistance in postcolonial literature is not monolithic but is instead inflected by context-specific modalities of power, agency, and identity negotiation.

Rationale:

Defiance in post-colonial literature is a vital theme which exemplifies the hard work of the colonised countries in order to restore their identity, agency, and socio-political independence. Although Seth and Adiga offered contradictory views of dealing with resistance, but it also hammers complimentary perspectives on how to deal as well as oppose the repressive systems. Economic inequality and social stagnation are well exposed in the White Tiger whereas advancement through gradual reforms through individual action can be witnessed in A Suitable Boy. The act of resistance as a complex phenomenon can be examined with the shifting sociopolitical changes taking place in the nation. By contrasting the nihilism of systemic upheaval with the possibility of reform, this work adds to the conversation on post-colonial resistance.

Objectives

1. To examine how resistance is represented in *A Suitable Boy* and *The White Tiger*.
2. To analyze the contrasting modes of defiance—gradual reform vs. radical subversion—within the framework of postcolonial theory.
3. To explore the role of class, caste, and economic aspirations in shaping the characters' approaches to challenging systemic oppression.
4. To investigate how these novels reflect broader shifts in postcolonial Indian society from independence to globalization.
5. To assess the relevance of Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha's theories in understanding postcolonial resistance in these texts.

Research Methodology:

This study employs a qualitative, comparative literary analysis to examine the theme of resistance in *A Suitable Boy* and *The White Tiger*. The research methodology involves:

- **Textual Analysis:** A close reading of both novels to identify key themes, character arcs, and narrative strategies related to resistance.
- **Theoretical Framework:** Applying postcolonial theories by Fanon, Spivak, and Bhabha to interpret how the characters' defiance reflects broader socio-political concerns.
- **Comparative Approach:** Identifying similarities and differences in how Seth and Adiga depict power structures, social mobility, and rebellion.
- **Historical Contextualization:** Situating the novels within their respective historical moments—post-independence democracy in *A Suitable Boy* and neoliberal capitalism in *The White Tiger*—to understand how resistance is shaped by time and context.

Scope and Limitations

Scope:

- The study focuses on the theme of resistance in *A Suitable Boy* and *The White Tiger* within the framework of postcolonial theory.

- It explores how class, caste, gender, and economic disparity influence the forms of resistance depicted in both novels.
- The research engages with critical perspectives from postcolonial studies to analyze the changing nature of power dynamics in postcolonial India.

Limitations:

- The study is limited to these two novels and does not encompass the entire body of postcolonial Indian literature.
- While postcolonial theory is the primary analytical lens, other critical frameworks such as Marxist or feminist perspectives are not explored in depth.
- The paper does not include an extensive discussion on real-world political movements but rather focuses on literary representations.

Comparative Analysis: Resistance in *A Suitable Boy* and *The White Tiger*

Historical Context and Setting:

Set in the early 1950s, A Suitable Boy represents the India after independence which was going through political transition, social reform and advent of a democratic nation. The novel depicts the goals and challenges faced by people in the transforming society. In contemporary circumstances such as these, resistance plays a role of progressive development — an endeavor to subvert systemic structures to build personal and social agency.

On the other hand, located within the neoliberal, globalized India where power structures rely on structural mobility and socioeconomic stratification, The White Tiger depicts the early 2000s. Adiga's protagonist, Balram Halwai portrays a cynical side of India with a form of passive resistance meanwhile challenging the socio-political and oppressive systems which is contradictory to Seth's protagonist who work for the oppressors and are a part of the system.

Modes of Resistance: Negotiation vs. Radical Subversion

Institutional Engagement in *A Suitable Boy:*

Seth's novel presents resistance through characters who challenge societal norms while still operating within established frameworks. Lata Mehra, the central protagonist, defies traditional expectations regarding marriage and asserts her autonomy in choosing a partner. One of the clearest assertions of female autonomy is voiced when Lata declares that she will not be forced into a marriage simply because it is suitable in the eyes of others. Haresh Khanna, another key character, represents economic and social mobility through hard work, self-discipline, and engagement with democratic institutions. Their forms of defiance illustrate how individuals can navigate power structures without entirely dismantling them.

Rebellion and Systemic Breakdown in *The White Tiger:*

In contrast, *The White Tiger* presents a protagonist who sees systemic oppression as insurmountable through conventional means. Balram Halwai, born into a lower caste, is acutely aware of his socioeconomic limitations and the futility of gradual reform. His resistance takes the form of murder, deception, and moral transgression as he seeks to escape servitude and achieve financial independence. He articulates his perspective starkly: "The moment you recognize what is beautiful in this world, you stop being a slave." *(Adiga 236)* His actions critique the entrenched inequalities of India's capitalist economy, suggesting that resistance, when negotiation fails, may necessitate radical disruption.

Class, Caste, and Economic Aspirations:

Both novels engage deeply with class and caste structures but present divergent visions of economic aspiration. In *A Suitable Boy*, upward mobility is portrayed as achievable through education, professional diligence, and alignment with nationalistic ideals. Lata's realization that she has to choose her own path reflects the novel's belief in self-determination within institutional constraints.

By contrast, *The White Tiger* challenges the notion that social mobility is universally accessible. Balram's story underscores how economic disparities perpetuate servitude, making conventional success nearly impossible for the marginalized. He notes bitterly that In India, the rich don't just own the wealth—they own us. His transformation from driver to entrepreneur critiques both the false promise of

meritocracy and the dehumanizing effects of extreme poverty.

Two Faces of Post-Colonial Resistance:

In contrasting the modes of resistance portrayed in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, one notes a fundamental divergence not merely in narrative tone but in the authors' philosophical engagements with postcolonial Indian identity. Seth's work, expansive in scope and classical in structure, offers a vision of resistance rooted in cultural negotiation and institutional participation, whereas Adiga's novel confronts systemic oppression through a corrosive, confrontational subversion. *A Suitable Boy*, as Anna Guttman asserts, is "a site of struggle between different visions of the postcolonial nation," one that embodies Seth's quiet yet resolute advocacy for pluralism and hybridity (Guttman 35). The novel's linguistic and thematic architecture reflects what Guttman terms "khichrification"—a metaphorical culinary image that evokes "an Indian stew in which many different ingredients may be cooked together in varying proportions" (Guttman 36). This notion encapsulates Seth's strategy of resistance: a deliberate weaving together of diverse religious, cultural, and linguistic strands to assert a collective Indian identity beyond colonial binaries.

In contrast, *The White Tiger* discards such conciliatory frameworks. Adiga's protagonist, Balram Halwai, weaponizes cynicism and individualism to resist entrenched class and caste structures, embodying what may be called a violent departure from the Nehruvian idealism implicit in Seth's narrative world. Where Seth explores the aesthetics of secular nationalism through characters negotiating love, tradition, and politics—such as Lata's final act of self-choice or Maan's journey from indulgence to civic awakening—Adiga presents resistance as annihilative rather than transformative. Thus, the two novels represent divergent faces of postcolonial resistance: Seth's through integrative continuity and Adiga's through disruptive rupture.

Postcolonial Theoretical Perspectives

- **Frantz Fanon's Decolonization and Violence:** Fanon's argument that violent resistance is sometimes necessary for true liberation resonates with Balram's arc in *The White Tiger*. His defiance aligns with Fanon's idea that oppressed individuals may resort to extreme measures to dismantle entrenched power structures.
- **Gayatri Spivak's Subaltern Agency:** Spivak's concept of the subaltern's inability to speak within dominant structures applies to both novels but in different ways. Lata and Haresh navigate existing power dynamics to carve out agency, while Balram asserts his voice only through violent rupture, raising questions about whose resistance is ultimately acknowledged.
- **Homi Bhabha's Hybrid Identity:** Bhabha's concept of hybridity is evident in *A Suitable Boy*, where cultural negotiation is a means of empowerment. Conversely, *The White Tiger* rejects hybridity, presenting a stark binary between oppressor and oppressed, suggesting that systemic integration may not always be viable.

Conclusion:

Resistance in postcolonial literature is neither monolithic nor static. *A Suitable Boy* and *The White Tiger* exemplify two contrasting yet interconnected modes of defiance—one rooted in reform, the other in radical subversion. While Seth's narrative offers a hopeful vision of transformation through engagement with institutions, Adiga's novel critiques the limitations of such an approach in the face of persistent structural inequalities. By examining these narratives through postcolonial theories, this study underscores the evolving nature of power struggles in modern India, highlighting how literature both reflects and challenges the socio-political realities of its time.

Suggestions:

1. Future studies could expand this research to include other postcolonial Indian novels that depict resistance in different contexts, such as *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy or *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie.
2. A deeper exploration of gendered resistance could provide additional insights, particularly in *A Suitable Boy*, where Lata's

defiance is framed within patriarchal constraints.
3. Analyzing the role of language and narrative structure in shaping resistance in these novels could further enhance our understanding of their ideological messages.
4. A cross-cultural comparison with other postcolonial literatures, such as African or Caribbean novels, could provide a broader perspective on resistance in formerly colonized societies.

Recommendations:

1. Incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives, such as economic theory or political science, can provide a more holistic understanding of how systemic oppression is sustained and challenged.
2. Further research could explore the impact of neoliberalism on postcolonial literature, particularly in the context of globalization and economic disparity.
3. Engaging with reader-response theory could offer insights into how contemporary audiences interpret and relate to these narratives of resistance.
4. Future analyses could examine adaptations of these novels in other media, such as film or television, to assess how different forms of storytelling influence the portrayal of resistance.

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14.

Traditional Culture and the Plight of Women in Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows*

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Abstract: This article examines the status of women in Afghanistan, in the novel *A House Without Windows* by Nadia Hashimi as a case study. The novel highlights various social and cultural norms that limit women's freedom, particularly as depicted in Chil Mehtab. Culture encompasses the social behaviours and norms prevalent within human societies. In contemporary conversations, cultural studies have manifested as a prominent area of study that offers groundbreaking revelations about the exploration of culture and society. Cultural Studies integrates a diverse array of politically engaged critical methodologies that are aligned with various theoretical frameworks and academic disciplines. Each nation possesses its own distinctive culture and heritage. Afghanistan is recognised for its rich cultural tapestry and has historically served as a pivotal hub for trade and migration. Nadia Hashimi, in her novel, portrays Afghan women as victims of injustice who seek freedom within the confines of prison alongside other female inmates. The title A House Without Windows symbolically represents the true essence of imprisonment. Through her writing, Hashimi uses literature as a mirror of cultural heritage. This study explores the factors contributing to violence against women in Afghanistan's patriarchal society. To achieve this, the novel reflects Hashimi's perspective on the struggles women face in her culture. A theoretical, critical framework is employed to analyse the selected texts thoroughly. The article examines how Afghan patriarchal traditions and societal norms oppress women. Additionally, it highlights the role of female writers in challenging patriarchal ideologies and the recurring theme of women's loss of identity, which is a central concern in Hashimi's works.

Keywords: Women's plight; Traditional Culture; Afghan women; Prison; Patriarchal Society.

Introduction

Women in Afghanistan have long faced significant challenges due to deep-rooted traditional and cultural norms, limiting their rights and opportunities. Afghan society, influenced by tribal customs and Islamic traditions, often enforces strict gender roles that restrict women's education, employment, and social freedoms. Despite some progress in recent years, many Afghan women continue to struggle for basic rights amid societal and political instability. The point to be focused on in this study is Afghan women, their situation in society, and the effects of traditional culture on them. Women's challenges remain a problem in Afghanistan. (Wahab and Youngerman). Afghan women have been deprived of their rights and freedoms because of the patriarchal social structure of their country. Classic patriarchy describes the system that makes women's sole role in society to be obedient wives and daughters-in-law from a very young age. Afghan women are subjected to severe restrictions on their physical appearance and

access to the public sphere on religious grounds (AIMEUR). The socio-economic, political, and cultural conditions of the Afghan people have necessitated Afghan writers to chronicle the problems that confront their region. There are some famous writers from Afghanistan, such as Khaled Hosseini, Nadia Anjuman, Nancy Dupree, Nadia Hashimi, and Nadeem Aslam. Among them, Khaled Hosseini and Nadia Hashimi occupy a prominent place in Afghan Literature, (Rasheed). In her novel *A House Without Windows* (2016), Nadia Hashimi weaves the stories of Afghan women, Afghan land, and Afghan prisoners into a narrative that voices female subjectivity in Afghanistan. The novel's title can be read as a metaphoric eponym for Zeba, the protagonist in the story, and for the land of Afghanistan. Nadia Hashimi's novel *A House Without Windows* (Hashimi et al.)personifies Afghan women's lives as prisoners in their own bodies while also dialogically situating their stories inside a prison–Chil Mahtab (Rasheed). The Chil Mehtab prisoners feel they belong to it as a shelter and a safe haven, called a house. All the women in Chil Mahtab are not merely sharing their tales but growing together. Women in Afghanistan suffer from oppressive situations and rules, resulting in inequality and injustice. Afghanistan women face difficulties at all levels of Afghanistan's patriarchal society. (Syiva Fauzia and Cahyaning Rahayu).

Afghanistan's conventional culture, influenced by its historical contexts and religious beliefs, significantly shapes societal norms, particularly concerning women. Historically, women have encountered substantial limitations in rights and opportunities in comparison to men, with patriarchal structures deeply entrenched within Afghan society. Women are traditionally expected to assume domestic responsibilities, whereas men are regarded as the primary economic providers. Rigid dress codes and behavioural constraints, frequently upheld by both societal expectations and legal frameworks, further curtail women's liberties. Notwithstanding these adversities, Afghan women assume essential roles within their communities and families, contributing to their sustenance and supporting their households despite considerable challenges. However, discrimination and impediments continue to afflict many women in Afghanistan, making it imperative to acknowledge the country's cultural heterogeneity when examining women's experiences, as these experiences differ markedly.

Study Area

The study explores the oppression of women in Afghanistan, highlighting it as a major human rights issue. It focuses on Nadia Hashimi's novel *A House Without Windows*, which explores the struggles of Afghan women throughout history. The novel portrays their restricted freedom, emphasising how Afghan traditional culture limits their rights and autonomy.

The theme of the story is a heartbreaking one: the fate of women and girls in an intensely patriarchal society. (Rasheed). Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows* follows Zeba, a woman accused of murdering her husband, as she navigates the Afghan justice system while fighting for her innocence. The novel highlights the humiliation, disrespect, and violence women face, with its central theme being violence against women. Through Zeba's words, the story explores the difficult conditions women endure.

The message, the rain, and the divine light come through my window

Falling into my house from my origins

Hell is that house without a window

True religion, O servant of God, is creating a window

Do not raise your ax to every nook, come

Raise your ax to frame a window

Do you not know that sunlight

Is only the image of the sun that appears beyond her veil? (Hashimi, 2016)

The title of the novel is taken from Rumi's Masnavi. The title "A House Without Windows" is itself symbolic. For example, the word 'windows' in the title symbolises optimism, hope, and light and also shows a connection to the outside world. Without

windows, a house is very dark, confined, and constricted and without connection to the outside world, as the female characters of the novel reveal the same situation. In addition, the human rights report on imprisoned women in Afghanistan reports that her travel to Afghanistan evoked Hashimi to write about such burning issues, problems, and violence against women in the Afghan patriarchal society (Salman et al.). Women in Afghanistan are denied fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, education, work, movement, and healthcare. Zeba's situation highlights this injustice after being accused of her husband's murder, and she is interrogated for hours and forced to sign a confession she cannot read. As a woman, she has no legal rights, and no investigation is conducted. She refuses to cooperate with her lawyer or defend herself.

Hashimi portrays the struggle for justice through Yusuf, an idealistic lawyer attempting to work within the legal system, and Gulnaz, Zeba's mother, who relies on *jadu* (ancient spells) for influence. The novel intertwines the stories of imprisoned women, giving their experiences a sense of realism. *A House Without Windows* exposes a society where ignorance and pride protect wrongdoing, but it also offers hope that Afghan women will one day overcome oppression in a patriarchal system that confines them both at home and in society.

Methodology

The study is based on a thematic textual analysis and is qualitative. The researcher has undertaken the task of exploring the theme of cultural studies and the status of women in Afghan patriarchal society in the selected texts of the feminist writer Nadia Hashimi. This study employs textual analysis and follows a qualitative approach. The researcher aims to examine the theme of violence against women within Afghanistan's patriarchal society as depicted in the selected text. Additionally, the research is conducted through the interpretation of various sources, including books, journals, articles, book reviews, and other materials related to the author.

Discussion and Results

Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows* offers a deep cultural study of Afghanistan, highlighting how societal norms dictate behaviour and negatively impact women. Through Zeba's story, the novel explores critical issues like forced marriage, domestic violence, and honour killings, ensuring women's struggles for their rights. It calls for reforms in culture and the legal system to promote gender equality, portraying the hardships women face both inside and outside prison. Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows* explores the struggles of Afghan women for freedom and independence, highlighting their oppression and marginalisation in a patriarchal society. The novel follows Zeba, a woman accused of murdering her husband, and her lawyer, Yusuf, who seeks to clear her name. It examines feminism and gender roles, showing how women are silenced and punished for expressing their desires.

The story also presents gender roles as socially constructed and subject to change. Yusuf, initially viewing Zeba as a victim, gradually recognises her agency and reevaluates his assumptions about gender. The novel portrays feminism as an evolving process rather than a singular solution, emphasising the need for continued action. Ultimately, *A House Without Windows* is a powerful call for justice and equality, shedding light on Afghanistan's cultural and social issues through Zeba's journey in the legal system.

Many feminist studies of women's autobiographies, diaries, and oral histories focus on identifying common experiences among women. The distinction between men and women, along with the power dynamics of dominance and submission, is interconnected. This perspective defines the social meaning of sex and represents a distinctly feminist interpretation of gender inequality.

It was all about honour. Honour was a boulder that men placed on the shoulders of their daughters, their sisters, and their wives […]. This girl had lost her father's honour in Zeba's courtyard. If he knew that something had

happened to her – the details hardly mattered – she might not be forgiven, even though she was an innocent child. (Hashimi,2016: 234)

The excerpt highlights the struggles of Afghan women, emphasising their societal inferiority and the harsh consequences they face for defying traditional norms. Many women in Chil Mahtab prison are incarcerated for moral crimes such as love affairs, extramarital relationships, or fleeing home. Ironically, within the prison, they experience a degree of freedom denied to them outside, engaging in activities like using mobile phones, smoking, applying makeup, and watching TV—acts restricted under male authority.

Gender discrimination against women in Afghanistan is widespread, denying them basic rights like education, employment, and personal autonomy. This inequality severely limits their opportunities and access to resources. In *A House Without Windows*, Yusuf, despite advocating for women's rights, displays bias when supporting restrictions on women working in the Supreme Court due to Islamic rules about touching the Quran. The excerpt argues that such justifications are merely excuses to highlight women's supposed deficiencies, reinforcing injustice against them.

"Have faith. Things could change," Yusuf said carefully." "As long as men are the judges, nothing will change." Yusuf suddenly felt a bit defensive on behalf of all men.

There was a woman nominated to serve on the Supreme Court last week. Things may change." "Did you not hear the rest?" Latifa shot back. "She was rejected because she dares bleed once a month." Yusuf had heard that news, actually. A Supreme Court justice would have to touch the Qur'an every day, one parliamentarian had argued. How could a woman be a judge when she could not touch the Qur'an one whole week out of the month? The reasoning had made Yusuf groan." (Hashimi, 2016:327).

According to the text, in Afghanistan, women's futures are largely determined by their families, including decisions about marriage. Widows, too, must seek permission if they wish to remarry. However, Gulnaz, Zeba's mother, stands out as a strong and independent woman by choosing not to remarry after her husband's death. Women like her are essential in challenging societal norms and asserting their autonomy in such restrictive environments.

"I kept his clothes at the house. There was always a place for him in case he did return. And I wept sometimes to see the emptiness where your father should have been, but they were bad times for us too, and I had to think of you. I had two children to feed, and only my sewing kept us alive. Your uncles hinted at me marrying one of them, but I told them I wouldn't marry again until your father's body was brought home." (Hashimi, 2016:110).

Zeba embodies the resilience of an Afghan woman, enduring oppression for her family's sake. Her strength is evident when her husband is found murdered, and despite the chaos, her priority remains protecting her children. Aware of the trauma they might face, she urges them to go inside, shielding them from witnessing the tragic scene and the consequences that follow.

Kamal's real murder is carried out by his victim, Laylee. Hashimi dismisses Laylee's situation. She was raped by Kamal because of that, she suffered much at a young age, "kill me" (p.342). After the incident, Laylee begs her parents, especially her mother, to put an end to her suffering. Honour is the essential norm that Afghan families have deadly preserved. The author sheds light on many aspects to demonstrate the various experiences lived by women and girls in their lives and the heavy load of being a woman in a society like Afghanistan.

"What a burden it is to be born a woman." (Hashimi, 2016:155)

Despite such conditions, women are strong only if they are united because they have been living and suffering the same situation and awkwardness.

Gulnaz, Zeba's mother, confronts Judge Qazi Najeeb, defending her daughter's innocence and insisting that Zeba's suffering should justify her release. However, the judge remains convinced of Zeba's guilt. The exchange highlights the broader issue of Afghan women being denied justice, legal protection, and participation in decision-making processes, which Qazi Najeeb reinforces in his response.

The truth is, Qazi Najeeb, that while tradition states a woman's word is only worth half a man's, a mother's word is the full story. I am telling you that Zeba was deeply troubled, and that man had everything to do with it." (Hashimi, 2016:174).

"Nor was anyone else, though the world is ready to condemn her "We have to look at the situation. She was at the house with him." (Hashimi, 2016:174)

A similar exchange occurs between Yusuf and Judge Qazi Najeeb as Yusuf defends Zeba's case. Despite the circumstances surrounding Zeba and her psychological state, the judge remains adamant about her guilt.

"Enough, Yusuf, Qazi Najbeen interrupted. "Let me speak. The prosecution has a strong case. I am trying to be very fair and open-minded about this case, but even if she's now been deemed insane, that's not enough to save her from being guilty of murder. Now, the only thing left to consider is this news about Kamal as a drunk who may have committed a horrible sacrilegious act." (Hashimi, 2016: 309).

In *A House Without Windows* by Nadia Hashimi, traditional culture is a central theme. The protagonist, Zeba, is a young Afghan woman trying to navigate her role in a society deeply entrenched in tradition. Through her journey, the novel offers a close examination of the complexities of Afghan cultural norms.

"I wanted to understand why our culture was so hard on women, why it seemed to be so unfair."

The texts highlight the challenges women face in traditional culture while also emphasising the importance of honouring one's heritage. Zeba's father's words, *"We must remember who we are and where we come from,"* reflect the value of tradition and ancestral respect. Despite its difficulties, the novel acknowledges both the struggles and the significance of cultural identity.

One other aspect of showing Afghan traditional culture is singing traditional songs in different life situations; of course, in the Dari language. Zeba has a background in Music from an early age. That is regarded as a part of her family's hobbies and society's traditional culture. She was singing these words as a kind of consolation for her condition, for she is in a miserable condition in Chil Mahtab.

"Judgment Day is coming. Allah help me, I'm ready for it. Send the winds, the hail, and the fires. I'm waiting for it! Just keep that devil away from me!"

"Imshab ba gisa-e dil-e-man goosh mekonee..." Zeba sang softly, hoping to drown out the moaning of her neighbor and the angry shouts for him to keep quiet. "Farda, man-ra chu qisa feramoosh mekonee..." (Hashimi, 2016: 272)

Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows* offers a deep exploration of traditional Afghan culture and the struggles women face in areas like education, employment, and justice. Through Zeba's journey, the novel reveals both the hardships imposed by tradition and the significance of preserving cultural values. Despite these challenges, Afghan women can still create opportunities for growth and progress, as filmmaker Sahraa Karimi emphasises the importance of using rare chances to learn, improve, and become a powerful force for change in their country.

Conclusion

Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows* examines the hardships Afghan women endure under traditional cultural norms. The novel explores themes of gender inequality, domestic abuse, and the fight for women's rights, illustrating how they are often oppressed, treated as inferior, and controlled by a patriarchal system. However, it also highlights their resilience, showing how they resist oppression through solidarity and determination. Ultimately, the book advocates for change in cultural traditions to protect and empower women in Afghan society.

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15.

How Social Media Is Changing What Young People Read: Rising Popularity of Popular Fiction and Social Media's Influence

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Abstract

Social media's presence is felt in every sphere of life, and it has become vital to analyse how pervasive it is in driving our opinion about what we read and what we consider as 'literary merit'. This study aims to investigate how digital media plays a pivotal role in changing literature reading among young readers, with a particular focus on the rising popularity of popular fiction. Digital media platforms like Instagram and TikTok are enabling increased access to literature. Popular fiction characterized by fast-paced narratives, relatable themes, and mass appeal, has become a dominant genre among young readers due to its visibility and promotion on social media. The hypothesis states that digital media acts as a catalyst in shaping young readers' preferences, increasing the consumption of popular fiction. The primary objective of this study is to explore how digital media influences the perception and consumption of literature among young people, with a focus on the mechanisms through which popular fiction gains prominence.

Through structured online questionnaires involving young readers, the study investigates the role of algorithms, viral Instagram book trends, BookTok, Wattpad and online communities in driving literary consumption. Key findings reveal that digital media democratizes access to literature and redefines what is considered "worthy" of reading, often prioritizing entertainment and relatability over literary merit. This research, highlighting the impact of digital media on literary consumption, offers insights for educators, publishers, and authors. By analyzing the interplay between digital platforms, popular fiction, and youth culture, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how literature evolves in the digital age.

Keywords: Young Readers, Popular Fiction, Digital Media, Literary Engagement

Introduction

Social media has irrevocably changed how we communicate, consume data, and define culture. The field of literature is no exception as it is undergoing significant transformation in reading habits, preferences and what is deemed 'worthy' of reading by the masses. Over the past decade, social media's influence has intensified, shaping not only our reading habits but also how we interpret literature and our perception of 'literary merit'. This research paper focuses specifically on the role of digital platforms in elevating popular fiction- narratives that are accessible, emotionally resonant and highly visible on social media. It analyses how specific mechanisms of platforms like Booktok, Wattpad and Instagram affect what young readers choose to read and how they engage with these texts. To investigate this relationship, this paper will make use of quantitative data collected from structured online questionnaires administered to 50 young readers.

Rationale:

This research paper arises out of the need to better understand how digital platforms are influencing the reading behaviour of young people. Social media has become a dominant platform for literary engagement amongst the

youth, particularly through platforms like BookTok, Wattpad and Instagram. These platforms are not only making literature more accessible and visible, but also altering what young readers choose to read and engage with texts. As the presence of popular fiction grows across these platforms, it has become important to examine the extent of social media's influence in empowering popular fiction. This study seeks to provide measurable insights into how digital media drives literary consumption and engagement of popular fiction.

Objectives:

The objectives of this research paper focus on young readers and shall be arrived at by analysing the data gathered through the online questionnaire.

- To examine how social media platforms shape young readers' book choices.
- To examine the role of viral book trends and algorithmic recommendations in influencing young readers' preference for popular fiction.
- To explore how young readers perceive the popularity and relevance of popular fiction promoted through social media

Research Methodology:

This research paper employs a quantitative methodology, using a structured online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms to collect data from 50 young participants aged between 15-27. The questionnaire includes multiple choice questions and a few short-answer questions designed to gather brief subjective inputs. The survey focuses on gathering data regarding reading habits, how participants discover books, reading preferences and their attitudes towards popular fiction.

Scope and Limitations:

The research only focuses on young participants, particularly those who are active on various digital platforms. As a result, this limits taking into account the views of readers from other age groups or those who are less digitally active. Moreover, the research is centred around English-language literature and does not encompass regional or multilingual literature. The paper relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to bias or inaccuracies.

Key Findings From Questionnaire Data:

To support this study, a quantitative approach was adopted through a structured interview via Google forms. 50 participants between the ages of 15-27 were asked to respond to questions relating to their reading habits and how social media has influenced their book choices.

Respondent Demographic:

The survey received responses from individuals within the 15-27 years age group, representing a variety of academic backgrounds. Participants included people from various fields like English, Psychology, History and Microbiology. The average age of the respondents was 21, and most were enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate courses.

Reading Habits

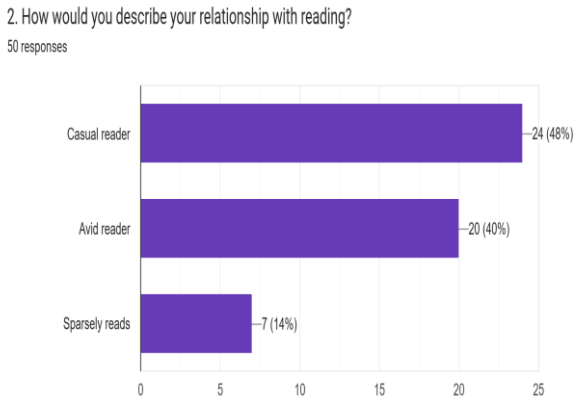

Figure 1: Showcases the relationship respondents have with reading, with 48% being casual readers, 40% being avid readers, and 14% who sparsely read.

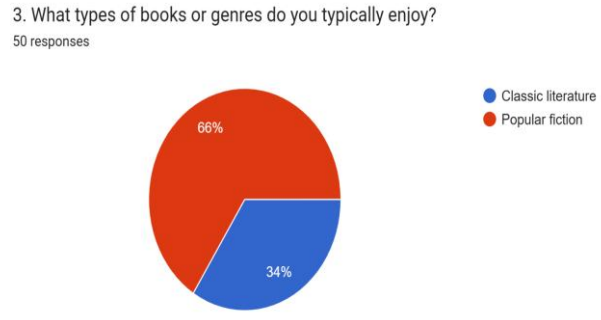

Figure 2: Shows the preference between classic or popular literature amongst the respondents;

66% prefer popular fiction while 34% prefer classic literature.

Role of Social Media in Influencing Book Choices

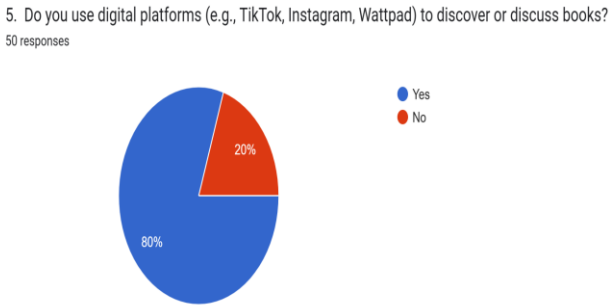

Figure 3: Displays the usage of social media platforms for discovering new books.

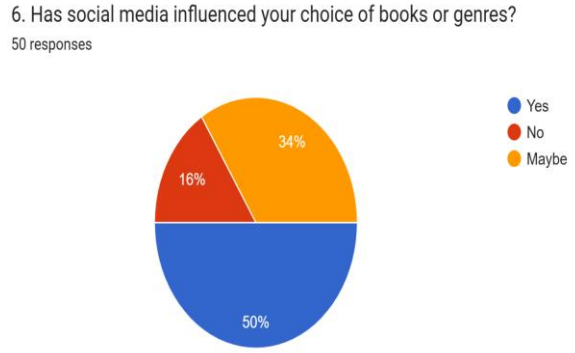

Figure 3.5: Portraying the influence of social media on book choices

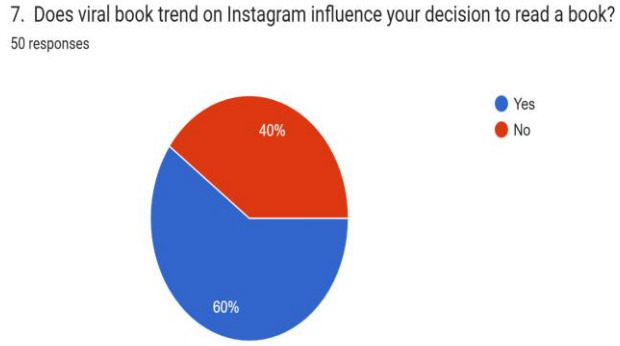

Figure 4: Exhibits how viral book trends on Instagram influences what to read.

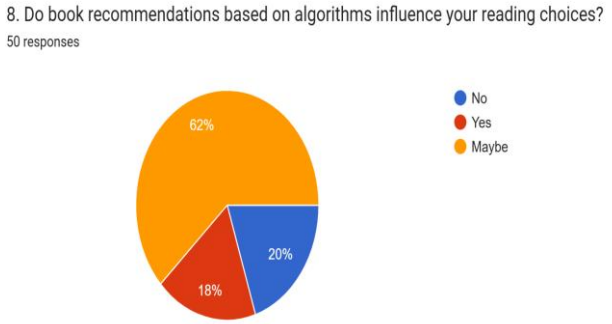

Figure 5: Exhibits how algorithms shape reading choices

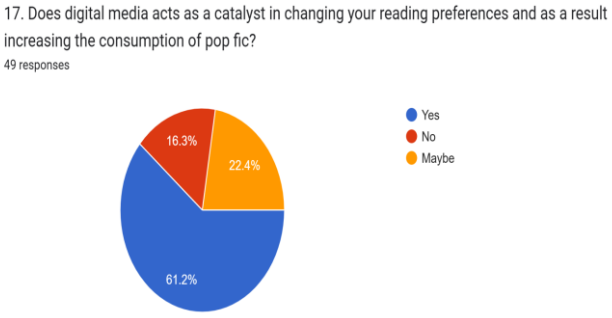

Figure 6: Presents if digital media acts as a catalyst in the increasing consumption of popular fiction with 61% of respondents agreeing.

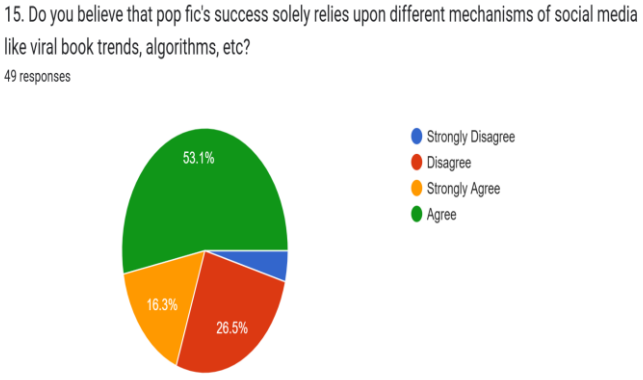

Figure 7: Showcases if the responders believe that popular fiction's success lies entirely upon social media, with 53% agreeing.

Popular Fiction and its Relationship with Young Readers

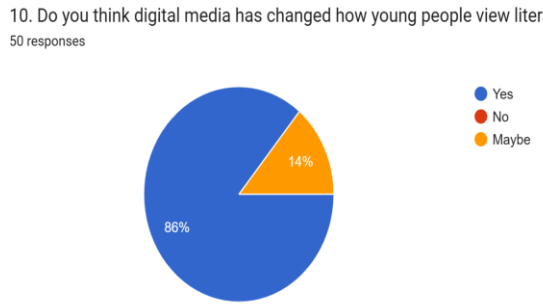

Figure 8: Displaying opinion about social media's effect on how young people view literature

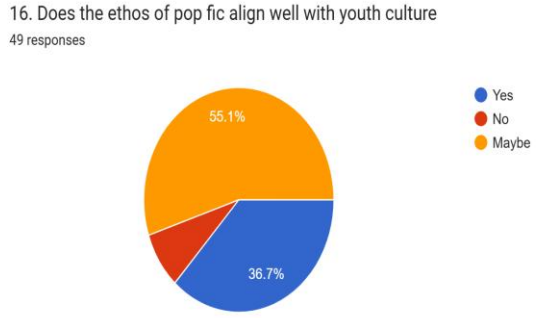

Figure 9: Exhibits responder's opinion about the ethos of popular fiction aligning with youth culture

Impact on the Perception of Literary Merit

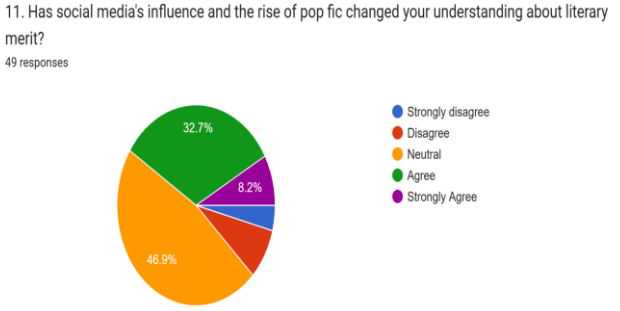

Figure 10: Displaying responder's opinion about social media's influence on their understanding of literary merit

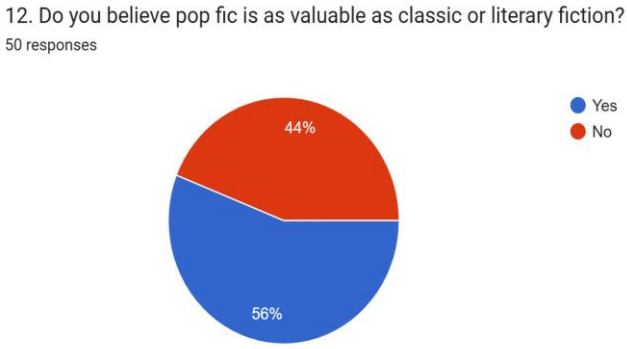

Figure 11: Exhibits respondents' opinion about whether popular fiction is as valuable as classical literature

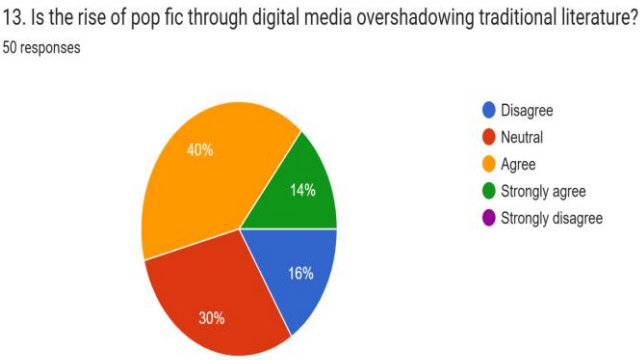

Figure 12: Displays concerns about the rise of popular fiction overshadowing traditional literature

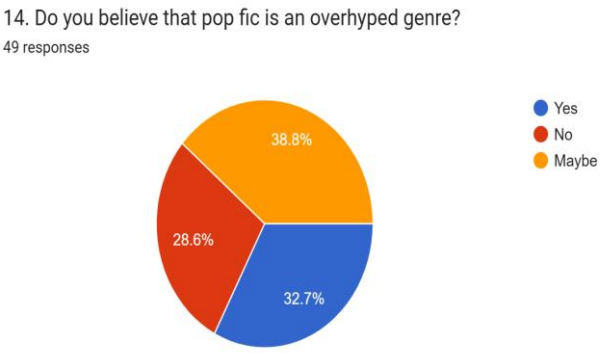

Figure 13: Opinion regarding if popular fiction is overhyped

Discussion on Findings:

As seen in Figure 1, respondents identified themselves as either casual or avid readers, suggesting a regular engagement with reading among the participants with varying intensity. Only 14% read sparsely. This

indicated that most respondents are active readers and familiar with the literary landscape. As seen in Figure 2, 65% of participants preferred popular fiction over classic literature. This aligns with the hypothesis and reflects a shift toward popular fiction, characterized by emotional relatability, fast-paced narratives, and frequent promotion through social media. Figures 3, 3.5, 4, and 5 highlight the strong role of social media in shaping literary consumption. 83% of respondents use social media to discover and discuss books, reinforcing its central role in literary exposure. Algorithms and viral trends were also found to influence book choices. These results reveal a key insight: exposure to books is increasingly filtered through algorithms, potentially favouring viral content over critical or diverse literature. Importantly, the findings reveal that while participants are aware of how social media influences their reading choices and boosts the consumption of popular fiction, they still conform to algorithm-curated trends. This points towards the subtle power of algorithms in shaping literary engagement.

Figure 6 supports the view that social media drives the rise of popular fiction, with 61% of respondents agreeing it significantly boosts its consumption. Moreover, Figure 7 shows that 53% of respondents attribute the success of popular fiction to its visibility on social media. Together, these findings suggest that social media tools and their mechanisms play a central role in the success of popular fiction.

Figures 8 and 9 explore how young readers' perception of literature is shaped by social media. As shown in Figure 8, 86% agreed that digital media has reshaped how young people view literature. Figure 9 further reveals that many believe the ethos of popular fiction aligns with youth culture. This reinforces the notion that popular fiction and digital media have a larger impact on the youth's perceptions.

Figure 10 indicates that 40% of respondents believe social media and popular fiction have affected their understanding of literary merit. Figure 11 exhibits the divided perspective of popular fiction compared to classic literature. While 56% consider popular fiction as valuable as classic literature, others are skeptical.

Figures 12 and 13 highlight young readers' critical awareness of popular fiction. As shown in Figure 12, 54% of respondents agree that the rise of popular fiction through social media may be overshadowing traditional literature, raising concerns about literary diversity. Additionally, 32% viewed popular fiction as an overhyped genre, questioning its literary merit. This shows that while popular fiction dominates the reading lists of the young readers, its literary merit is still contested by many.

This reveals a key insight: youth engagement with literature is both enthusiastic and reflective. While many enjoy popular fiction, they also remain critically aware of its limitations and express concern about marginalized voices being overshadowed. These findings reinforce the argument that social media serves not only as a promotional tool but as a transformative force in shaping book choices and reading preferences, particularly by promoting popular fiction.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the influence of digital media, particularly platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Wattpad on the literary engagement of young readers, with a focus on the rising prominence of popular fiction. The findings support the initial hypothesis: social media acts as a powerful catalyst in shaping reading preferences and increasing the consumption of popular fiction.

The survey revealed that a majority of young participants actively use digital platforms to discover and discuss books, with viral trends, algorithmic recommendations, and peer interactions playing a key role in their book choices. Popular fiction, characterized by its relatability, emotional appeal, and accessibility, has become especially prominent within these digital spaces.

While respondents largely favored popular fiction and acknowledged its alignment with youth culture, the data also indicated a degree of critical awareness. Many readers recognized the role of social media in influencing their tastes and expressed concerns about its dominance in shaping literary exposure.

Overall, the study highlights the transformative impact of social media on contemporary literary consumption. These insights hold significance for publishers, authors, and educators seeking to engage with young readers in a rapidly evolving digital environment. Future studies could build on these findings by comparing different groups of readers, including more regional backgrounds, or looking closely at the kinds of books being read to better understand the cultural impact of this shift.

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16.

Exploring the Role of English in the Sanskritization and Westernization of the Indian Masses

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Abstract:

It is significant to note that language always carries meanings and references beyond itself. This is because language is not only the medium of communication but is also intricately related to the element of culture. The paper tries to explore how English as a language has played a catalytic role in Sanskritization—a process of upward mobility by imitation and Westernization of people living in postcolonial India. The study in the paper is supplemented with Schumann's theory of Acculturation to analyze and interpret the various factors that influence Indian citizens' acquisition of English as a second language. The contemporary relevance of the study and the extent of acculturation is supported by the use of a Google survey conducted by the researcher.

Keywords.: Schumann's Acculturation model, Sanskritization, M.N. Srinivas, Westernization, English, Language, Postcolonial India.

Introduction:

English has played a crucial and multifaceted role in postcolonial India, shaping its historical, political, social, economic, and cultural landscape. Introduced during British rule as a tool of administration, it has since evolved into a language of opportunity and mobility while also being a subject of debate and contention. It is significant to note that interacting with a language indicates interacting with the culture of a particular social group. Thus, "learning a language, therefore, is not only learning the alphabet, the arrangement of words, but it is also learning the behavior of the society and its cultural customs" (Guessabi 1). According to Fatiha Guessabi, "The human communication process is complex…. communication techniques are culture-specific, so communication with people from other societies or ethnic groups is fraught with the danger of misunderstanding if the larger framework of culture is ignored" (1). Language and culture have a complex, homologous relationship as it is intricately related to culture.

It is with regard to the aspect of language acquisition and culture that Schumann's theory comes into focus. John H. Schumann is a professor Emeritus of Applied Linguistics and former chair of the Department of Applied Linguistics and TESL at UCLA. His research includes language acquisition, the neurobiology of language, the neurobiology of learning, and language evolution. John H. Schumann's Acculturation Theory, as presented in *The Pidginization Process: A Model for Second Language Acquisition (1978),* predicts that the degree of a learner's success in the second language (L2) acquisition depends upon the learner's degree of acculturation. Furthermore, he notes that social and psychological factors significantly influence the acculturation process and second language learning. According to Schumann, second language acquisition is a by-product of acculturation. The Acculturation model examines Second Language Acquisition from a socio-psychological perspective. Schumann defines Acculturation as the "Social and psychological integration of the learner with target language learner group" (qtd. in Hambali). The elements of both sociology and psychology, therefore, play an important role in Schumann's theory as they become the deciding

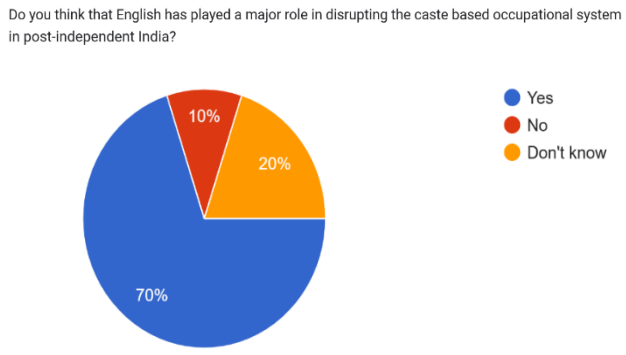
factor in an individual's acquisition of a second language.

In a similar vein, M. N. Srinivas' concepts of Westernization and Sanskritization are deeply rooted in sociological and psychological perspectives. According to M. N. Srinivas, "in the Indian situation people attempt to be westernized so as to sanskritize their culture and lifestyle" (qtd. in Elahi 5). Language and culture being closely related, the statement is reflective of the impact of the colonial Western language on the Sanskritization and Westernization of the Indian masses. The term Sanskritization was introduced into Indian Sociology by Prof. M.N. Srinivas. The process of Sanskritization indicates a process of cultural mobility in the social system of India. It is significant to note that Sanskritization does not take place in the same manner in all places. Sanskritization is a long-drawn social and cultural phenomenon that goes beyond just caste hierarchies; it can encompass various aspects of life, including religious beliefs, lifestyle, and cultural assimilation. Although various research studies have been conducted on the topic of Sanskritization and its impact in the Indian social context, this paper aims to explore and highlight the role of the English language in the process of Sanskritization and Westernization experienced by the Indian Masses. The study is reinforced with statistical data collected through a Google survey, focusing on individuals who completed their schooling in regional medium institutions.

The description of India's societal structure and uniqueness lies in its being defined as a land of diversity. With its diverse array of languages, castes, and religions, Indian society is an amalgamation of various cultures. However, with the element of diversity comes the aspect of differentiation. The evolution of the usage of English in India and the status associated with it can be traced back to the state's social stratification that continues to exist in Indian society. At the time of the English language's introduction to India during British colonial rule, it was referred to as the Christian tongue. Gradually, the Christian tongue became a powerful medium to amplify the voices of the marginalized on global platforms.

The transformation of English from being considered a Christian tongue to being treated as a strategic weapon- a way to bypass local oppression and speak to a broader, often global audience reflects the language's ability to act as an equalizer in terms of providing lower-caste individuals access to knowledge and skills that transgress the traditional caste-based societal norms. Thus, in India, it could be said that English is increasingly becoming a paradoxical voice of the downtrodden as it offers a way to escape the hierarchies embedded in the Indian vernacular languages, especially those closely tied to caste and regional power structures.

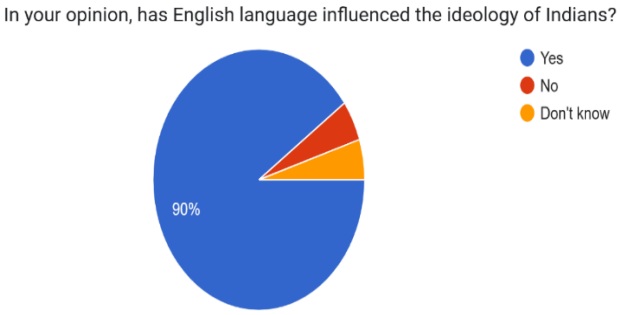
The direct British rule in India spanned from 1858 to 1947. From a linguistic perspective, the period emerged as a significant factor in social acculturation, one of the key components in Schumann's theory of Acculturation proposed for second language acquisition. The external interactions that Indians had with native English speakers catalyzed the acquisition of the English language. Acquisition of the English language by the Indian masses that started during the colonial rule in India and its continuation till date in the post-colonial set up is reflective of the extent to which the language has influenced the lived experiences of the people in India, especially of those who belong to the lower strata in a multi-cultural and caste stratified society. The upward mobilization that takes place irrespective of the caste identity becomes explicitly evident as 70% of the respondents view that English has played a major role in disrupting the caste-based occupational system in post-independent India.



Thus, it reinforces the idea that the functioning of the English language has a crucial positioning in the process of Sanskritization and

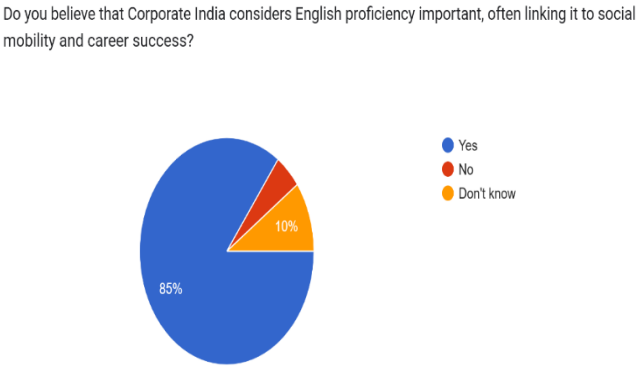
Westernization that people in India have undergone.

M. N. Srinivas used the term "'Westernization' to describe the changes that a non-western country had undergone as a result of prolonged contact with the western one. It implies, as per Srinivas, "certain value preferences", which in turn subsumes several values…" (qtd. in Elahi 4). According to Hill, "Values are individual beliefs to which people attach significant worth and by which they organize their life". The impact of the English language in shaping the ideologies and values of Indians becomes evident when 90% of the respondents think that the language has been instrumental in influencing ideological shifts over time.



The infusion of Western ideologies and their dissemination through the use of the English language is not just restricted to the formation of individual values but also extends to shaping the collective values of the entire nation. Within the Indian context, this collective value is reflected in the Constitutional framework of India as the Indian Constitution is a unique document that incorporates various values and features from different Western ideologies and constitutions. The values drawn from the Western constitutional thought are contextualised while integrating them within the pluralistic ethos of Indian society. It could thus be said that the pervasive influence of Western ideologies has transformed societal and cultural norms, fostering shifts in values, political systems, and individual conceptions of self and progress.

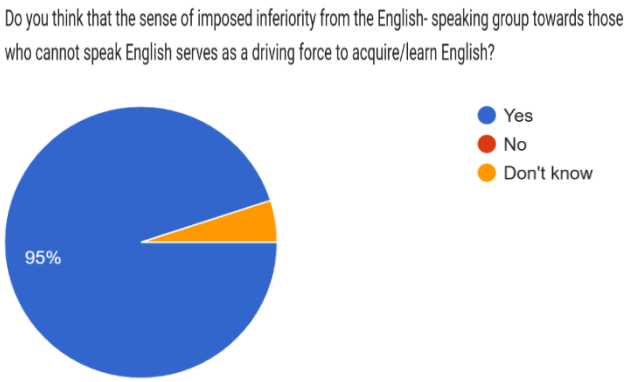
A noticeable shift in value preferences of the Indian masses, resulting in the shaping of a new Corporate India that illustrates a powerful positioning of English in Indian society, becomes evident as 85% of the respondents believe that proficiency in the English language is often associated with career success and social mobility. Thus showcasing how the aspect of Sanskritization continues to exist in contemporary India as a result of Westernization.



According to Srinivas, "the increase in westernization does not retard the process of Sanskritization. This is because both the element of westernization and Sanskritization go on simultaneously and to some extent, an increase in westernization accelerates the process of Sanskritization" (qtd.in Elahi 4) as Sanskritization includes "an upward mobilization which contains the process of imitation" (qtd. in Elahi 2). The accelerated rate at which the imitation occurs to climb up the social ladder includes both social and psychological factors. This becomes apparent, as 95% of the responses given by the target group of the study who have completed their schooling in regional medium institutions agree that it is the desire of wanting to overcome feelings of alienation and imposed inferiority by getting integrated and assimilated into the dominant English-speaking group's culture, that made them want to learn and acquire English as their second language. This view reinforces the influence of Schumann's 'Assimilation' factor and M. N. Srinivas's opinion that "in the Indian situation people attempt to be westernized so as to sanskritize their culture and lifestyle (qtd. in Elahi 5)

The dynamic nature and evolution of English in the Indian societal setup are evident in its transformation from being a Christian tongue to being recognized for official purposes in the Constitution for a period of 15 years, as well as its continued recognition under the Official Languages Act, 1963. While the "national language" issue was contentious during the Constituent Assembly debates and remains unsettled even today, the use of English remains prevalent, not just for official purposes but also in shaping the lived experiences of the people. In contemporary times, knowledge of the English language has become the passport for employment at higher levels in all fields. It has become an unavoidable avenue to status and wealth. Thus cementing its status as a gatekeeper to opportunities, which was once denied to the vast majority of Indians due to their caste identity.

The possibility of reinvention offered by the English language and its ability to reframe narratives that have long been silenced in mainstream discourse reflect the repurposing of English. However, this repurposing is not without contradictions. The growth of English in India also witnessed its transformation into a divisive power. Nevertheless, the English-induced inferiority has not been a demotivating factor in learning English as a second language, specifically for those who have completed their schooling in a vernacular medium. This becomes evident in the following statistical data in which 95% of the respondents agree with the notion that the imposed inferiority serves as a driving force to acquire English. It is in association with this attitude and psyche of the respondents that Schumann's Acculturation model, which has 'Motivation' as one of the four affective variables under the psychological category, comes into focus. It is in line with this affective variable proposed by John. H. Schumann, it could be said that the degree of motivation becomes one of the major influential factors in second language (L2) acquisition.



In the Indian social context, both Integrative motivation and Instrumental motivation play a substantial role in the L2 acquisition. The respondents' desire to overcome a sense of alienation, functioning as a significant factor motivating them to learn or acquire English as a second language, exemplifies the concept of integrative motivation. On the other hand, the pursuit of upward mobility and the attainment of social recognition functioning as a key motivational force reflects the aspect of instrumental motivation. This is because 'Instrumental' motivation motivates the learner "to learn the language for some utilitarian reasons, like getting ahead in his occupation, gaining recognition…." (qtd. in Maha. Slide 15).

While English has played a vital role in transforming the lives of Indians, it is also significant to note that the language itself has undergone a major transformation within the nation. This metamorphosis is reflective of how, over the years, the foreign language, English, has undergone an evolutionary process to shed off its foreignness to become an indigenous language in the areas to which the forces of colonialism transported it. Edger W Schneider names this phenomenon as 'Postcolonial Englishes'. The five-phase Dynamic Model proposed by Schneider provides a framework for understanding the complex processes by which postcolonial Englishes develops and

becomes distinct from Standard English. The name Postcolonial Englishes mirrors the ever-increasing interest in the field of English in a similar way to the ever-increasing attraction of speakers of other languages to English.

With specific reference to India's multi-cultural and multi-lingual setup, the ever-increasing attraction of speakers of other languages to English can be attributed to the aspect of upward mobility that the users of the language experience as a result of Westernization. On a global scale, India's total English-speaking population is second only to that of the U.S. This places India in the Nativization phase in Schneider's five-phase Dynamic Model. A phase where phonological innovations and structural nativization take place and coexist. Thus giving the world a new variety of English known as Indian English.

It must be noted that although the language might have shed its foreignness in the evolutionary process, within the Indian social context, the language has not shed its elitism entirely, but it's being repurposed, reimagined, and even reclaimed. English in India is no longer just the language of the colonizer, it is being reshaped, specifically by the hands and voices of those who were once denied it. As a medium of protest, identity, and hope, English has played a major role, with Schumann's concept of Acculturation serving as a significant factor in the Sanskritization that reflects the upward social mobility and Westernization of the Indian masses.

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17.

Alcohol, Trauma and Transformation: Evolution of a New Culture in Jayaraj V. Thoppil's *One Pint of Cheers*

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Abstract

Alcoholism is often associated with the theme of depressing trauma in literature and film. However, different generations look at alcohol consumption with different perspectives and cultures often change with eating and drinking habits. Youngsters, in particular, in India and abroad go through the struggle of alcohol-based problems in life. 21st century Indian English Fiction has given new perspectives on the realities of human life that are linked with alcohol consumption. Aspirations of generations X and Y have been instrumental in the evolution of a new culture and these aspirations have demanded a new approach to alcohol consumption.

This paper analyses Jayaraj V. Thoppil's novel *1 Pint of Cheers* that documents alcohol abuse along with other Indian problems such as unscientific development, poverty, corruption and the disillusionment of the new generations. This paper examines how Kevin, the protagonist, falls into the dark sites of modern life. Also, within the scope of the paper is the study of the people who become victims of alcohol. This paper mobilizes the tenets of Alcohol Studies and Culture Studies in scrutinizing the societies and cultures that are impacted by alcohol. Particularly in focus is the theme of social and familial transformation that alcoholism and deaddiction bring into play.

Keywords: Alcoholism, Alcohol Studies, Generations X and Y, Transformation

Culture plays a pivotal role in shaping an individual's personality and identity within a society. This is largely because culture defines the accepted norms of behavior among its members, as well as the biological and social practices necessary for survival. Culture, therefore, is dynamic and evolving and it significantly encompasses all the key aspects of living in a society such as values, traditions, customs and shared beliefs to name a few. Raymond Williams in his essay "Culture is Ordinary" explicates on the meaning of the term as follows:

> A culture has two aspects: the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to; the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested. These are the ordinary processes of human societies and human minds, and we see through them the nature of a culture: that it is always both traditional and creative; that it is both the most ordinary common meanings and the finest individual meanings. (Qtd in McGuigan 3)

What Williams tries to reflect through this observation is that the conceptualization of the term culture is quite broad and complex because it carries a wide range of meanings related to the varying aspects of human life and existence by thus making culture ordinary. He further discusses the point that culture shapes and impacts human lives in many ways. This is because a characteristic feature of culture is that it is learned and not inherited. It is herein that one can say that culture does not remain the same but continuously evolves with time and age where new traditions, beliefs, customs and ideas replace the former practices so as to form a collective culture and identity.

Lately, the close link formed between culture and alcohol is of much debate among the social scientists, a link that has compelled them to revisit the typologies of drinking cultures. It is always seen that the concept of drinking is employed as well as understood to be problematic due to vivid discourses that govern the very existence of a society. However, alcohol literature underscores the point that alcohol consumption happens at different trajectories, namely the physical, psychological, physiological and social levels which then categorize the act of drinking as normal or abnormal by thus demonstrating the perceived stake it represents in a culture.

Alcohol in the majority cases has been a subject of set normative prescriptions of culture. For instance, drinking is often associated with social judgement because of which the one transgressing the cultural boundaries is exposed to the risk of negative judgment and exclusion. Such differentiated representations directly inscribed within the social groups further highlight the point that alcohol norms are context-dependent to determine the evaluation of alcohol use and abuse to drinking behaviours. Rachel Black explains how social representations fulfill the purpose of identity markers to showcase how in some cultures, alcohol is a subject of cultural identity:

> The United States is known for its Kentucky bourbon and its whiskey (Jack Daniel's from Tennessee). Mexico has its prized tequila. France is famous for its wine, while Belgium is noted for its beer. In the Mediterranean, strong licorice-flavored aperitifs abound: ouzo in Greece, and raki in Turkey, and arrack extends into the Arab world. Japan is known for its sake, a rice wine. Ireland has Guinness and Irish Whiskey. Poland, Russia, Sweden, and Finland all produce excellent vodkas. (Black 140)

Black also considers drinking stories as narratives which can be used to challenge the conventional ideas of identities. To illustrate this, she brings into focus the ideology of normative alcohol culture to showcase how alcohol can also be used as an object to foster inclusivity, moderation and wellness despite its drawbacks. According to Black, societal influences for example, shape drinking behaviours extensively. The noted determinants of alcohol-influenced behaviours account to range from sociodemographic factors like race, class, age, ethnicity and gender to mediating variables such as mechanisms to cope with stress, environmental circumstances and drinking to be sociable. For example, the role of alcohol as a social lubricant particularly in leadership roles, offer insights for those contemplating a change. This realization stems from the fact that today professionals find the use of alcohol being reintroduced into their social settings to integrate business with networking events. This intertwining further unfolds the fact that alcohol as a social agent and conflict solvent also enjoys a significant place at workplace cultures as an ingrained phenomenon. Reliance on alcohol at professional level, majorly takes place with the idea of releasing work related stress and as an act of rebellion against higher authorities which then impacts their decision-making, creativity, and overall performance. Black defines workplace drinking and its potential attributes:

> …the act of drinking together creates a sense of belonging and camaraderie. Business meetings can often be held over lunch breaks or during meals where drinks are used as a social lubricant and tool to gain favor of a potential client. Any level within the corporate or general workplace structure may be exposed to these social pressures. Another situational motivation is when employees might feel as though they are in a "dead-end job" with no real responsibility or room for advancement. Drinking may help to pass the time or be an act of rebellion against a supervisor who makes them feel misunderstood, not heard, or ignored. (Black 210)

Furthermore, early exposure to adversities such as poverty, family conflicts, academic failure, higher debt and familial unemployment are said to likely have an impact on drinking patterns and cultures to identify its nature, prevalence and context. For instance, the alcohol-induced culture of the rural sections of society potentially contributes to a higher percentage of alcoholics than social drinkers. This is primarily because geographic designations based on socioeconomic hardships appear to be more prevalent in rural areas than in urban societies. Since cultural differences influence the societal cost of drinking habits, one cannot ignore the fact that the prevalence of alcohol use among rural poor adolescents and young adults provide deeper insights on policymakers as well as

the intensification of alcohol use behaviours that range from short to long term risks like neurological dysfunction, seizures, to communicable diseases like HIV and tuberculosis, as well as non-communicable diseases like hypertension and diabetes. Rachel Black, while explaining the health effects of alcohol, states:

> Not all individuals who consume alcohol are alcoholics. Medical and psychiatric practitioners qualifying terms that vary from use to abuse when talking about alcohol consumption. Dipsomania is the term used to refer to the condition characterized by uncontrollable cravings for alcohol or other intoxicating substances that can occur for unknown reasons. Dipsomania is often confused for alcoholism. Most modern medical definitions of alcoholism focus on the physical damage to an individual's health that is the outcome of heavy drinking. The social effects of alcoholism are in many ways just as damaging as the physical effects. Domestic violence, assault, and loss of employment are just a few of the negative social outcomes that can be caused by alcoholism. (Black 6)

As per research, binge drinking has become a noticeable trend among poor rural and urban individuals to induce happy emotions and to overcome the problems of substantial stress, depression, anxiety or negative psychology. To address alcoholism in tribal India, for example, is a multi-faceted approach because it helps people in coping with the stresses of poverty, unemployment and harsh realities of daily life which are majorly influenced by socio-economic and cultural determinants. Such prevalence of alcohol consumption greatly reflects the changing dynamics of alcohol culture and the complex socio-cultural context that raise implications about reconsidering discourses on alcohol. Black opines: "Alcohol is a political, economic, and moral subject. Studies that help understand the problems related to alcohol abuse can be biased by political views, strong economic interests, and religious beliefs. It could be said that culture has shaped both research agendas and public opinion about drinking" (Black XIV).

Another significant aspect to consider when examining drinking patterns and cultures is the generational divide between Generation X and Generation Y. Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980, grew up during a time of economic uncertainty and shifting social norms because of which they often fostered a more private and composed response to personal struggles, including substance abuse like alcohol. In contrast, Generation Y, or Millennials, raised in the digital age, confront their personal challenge including alcoholism in more visible and emotionally expressive ways. While Millennials are typically associated with a focus on mental health, authenticity, and personal development, their openness can also lead to increased normalization of coping mechanisms such as drinking, especially when faced with the pressures of modern life, underemployment, and social comparison amplified by technology. This duality is often seen in literary portrayals of Millennials, where the desire for self-improvement coexists with escapist behaviours. Thus, while both generations struggle with alcoholism, their approaches reflect broader generational identities: one rooted in repression and survival, the other in exposure and contradiction.

Moreover, alcohol often emerges in literature and life as both a symptom and a response to trauma, serving as a coping mechanism for those struggling to process emotional pain. Trauma, whether stemming from loss, violence, or chronic emotional neglect, can fundamentally alter an individual's psychological landscape, where alcohol frequently becomes a means of escape, a numbing agent that temporarily silences the weight of past experiences. However, the use of alcohol in response to trauma rarely remains passive. Over time, it transforms the individual, often deepening the wounds it seeks to soothe. This transformation is not merely physical but existential: identities fracture, relationships deteriorate, and self-worth erodes. In many narratives, characters who resort to alcohol as a way to manage trauma find themselves trapped in a cycle of dependence that magnifies their suffering rather than relieving it. Yet, this downward spiral can also prompt moments of confrontation and clarity, forcing characters to reckon with the roots of their pain. In this way, trauma coupled with alcoholism becomes a crucible for transformation—one that can either lead to self-destruction or, in rare cases, to redemption. Literature often uses this dynamism to explore the fragility of the human condition and the complex, often painful path towards healing.

Jayaraj Thoppil's *One Pint of Cheers* can be considered as a novel that documents the social, cultural and economic aspects of alcohol consumption. It can be analysed to show how the novelist depicts drinks as social lubricants. Furthermore, this novel can be studied to see the link

between alcohol and trauma apart from tracing the transformative potential of both alcohol and trauma. It is also possible to explain with the help of Thoppil's novel the generational differences in approaching alcohol consumption.

One Pint of Cheers skillfully portrays the socioeconomic and poor living conditions of a remote village called Devasam or God's own village to voice his prominent concern regarding the deprived poor Indians who are often seen as helpless and suppressed individuals, suffering from the ongoing forms of power dynamics of a dominant culture that does not recognise or validates the pain of destitutes. Herein, the people of Devasam are also seen to be in quest for their true identities as a result of which they get heavily influenced by alcohol to express their pathetic grief and struggle to survive in a situation that is excruciatingly painful, recognizable and full of hopelessness and poverty. The theme of cultural evolution and the challenges of alcoholism are highlighted in the following lines:

> Alcohol captivated a large part of our youth, and later benefited the vote bank of every political party. Our so-called guides like the intellectual writers, artists, philosophers are unwittingly and unceasingly injected depression and dreaded drugs, into the veins of gullible jobless youth. Youth resorted to suicide out of depression, while our farmers ended their life out of debt and despair. Alcohol and unemployment took the toll of youth callously in the Devasam soil. (Thoppil 5)

Thoppil, through such statements, attempts to craft a compelling portrait of modern India, one where history forces attention toward specific atrocities that have long been silenced. Within the narrative, certain moments powerfully draw the reader's focus to the experiences of traumatized victims who are unable to openly acknowledge or publicly mourn their suffering. This suppression stems largely from a dominant culture that systematically denies uneducated and marginalized any viable avenues for expression or remembrance. As a result, their pain remains unspoken, existing in the margins of both historical record and cultural discourse. Such extended episodes of oppression and governmental neglects cause stagnation and indiscriminate alcohol consumption, suggests Thoppil:

> In down south Devasam, people were not allowed or encouraged to work or progress towards development, because of the political culture and its legacy. No significant development took place in Devasam, as our so-called authorities or government servants preferred an idle and relaxed life. They took no risks. Nothing moved there. Any proposal or files wound up, tied up firmly with red tape and fed to termites and rats. Eventually government offices became shelter of rats and snakes. (Thoppil 3)

Further, the text delves into depicting the widening gap that exists between the haves and the have nots thereby documenting the spatial complexities and determinants of wealth inequality in rural India which too accelerate alcohol consumption. The sordid realities and experiences of the downtrodden who witness abject poverty, corruption and inequality daily, get examined in the narrative to highlight how the people of Devasam are deprived of their rights and exploited for the financial and political gains of the dominant class or culture. This for instance is well illustrated when Thoppil tries to draw a comparison and contrast between Devasam "a remote village popularly called 'God's own Village' still remains untouched" (Thoppil 1) and Orugav "a trans-border village, was rapidly transformed into Oregaon, a busy city, now widely known as 'Millenium Metropolis.'" (Thoppil 1). The contrast between the two thus vividly unravels India's rise as a global economy and the griding poverty in which the youth of Devasam lives. Devasam's frustrated alcoholics are contrasted with the moderate social drinkers of Oregaon, implying that poverty and lack of opportunities push the generations X and Y in India into self-destructive drinking habits:

> People from various parts of the country migrated to Oregaon either for jobs or for business. At night the city looked marvelous with all the lights on, when viewed from height. It was a haven for job seekers and entrepreneurs. Most of the youth of the neighboring provinces, settled in Oregaon, were employed. They were not severe alcoholics, unlike the youth at Devasam. However, their ambition, greed and materialism forced many of them into alcoholism, bribery, snatching, theft, rape, kidnapping and murder in recent times. (Thoppil 12-13)

What Thoppil tries to reflect through this example is how alcohol, as a coping mechanism, symbolizes the

pursuit of superficial pleasures that the youth of Devasam desperately long for to escape their problems, loneliness and lack of purpose in life. It also sheds light on class differences and social hierarchies where the destitutes are often portrayed as binge drinkers and wealthy as sobers.

Another often overlooked yet crucial facet of the alcohol industry depicted in the novel is its deep entanglement with the governmental institutions. According to Thoppil, in India, liquor production and distribution have undoubtedly secured a prominent place in both public and political domains, largely due to their substantial contribution to government revenue and the widespread consumption among the population. Thoppil, therefore, challenges India's perceived image as a culture of abstinence when he asserts: "Alcohol is not only a population control device but also one of the major sources of revenue for any government. No government in the country survived without alcohol" (Thoppil 96), highlighting the fact that drinking practices within a society are shaped not only by socio-cultural contexts but also by the broader socio-political framework that actively profits from and perpetuates alcohol consumption. In addition, the text addresses in detail the phenomenon of booze diplomacy in India through the character embodiment of Victor Vallya, the Liquor King. This is powerfully captured in the line: "Alcohol is my country. 'Nasha' out of alcohol is life. Alcohol maker Liquor King Victor Vallya is a great ruler my country ever seen. Victor Vallya jai ho…Victor Vallya jai ho…A chorus of alcoholics waved in' (Thoppil 98). In the dominating presence of Victor Vallya, Thoppil reflects a political ideology embraced by certain opportunistic politicians who profit immensely by diversifying hospitality channels such as offering cash, drugs, and liquor in exchange for votes. Vallya's portrayal as a god-like or spiritual figure underscores a troubling reality: in times of uncertainty, crisis, and personal turmoil, people often seek comfort and guidance from their leaders. However, Thoppil shows how such trust is systematically exploited, as individuals are instead encouraged to drown their struggles in alcohol. This is sharply illustrated in the narrative: "Daily earnings of ordinary people were looted by Lord Victor Vallya by selling his cheap wine to them. He made their life miserable and hopeless. He exploited people ruthlessly through his wide network of wine sales spread across the country" (Thoppil 98-99). In this way, Vallya becomes both a symbol of corrupted leadership and a sample of the political mechanisms that thrive on the disempowerment of the poor masses. Moreover, the text is replete with instances that highlight the rapid expansion of the Indian alcohol industry, particularly in the way wine shops increasingly lure young adults. These establishments entice customers not only with alcohol but also by offering complimentary items such as chickpeas, boiled eggs, or cigarettes. These seemingly harmless offerings function as appealing accompaniments that subtly normalize, and in many ways, glamorize the emerging drinking culture. In doing so, Thoppil critiques the commercialization of addiction and the systemic forces that encourage escapism under the guise of leisure:

> Outside wine shops, there are boiled egg vendors, steamed chickpeas vendors and cigarette walas to entertain the people, who consume liquor around the wine shops. They were groomed by wine shop owners. Their spice trickled half-boiled eggs and boiled chickpeas were tastier than whatever was cooked at home. Steamed chickpeas were well garnished with finely chopped green chillies and onion. A half piece of lemon squeezed and trickled over the garnishing made the serving delicious. (Thoppil 99-100)

Further, *One Pint of Cheers* explores the traits of alcoholism through the imaginative world of Kevin, who is portrayed as being haunted by the painful memories of his beloved brother Aldrin, a young man consumed by alcoholism. Kevin describes alcoholism in deeply metaphorically terms: "Peg after peg, people catch up the infinities of joy. One gets, enveloped in the balloon of ultimate bliss. Its buzz made you more and more indolent. Probably, it is killing certain extent the burdens of life, which have been induced through the umbilical cord at birth" (Thoppil 102). This reflection of Kevin not only reveals the seductive illusion of alcohol-induced euphoria but also points at the existential burdens people who attempt to escape through drinking. Kevin's ongoing research into the psychological and societal effects of alcohol sparked by Aldrin's tragic downfall leaves him overwhelmed with frustration and rage. His disillusionment is clearly articulated in a raw, disturbing passage:

> Drinking on empty stomachs gives quick 'nasha'. Some vomited instantaneously and fell in the drain. Pigs and dogs licked mouth and a**se. They slept in the drain. They forgot conveniently that somebody is waiting

> at home desperately. Some forgot their beloved mothers. Some forgot their beloved wives. Some forgot their innocent children. (Thoppil 105-106)

Kevin's anger is not only justifiable but also deeply symbolic, echoing the collective pain of households devastated by alcoholism. Thoppil uses his character's rage and sorrow to expose how addiction takes a toll not only on the individual, but also on the victims' families and communities. The plight of such traumatized families is poignantly captured in one of the Kevin's dejected curses directed at Victor Vallya, the Liquor King:

> Let the curse kill the clan of Victor Vallya, the God of Liquor.
>
> Let Victor Vallya become the street dog in his next birth.
>
> Let Victor Vallya's wife become the bitch, without a tail in her next birth.
>
> Let Victor Vallya's son become the puppy eating human shit. (Thoppil 110)

However, it is important to note that while Kevin curses Victor Vallya in moments of sobriety, he simultaneously praises and admires him when under the influence of alcohol. In his intoxicated state, Vallya takes on a redemptive, almost divine aura, as drinking temporarily numbs Kevin's emotional pain and grants him a fleeting sense of relief from life's burdens. This contradiction is powerfully illustrated in the following lines, which reflect the duality of Kevin's inner world, a world where alcohol becomes both an enemy and a seductive escape:

> …Kevin's silent wish was to just die out of alcohol and forget his own pain of life momentarily.
>
> He craved, to pour more and more alcohol into crystal glasses. Gulp and relax.
>
> Guzzle into his empty stomach for better effect. Light a cigarette to add more tipsiness.
>
> He listens to a vulgar tracks of Bollywood 'munni badnam hoyi…' And praises alcohol to the sky and beyond.
>
> Praises Victor Vallya afar horizon.
>
> Alcohol is Victor Vallya's gift…Alcohol is God's gift. (Thoppil 167)

Kevin's glorification of Vallya under the influence highlights the tragic story of seeking solace in the very substance that is slowly, yet inevitably, destroying him. This irony extends beyond Kevin to the bachelors of Oregaon, who, after sinking into the depths of alcoholism, "…replaced the photo of their secret and beloved deity by Victor Vallya's photo" (Thoppil 176).

Thoppil seeks to trace the destructive traits of alcoholism while simultaneously questioning the role of policymakers, who, according to him, exploit the vulnerability of the youth for their own personal and political gains. He illustrates this through the example of 'Ganjha' being smoked alongside liquor, both of which are made readily and irresponsibly available and sometimes even for free in the local Devasam shops by further entangling the masses in cycles of addiction and despair:

> The 'Governing' body did not stop the consumption of such drugs. It's easy to manage a drug addicted youth than a thinking man. They liked this population control devise and its unusual peace. Consumption of alcohol and ganjha aged the youth instantly, damaged their liver and kidney, damaged the respiratory system, made them blind and then led to mysterious deaths. It sounds good for a place like Devasam, where redundancy is one of the major population control devise for the 'authority'. (Thoppil 106-107)

Thoppil further brings into focus the growing popularity of alcohol among college-going students as a consequence of political corruption. He portrays how toxic campus politics take a heavy toll on innocent students, drawing them into illegal and harmful practices that are especially damaging for young adults. This is particularly evident in the depiction of the college where Kevin's brother, Aldrin, studies. The campus is shown to be infiltrated by political leaders who manipulate and misguide students, especially the naive and idealistic, by involving them in corrupt campaigns and luring them with arrack, a cheap and widely available local drink in Devasam. Kevin eventually uncovers the extent of this influence on Aldrin's academic decline, particularly through a letter from their mother. In the letter, she expresses her deep disappointment in Aldrin's choices and her emotional plea for him to withdraw from the college elections and the alcohol-fueled political activities that were derailing his future: "It is all about adipidi,

beedi and paripu vada rashtriyam. Aldrin did not have enough maturity to recognise the negative powers and elements in college. Aldrin was spoiled in college. He got lost in the dark and drug afflicted corners of his college. College killed him immorally" (Thoppil 185-186). This deep yet personal reflection underscores the destructive intersection of youth, addiction, and political manipulation, revealing how institutions meant to nurture young minds can become spaces of moral and emotional collapse.

Though the narrative offers many subtle instances that reflect the disintegration of Aldrin's identity, he ultimately serves as a symbolic figure—representing the many Millennials who, despite being part of a generation that champions self-growth and purpose, fall into patterns of self-destruction. Aldrin's descent into alcoholism illustrates how such individuals, when confronted with personal or professional setbacks, choose escapism over resilience. Aldrin's awakening comes late and only after he has lost his mother, his self-respect, his sense of belonging and has become a figure of ridicule among the peers, he realises the weight of alcoholism. It is in this state of utter loss that Aldrin finally grasps the devastating impact of his addiction. His raw confession underscores the brutal reality of alcoholism:

> Alcoholism Humiliates,
>
> Alcoholism Detaches,
>
> Alcoholism secludes.
>
> Alcoholism depresses,
>
> It disfigures,
>
> It sucks,
>
> It kills.
>
> So change…change…change…
>
> Realization and wisdom are the deaddiction drugs… (Thoppil 416-417)

This stark confession functions as both a moment of personal reckoning for Aldrin and a broader generational warning. It distills the emotional, physical, and social impact of addiction into a chilling poetic rhythm, reinforcing the message that meaningful change begins with self-awareness. In portraying Aldrin's downfall, the narrative emphasizes the fragile balance between aspiration and despair that defines much of the generation Y experiences.

Thus, in *One Pint of Cheers*, Jayaraj Thoppil crafts an appealing narrative that intricately weaves together the deeply personal and the overtly political views. Through the characters of Kevin and Aldrin, he explores how addiction is not merely an individual affliction, but a systemic issue fueled by political corruption, generational neglect, and institutional failure. The normalization of alcohol in both urban and rural settings, its seductive appeal among the youth, and its entwinement with power structures expose the vulnerabilities of those caught in its web. From the silent suffering of families to the moral collapse of educational spaces, Thoppil lays bare a society that has failed to protect its most impressionable minds. Ultimately, the novel becomes not just a tale of addiction, but a poignant social critique that demands collective introspection and reform.

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18.

The Power of Resistance in Postcolonial Literature: Voices against Oppression

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Abstract

Postcolonial Literature has long been a powerful medium for voices of resistance against oppression. This paper explores the concept of resistance in postcolonial literature, examining how authors from colonised nations have utilized their writing as a form of resistance against colonial and neocolonial powers. Postcolonial theory has emerged as a significant framework in contemporary critical discourse, challenging traditional Western-centric perspectives and offering alternative ways of understanding the legacies of colonial rule. The objective of this paper is to examine the role of resistance in postcolonial literature. By analysing works from various postcolonial authors, like Edward W. Said, revolutionized the field with his work, *Orientalism*, which demonstrated the link between Western representations of the "Orient" and the exercise of power and dominance. Homi K. Bhabha further developed the concepts of 'hybridity', 'ambivalence', and 'mimicry', which challenged the authority of colonial discourse as a dominant form of knowledge creation. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay *Can the Subaltern Speak*? critiqued the power dynamics inherent in knowledge production. Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* examined the psychological and cultural impacts of colonialism and the necessity of revolutionary change. the paper explores how literature serves as a medium of protest against colonial oppression, cultural hegemony, and identity erosion. Through thematic and stylistic analysis, the study aims to highlight the transformative power of literary resistance.

Edward W. Said's work, particularly *Orientalism*, stands as a cornerstone in postcolonial studies, highlighting the mechanics of resistance against colonial and imperial narratives. Said explores how cultural representations in Western literature, art, and academia reinforced colonial domination by creating a distorted image of "the Orient"—a term used to denote Eastern societies. These depictions functioned as tools of power, legitimizing colonial rule and marginalizing indigenous voices. In *Orientalism* (1978), Said deconstructs how the West has historically portrayed the East as exotic, primitive, and inferior. His analysis acts as a form of resistance by revealing the ideological biases and power dynamics embedded in such portrayals. This empowers postcolonial writers and thinkers to challenge the stereotypes and reclaim their own narratives. Said emphasizes the need for intellectual resistance, urging postcolonial societies to question and dismantle the authority of colonial discourse. By exposing the way knowledge about the "Other" was constructed as a form of dominance, he opens a pathway for marginalized communities to resist and rewrite their histories.

Keywords: Postcolonial literature, resistance, oppression, cultural identity, colonial hegemony, Orientalism, Hybridity, Ambivalence, Subaltern, Decolonization, Intellectual strategy

Introduction:

This research paper explores the redemptive force of resistance in postcolonial fiction, exploring the ways in which groundbreaking intellectuals such as Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Frantz Fanon disrupt the discourses of domination and colonial dominances. Through the lens of their theory and major works, this paper explores the literary and cultural tactics

that amplify subaltern voices, dismantle colonial narratives, and reshape identities in a postcolonial world.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the function of resistance in postcolonial literature. Through an analysis of works by different postcolonial writers, the paper investigates how literature as a genre function as a form of protest against colonial domination, cultural hegemony, and erosion of identity. Through thematic and stylistic examination, the research seeks to foreground the transformatory role of literary resistance.

Postcolonial literature is not just a consideration of the consequences of colonization; it is an intellectual battleground, a forum in which silenced histories are reclaimed, colonial ideologies dismantled, and the voices of the oppressed magnified. Writers, theorists, and philosophers—Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Frantz Fanon, among others—have used literature and theory as weapons to challenge and redefine narratives of domination. Postcolonial writing is a critical site of resistance, countering the systemic oppression and cultural erasure caused by centuries of colonial domination. As a creative and intellectual project, it recovers histories, identities, and voices erased by imperial discourses. Its essence is the power of resistance—a dynamic energy that unmasks colonial ideologies, reimagines repressed identities, and builds new cultural paradigms.

Edward Said's theory of "Orientalism" explains how the West's representation of the "Orient" used stereotypes to legitimate colonial control. His own critical work highlights the connection between imperialism and culture, with an emphasis on literature's role in reproducing or resisting colonial domination.

Homi K. Bhabha presents the concept of hybridity and ambivalence, subverting colonial dualities and offering a more complex vision through which to see resistance. His discussion of mimicry demonstrates how the colonized subvert authority by taking up the cultural tools of the colonizer and converting them into instruments of subversion.

Gayatri Spivak's seminal paper "Can the Subaltern Speak?" speaks for the silenced voices in imperial discourses and calls for the retrieval of subaltern agency. Her strategic essentialism theory emphasizes the tactical cohesion of oppressed groups in order to counter systems of domination while preserving their multifarious identities.

Frantz Fanon's critical writings, including The Wretched of the Earth, explore the psychological and cultural aspects of colonial domination. Fanon supports the decolonization process as a resistance movement that entails reclaiming humanity and destroying colonial apparatuses, with a focus on the cathartic potential of literature as a force for revolution. Using the insights of these theorists, this paper will discuss how postcolonial literature contains resistance, not merely as a defiance of oppression but also as an artistic energy that reconstitutes narratives, cultures, and identities in the postcolonial world.

Research methodology:

The research design for the paper Use the theoretical models developed by Edward Said, *Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism*, Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Gayatri Spivak *Can the Subaltern Speak,* and Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Explains how these ideas—such as Orientalism, hybridity, ambivalence, subaltern agency, and decolonization—shape postcolonial resistance.

Literary analysis analyses postcolonial literature that has been shaped by these theorists e.g., Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. Analyse how these texts' express themes of resistance, give voice to marginalized communities, and deconstruct colonial ideologies.

Critical Evaluation- Engage with secondary literature available, such as scholarly critique and interpretation of Said, Bhabha, Spivak, and Fanon's writings, in support and context to the analysis. It identifies gaps or weaknesses in the debate and propose how postcolonial literature can further be a site of resistance.

Scope and Limitations:

The scope is wide but specific, covering the intersection of resistance, oppression, and postcolonial debate. It will examine the key

frameworks offered by Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Frantz Fanon, highlighting their impact on postcolonial literature. The essay will examine chosen postcolonial texts (Wide Sargasso Sea, Things Fall Apart, Nervous Conditions, and others) to demonstrate resistance themes and raise marginalized voices. It will place these texts in particular colonial and postcolonial contexts, highlighting how resistance changes over time. By bringing together literature, history, and philosophy, the essay spans the intellectual tactics of resistance and their cultural expressions in texts.

The study highlights particularly the work of Said, Bhabha, Spivak, and Fanon, which translates into other highly relevant postcolonial theorists not being discussed at length. Although representative, the essay only examines a few texts; thus, it cannot include the entire scope of postcolonial literature. examples are largely taken from Anglophone postcolonial fiction, possibly ignoring regional or non-English inputs to the discussion. The paper seeks to find a balance between theoretical richness and literary critique, which may constrain in-depth examination of either dimension. This focus guarantees that the paper is focused and perceptive, while its constraints recognize the limits of what can be covered within the scope of one investigation.

Key themes:

Postcolonial Resistance as an Intellectual Strategy: Said's criticism of Orientalism and literature as colonial propaganda. Bhabha's theories of hybridity and ambivalence in colonial power relations. Postcolonial resistance as an intellectual strategy is about using critical thinking, theory, and literature to deconstruct colonial ideologies and subvert structures of oppression. Theorists like Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Frantz Fanon have exemplified this by turning intellectual discourse into a tool for reclaiming agency and asserting cultural autonomy.

- **Unveiling Colonial Ideologies-** Edward Said's Orientalism depicts the manner in which the West developed stereotypes of the East to legitimate imperial rule. Through the unveiling of these falsifications, postcolonial thinkers subvert the cultural narratives that perpetuate colonial power. Through critical scrutiny, intellectual resistance lays bare the prejudice inherent in literature, art, and academic discourse, challenging colonial narratives' legitimacy.
- **Subversion of Colonial Constructs-** Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and mimicry identify how colonized peoples subvert power. By borrowing and reinterpreting the colonizer's cultural instruments, they challenge the presumed superiority of colonial systems. Intellectual resistance exposes the ambivalence and fissures in colonial power, showing that it is neither absolute nor unquestionable.
- **Empowering Silenced Voices-** Gayatri Spivak's research aims at retrieving voices of the oppressed and subaltern. Intellectual resistance entails struggling on behalf of representation and agency so that the voices erased by imperial discourses will be heard. Spivak's strategic essentialism calls for unity of oppressive groups, facilitating collective opposition against domination.
- **Promoting Cultural and Psychological Liberation-** Frantz Fanon's work highlights the significance of improving cultural identity and mental independence. Intellectual struggle battles the psychological trauma of colonisation, creating the space for decolonization. Literature, philosophy, and education are tools of cultural liberation, enabling one to imagine possibilities unencumbered by the colonial past.
- **Reimagining Identities and Histories-** Postcolonial thinkers rethink histories and identities, subverting the linear, Eurocentric frames imposed by colonial authorities. Such reimagination makes room for varied narratives and visions to flourish. Intellectual resistance fuels pride in cultural heritage, initiating dialogue instead of dominance. Essentially, postcolonial resistance as a strategy of thought utilizes critical thinking and artistic expression to resist oppression, reclaim power, and imagine a world that values cultural diversity and autonomy. It reminds us that

the pen is mightier than the sword, particularly in the struggle against colonial legacies.

- **Subaltern Agency and Silenced Voices-** Spivak's examination of subaltern silence and ethics of representation. Fanon's demand for recovery of identity via radical resistance.

Postcolonial literature has drawn heavily upon Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Frantz Fanon's critical ideas and theories. Some examples of texts in which their noted influences included:

1. Edward Said - Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism

- *A Passage to India* by E.M. Forster: Said's analysis of how Western literature reinforces the stereotypes of the "Other" finds resonance in Forster's portrait of colonial India and the entangled relations between the British and Indians.
- In *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie: Rushdie's novel subverts Orientalist views by reimaging India's history and identity using magic realism.

2. Homi K. Bhabha - Hybridity and Ambivalence

- Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*: This book recasts the "*madwoman in the attic*" narrative of Jane Eyre according to Bhabha's vision of hybridity and the shattered identities brought on by colonialism.
- Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: Achebe's description of cultural clash and colonial relationship ambivalence is consistent with Bhabha's ideas.

3. Gayatri Spivak - Subaltern and Representation

- *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga: Spivak's influence is seen in the novel's interest in the crossing of gender and colonial oppression, giving voice to a subaltern protagonist.
- *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy: The novel's investigation of subaltern identities and silenced discourses reflects Spivak's concern with the retrieval of subaltern voices.

4. Frantz Fanon - Decolonization and Resistance

- Fanon's own *Wretched of the Earth* has inspired hundreds of writers. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind*, for example, captures Fanon's insistence on taking back culture and language as resistance tools.
- *A Grain of Wheat* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o: The novel deals with issues of decolonization and liberation, thoroughly inspired by Fanon's thinking on resistance and national consciousness. These works not only bear the imprint of Said, Bhabha, Spivak, and Fanon but also build upon their theories by situating them within narratives that recast history, identity, and resistance.

Conclusion:

Postcolonial literature is a deep level of resistance, resisting the oppressive regimes and repossessing the histories, narratives, and identities colonized by the colonial forces. From the path-breaking writing of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Frantz Fanon, postcolonial writing reveals the intricate operation of colonial oppression while shedding light on routes of intellectual and cultural emancipation. Their Orientalism, hybridity, subaltern agency, and decolonization theories explain how resistance acts as a force both deconstructive and reconstructive. Through readings of postcolonial works informed by such thinkers, we observe the revolutionary power of literature as a resistance mechanism. Writers deconstruct colonial doctrines, voice the silenced, and imagine alternative narratives that affirm diversity and human dignity. These works are not just histories of the past but also battle cries for the struggles of today and tomorrow against oppression in whatever forms it may take. At its core, the strength of postcolonial resistance literature is not just in its critique of colonial formations but in the fact that it has the potential to create new identities, new voices, and new possibilities. With the postcolonial world ongoingly striving to overcome the inheritances of empire, the theory and the literary work represented by these scholars and their writing remain more pertinent than ever, standing as a lasting series of beacons in the struggle towards justice, fairness, and cultural autonomy.

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19.

Connecting Realms: Cross-Cultural Encounters and Cultural Hybridity in *Journey to Ithaca* by Anita Desai

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the cross-cultural encounters and cultural hybridity depicted in the novel *Journey to Ithaca* by Anita Desai within the context of a globalised world. Culture originates from a specific region or location and includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities, attitudes, literature, and habits of individuals of that definite region. In today's globalised world, cultural exchange and cultural assimilation are generic, paving the way for different branches of studies like Culture Studies, Diaspora Studies, and Migration Studies. Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca* explores cultural exchange as a central theme, depicting interactions between the East and the West through its characters' spiritual and personal journeys. With the portrayal of characters like Matteo, Sophie and the Mother, the author highlights the complex and problematic process of cultural exchange and the challenges and possibilities in a multicultural world. She also narrates how individuals from different backgrounds interact with and interpret other cultures, especially from the East and West perspectives. The characters in the narrative struggle with language, customs, and social expectations as they negotiate the difficulties of cross-cultural communication. The blending of European and Indian elements in the novel reflects a world where cultural identities are increasingly fluid, shaped by personal journeys rather than fixed heritage. It also illustrates cultural hybridity by narrating the different identities of the characters in an interconnected world. It also examines East-West encounters, highlighting themes of spiritual seeking, identity transformation, and cultural appropriation.

Keywords: Cultural Exchange, Identity, Cultural Hybridity, Cross-cultural.

Introduction:

Today's globalised world witness cultural exchanges that denote the culmination of cultural assimilation and cultural hybridity across borders. In a multicultural society, the notion of a single, unified culture often becomes more of an ideal than a reality. People migrated from one country to another country for better employment opportunities, education or any external force that enabled the culture to become a dynamic and ever-evolving construct rather than a fixed or monolithic entity. Multicultural societies represent diverse experiences, social, cultural and political backgrounds, values, customs and lifestyles that are present in a heterogeneous population and marked by the coexistence of multicultural identities. Culture shapes how individuals perceive the world, interact with others, and construct their identities, often passed down from generation to generation while also adapting over time through contact with other cultures. Such kind of cross-cultural encounters and cultural hybridity are vividly depicted in the novel *Journey to Ithaca* by Anita Desai.

Rationale:

Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca* is a juncture where East and West meet together.

Though there are multiple Cultural and Diasporic Studies that explore the encounter of the East with the West, this selected novel explores themes of spiritual longing, personal identity, and the clash between Eastern and Western worldviews. This study tries to analyse how Desai represents cultural hybridity and cross-cultural interactions, particularly through the journeys of Matteo, Sophie, and the Mother. The depiction of characters like Matteo, Sophie, and Mother illustrates how individuals from different cultural backgrounds interact, clash, and learn from one another, exploring the complexities of multicultural societies. Their encounters with Indian culture provide opportunities for reflection, transformation, and conflict. The main focus of the novel is the intersection of Western rationalism and Eastern mysticism. This study is significant in finding out how the characters, through their own journeys, explore the culture and assimilate with the same, which eventually leads them to cultural hybridity that is pivotal in today's multicultural society. By analysing the novel through the lenses of Cultural Studies, Diasporic Studies and hybridity theory, this study will also contribute to a deeper understanding of how literature reflects and critiques transcultural experiences.

Objectives:

- To analyse the cross-cultural encounters depicted in the novel.
- To explore the cultural hybridity prevalent in a multicultural society.
- To examine the intersection of Eastern and Western cultures represented in the selected novel.

Research Methodology

The primary tool for this research is the novel *Journey to Ithaca,* written by Anita Desai. The selected work will be examined by textual analysis and close reading to draw observations and inferences from the research. The cross-cultural perspectives and cultural hybridity described in the novel will be explored mainly through this research. It also uses a descriptive study as the findings will be denoted in descriptive forms. Articles, critical essays and theoretical writings related to the particular text and concept will be used as secondary sources to support the analysis.

Scope and limitations

The proposed study focuses on the representation of cross-cultural encounters and cultural hybridity depicted in the selected work. This research is significant as it analyses the text using the frameworks of Diasporic and Cultural Studies. It closely analyses the characters such as Matteo, Sophie, and Mother to explore themes of identity, spirituality, displacement, and cultural hybridity among them.

One of the limitations of this proposed study is that it analyses a single text instead of providing a comprehensive analysis of all the works of Anita Desai. Another limitation of the study is that, although it can be examined through the lenses of Postcolonial and Feminist Studies, these perspectives are not the primary focus of this research.

Critical Analysis:

In general, culture can be defined as the set of values, beliefs, customs and traditions that inform, guide and motivate people's behaviour. It includes language, clothing, food, art, social norms, religious beliefs, festivals etc. It also includes how people think, behave, communicate, and interact with the world around them. Culture is dynamic, evolves over time and is influenced by other cultures, especially in today's multicultural technology driven society. In literature, culture significantly impact the formation of characters' identities and the challenges they encounter in the society. In *Journey to Ithaca*, Anita Desai explores the theme of cross-cultural encounters and cultural hybridity to highlight how people from different backgrounds seek meaning, spirituality, and self-discovery in their own ways.

Journey to Ithaca by Anita Desai explores intercultural themes, particularly through a spiritual lens. The novel is centred on the nuances of the religio-philosophical interaction of the characters. It portrays Matteo, Sophie, and Mother's journey to India that changes their life. Though their destinations are the same, the reasons behind their quests are different. Matteo's travel is a spiritual quest, as he is influenced by the writings of Herman Hesse. On the other hand, Sophie travels to

India to get back her husband and is sceptical about India. Laila first wants freedom from her life and further follows the spiritual journey, eventually becoming The Mother. Through their journey, Desai explores how different cultural backgrounds influence one's perception of truth, faith, and self-discovery. The novel brings out the characters' journey, struggles and experiences as expatriates and transitions into new cultural identities.

Cross-cultural Encounters:

Migration of people from one country to another country always witnesses cultural exchanges, and cross-cultural encounters are a key feature of Diasporic fiction. In *Journey to Ithaca* by Anita Desai, cross-cultural encounters play a pivotal role in shaping the characters' identities and spiritual quests. The idea for the title of this novel, *Journey to Ithaca*, is taken from the poem Ithaka by C.P. Cavafy. Cavafy writes, "Keep Ithaka always in your mind, arriving there is what you're destined for". The poem tells us the importance of experience in human life and the novel is a depiction of diverse experiences confronted by the characters in their voyage. Their varied experiences in the host nation enrich and challenge their personal beliefs, often leading to transformation, confusion, or conflict.

The foremost cross-cultural encounter in the novel is between Western rationalism and Eastern mysticism. Matteo, an Italian man, is fascinated by Eastern spiritualism and follows the path to enlightenment. He embraces the Indian culture and spiritual tradition, and represents a classic East-West encounter, highlighting the Western idealisation of the East as mystical and pure. In contrast, Sophie is sceptical about Eastern tradition and grounded in a rational, western mindset. Throughout the novel, she questions Indian spiritual practices and tries to expose the flaws in them. Unlike Matteo, she feels alienated and displaced in the host nation and struggles to assimilate into their culture.

Though Matteo and Sophie are married and follow Western traditions, they also belong to different cultures. Matteo is an Italian, and Sophie is a German by origin, who are entangled in a dissatisfied marriage. Matteo is ascetic and spiritual, while Sophie is rational and practical. The story also takes place on four different continents, bringing out different cultural encounters in the novel. All three characters confront identity crises with the 'other' while exploring the host nation. When Matteo engages and immerses in the new culture, Sophie experiences cultural displacement in the host nation.

Desai also presents the conflict in terms of spirituality and religious beliefs. She shows how negativity and positivity exist together in society. She observes how people who don't have real spiritual knowledge give birth to superstitions, and those who have immense knowledge about the Vedas and Upanishads become true religious leaders. For instance, Sophie is shocked when she sees how deeply superstitions grip the people around her. She watches in disbelief as sick and suffering individuals, who desperately need medical treatment, move to temples instead of going to hospitals. On the other hand, there are true religious leaders or Gurus who guide the people and show the path of spirituality.

Another best example for cross-cultural environments are the ashrams depicted in the novel. Ashrams are filled with spiritual seekers from all around the world. This is a place where Western followers adopt Indian customs, languages, and philosophies, while also bringing their cultural influences into the mix. In these ashrams, Indian spiritual traditions such as yoga, meditation, and asceticism will be embraced, studied and interpreted by Westerners. Through showing ashrams, Desai observes how spiritual spaces can become sites of deep cultural exchange and make them a powerful symbol of cross-cultural interaction.

Disillusionment of Matteo about Indian spiritualism is the another cross-cultural perspective. He represents the Western idealisation of India and is detached from its socio-cultural realities. Sophie is sceptical about the legitimacy of gurus and ashrams, and a logical Western mindset is employed while perceiving things in the host nation. On the other hand, Matteo often ignores the harsh realities like poverty, exploitation and commercialisation of spirituality in India.

Matteo lost his rationality in search of his spirituality and sees India as sacred, mystical and pure.

Cross-cultural encounters in *Journey to Ithaca* not only shape individual identities but also deeply influence the interpersonal relationships between Matteo and Sophie. His quest for spirituality brings him into an intense and devotional relationship with his guru, the Mother eventually leads to a detachment from his worldly life. His acceptance of suffering and increasing devotion symbolise his readiness for a hybrid identity. Sophie follows Matteo to India out of love and curiosity, and experiences displacement in the host nation. Even the guru becomes a rival figure who has taken her husband. While Matteo seeks transformation through cultural hybridity, Sophie adheres to her cultural identity. With their conflicting bond, Desai explores how cross-cultural experiences divide relationships.

Cultural Hybridity:

Cultural hybridity refers to the process and outcome of the blending, mixing, or interaction between two or more different cultures. In his *Location of Culture*, Homi K Bhabha proposed the concept of a third space that denotes cultural hybridity, where multiple cultures intersect and new cultural identities begin to form. He questions the fixed nature of cultural identities and homogeneous characteristics and redefines them as dynamic features influenced by the interactions and exchanges between different cultural and historical forces. He explains the hybrid nature of identity and culture in a globalised, postcolonial world in his text.

Cultural hybridity is a central theme of the novel *Journey to Ithaca,* depicted through the characters' journeys who cross geographical and cultural boundaries in search of meaning. Instead of showing a simplistic notion of cultural exchange, Desai depicts the complexities of cultural hybridity, especially through the evolution of the identities of the characters. She denotes the cultural hybridity of the characters in a hybrid environment like an ashram led by a Western woman.

The character of the Mother is the best example of cultural hybridity in the novel as she represents Eastern and Western cultural identities. From a white European woman named Laila, she transcends to an Indian Spiritual leader with followers. She rejects her Western background and is fully immersed in her spiritual life. Her teachings and spiritual presence reflect a unique fusion of both cultures, combining elements of Western thought with Indian spirituality. Even her ashram includes both Indians and Westerners. Her identity is no longer entirely European or Indian. Her character is an embodiment of how identities can evolve through cross-cultural experiences.

Matteo's represents cultural hybridity mainly with identity. Born to an upper-class Catholic family with Italian roots, he was fascinated with Indian spirituality from the texts of Herman Hesse. His journey from Italy to India is not just a geographical relocation, it symbolises his transformation. Though he tries to shed his Western identity and immerse himself in the spiritual quest across various ashrams and spiritual communities, he never becomes fully 'Indian' to others as well as to himself. Even though Matteo embraces Indian culture, his wife Sophie is disappointed with India. These differing reactions between the couples to Indian culture itself reflect the complexity of hybrid identities.

Though Desai does not foreground language as a shaping tool of cultural hybridity in the way some postcolonial novels do, it provides nuances of language blend in the novel. When Matteo and Sophie engage in their journey in India, language becomes a barrier to understanding Indian culture. Their interaction with spiritual gurus and locals happens through translations or simplified English by mediators. This linguistic gap arouses miscommunication and misunderstanding and contributes to their sense of otherness. The spiritual and poetic language of Indian spirituality, like mantras and teachings of gurus, contrasts with the logical Western form of knowledge. It shows how language limits access to authentic cultural knowledge and how hybrid identities are formed through a partial, fragmented understanding. The cultural hybridity does not just exist in the story she tells, but through the way she tells it. Her narration includes Indian idioms, imagery

and cultural references as well as untranslated words like ‘sari’, ‘ashram’, ‘guru’, and ‘puja’, etc reflect the hybridity.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, we can observe that *Journey to Ithaca* by Anita Desai provides deep insights into the effects of cross-cultural encounters and the complexities of cultural hybridity prevalent in a multicultural society. The depiction of the contrasting journeys of Matteo, Sophie and Mother, Desai reveals that such kind of cross-cultural encounters and cultural hybridity are not a simple process and harmonious co-existence of different cultures, but a space of tension, conflict and negotiation. While Matteo’s spiritual Journey reshapes his identity, Sophie’s scepticism alienates her from the host nation. Desai also highlights cultural identity as fluid, dynamic, and shaped by individual perception and lived experience. Instead of romanticising the cultural hybridity, sshe presents it as an intensely personal and painful process. In the twenty-first century, a novel like *Journey to Ithaca* by Anita Desai is significant as we witness Migration, mobility, intercultural exchange etc, increasing and shaping the lives of expatriates as well as natives.

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20.

Between Tradition and Transformation: Social and Cultural Dynamics in Chitra Divakaruni Banerjee's "Affair" and "Meeting Mrinal"

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Abstract

Literary works often blend tradition and transformation to indicate the dynamic nature of societies and cultures. Such a blend is predominant in Diaspora fiction in which tradition is challenged by the transformative dynamics of the host nation. Indian Diaspora fiction conspicuously depicts this blend and class of tradition and transformation as experienced by the characters going abroad and returning to homeland. While tradition is based on cultural practices and ways of thinking, transformation is signaled by social changes including the women's ability to participate in social cultures and economic activities. While traditions focus on stability and retaining the existing socio- cultural practices, innovation and risk- taking are the driving forces in transformation. Diasporic experiences in fiction usually focuses on the journey of characters from tradition to transformation.

This paper analyses Chitra Divakaruni Banerjee's short stories "Affair" and "Meeting Mrinal" to show how the characters such as Meena, Ashok, Dinesh and Mrinal have to negotiate their ways between tradition and transformations. It discusses constraints of marriage and the traditional approach to man- woman relationship in the face of dynamic culture as experienced by Abha and Ashok in "Affair". Further this paper focuses on the concepts of home family and relationship that are modified is the context of Diaspora as depicted in "Meeting Mrinal". The paper mobilizes the tenets of social and cultural analysis to make a commentary on transformative realities of diasporic lives.

Keywords: Tradition, Transformation, Family, Host Nation.

Tradition is an important theme in Diaspora fiction wherein communities living in the host nations that are uprooted from their homelands are shown to be holding on to their ancestral cultures and traditions. However, despite maintaining cultural practices in Diaspora these communities have been adapting and evolving in their new environment. Diasporic subjects often create hybrid identities as Homi K. Bhabha maintains by blending old and new cultural practices. This identity is essentially transformative as it enables an immigrant subject to adapt his/her new context. Furthermore, such a transformation indicates the dynamic nature of Diaspora which has to constantly negotiate spaces between the homeland cultures and the host nation's reality.

Diaspora communities, as depicted in Diaspora fiction, are shown to be actively involved in maintaining their traditional cultural practices. This is done through the use of Indian languages, consumption of Indian cuisine, practicing of Indian rituals, celebrating Indian festivals and maintaining Indian family structures even when they are located far away from the country of their origin. This affinity to

homeland culture, however, changes from one generation to another in Diaspora.

Transformation of the Diasporic communities is a result of their constant interaction with the culture of the host nation. The members of Diaspora group often modify and re-interpret their traditions so as to fit their new socio-cultural backgrounds and such adaptations also lead to hybrid cultural expressions.

Identity is another template where tradition and transformation blend or clash. Diasporic existence can result in simultaneous belonging to people's heritage culture and the culture of their adopted society. This, however, does not happen overnight but rather a result of a dynamic process of negotiating ones identity in Diaspora

Kogielam K. Archary maintains that Indian Diaspora is perpetually caught between cultural heritage and cultural transformation. Tracing the experiences of indenturered Indian labourers from the colonial period to the present time, she explains the making of Indian Diaspora in the context of vast movements across continents. She explains the concept of cultural transformation in the context of Natal which was a colony: "In the Colony of Natal, cultural transformation occurred as the indentured Indian labourers worked, interacted and lived among black Africans and were subjugated to an existence under British plantation owners and white rule" (Archary 4).

Oliver Pierce states that to understand migration, it is essential to learn about the dynamics of culture. The transformation the diasporic group goes through the negotiation between the traditions of the ancestral and adaptions of a new culture. He further explains about the new forms of cultural expressions which creates hybridity: "… diasporic groups often retain elements of language, religion, cuisine and family structure, passing them down across generations. These practices act as cultural anchors, preserving a sense of continuity despite geographical separation from homeland" (Pierce 1).

Chitra Divakaruni Banerjee's short stories "Affair" and "Meeting Mrinal" perfectly justify the struggle of two female immigrants who find it difficult to transform themselves as they have been brought up in the traditional Indian family setup. Both the females struggle to fit in the parameter of host nation's society.

The relation between the Diasporic group plays a very vital role in creating a bond within them. Abha and Meena in "Affair" share a beautiful bond where both of them are confidante to each other and they also try to adjust in the host nation differently. Abha and Meena talk about everything about their life over the phone call and this conversation help them to bond with the other person:

Until today I'd though I knew all about Meena's life, just as she knew about mine. We talked to each other every other day—on the phone if we couldn't get together in person. She'd called me just an hour earlier, before our husbands returned from work, so we could "really talk, without the guys interrupting us." She'd told me about the office, how the new ad campaign she'd thought up had already increased their sales. (Banerjee 232)

The constant need for transformation is another challenge the Diasporic group goes through. The traditional upbringing in the Indian family system includes certain restriction, when such an individual migrates he/ she finds it difficult to adjust immediately to the surrounding. Here Abha struggles to transform her thoughts: "I knew Ashok was watching me, a mocking curl to his lips that seemed to say, *Still suffering from your prudish Indian upbringing, Abha?* But I couldn't help it" (Banerjee 234).

Meena, Abha's friend also finds it difficult to cope with in the host nation. Being a married immigrant female, she learns about her husband Srikant's demanding long working hours and shares her experience of India where she had spent most of her life. She confesses how being alone was not just quite but also horrible: "Shrikant would stay on at work till all kinds of hours, even though I kept telling him I hated being alone in the house. It was so deathly quiet, not like India, where something's always going on—street vendors, servant, people dropping in to gossip. . . ." (Banerjee 239).

Meena is largely impacted by her husband's working hour. She finds it difficult to cope with her loneliness and hence finds comfort in the conversation with her friend Abha with whom she shares all the important

events of her life. Meena being a married immigrant female is often left alone and has nobody to talk to. Her long phone calls with her friend Abha were the only resort for her to get rid of her alienation. This conversation between Meena and Abha created a strong bond amid them both emotionally and mentally:

I knew things about Meena that no one else did—how she still turned on the TV evenings when Srikant was late coming back so she wouldn't have to listen to the silence, how she slept with the lights on when he went out of town. I was the one who held her and tried to calm her when, after her miscarriage last year, the doctor said that something was wrong with her uterus and she might never be able to have a baby. When her tears dampened the shoulder of my sari, I too had wept. That was another bond that held us close, the unspoken sorrow of being childless. (Banerjee 240)

The first-generation Diasporic group often finds it difficult to adapt to the culture of the host nation. The Diasporic communities, especially the females, undergo major transformation in order to get used to the tradition and culture of the host nation. Abha makes an attempt to accept the transformation needed to fit in the host society. She is exposed to the culture differently which makes it difficult for her to accept the change as a whole:

The people on TV—the men with their hair cut in the latest mode and tanned faces out of which shine eyes blue as stones, the women with their high, high heels, their carefully made-up mouths, their tiny waists and breasts that never sag—seem to inhabit an alien world of romance and intrigue and designer clothes that fit perfectly. (Banerjee 242)

Hybridity is vastly noticed within the Diasporic communities when it comes to the acceptance of the tradition of the host nation. The Diasporic group tends to learn about the various dynamics of the culture of the host nation and tries to implement them when and as possible in their groups. Abha is astonished by her friend Meena's gesture towards her and her husband Ashok when she comes to greet them at an event:

I hadn't noticed Meena leaving her group of admirers. Now she leaned forward to give me—and then Ashok—a kiss on the cheek. It was not something Indians did as a rule—but then that was Meena. I watched her bright lips grazing my husband's cheek and his smile as he whispered something in her ear, and I remembered my dream. (Banerjee 246)

The quest for identity is one of the constant struggles of an individual of the Diasporic community. He or she always tries to find themselves in the middle of the chaos where he/she needs to rediscover about one's interests and passion all over again. Abha is one such female who finds joy in all the little things of her life. Her interest is resurfaced by Suren Gupta, who is the editor of the Lifestyle section of *The Indian Courier* and he approaches Abha to work with him for a cookbook. Abha is overjoyed to learn about this proposal by Suren Gupta: "Sounds very interesting," I said, battling the heaviness in my heart. And indeed, it was. I'd been wanting to put together a cookbook for a long time, and this way I'd learn a lot about professional Indian cuisine. It would also keep my mind off things I didn't want to think about" (Banerjee 253).

The impact of certain events on the females of the Diasporic communities is often very significant. The female immigrants face difficulties while searching for employment opportunities. The limited contacts they have in their group often becomes the first source of their employment. Abha is one such woman of the Diasporic group who has secured a new job and decides to celebrate her small victory by shopping for herself all alone: "But today I wanted to celebrate my new job. Or maybe it was because, as I drove through the city, I was aware as never before of all the billboards with women in strapless evening gowns raising glasses of Smirnoff vodka to glistening lips" (Banerjee 255).

The females of the Diasporic group have to face many challenges while going through transformation owing to migration. The constant change that a woman in immigration undergoes is challenged by social and cultural norms. Despite all the difficulties, Abha is ready to accept the need for transformation and decides to change her appearance for better:

I was getting better at it already, I could see that as I outlined my lips in deep peach, darkened my eyes, and brushed blusher onto my cheeks. I sprayed myself generously with the Chanel No. 5 that Ashok had given me for my first anniversary and that I'd been saving all this while and, on impulse, slipped on my one pair of really high heels. I even put on a pair of dangly crystal earrings. (Banerjee 258)

Another challenge faced widely in the Diasporic community is that of the complexity

of relationship. In the constant need in order to get adapted to the host nation, the Diasporic group undergoes several challenges. Those changes make an impact on their social and cultural values. The spousal relationship between Meena and Srikant in "Affair" faces many issues due to the transformation which eventually creates imbalance in their martial harmony due to which Meena falls out of love with Srikant. This incident has made Srikant aware that his wife Meena is in an extra-marital affair. He accepts this fact and he reaches out to Abha to share his heartbreak:

"She's been having an affair for two months now. She finally told me last week, asked me to let her go." He rubbed at his face tiredly. "I'd begun to guess it was something like that—little things didn't fit, times she said she was working late, or visiting a woman friend, times in bed when . . ." He broke off. (Banerjee 260)

Meena finds it difficult to stay in marriage with Srikant. She struggles emotionally and decides to supress her feelings before opening up to her friend Abha. Meena continued to live with Srikant due to societal pressure, given by her friend Abha:

"You've always been so good," Meena continued in a rush. "A good wife, a good homemaker. Perfect at all the things I didn't want to do but knew I should. Like a mother, kind of. I wanted your approval. Needed it. For a long time I told myself, I've got to stay with Srikant. What will Abha say otherwise?" (Banerjee 266)

The search for identity is another challenge faced by the Diasporic community. This community negotiates between tradition and modernity. The tension of being caught between adapting new culture and preserving traditional values leads to the conflict of identity. Here, Meena is in the process of self-discovery which is challenged by the traditional norm:

Just before I left her house Meena had said, "Sometimes I still feel so guilty. I think of what my parents will say, and Srikant's mother, when they find out. Selfish, they'll call me. Immoral. A bad woman. I have to keep telling myself I'm not that. It's not wrong to want to be happy, is it? To want more out of life than fulfilling duties you took on before you knew what they truly meant?" (Banerjee 270)

The female immigrants of the Diasporic group often experience nostalgia largely while navigating through a new culture. The sense of belongingness towards their native land is never forgotten by them. Hence the sense of displacement never leaves their mind. Asha who is undergoing separation with her husband Mahesh, in "Meeting Mrinal" experiences rootlessness in the foreign land:

The alimony payments from Mahesh are fair, and enough and every month I have to dip into my savings. "Why don't you move to an apartment, Asha," my supervisor keeps telling me. "It'd be a lot cheaper and you wouldn't have to fight the memories." She's right. But Dinesh has lived in this house all his life. (Banerjee 277)

Alienation and Nostalgia are central themes of Diaspora fiction. Asha who is experiencing separation is left alone with her teenage son Dinesh. She is going through the complexity of her troubled marriage and she is left all alone in the foreign land where she finds it difficult to adjust herself in the host nation. Asha receives a phone call of her childhood friend Mrinalini and drifts to the past to rethink and revisit her memories with Mrinalini:

"Mrinal!" I whispered into the phone, and a mix of happiness and sorrow swept over me, making me dizzy. "How are you? What are you doing in England?" I spoke in Bengali, stumbling a little over the intimate *tui* I hadn't used for so long. Were scenes flashing through her head, the way they were through mine? (Banerjee 278)

Generational difference between the first-generation immigrants and the second-generation immigrants leads to various challenges within the Diasporic household. These challenges are nothing but the cultural difference between the two generations. The cultural clash between Asha and Dinesh later turns into a little heated argument which creates tension between them. Dinesh, the otherwise obedient child, loses his temper and states facts which Asha wasn't ready to face:

"I'm not good enough for your friend just the way I am, is that it? And why'd you have to lie to her about him"—he wouldn't use his father's name—"being out of town on business." He imitated my Indian accent, thickening it in exaggeration. "Why couldn't you just tell her the fucking truth—that he got tired of you and left you for another woman." (Banerjee 283)

Family bonding in the Diasporic group has different values and goals. The boding between the parent and child also faces multiple challenges beyond culture and tradition. The new dynamics of parenting decides the pattern of upbringing a child in a Diasporic household which eventually leads to hybridity of culture, values and tradition. Banerjee tries to portray the complex mother- son relationship between Asha and Dinesh where the son's cold behaviour

towards his mother is a bit rude and makes her feel more vulnerable in an alien culture:

Dinesh was avoiding me. He left the house early each day—even on the weekend—and came back late, when he was sure I'd be asleep. In the mornings I'd go to the kitchen and find the dinners I fixed for him the night before still sitting on the stove top, untouched. When I lifted the lid, the congealed food would give out the faintly sweet odor of rot. (Banerjee 284)

Survival in separation in the Diasporic community becomes challenging for a woman. The difficulty a woman faces while staying in the host nation and accepting her status as a single woman affect her the most mentally. The females of the Diasporic group undergo identity crisis throughout various stages of separation. Here, Asha tries every possible way to make her husband stay with her in the marriage but her husband Mahesh clearly denies. She tries to reestablish her relationship with her husband by making her look desirable but she fails miserably, sinking into depression and agony:

I'd fought the divorce every way I knew—reasoned, pleaded, tried the silent treatment, cooked Mahesh's favourite meals. I'd even bought myself a gauzy black negligee from Victoria's Secret. I'd taken a long time in the bathroom that night, brushing my hair till it shone down my back, rubbing lavender oil on my wrist and throat, trying different lipsticks. (Banerjee 289)

Banerjee also portrays the conflict between tradition and transformation in "Meeting Mrinal." The traditional expectation of the society to get a female married timely is challenged by Mrinal. She lives independently and disapproves the idea of marriage and is proud of her achievement in her life. She loves to live her life on her own terms and she projects her identity as a career woman:

> Mrinal sat silent for a moment, looking down at her ring, twisting the diamond around to catch the light. Then she said, "You're right. There's a lot in my life that I'm proud of. The freedom. The power. Walking into a room full of men knowing none of them can push me around. Seeing the reluctant admiration in their eyes when I close a tough deal." (Banerjee 294)

Attachment between the family members becomes easy after the acceptance of individuality in Diaspora. Asha who undergoes separation, meets her friend Mrinalini and her perspective towards relation changes. She starts comparing her life with Mrinalini's and learns how happy she is in her life. The joy of reconciliation with her son becomes the event of celebration for Asha and Dinesh:

Later I stand over the stove, stirring the blended pistachios into the simmering milk, watching with wonder as it thickens beautifully. I know there will be other fights, other hurtful words we'll fling at each other, perhaps even tonight. Other times when I sit in the car, listening to the engine's seductive purr (Banerjee 300)

Thus in "Affair" and "Meeting Mrinal" Chitra Banerjee depicts characters and families which are caught between tradition and the compulsion to transform. These characters reflect the cultural dynamics of being in Diaspora with the ever-changing values and expectations influencing their outlook on family, relationship, identity and past.

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21.

Narratives of the Marginalized: Subaltern Voices in R. K. Narayan's Short Story Collections

Dr. Kruti Vyas

Abstract

This paper investigates the nuanced portrayals of subaltern characters in R.K. Narayan's short stories, with a focus on "A Horse and Two Goats," "A Willing Slave," and "An Astrologer's Day," among others. Through the lens of subaltern theory—particularly the works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Ranajit Guha—the analysis reveals how Narayan captures the silent struggles, quiet dignity, and limited agency of marginalized figures within India's evolving socio-cultural landscape. Narayan's storytelling, while often marked by wit and simplicity, brings into focus the layered experiences of rural poor, women, and urban street dwellers. The paper argues that his characters, though seemingly passive, embody a subtle resistance and survival ethic that calls for a re-examination of how voice and agency are defined within the subaltern framework.

Keywords: R.K. Narayan, Subaltern Studies, Postcolonialism, Gender, Caste, Indian English Literature, Malgudi, Short Stories.

Introduction:

The term subaltern, drawn from Antonio Gramsci and elaborated in postcolonial studies by scholars like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Ranajit Guha, refers to groups socially, politically, and geographically excluded from power structures. Spivak's provocative question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" interrogates the systems that silence or misrepresent these voices in dominant discourse. In the Indian literary context, R.K. Narayan's fiction—especially his short stories—offers a fertile ground for exploring subalternity. Unlike overtly political narratives, Narayan's work presents the everyday lives of those who exist on the periphery: the poor, the caste-marginalized, women trapped by patriarchy, and itinerant workers. The fictional town of Malgudi becomes a microcosm of India's social stratification, offering an insightful portrayal of how subalterns survive, adapt, and—occasionally—assert agency.

Though Narayan's characterization often appears simple and deeply rooted in age-old customs and traditions, he is far ahead of his time. He gives agency and a speaking presence to his characters, constructing a combative space in his fiction. Through this space, Narayan challenges colonial rule, entrenched hierarchies, and Indian cultural taboos. His narratives go beyond mere observation—they are subtle yet deliberate acts of resistance. Narayan's short stories, while embedded in the local color of Malgudi, often transcend their setting to expose larger structures of power and marginalization. Rather than conform to the quietism often associated with traditional narratives, Narayan crafts nuanced assertions of resistance and identity through the very ordinariness of his characters' lives.

Subalternity and Symbolism in "A Horse and Two Goats:"

Muni, the elderly herder, represents a quintessential rural subaltern. Once self-reliant, he is now impoverished, scorned even by local shopkeepers. The two goats he tends are symbolic—they reflect not only his dwindling resources but also his remaining sense of identity and pride.

Narayan writes, "He had been a prosperous man once and had owned a flock of forty sheep and goats" (*Malgudi Days* 3), establishing Muni's fall from relative prosperity. The statue of the horse becomes a site of cultural dissonance: while Muni imbues it with mythic meaning rooted in local oral traditions, the American tourist views it as an exotic art object. This cross-cultural misunderstanding illustrates

Spivak's claim that the subaltern is not merely unheard but structurally misrepresented.

Spivak asserts, "The subaltern cannot speak... the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (Spivak 287). Muni's inability to convey the significance of the statue is not a language problem alone but a deeper epistemic rupture, where indigenous meaning is overridden by colonial and capitalist frameworks. Thus, Narayan critiques both economic marginalization and the epistemic violence of cultural translation, where the subaltern's knowledge systems are rendered invisible. Narayan also emphasizes Muni's powerlessness in social terms. His conversation with the shopkeeper early in the story sets the tone of humiliation and rejection: "You have no money and you come here talking of dhall and onions" (Narayan 4). The villager's laughter, the shopkeeper's refusal to extend credit, and Muni's retreat into tales of his past prosperity—all combine to show a character stripped of voice and agency. Yet even in such subjugation, Muni maintains a form of personal pride. His willingness to converse with the foreigner, despite the language barrier, is itself an act of self-assertion within a context that consistently denies him value.

Gendered Subalternity in "A Willing Slave:"

Ayah, the domestic servant in "A Willing Slave," exemplifies subalternity along both gender and class lines. As a widow, she has no social power; as an unpaid caregiver, she is exploited emotionally and economically. Her "willingness" is not a sign of contentment but a result of internalized patriarchy and dependency. Narayan describes her with restrained empathy: "She had grown to love the household as her own and could not think of life apart from it" (*Malgudi Days* 62). Her sense of belonging is tragically tied to her servitude. Ayah's identity is so entwined with her role that she resists retirement. This reflects how societal structures condition women to find worth only through service, reinforcing what Spivak identifies as the silencing of the "subaltern woman." Spivak notes, "Between patriarchy and imperialism... the subaltern woman disappears" (Spivak 306). Ayah's marginal voice is heard only through the narrator's description, never directly—a powerful technique that underscores her erasure from self-representation.

Narayan carefully avoids giving Ayah direct speech, even as her emotional world is relayed to the reader. Her memories of her deceased son, her attachment to the children she serves, and her eventual disillusionment when her replacement is brought in—all are filtered through the narrator's voice. This narrative strategy subtly reflects the limitations of even sympathetic storytelling in fully representing the subaltern. The lack of direct dialogue not only dramatizes her exclusion but also critiques the literary devices that may unintentionally reinforce subaltern erasure.

Urban Subalternity in "An Astrologer's Day:"

The astrologer in this story is a subaltern figure in disguise. He survives by exploiting the spiritual credulity of urban dwellers, yet his performative knowledge masks a personal history of violence and displacement. Narayan notes, "He had left his village without any plan or purpose. He had to leave it secretly... and he never dared to return" (*Malgudi Days* 6). His profession is rooted in spectacle rather than scholarship, reflecting how the city economy recycles subaltern labor into commodified services. What is striking is his adaptability—a form of agency often overlooked in classical definitions of resistance. Though marginalized, he crafts a livelihood through psychological insight, storytelling, and illusion.

As Ranajit Guha argues, "The politics of the people is not elite politics" (Guha 4). The astrologer's subalternity is urban, moral, and performative, providing a counterpoint to the rural and gendered forms discussed earlier. He adapts, survives, and manipulates his environment without formal power or recognition. Narayan's depiction of the astrologer's workspace also contributes to the subaltern theme. Described as a "path running through the Town Hall Park," his makeshift stall, surrounded by "groundnut sellers," "medicine vendors," and "magicians," becomes a site of informal labor and economic marginality (Narayan 1). His reliance on disguise—turban, sacred ash, mystic vocabulary—reveals how subalternity in the urban sphere demands constant self-reinvention.

Furthermore, the astrologer's encounter with his past victim exposes another layer of subaltern dynamics: guilt, fear, and survival intersect in a moment of personal crisis. His confession—"You tried to kill me... I'm not going to press charges, just don't come to my village again"—underscores the limits of justice for subaltern figures. Rather than seeking institutional redress, the story closes with informal negotiation, reflecting the mistrust and inaccessibility of formal power structures for the marginalized.

Critics on Narayan's Subaltern Stance:

The framing of Narayan as an 'artist arrived from the future' has parallels with several critical observations. Sravani Biswas's view of Narayan's ironic realism, Bharucha's reading of Malgudi as an autonomous counter-colonial space, and Michel de Certeau's idea of 'tactics of the weak' all resonate with this interpretation. Though Narayan's tone remains gentle and his characters ordinary, his aesthetic quietly anticipates the postmodern concerns of fractured identities, performativity, and decentralized narratives. This fusion of tradition and foresight makes Narayan's fiction a timeless reservoir for understanding how the subaltern negotiates survival in changing socio-political landscapes.

Nilufer E. Bharucha, in her essay "Colonial Enclosures and Autonomous Spaces: R. K. Narayan's Malgudi," argues that Narayan's depiction of Malgudi subtly creates autonomous spaces that resist the dominance of colonial structures. Though seemingly insulated, these worlds challenge imperial control by sustaining traditional Indian values and fostering an internal critique of socio-political hierarchies. Her analysis reinforces the view that Narayan's fiction, while understated, participates in a broader postcolonial dialogue about resistance and identity.

Sravani Biswas, in her paper "Malgudi Milieu: A Sensitive World of Grotesque Realism," emphasizes how Narayan's world is "a sensitive portrayal of small-town India where realism is frequently tinged with irony and grotesque elements to foreground the absurdity of social hierarchies" (Biswas). Biswas argues that Narayan's realism is never neutral—it often destabilizes dominant narratives through its gentle subversions and understated critiques.

Several critics have recognized Narayan's subtle yet profound engagement with subaltern concerns. In her analysis, Meenakshi Mukherjee observes, "Narayan's genius lies in his ability to make the ordinary appear extraordinary, giving voice to the voiceless without ever turning his narratives into manifestos." Mukherjee emphasizes how his seemingly simple storytelling belies a deep political consciousness. Similarly, S. P. Raja notes, "Narayan's protagonists are often powerless in a socio-political sense, yet they possess a spiritual and emotional autonomy that resists complete subjugation." Raja sees Narayan's fiction as a space where moral dignity replaces material power, a hallmark of subaltern resilience.

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar also suggests that "Narayan writes about the small man in a big world, whose resistance lies not in violent upheaval but in quiet assertion, in being true to one's self." These perspectives affirm that Narayan's literary contributions reflect a deep sensitivity to the lives of those on the margins—rural poor, lower castes, women, and informal workers—thus aligning him with the ethical concerns of subaltern studies.

Narayan's Vision of Subalternity:

In exploring Narayan's oeuvre further, one discovers a consistent commitment to revealing the lived textures of marginal existence. His story "The Missing Mail," for instance, revolves around Thanappa, a humble village postman, who delays delivering a telegram about a death so a wedding can take place without disruption. Thanappa, though seemingly peripheral, enacts moral agency that disrupts bureaucratic rigidity—an act that quietly asserts the primacy of community wisdom over institutional protocol. This reinforces Narayan's portrayal of subaltern figures not just as victims but as bearers of ethical complexity.

Another notable example appears in "Lawley Road," where the protagonist, who champions the removal of a colonial statue, ultimately finds himself questioning the utility of such symbolic gestures. This ironic twist critiques both colonial memory and the postcolonial tendency to replace one form of authoritarian symbolism with another. Narayan here engages in a dual critique: the absurdity of colonial relics and the

ineffectuality of token resistance, thus complicating the binary of oppressor and oppressed.

Narayan's treatment of caste is equally subversive. In "The Blind Dog," the protagonist, a visually impaired beggar, depends on a dog to guide him through his daily routine. The man's vulnerability and the transactional nature of his relationship with the dog allegorize the dependence of lower castes on systems that both sustain and exploit them. The story refrains from overt moralizing but quietly critiques a society that tolerates such precarious modes of survival. The dog's eventual rebellion—a refusal to continue being tethered—can be read as a metaphor for the suppressed agency of the subaltern asserting itself in nonverbal, instinctive ways.

Throughout these stories, Narayan reiterates that the lives of the marginalized are not static but filled with movement, irony, and occasional assertion. These moments, though small in scale, are deeply subversive in intent. His ability to combine humor with critique, and empathy with detachment, allows him to present subaltern experiences without reducing them to caricature or victimhood.

Conclusion:

In his short stories, R.K. Narayan presents a rich tapestry of subaltern lives. His characters—be they rural herders, domestic servants, or city tricksters—exist in the margins of society yet demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and a quiet assertion of agency. Through subtle storytelling, Narayan critiques social hierarchies and reveals the complexity of subaltern existence.

His fiction aligns with subaltern theory's insistence on acknowledging the voices from below—not necessarily in the grand rhetoric of revolution but in the soft cadences of everyday survival. In doing so, Narayan broadens the scope of Indian English literature to include those whose stories are often left untold. His narrative empathy does not erase the conditions of oppression but invites readers to witness the lived experiences of those on the fringes—an act that, in itself, becomes a form of literary resistance.

Narayan's subaltern characters, whether knowingly or unknowingly, challenge dominant structures by simply existing, enduring, and narrating. They remind readers that voice and agency need not be loud or confrontational to be powerful. Even within systems that repress, there are moments of negotiation, assertion, and dignity. This paper, therefore, posits that Narayan's contribution to subaltern discourse lies not in political manifestos but in his humanizing portrayal of the marginalized—individuals who, in their quietude, demand to be seen and heard.

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22.

Narrative of Transformation: Pre-Adult Sensibility and Emerging Identities in Payal Dhar's *Slightly Burnt*

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Abstract

Pre-adult sensibility which is also known as the sensibility of emerging adulthood refers to sharp sensitivity, in particular, to emotions and social signals. It associated with adolescence and early adulthood—a period of important biopsychological growth. Pre-adult sensibility is marked with heightened sensitivity to recognition, threats and social interactions as compared to other age groups. It is also marked with a transition towards independence and responsibility—signs of early adulthood. Pre-adult stage may have vulnerability markers such as insecurity, jealousy and emotional instability. Friendship, family environment, sexual orientation and socialization are the other factors which shape pre-adult sensibility.

This paper analysis Payal Dhar's Young Adult novel, *Slightly Burnt* to show how characters such as Komal, Sahil and Vikram reveal the complexities of pre-adult sensibility. It shows how these adolescent subjects have to negotiate their emerging identities in the context of normative cultural ideas of gender and sexuality. This paper uses theories of Pre-Adulty Studies and Gender Studies to examine the biopsychological development of the adolescent characters in the novel. It also explores the ways in which Komal, Sahil and Vikram make a transition to adulthood, shaped by identity exploration, emotional instability and relationships.

Keywords: Pre-Adult Sensibility, Emerging Identity, Biopsychological Growth, Identity Exploration

Young adult sensibility or Pre-adult sensibility is the emotional and intellectual response made by adolescents. It is marked with emotional sensitivity, social sensitivity, self-consciousness, risk-taking tendencies and emerging identities of individuals in their teens. This sensibility is often depicted in literature and films. Young adult sensibility is the term often used in psychology, sociology, literature and culture. In developmental psychology, this term indicates cognitive abilities and psychological skills needed for making mature decisions and for self-regulation. In cognitive psychology, this term stands for adolescents who display heightened emotional and social sensitivity. In social studies, this term indicates the urge of a teenager to live more independently, trying to move away from parental regulations. Here, the term also connotes the individual's tendency to take risks. Generally, certain traits are associated with young adult sensibility. Risk-taking and sensation seeking with a sense of urgency are these two major traits.

Young adult sensibility is often depicted in literature, particularly in Young Adult (YA) fiction that focuses on characters in their late teens who explore their identities by navigating complex social relationships. Most of these characters face issues in relationships with family and friends and in romantic relationships. Young adult fiction also foregrounds sensitive topics that are related to the developmental stage of teenagers. Some of these characters display sharp emotional and social sensitivity and they learn from a process called associative learning, which is both appreciative and aversive. Young adult sensibility is also considered as introspective sensibility which can also be considered as a marker of vulnerability among

teenagers. In young adult fiction, loneliness is highlighted as a symptom of young adult sensibility.

Emerging identity refers to the formation of emerging self during adolescence and early adulthood. This kind of identity is often based on exploring different aspects of socio-psychological development including the possibility of challenging traditional norms. An emerging identity is often based on the beliefs, values, social roles and interests of a young adult. It is often the result of an adolescent's urge to question his/her identity and to define himself/herself.

There are many factors considered to be instrumental in constructing emerging identities. Firstly, one finds social identities which are the identities constructed upon the adolescents' membership to various social groups in terms of gender, regime, community and nationality. Secondly, one could look at personal identities which are based on the unique attributes of individuals such as education, physical features, experiences and so on. Thirdly, there is co-cultural identity. This identity is developed on the basis of membership to co-cultural groups such as sports groups, students' groups, hobby groups, etc.

Maria Mathew and Sruthi Sivaraman argue that 'Rejection Sensitivity' is an important aspect of young adult sensibility. They define rejection sensitivity as a tendency among young adults to "… anxiously anticipate rejection, easily perceive rejection and intensely respond to rejection. Rejection sensitivity is the ability to anticipate rejection with anxiety, comprehend it easily and respond emotionally" (Mathew & Sivaraman 265). Mathew and Sivaraman further establish a link between rejection sensitivity and behaviour of young adults. According to them, this sensitivity may hamper emotional regulation strategies among the teenagers and might affect their self-esteem, often resulting in withdrawal and anxiety: "Furthermore, the relationship between rejection sensitivity and unstable self-esteem as well as self-behavioural silencing was mediated by self-behavioural attributions. Furthermore, unstable self-esteem was revealed to be strongly related with self-suppressive behaviours" (Mathew & Sivaraman 266).

Sexuality and Sexual Identity are two significant themes linked with young adult sensibility and emerging identities. In recent years, young adult fiction has started addressing the LGBTQ question. LGBTQ themes and identities have made young adult narratives more complicated in recent decades. Adrienne Colborne and Vivian Howard explain the thematic significance of LGBTQ young adult novels: "Contemporary LGBTQ + young adult literature includes heroines across the spectrum of sexual orientation and gender identity, with stories that contain multiple happy endings, a cast of LGBTQ + characters, and depth of character development that make these stories engaging. There is still progress to be made in the intersectionality of identities: representation is not truly diverse until all facets of identity may be found within a category" (Colborne and Howard 18).

Based on the above discussion on pre-adult sensibility and emerging identities, it is possible to read Payal Dhar's novel *Slightly Burnt* to show how this narrative depicts the bio-psychological growth of characters such as Komal, Sahil and Vikram. This novel largely deals with friendship, rejection sensitivity, anxiety about sexual orientations and the issues of socialisation which are characteristic of young adult fiction. This novel tells the story of Komal and her friend Sahil along with the bonding of their families. The real turn in the plot happens when Sahil confesses to Komal that he is a gay. Subsequently, she imagines that Sahil has an intimate physical relationship with her brother, Vikram. Komal's character in particular is characterised by emotionality, impulsivity and exploration of personal identity. Sahil suffers acutely from rejection sensitivity. These features are defining templates of young adult fiction.

Dhar's novel is narrated by Komal, a seventeen-year-old girl who has a distinct perception of life. Her approach to Sahil changes when she finds him mostly moving closely with Vikram. This novel is about the anxiety of Komal who struggles to understand

her own identity and the identities of her best friend and her brother. Her emerging identity has to make peace with the idea of homosexuality as a reality and also come out of the doubt whether Sahil and Vikram are in a queer relationship or a simple companionship. She thinks that she is in a state of shock since she has known Sahil and Vikram as 'normal' kids since their childhood. Her identity transforms into a healthy state with her clearer pre-adult sensibility which questions her mistaken perception and in accepting homosexuality as a social reality and as a different sexual desire than an aberration and crime. Her emergence into healthier identity is catalyzed by the school counselor Usha McDowell who helps her time and again to understand what homosexuality is and the changes that she is undergoing and the ways to deal with them.

One of the features of YA fiction is the communication gap between the adolescent protagonist and their parents. Though both Komal and Sahil have loving relatives around them, they do not play any significant role in making them understand the complexities of emotions, identities and sexualities. They have to deal with people like Neeti Maasi, a distant aunt of Komal, who believes that homosexuality is social evil.

Dhar's novel unfolds in the background of the supreme court order on homosexuality and the verdict on article 377. It is not Komal's fault that she too considers initially homosexuality to be sinful. Hence, Komal cannot even think that Sahil, her best friend, can be a gay. "How could it have happened? Sahil had always been such a normal boy. He wasn't girly or anything, it's not like he used to play with dolls, or wanted to wear dresses. I know that much. He's good at sports too. He lives in a normal home and all. So yeah, back to my question — how could something like this happen?" (Dhar 63). Here, Komal reveals her cultural conditioning that a gay is not supposed to look like a boy and should be more girlish or like effeminate. Dhar uses Komal's emerging identity to question Indian social conditioning and the hegemony of heteronormativity. However, Komal soon realises that her feeling of being betrayed by Sahil's confession is a part of her homophobia. This realization adds to her emerging identity and the growing maturity: "You feel confused and betrayed, you selfish asshole? Can you imagine what he's going through? Get your head out of your own ass first. He doesn't deserve you, you inconsiderate piece of shit!" (Dhar 64).

Komal subsequently becomes conscious of her inability to accept Sahil for what he is. Her young adult sensibility which tries to become more inclusive starts questioning her internalised orthodoxy and intolerance towards alternate sexuality. "The nights that I couldn't sleep, I crept into the study and randomly surfed around. Well, not so randomly, maybe. I've learnt a lot of new words — like 'heteronormative' and 'homophobia'. The latter makes me a little uncomfortable" (Dhar 66).

Sahil is another emerging identity with a distinct young adult sensibility in Dhar's novel. He grows more silent and more tentative when he knows that the society is not quite open to gay identity. He represents those adolescents who have confused identities on account of their sexual orientation and rejection sensitivity. Though Sahil is focalized in Komal's narrative and thereby visiblized in a heteronormative world, he is not shown to be an articulate character.

It is Usha McDowell who brings about transition in Komal's perception with her helthy and inclusive evaluation of homophobia in Indian society. She says, "Komal, you realise that our society doesn't make it easy for people who don't conform, who don't live traditional lives, get married, have children and so on? The law is not on the side of gay people either" (Dhar 79). It is McDowell again who makes Komal realize that gays and lesbians have very few close friends in a normative society. She makes Komal understand her role as a friend in helping out a young adult who is gay: "You were trusted because someone felt safe talking to you. Felt safe in a world that is hostile and narrow-minded. If it wasn't being gay, wouldn't be a big deal would it?" (Dhar 79).

It is Komal's empathy for Sahil which makes her a more evolved personality. Like a confident young adult, she revolts against the social norms and understands what Sahil must be going through as a closeted gay: "I do. I really do. And I know I'm being selfish, but I feel so messed up about it sometimes. I don't know what to say. I know Sahil must be feeling.." (Dhar 80).

Even as Komal thinks about Sahil's difficult identity, she's conscious as a young adult of her looks. It is a common phenomenon that a young adult subject thinks about his/her outfits and public appearance: "My ribcage vibrated and head pounded to the DJ's thundering beat. Gathering the folds of my lehenga in a very unladylike (but most satisfying) manner, I pointed to the steps at the edge of the lawn before limping off in that direction hoping that Sahil would follow" (Dhar 99).

Komal begins to question the gender boundary in sartorial culture. She tells Sahil: "This fashion gender divide is so unfair," I said, "Why is it that women's clothes are so inconvenient and look at you two – so… so… unencumbered!" (Dhar 101). She is made to think seriously about the supreme court order to re-criminalise homosexuality. She aligns herself with the revolting section of the society against the 377 verdict. Here, she turns into a rebellious young adult individual when she empathizes with the affected people. She internalizes the message of the television news: "…a sizeable section of society to live their lives in the shadow of harassment, exploitation, humiliation, cruel and degrading treatment at the hands of the law enforcement machinery. The supreme court decision may have just forced that sizeable section back into the shadows and…" (Dhar 124).

Komal's emotionality and impulsivity are the clear markers of young adult sensibility that are revealed in the night after she listens to the supreme court verdict on 377. She goes through an emotional turmoil as she places Sahil in the context of this event: "I was too restless to go to bed. I wanted to go online and figure out what this 377 ruling by the Supreme Court was. Sahil had WhatsApp-ed back, but while we got the gist of it that homosexuality was a crime once again – neither of us was sure what it exactly meant" (Dhar 123).

Komal undergoes her transformation in realizing that anyone can be a gay. She becomes aware of this possibility when she realizes the fact that Vikram is no longer a little boy and that it is a possibility that he too is a gay!! "It had felt a little surreal then knowing your little brother had a secret girlfriend in waiting. For some reason, the fact that he probably had a very secret boyfriend wasn't freaking me out as much as I thought it would. Or maybe it just hadn't sunk in yet." (Dhar 143)

Eventually, Komal convinces herself that probably Sahil and Vikram are only close friends. She emerges into a more convincing personality when she tries to become less certain about her inferences about them: "I'd been keeping a close eye on Sahil and Vikram this past week and it amazed me to see how normal they were with each other. In fact, if I wanted, I could have convinced myself that what I'd seen that day had been a dream or that I'd imagined it. There were no glances, no extra casual touches, nothing between them. In school they barely even looked at each other" (Dhar 152).

Komal's development into an emerging identity is like the cake that she bakes. Her baking experiment gets the product *Slightly Burnt* but she accepts it and makes peace with the possibility of the cake getting burnt. Likewise, she comes to accept the identity and the sexuality of Sahil, which though different is still a possibility. Sahil's self-image to becomes less blurred in his own eyes. From rejection anxiety he moves on to see himself as an individual, with the help of Komal's understanding.

A close reading of Payal Dhar's *Slightly Burnt* thus, shows that it is narrative of transformation that documents Komal's adaptive changes that she makes in her pre-adult sensibility in accepting non-heteronormative sexualities as possible identities. It is still a young adult novel that captures the complex friendship between Komal and Sahil which is

unfolded with the help of jealousy and emotional instability which define a YA fiction.

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23.

Lakshman- Beyond A Loyal Warrior: Exploring His Character In Toru Dutt's Poem "Lakshman"

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Abstract

Lakshman, traditionally relegated to the role of Rāma's loyal brother in the Ramayana, is often perceived as a mere shadow and passive follower, defined by his unwavering devotion and as a loyal warrior. The incarnation of Shesha Nāga who left behind his wife for 14 years without a second thought and devoted his entire life to the feet of Rāma; the faithful step-brother who never saw the face of his sister-in-law — Sitā and worshipped her as his mother, was questioned and accused on the account of his intentions towards Sitā and loyalty towards his brother, by Sitā herself in the Aryakaand of Ramayana. This very segment of Ramayana is elaborated in Toru Dutt's Lakshman (1822) expressing through her diction the unvoiced emotional turmoil of Lakshman. This paper seeks to challenge the monolithic and one-dimensional portrayal by delving into Toru Dutt's evocative poem, 'Lakshman.' Through a close reading of Dutt's nuanced verses, we move beyond the conventional narrative of unwavering obedience to uncover a complex character grappling with inner turmoil, showcasing a blend of fierce loyalty, human vulnerability and a profound sense of isolation. Dutt's Lakshman is not simply a warrior; he is a figure imbued with human frailties, revealing the emotional toll between loyalty, duty, personal sacrifice and human emotion. This exploration of Dutt's Lakshman contributes to a deeper understanding of the Ramayana and the multifaceted nature of its iconic figures, exploring their psychological landscape, and highlighting their moment of doubt, unspoken anxieties, and deep-seated affection.

Keywords: Lakshman, Aranyakānd, Ramayana, Human emotions, Inner turmoil, Unvoiced Anxiety, Psychological State, Loyalty, Warrior.

INTRODUCTION

The Ramayana, a cornerstone of Indian literature and culture, stands as an epic narrative of profound influence, its stories and characters resonating across millennia and inspiring countless adaptations throughout the Indian subcontinent and beyond. Within this rich tapestry of heroic figures and moral dilemmas, Lakshman emerges as a remarkable character, extending his significance far beyond his widely recognized role as Lord Rāma's devoted younger brother.

Lakshman's origins are established as the son of King Dasharatha and Queen Sumitra and the twin brother of Shatrughna. From the outset of Ramayana, the narrative emphasizes the extraordinary connection between Rāma and Lakshman. Rāma himself articulates the depth of this bond in powerful terms, describing Lakshman as his "second innermost self" (2.4.43).

Across the diverse retellings of the Ramayana, Lakshmana consistently embodies the very essence of unwavering loyalty and profound devotion to his brother Rāma. His steadfast and immediate decision to accompany Rāma into exile, willingly embracing a life of hardship and uncertainty for fourteen long years while relinquishing the comforts and privileges of the royal palace and the company of his newly wed wife Urmila, stands as a powerful testament to this devotion. His constant vigilance in guarding their dwelling in the forest and his immediate readiness to confront anyone who poses a threat

to them are clear manifestations of this protective instinct. This fierce protectiveness, stemming directly from his deep love and loyalty, makes him an indispensable figure in safeguarding Rāma and Sitā throughout their trials.

Lakshman, thus, is frequently described as the embodiment of wavering loyalty, profound devotion, exceptional bravery, selfless service, and wavering righteousness. He was considered the "ideal brother", epitomizing fraternal love and support, and is often recognized as an "unsung hero" of the Ramayana due to his consistent and selfless contributions.

Toru Dutt's poem "Lakshman" (significant work from her collection *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*) while rooted in the epic Ramayana, offers a nuanced portrayal of the titular character that extends beyond his conventional image as merely a loyal and obedient brother. Dutt's concise yet evocative verses capture Lakshman's internal turmoil and the depth of his devotion during a pivotal moment: Sitā's abduction. "Lakshman" poem is the reinterpretation of the Aranyakaand of Ramayana set in the forest of Panchvati where Rāma, Sitā, and Lakshman were living In this section of the epic, the demon Marich reincarnates himself into the beautiful golden deer. When Sitā catches the sight of the golden deer, she instantly desires it. To fulfill her desire, Ram goes into the dark forest behind the deer and eventually kills it. While dying, cunning demon Marich, now disguised as deer, cries in the voice of Ram and calls for Lakshman and Sitā. Sitā and Lakshman, who were waiting for Ram to arrive, hear the cry of Ram. Sitā panics believing that Ram is in danger and asks Lakshman to go and rescue her love. Lakshman is aware of the bravery and greatness of his brother Ram and refuses to believe that Ram would ever cry for help. Sitā continues her plea to Lakshman and in the flow of her hysteria points figures at Lakshman for being selfish and accuses him of having desire to marry her. She blames the family of Ram for their current conditions, and even accuses the Lakshman to be greedy too like his family.

Lakshman is stuck in the turmoil whether he should listen to Sitā and go behind the voice but defy the orders of Ram to protect Sitā in his absence or should he continue following Ram's order and defy the plea of his motherly Sitā. But because of the harsh words of Sitā, Lakshman was deeply hurt and decided to pay his heed to Sitā and prove his loyalty to Ram and her.

This poem serves as a powerful lens through which to explore the complexities of Lakshman's character, revealing him not just as a warrior, but as an individual grappling with intense emotions, unwavering commitment, and a profound sense of responsibility.

Rationale:

Rereading mythological epics lets us explore our own culture and tradition and lead us to go back to our roots which were once forgotten due westernization of the world and most importantly due to colonialism. Rereading epics like Ramayanaa evokes the feeling of sharing the same roots eventually oneness.

Reinterpretation of such epics gives a fresh perspective of viewing this epic. It helps in challenging the social norms and helps in modifying the society. "Lakshman" poem has significantly helped in bringing out the new perspective of human nature of the divine characters. This research thus helps society to rethink our idols. Humanizing such idols makes them easier to follow and inculcate in day-to-day life.

The one thing that intrigued the researcher the most was a new perspective and rare relationship of Lakshman and Sitā being explored. It brings to the spotlight their internal turmoil and their relations with each other.

Objective:

The objective of this study is to explore the traditional archetypes associated with Lakshman in the Ramayana while also considering Toru Dutt's reinterpretation of the character. By examining Dutt's portrayal of Lakshman, we aim to analyze how it diverges from the traditional representations found in the epic. This investigation will extend to the ways in which Dutt humanizes these characters, challenging their divine status and emphasizing their complexities. Furthermore, we will delve

into the internal struggles faced by both Lakshman and Sitā as depicted by Dutt, highlighting a more nuanced understanding of their experiences and emotions.

Research Methodology:

The research shall be carried on with qualitative research methodology to explore the portrayal of Lakshman in Toru Dutt's poem "Lakshman". It will be carried out through close reading and analysis of the poem as primary data and comprehensive blogs, published articles and research papers will be analyzed for research as secondary data.

A descriptive and comparative analytical approach will be adopted to examine the traditional archetype of the characters and those portrayed by Dutt. By adopting a descriptive approach, researchers can gain a detailed and nuanced understanding of the Ramayana in both its traditional and contemporary forms by Toru Dutt. It helps to examine the specific characteristics of the character, settings and events in both the folklore and the poem. The researcher has used the mythological approach to analyze the Ramayana in folklore, and the Ramayana portrayed by Toru Dutt in her poem "Lakshman". This approach helps in critically analyzing mythological elements and characterization and using them to interpret the poem. Along with this comparative analytical approach has been employed to compare the character in both traditional Ramayana and the poem to determine if they correspond to common archetypes or deviated from the same.

Limitations:

Firstly, literary analysis is inherently subjective, and different researchers may have varying interpretations of Dutt's poem. There can be different perspectives to look at the mythological characters. This can make it challenging to reach a consensus on the meaning and significance of her work. While comparing Dutt's portrayal of Lakshman to traditional Ramayana narratives can be insightful, it can also be challenging to establish a clear baseline, as there are various versions of the Ramayana. Though Valmiki's Ramayana is considered the base story, there are several interpretations and mythological folklore of different narratives of this epic. Therefore, comparative study becomes difficult.

Ramayana was initially written in Sanskrit. The researcher may face difficulties in accurately interpreting the original text. Translations can be huge limitation in reaching accuracy. It can introduce biases or wrong interpretations.

Significance:

Lakshman, while a pivotal character in the Ramayana, often remains in the shadow of Rāma. Always being depicted as a loyal brother and warrior, Lakshman was portrayed as a one-dimensional character in Ramayana overlooking his inner turmoil which Toru Dutt explored in her poem. This research directly addresses this by bringing Lakshman into sharper focus. By examining Toru Dutt's interpretation, it encourages a deeper understanding of a character whose motivations and complexities are frequently overlooked. This contributes to a more complete and nuanced appreciation of the epic narrative itself.

It is crucial to investigate humanizing characteristics of idealized and divine figures for better understanding and bridging the gap between the divine and human, making epic heroes more relatable and their struggles more resonant. In essence, this research goes beyond a simple literary analysis of a poem. It delves into the complexities of character interpretation, the dynamics of literary adaptation, the humanization of epic figures, and the potential for uncovering alternative perspectives within traditional narratives. It promises to offer a fresh and insightful understanding of Lakshman's character and Toru Dutt's significant contribution to Indian English literature.

Literary Analysis:

Toru Dutt, a pioneering figure in Indo-Anglian poetry, left behind a significant literary legacy despite her tragically short life. She was a pioneer who adeptly navigated the confluence of Eastern and Western literary traditions. Her unique position as an Indian woman writing in both English and French allowed her to serve as an interpreter of Indian culture to a Western audience. This cultural ambidexterity provided

her with a distinctive lens through which she could re-examine and reimagine the rich tapestry of Indian mythology. Her collection, "*Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*," remains a testament to her deep engagement with India's epic past and her ability to render these age-old narratives in a compelling and accessible manner for a global readership.

Within her body of work, particularly in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, the poem "Lakshman" stands out as a compelling reimagining of a well-known episode from the Ramayana. This collection, published posthumously, showcases Dutt's deep engagement with Indian mythology and her endeavor to bring these rich narratives to a wider audience. "Lakshman," as a poem, is central to understanding Dutt's poetic identity and her unique approach to retelling ancient stories.

Lakshman- A Loyal Warrior

Lakshman is considered as epitome of loyalty and devotion which Toru Dutt explicitly underlined in her poem. The theme of loyalty and duty is central to the poem, primarily embodied by Lakshman's unwavering devotion to Rāma and his strong sense of responsibility to protect Sitā as per his brother's command. Even when faced with Sitā's vehement accusations and personal hurt, Lakshman remains steadfast in his commitment to his duty, ultimately choosing to help Rāma while ensuring Sitā's safety.

While a cry of help in Rāma's voice was heard, Sitā panicked out of her love but Lakshman questioned the authenticity of the cry reminding her of Rāma's unparalleled strength. He attempted to reassure her by saying, "Hast thou his prowess never seen? / Wipe off for shame that dastard tear/ What being of demonian birth / Could ever brave his mighty arm?" (line 27-30) . This unwavering faith in Rāma's capabilities underscores his deep loyalty and respect for his brother.

Furthermore, Lakshman's explanation of the cry as a potential "trick of magic by the foe" reveals not only his loyalty to Rāma but also his rational assessment of the situation. He reasons that Rāma "has a work,--he cannot die,"(line 55) highlighting his belief in Rāma's divine purpose and invincibility. His reluctance to leave Sitā unprotected in the forest, where "Bands scattered of the giants lurk,"(line 62) further exemplifies his dedication to Rāma's command and his concern for Sitā's well-being.

Even as he prepares to depart at Sitā's insistence, his act of drawing a magic circle with an arrow demonstrates a final, protective gesture, ensuring her safety in his absence. Finally, his compassionate forgiveness of Sitā's harsh accusations, attributing them to her grief and fear, showcases a loyalty that transcends personal hurt. He asks, "We part as friends,--is it not so?" (line 151) revealing his desire to maintain their bond despite her unfounded suspicions. His plea to the sylvan gods to watch over Sitā before he leaves underscores his continued commitment to his brother's charge. These instances collectively illustrate a loyalty that is not merely a passive adherence to duty but an active and deeply felt commitment to both Rāma and Sitā.

Defiance to Ramayana:

Toru Dutt's "Lakshman" has frequently noted her deviation from the traditional Ramayana portrayal, emphasizing her focus on the human vulnerabilities and emotional complexities of the characters. While the epic generally depicts him as an unwavering figure of loyalty and strength, Dutt presents a more emotionally complex and conflicted character.

Subjugation of Wisdom by Emotions:

A key aspect of this deviation lies in the interplay between Lakshman's initial wisdom and his eventual emotional response. He demonstrates sound judgement by recognizing the cry as potentially deceptive and by adhering to Ram's command. His rational arguments, using vivid animal imagery to emphasize Rāma's strength, showcase his initial wisdom. However, this wisdom is ultimately overridden by his emotional reaction to Sitā's relentless and hurtful accusations. Despite his better judgment and his awareness of the potential dangers of leaving Sitā alone, his emotional distress compels him to disobey Rāma. This portrayal explores how intense emotions can cloud

judgment and lead to actions that contradict one's initial wisdom or sense of duty. It challenges the traditional heroic ideal where reason and duty are expected to always prevail, offering a more realistic depiction of human behaviour where even the most steadfast individuals can be swayed by emotional factors.

Focus on Helplessness and Inner Conflict:

The poem retells the Aryakaand of Ramayana, narrating the setup involving Rāma leaving to hunt a golden deer to fulfill the wish of Sitā . Before departing, Rāma instructs Lakshman to stay behind and guard Sitā. The golden deer is, in fact, the demon Marich, disguised as part of Ravana's plan to abduct Sitā. When Rāma kills the demon, Marich imitates Rāma's voice and cries out for help. Sitā, hearing the cry, believes it is Rāma desperately in need of assistance and urges Lakshman to go swiftly to his aid. Lakshman, however, knows of Rāma's invincibility and strength. He attempts to reassure Sitā, telling her that Rāma cannot be defeated easily by demons, ghosts, or gods, and that the cry must be a deceptive plan by a foe. He denies her request, trusting in his brother's might. He quotes:

Beseech me not from hence to go
For here beside thee, as a guard
'Twas he commanded me to stay,
And dangers with my life to ward
If they should come across thy way. (lines 56-60)

This is where Lakshman's inner conflict and subsequent helplessness become prominent. He is placed in an agonizing position, torn between two irreconcilable demands: his sacred duty and obedience to his brother Rāma (who ordered him not to leave Sitā) and Sitā's urgent insistence, which rapidly escalates into angry accusations. The internal conflict was so brutal that Lakshman had to choose between his God-like brother and his mother-like sister-in-law. How can Lakshman, who was well-known to obey each and every word of his brother whom he worships like God, disobey Rāma's command? but if he has to obey Rāma's order he will have refused the plea of Sitā who was mother-like to him.

Lakshman requests Sitā not to put him in this moral dilemma and refuses to leave, Sitā becomes enraged and levels severe, humiliating, and degrading taunts against him. She accuses him of cowardice and, more painfully, of having a hidden, malicious motive – suggesting he secretly desires Rāma's kingdom and wants Rāma removed so he can take her for his own wife. These bitter remarks make Lakshman feel helpless and deeply harmed and wronged. The poet brings out Lakshman's helplessness in this moment.

Depiction of Psychological pain:

The harsh words, inflicted by Sitā, creates significant psychological pain on Lakshman. He is described as being "harmed by her venomous words" and feels she "cruelly wrongs him". The poet emphasizes his suffering, stating that Lakshman is "unable to bear it any longer her taunts". He states that- No longer can I bear thy words, / They lacerate my inmost heart/ And torture me, like poisoned swords. (118-120). The emotional onslaught creates a severe "inner conflict" for Lakshman. He is placed in an agonizing position, "torn between obeying Sitā" and his sacred "obedience to his brother Rāma". His loyalty to Rāma is paramount; he regards his brother not just as kin but as his "chief", and disobeying Rāma's direct order to guard Sitā is considered a "crime". Though showing such a great loyalty towards Rāma, Lakshman questions Sitā's remarks in the lines- Have I deserved this at thine hand? / Of lifelong loyalty and truth (lines 121-122).

He expressed his psychological pain and mental wretch caused by Sitā's poisoned words. He mentions that it didn't anger him, but more than ever hurted him to learn what Sitā thinks of him. He divulged that whatever she said had "broken his heart" and confessed his "wish to be dead" before being questioned for his loyalty.

Though Lakshman maintains a sense of calm and nobility towards Sitā as he prepares to depart, blessing her and invoking protection, his internal state is one of deep sorrow. He departs with "a sorrow dark", a vivid depiction of the emotional burden and psychological pain stemming from his forced decision and the foreboding ill-omens.

This portrayal underscores Lakshman's vulnerability not to external threats, but to the cutting force of unwarranted accusations and the impossible choice they impose upon him. Lakshman, who is described as stoic moreover "Vijitendriya" meaning "one who has conquered the senses, reflects feeling of betrayal, helplessness and even being suicidal. The poem shows him experiencing deep mental agony, reflecting his internal suffering, which goes beyond simply being a steadfast warrior following order.

Thus, this interpretation offers a humanized Lakshman, revealing his vulnerabilities and internal struggles, contrasting with his often idealised depiction in the epic. By focusing on his inner turmoil, his hesitation, and his emotional responses to Sitā's accusations, Dutt moves beyond the archetype of the Steadfast warrior. It can be viewed as a form of character deconstruction, bringing a mythological figure to a more relatable human level, complete with doubts and emotional complexities.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this exploration of Toru Dutt's "Lakshman" reveals a compelling reinterpretation of a figure traditionally confined to the archetype of the loyal warrior. By meticulously examining Dutt's poetic choices, this research has demonstrated how her portrayal of Lakshman transcends simplistic devotion, delving into the intricate layers of his character. The analysis has shown that Dutt's Lakshman embodies a complex blend of unwavering loyalty and fierce protectiveness, often underscored by a palpable intensity and moments of internal struggle. Furthermore, Dutt's poem subtly humanizes Lakshman, showcasing his emotional endurance, internal conflict and the weight of his sacrifices, thus moving him away from the idealized, almost divine, status often accorded to him in traditional narratives.

Through her nuanced portrayal, Toru Dutt not only offers a fresh perspective on a key figure in the Ramayana but also engages in a subtle yet significant act of literary re-evaluation. Her "Lakshman" invites readers to consider the emotional and psychological complexities of those who stand beside heroes, highlighting the human cost of epic journeys. This research underscores the enduring power of literature to reimagine familiar narratives, offering new insights into even the most established characters and enriching our understanding of both the epic tradition and the innovative spirit of writers like Toru Dutt. Ultimately, Dutt's poem serves as a powerful reminder that even within grand narratives of heroism and divinity, the intricate tapestry of human emotion and experience remains profoundly significant.

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From Jingles to Journeys: Consumer Culture and Performing Femininity in Anuja Chauhan's *The Zoya Factor*

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Abstract

Consumer culture and feminine performativity form integral aspects of contemporary Indian popular fiction, especially in narratives where advertising media plays a pivotal role. Anuja Chauhan's *The Zoya Factor* (2008) offers insights into consumerism, celebrity culture, and feminine identity, offering a fertile ground to examine how consumer culture intersects with gender performance. The novel, which is a blend of chick lit and cric lit situates the main protagonist - Zoya Solanki within the world of advertising jingles, fashioning her as the face of the Indian cricket team's "lucky charm" - a role where her body and image become products for consumer attention. This phenomenon aligns with the broader dynamics of contemporary media, where women's visibility often hinges on commercial aesthetics. Zoya's reluctant participation in the media spectacle highlights the tension between agency and commodification, inviting critical questions about women's autonomy within the structures of consumer culture. Drawing on the theory of gender performativity by Judith Butler, the concept of commodified femininity in consumer culture offers new opportunities for female self-fashioning, while simultaneously reinforcing patriarchal structures that regulate women's performative identities. Chauhan negotiates the intersections of popular fiction, advertising media, and self-representation by situating *The Zoya Factor* within the framework of interdisciplinary interactions between literature and visual arts and contributes to the broader discourse on Indian popular fiction, feminist media studies, and the cultural politics of gender representation in post-liberalization India.

Keywords: Consumer Culture, Commodification, Feminine Performativity, Feminist Media Studies

Introduction:

Contemporary Indian popular fiction often serves as a reflection of broader social, cultural, and economic transformations. Anuja Chauhan's bestselling debut novel *The Zoya Factor* (2008) stands out as a compelling narrative that interlaces consumer culture with female identity, offering a satirical yet poignant critique of the intersections between media, commerce, and femininity. The rationale of this article is to explore how Chauhan's novel articulates the dynamics of performing femininity within the framework of consumer culture, using advertising media and celebrity endorsements as key sites of inquiry. The central argument posits that while consumer culture provides women with new forms of visibility and agency, it simultaneously reinforces patriarchal structures that commodify female identities.

The study employs a qualitative research methodology, incorporating textual analysis, feminist literary criticism, and media studies approaches. Textual analysis entails a close reading of *The Zoya Factor* to identify key themes, character portrayals, and narrative strategies that depict consumer culture and femininity. The novel encapsulates the career trajectory of the protagonist, Zoya Singh Solanki, who transforms from a mid-level advertising executive to a national celebrity. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is applied as a framework to analyze how Zoya's femininity is performed, constructed, and negotiated within the realms of male expectations. Additionally, consumer culture

will provide insights into the commodification of femininity in advertising and celebrity culture. The study will employ an interdisciplinary approach by integrating concepts from feminist media studies, visual culture, and cultural studies to offer a comprehensive understanding of the novel's engagement with representation of women in media and consumer culture in contemporary Indian literature. Some of the research problems statements that will be analyzed are whether *The Zoya Factor* portrays consumer culture and commodification of femininity through advertising and media representation in post-liberalization India.

The objectives of the study are to examine how *The Zoya Factor* represents the role of advertising media and celebrity culture in shaping and commodifying women's public image. The scope of the study includes primary analysis of *The Zoya Factor* as a representative text that illustrates the interplay between consumer culture and gender performance in Indian popular fiction. It will examine the novel's portrayal of media, advertising, and celebrity culture, considering their influence on Zoya's identity formation. The limitations of the study are that given the specific focus on *The Zoya Factor*, the research may not encompass a broader comparative analysis of multiple texts in Indian popular fiction. Additionally, the study will primarily rely on literary analysis rather than empirical studies of consumer behavior or media impact. The research will also be limited to textual and theoretical interpretations rather than firsthand accounts from advertising professionals or media figures.

The rise of consumer culture in post-liberalization India has significantly reshaped the social and cultural landscape, particularly for women. As brands and advertising campaigns target consumers, the construction of idealized femininity becomes increasingly enmeshed with commercial aesthetics for women. The novel's consistent use of advertising jargon and product placements underscores the pervasive influence of consumer culture on self-fashioning and identity construction. Advertising media plays a central role in shaping gendered subjectivities by presenting idealized images of beauty, success, and desirability. Zoya's career in advertising places her at the heart of this apparatus, where she simultaneously creates and becomes a product of the very industry she serves. The jingles and slogans that permeate the novel function not merely as background details but as symbolic markers of how women's bodies and identities are intertwined into consumer narratives. This section explores how Chauhan's satirical representation of advertising media highlights the tension of women's agency.

Chauhan intricately weaves advertising and media into the fabric of the story, making them central to both the narrative and the novel's critique of consumer culture. The protagonist works in an advertising agency, which makes advertising a core element of the plot. Her job involves branding and creating marketing campaigns, giving readers an insider's view of the industry. The way Chauhan portrays the advertising world - its cut-throat nature, client demands, and exaggerated marketing strategies critiques the industry's manipulative tactics in a satirical way. The novel's central premise is Zoya's supposed ability to bring luck to the Indian cricket team which spirals into a marketing gimmick. The media and advertising industry capitalize on this belief, which reflects how advertising turns people into commodities, how brands manipulate public sentiment, and how media constructs narratives that fuel consumerism. The novel shows how the media plays a key role in shaping public perception and mirrors real-life celebrity endorsements, where brands create associations between products and certain personas to drive sales.

Consumer Culture and the Construction of Identity:

Analyzing *The Zoya Factor* through the lens of consumer culture highlights how the novel engages with the commodification of identity, and the branding of personal success. The protagonist Zoya's transformation from an ordinary advertising executive to the Indian cricket team's lucky charm exemplifies how consumer culture shapes identity. Her value in the public eye is not based on her personal abilities but on the perceived luck she brings, a

quality that is commodified by brands and media. Zoya becomes a symbolic brand, much like a celebrity endorser. The marketing world capitalizes on her persona, reinforcing how consumer culture thrives on the commodification of individuals. Her "luck" is marketed like a product, reflecting how brands turn individuals into consumable icons. The novel also showcases aspirational consumerism - the idea that individuals purchase goods or adopt lifestyles to signal upward mobility. Zoya who hails from a middle-class background, is suddenly thrust into the world of elite sportsmen, luxury brands, and media attention. Her experience showcases how consumer culture sells the dream of social ascension through branding, lifestyle marketing, and association with high-status symbols. Zoya's journey also intersects with gendered expectations in consumer culture.

Cricket in *The Zoya Factor* is not just a sport but a highly commercialized industry and a consumer spectacle where players are brands, endorsements dictate visibility, and fandom is monetized. The Indian Premier League (IPL)-style commercialization of cricket mirrors how sports today are packaged as entertainment products, with consumption driving their success. While *The Zoya Factor* is a romantic comedy influenced by chick lit, it offers a satirical critique of how modern consumer culture shapes personal identities, success narratives, and even nationalistic fervor through branding and media manipulation.

Zoya's reluctant transformation into a national celebrity encapsulates the ambivalent relationship between female agency and media spectacle. Her rise to fame as the lucky mascot of the national cricket team (in a nation where cricket is often likened to religion) is mediated through a carefully curated public image, which blurs the boundaries between personal identity and commercial branding. Drawing on Laura Mulvey's concept of the 'male gaze', it is seen how Zoya's visibility is contingent on her adherence to her physical appearance which is perceived to bring good fortune to the cricket team. While *The Zoya Factor* critiques the commodification of femininity, it also offers glimpses of female agency within consumer culture.

In post-liberalization India, advertising, celebrity culture, and popular fiction have significantly influenced the construction and representation of femininity. *The Zoya Factor* provides an insightful case study of how these forces converge in the depiction of its female protagonist. Through the lens of consumer culture, Zoya's identity is shaped, commodified, and negotiated within the larger framework of media spectacles and commercial aesthetics. By drawing upon Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, this study aims to contribute to ongoing discussions in feminist media studies and Indian popular fiction scholarship.

The study also aims to investigate the novel's contribution to the discourse on gender. A case in point is the contract that delineates the Cricket Board's expectation from Zoya for her unconventional role of being a lucky mascot in exchange for compensation of ten lakh rupees. The contract is rejected by Zoya as she is appalled by the terms and conditions, some of which are mentioned as:

'The Undersigned is bound to EAT EVERY MEAL with the Team for the time period of the World Cup 2011 if the Team so wish it…

The Undersigned is to KISS AT LEAST ONE TEAM MEMBER on the facial cheek directly after breakfast on the day of every India match…

The Undersigned is to MAINTAIN HER SPINSTER STATUS till the 22nd of May 2011' (Chauhan, *The Zoya Factor* Page 147-148).

The above excerpt from *The Zoya Factor* illustrates a satirical yet incisive commentary on the control of feminine agency within patriarchal and consumerist structures. It encapsulates how Zoya serves as a symbol of controlled femininity where her agency is regulated, objectified, and commodified in service of male success. These conditions placed on Zoya highlights themes of performative femininity, and institutionalized control in a hyper-commercialized, male-dominated space. The stipulations dictating Zoya's eating habits underscore how her body autonomy is being controlled and regulated to serve the interests of the team. This reflects broader social structures where women's physical choices are often policed, whether in the form of beauty standards, dietary expectations, or reproductive

rights. By explicitly removing her ability to make choices about her own body, the contract reduces her autonomy to a functional utility for male success. The requirement that Zoya must "KISS AT LEAST ONE TEAM MEMBER" per match day reinforces gendered performance, where her role is reduced to a talismanic figure whose perceived lucky actions determine the success of the team. The expectation of kissing becomes a symbolic act of ritualized femininity, linking her personal actions, irrespective of her liking, to male performance in sport. The demand that she "MAINTAIN HER SPINSTER STATUS" until a set date reinforces patriarchal control around female sexual choices. The Cricket Board feared that her marriage may affect her "propitiousness" which they believed was directly proportional to her "purity" (Page 150). By stipulating her single status, the team ensures that she remains an object of fantasy and a controllable entity rather than an autonomous individual with personal relationships. Zoya's exclusion from decision-making spaces restricts her role as ceremonial rather than participative. This parallels real-world dynamics where women are frequently denied entry into positions of power, even when their presence is deemed valuable for appearances or morale. While presented humorously, the deeper commentary exposes how women's participation in public spaces—whether in sports, media, or corporate settings - is often conditional upon adhering to male-driven expectations. Whether through controlling her diet, dictating her romantic choices, or barring her from strategic discussions, the contract transforms her into a branded mascot rather than an independent individual. Zoya rejects the exaggerated, almost absurd conditions of this contract and assertively informs them that they are "seriously intruding on her personal space" (Page 150). Chauhan critiques the broader societal mechanisms that control and commodify female bodies, labor, and identities in both patriarchal and consumerist contexts.

Gender Performativity in a Media Circus:

Judith Butler's seminal essay 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution' (1988) argues that gender is not something one is born with but something we perform repeatedly over time. She builds on Simone de Beauvoir's idea that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (Butler, Page 519) which implies that gender is not something one inherits biologically but something one learns to do through social expectations She challenges the idea that gender is a fixed identity and instead describes it as a social construct created through repeated behaviors, gestures, and norms imposed by society. Just like actors on a stage, people "perform" their gender by following cultural scripts - how they dress, talk, and behave. The way we perform gender is shaped by societal rules and punishments. If someone does not conform to expected gender norms they may face negative consequences like ridicule or discrimination. Butler critiques traditional feminism for sometimes reinforcing rigid categories of "woman" and "man." Overall, Butler's work shifts the focus from thinking about gender as something we "are" to something we "do" repeatedly. This idea has been hugely influential in gender studies, queer theory, and feminist thought.

The Zoya Factor can be analyzed through Butler's theory of gender performativity, which advocates that gender is performative rather than innate. An advertising professional who becomes the "lucky charm" for the Indian cricket team, Zoya's identity as a woman is shaped not just by her biology but by societal expectations of femininity. In line with Butler's theory, Zoya does not have a fixed, natural femininity; instead, she performs different versions of womanhood depending on the social setting. At work, she adopts a professional and aspirational persona, while in the cricket world, she is treated as a mystical figure with supernatural powers rather than an individual with agency. Zoya's role as a brand ambassador for luck is an example of how gendered identities are commercialized and reinforced by media and advertising - something Butler would argue is part of the repetition that reinforces gender roles. The novel satirizes the way women's worth is often tied to external factors (beauty, charm, or, in Zoya's case, luck). Nikhil Khoda, the male protagonist, represents a rational, disciplined masculinity, while Zoya's "luck factor" is positioned as irrational and

emotional—stereotypically feminine traits. Nikhil is attracted to Zoya for her individuality rather than her perceived luck factor. As she develops feelings for the Indian cricket captain Nikhil Khoda, she wonders whether his romantic interest in her was merely for capitalizing on the luck factor perception, or if it was genuine.

A Journey of Reclamation of Agency

The Zoya Factor contains strong elements of the bildungsroman genre that follows Zoya's journey of self-discovery, personal growth, and transformation. The novel is primarily a romantic comedy and a satire on consumer culture and cricket mania in India, as well a narrative of her journey from an insecure, whimsical advertising executive to a self-assured woman who reclaims her agency. At the start of the novel, Zoya doesn't see herself as particularly talented or valuable. Zoya's accidental rise to fame as the Indian cricket team's good luck charm acts as the catalyst for her personal growth. Initially, she is passive, merely going along with what others dictate—whether it is her advertising agency capitalizing on her new status, the cricket team depending on her presence, or the media turning her into a national celebrity. This moment of unexpected fame exposes Zoya to power dynamics, manipulation, and the commodification of identity, forcing her to reevaluate her own sense of self. Zoya faces several challenges in her journey, such as the whimsical and constant media scrutiny. Through these experiences, Zoya moves from passivity to active resistance, questioning the systems that control her. By the end of the novel, she learns to assert herself rather than being a pawn in the hands of brands, media, and patriarchal structures. She comes to the realization that her luck is not what defines her, she is more than just a charm for the team. She challenges the contract, stands up to the manipulative advertising world, and decides how she wants to be perceived. This transformation marks the completion of her personal growth arc, a key element in a bildungsroman. Through satire and humor, Chauhan critiques the commodification of women and the shallowness of celebrity culture, making Zoya's coming-of-age story both entertaining and subversive.

Conclusion:

The Zoya Factor provides a rich terrain for exploring the intersections of consumer culture, gender performance, and media representation in contemporary Indian fiction. By situating the novel within the interdisciplinary framework of literature, visual arts, and performance, this paper reveals how consumer culture both enables and constrains women's image. While the novel exposes the commodification of femininity, it also opens up possibilities for agency and resistance, offering a nuanced critique of the cultural politics of gender representation. This study contributes to the broader discourse on feminist media studies, popular fiction, and the evolving landscape of Indian consumer culture. Zoya's transformation from an underestimated advertising executive to a media sensation and independent woman highlights how femininity is constructed, reinforced, and sometimes subverted in a patriarchal society. Chauhan, through humor and satire, critiques the rigid gender roles prevalent in Indian culture, making *The Zoya Factor* a fitting example of new femininities.

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25.

Reading, Listening, And Revolutionizing Storytelling in the Digital Age: The Sojourn from Indigenous Storytelling to Audiobooks and AI

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Abstract

When facilitated and independent, creating a scaffold for enhanced reading and generating space for further reading and reflection is possible. The traditional reading and delivery method of storytelling incorporated reflective thoughts and promoted experiential learning. This paper aims to research the essence of such indigenous stories that found their way into the Digital Age and became popularized as audiobooks. The research also aims to trace from various comparative analyses whether digitization alters the true substance of storytelling and Indigenous literature at its core. The paper will also focus on deciphering the journey from storytelling to audiobooks and the relation between orality and writing, examining it through different theories, including Walter J. Ong's theory of "secondary orality". The rhythmic balance of expressions contributes to the vividness of the storytelling traditions that go amiss in audiobooks. However, studying it closely through the proposed research, the intent is to amass the essentials and bring an experiential reading and listening experience for the avid readers turned into avid listeners of the digital age. The paper intends to underline the significance of "formulary expressions," which "…had best be kept intact." The narrative originality should not lodge up in making new stories every time. It should rather focus on managing interaction with the audience. This paper will also cover the voyage of storytelling from "myth-woven and elf-patterned" Indigenous tales to revolutionized reading and listening to books in the digital age, decoding AI and its effect on the same.

Keywords: Indigenous, orality, formulary, myth-woven.

Introduction:

Storytelling has always been canopied under the traditional cave paintings, oral historical traditions, and generational folk culture traditions. The transition in the methods of storytelling and consuming the same has evolved with the digital age. However, there are chances that these methods get marred by technological advancements. The study of these advancements needs to be examined in the research paper, as the preservation of the indigenous tales is significant. The paroxysm of AI in the indigenous storytelling methods has been intensifying after the storytelling and consuming had a seismic shift to audiobooks. The implications of the new discoveries have been startling. Many of the resources come to the readers and audience as speech systems in the form of oral traditions. To adopt novel technological evolutions, it becomes necessary to address the issue of authenticity the digital platforms have to offer. Language forms an aspect that is so astounding that there are thousands of languages and possibly more, but most of it has committed to literature that is written, and to a degree that most of it has never been written at all. Edmonson puts it as "…of some 3000 languages spoken that exist today, only some 78 have literature." There is barely any record of the number of languages in existence and how many of them had been transmuted into other languages before writing came into the picture. Ong Walter, however, comments that the "…basic orality of language is permanent." Proverbs are an example of how oral culture stays and is accepted with meanings

afresh. The fascination appears unabated for centuries irrespective of the language and the acceleration in the print media. However, J.Ong also mentions that writing from the beginning did not reduce. A repertoire of similar themes is found in the oral traditions and oral discourse worldwide. The present scenario registers AI so deep in the system that it is moulding the stories and the oral traditions. Audiobooks have increased the audio consumption of the contents, but the same prediction implies for the protégé of the systems embedded in the course of the demand of the global development of the jalopy. The transformative journey of the shift from traditional storytelling to digital narratives calls for an insightful examination, as it holds both pros and cons of the technology advancement. This paper studies the question of whether– "is storytelling merely mimics the live experience. Or is it truly preserving the essence of storytelling?"

Rationale:

The rationale of this study emanates from the significant aspects of technological headways and the effects they have on the cultural aspects of ancient Indigenous storytelling methods. The digitizing of storytelling has gained prominence due to podcasts, audiobooks, and AI-generated stories. This paper aims to explore the ancient and cultural importance of storytelling. This will help in elaborating the cultural underpinnings taken up by Indigenous storytelling that is digitized today. This paper also aims to examine how storytelling is surviving and thriving in the digital age. The rationale behind this research thus aims to unfurl the metamorphosis of storytelling with the risks of static and passive transmission rather than a dynamic expression of the Indigenous ways. The risk also encompasses the compromising factor where integrity and authenticity become questionable.

Objectives:

Primarily the research aims to examine the impact of digitized aspects of storytelling on the traditional versions of it. It also aims to incorporate the impact of artificial intelligence on storytelling. The objectives also encompass the indigenous communities and their traditional engagements in storytelling. The paper aims to weigh the potentialities of the tools of the digital age to maintain the authenticity of insightful oral traditions. The objectives of this research are incomplete until the equilibrium between technological advancements and cultural preservation is maintained.

Research Methodology:

This research paper conjointly touches upon the qualitative and quantitative methods of collecting and analysing data. To encompass an elaborate and authentic research methodology, the methods incorporated literature review, prominent case studies, surveys (collected from varied age and profession groups) and graphical analysis.

Scope & Limitations:

The scope of this research paper explores the focus on Indigenous communities, covering technologies that include text-to-speech, AI-generated stories, and audiobooks that stress cultural, social, and technology-created impacts.

The limitations of this research area include restricted access to certain indigenous storytelling traditions. Potential language constraints can also limit this research. Survey responses may not be directly adherent to the interaction between Indigenous communities and tech-savvy communities.

Main Research Content:

"Oral structures often look to pragmatics" (Sherzer, 1974). Ong Walter, in his book Orality and Literacy, points out the impact created by oral traditions vividly. He mentions that " …an oral culture may ask in a riddle why oaks are sturdy, but it does so to assure you that they are…" In the words of Ong Walter, the riddle elicits the "aggregate" and does not question the "attribution." Once a formulary expression crystallizes, it needs to be kept intact just as idioms do (so that it doesn't lose its charm). Redundancy becomes a part of the oral traditions, especially when there is a large audience. Oral culture promotes "fulsomeness," "fluency" and "volubility." Rhetoricians generally name it "copia". Seniors of the community hold the Indigenous stories as their pride and thus want to convey the same with full integrity and authenticity to the generations. Audiobooks play a crucial role in preserving the Indigenous tradition of oral culture and

storytelling. This technological transformation has gained momentum because of the accessibility and riveting experience it provides. However, the essence of storytelling being aptly captured remains a question.

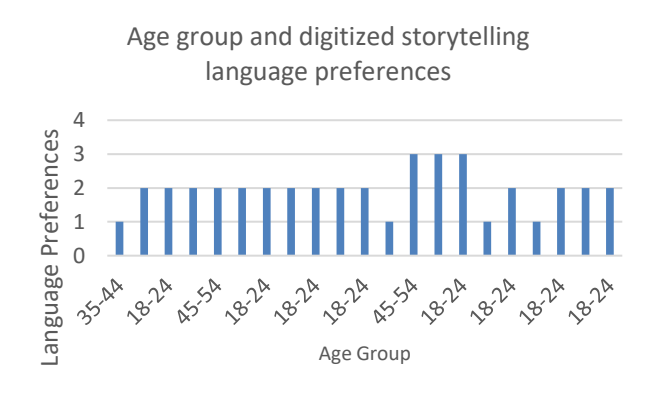
Artificial Intelligence, when used with the components of NLP (Natural Language Processing) and TTS (text-to-speech technology) can mimic human voices closely and create narratives. It can reach a wider audience, but the essence, nuances, and glory can be lost. It also can generate misinterpretation and lead to tampering with the Indigenous oral traditions. The Cultural Community sub-page of the Library of Congress includes the American Folklife Centre Collections. This subpage highlights the "Ancestral Voices" and "Selected Collections from the Folklife Centre." The storytelling materials are available under the subject headings, "tales", "trickster tales" and "legends". The Maine Folklife Centre holds a collection of field recordings from the 1960s, primarily interviews and interactions with Maine and the Atlantic Maritime region. However, the "Jane Willets Collection of Ottawa Language Wire Recordings dates back to the year 1947. This Congress has held various programs related to the indigenous oral storytelling culture, right from its inception. The intent is to bring in lessons with deep insights.

Another example of how treasuring the Indigenous oral traditions makes an impact is- *Adivaani*, a trust based in Kolkata, West Bengal. It is a platform for "Indigenous expression and assertion." They claim that it is "an archiving, chronicling, publishing, and dismantling outfit of and by the 104 million Indigenous people of India (Adivasi). It appears with subheadings as "sound cloud" and " vimeo" where the collections reflect. They also connect through the social media portals such as Twitter and Facebook.

The UNESCO Digital Library also upholds a section named "Digital Initiatives for Indigenous Languages," which highlights the global voices and comes with open access and online search options. The cases mentioned, however, underscore the relevance of both storytelling in its true Indigenous flavour and the way to store and restore it using all sorts of media. The research paper is incomplete without the mention of the survey and data collected through the same.

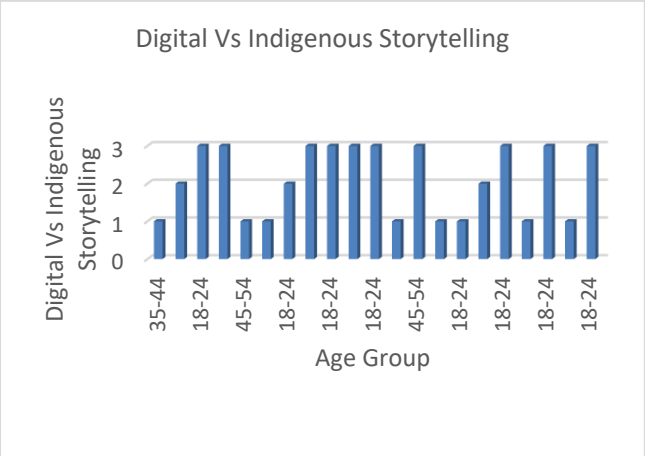
To entail an enriching examination of the research topic, a research survey was carried out where people of various ages and varied professional experiences marked their choices and contributed to the data scrutinization for the paper. The survey conducted was titled "Survey on Technological Headways to Storytelling," with a description that it intends to investigate the seismic shift from indigenous storytelling to novel technological methods. It is also meant to examine the audience preferences based on the digital tools and the enhanced experience related to them. There were 20 questions that were framed to analyze whether the technological advancement is taking people closer to their Indigenous storytelling and receiving or a serious breach is being created between the two. The questions included the age group, the primary language for consuming stories, the frequency of listening to audiobooks or podcasts, experiencing traditional or Indigenous storytelling, preferred formats for experiencing storytelling, preservation of the essence of traditional storytelling (vs. audiobooks, AI-generated stories, etc.), the most valued aspect of storytelling, audiobook adaptations of Indigenous storytelling, advantages of audiobooks and AI-generated storytelling among others.

To put it precisely, a few graph plots will aid in a clearer picture of the same.



Graph 1: Age group and digitized storytelling language preferences, where 1 is Hindi, 2 is English, 3 is indigenous languages/mother tongue and 4 is any other.

This graph shows a varied age group range and the language preferences of the people marking that age group. The age groups majorly block from 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, and 45-54. The language preferences of consuming podcasts, audiobooks, and any other digitized content highlight English as it plots majorly at number 2. The other preferences are scantily numbered as per the data collected. The consumption is high in the convenient language. However, another graph will take the other concerns related to the research into account.

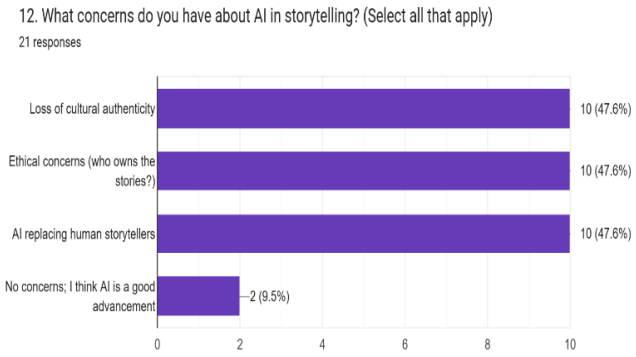


Graph 2: Digital Storytelling vs. the essence of indigenous storytelling where 1 is no, it cannot replace traditional storytelling; 2 yes, completely; 3 is somewhat, but something is lost.

This graph estimates the preferences based on digital vs. indigenous methods of storytelling. The question posed for the same was, "Do you believe digital storytelling (audiobooks, AI-generated stories) can preserve the essence of Indigenous storytelling?" The answers collected show a discrete shift as it boils down to either 1 or 3 majorly. Where 1 holds the option "No, it cannot replace traditional storytelling," and 3 scales up to the response "somewhat, but something is lost." That something that is lost opens the room for cautious optimism that blends the idea that AI-generated storytelling could be useful but has risks. The responses have also recorded skepticism toward the authenticity of the AI-generated version of Indigenous stories.

Conclusion:

Journeying from Indigenous storytelling to the digitized versions of it is in itself a complete, intricate structure. However, a balanced blend of caution and innovation can minimize the friction and create harmonized story-capturing experiences. Reading about the oral traditions lenses the essence to a great extent but loses the naturalness of the story if under- or over-worded. Thus, revolutionizing reading and listening added a strong foothold. Technological advancements cannot be negated but embraced. However, if not handled with caution, technology as a tool may lead to the failure of the inability to encase the authenticity of indigenous storytelling.



Graph 3: AI and Storytelling Concerns:

This graph depicts one of the questions asked in the survey that talks about AI concerns. The responses adhere to the first three options that talk about the cultural authenticity being marred, ethical ownership concerns, and AI replacing human storytellers. Merely 9.5% acknowledge the contribution of AI in the positive advancement when concerned with storytelling. The data collection also sediments to a few points when preserving the indigenous storytelling in the digital formats is the concern. The involvement of audience and Indigenous storytellers on websites and portals by bringing in their voices, maintaining the oral storytelling techniques in audio form, and avoiding AI-generated content, at least for Indigenous storytelling methods, can initiate authentic preservation.

Suggestions:

The community-driven and community-initiated storytelling centers (that function both online and offline) can be set up. Indigenous storytellers should be the guides during generation of AI-sourced stories. Language bolstering and audiobook adaptations should be

juxtaposed. If required, a return to live storytelling methods should be paved. An amalgamation of digital and traditional methods can then be reflected in the Folklife centers, as highlighted through the case study of the Library of Congress.

Recommendations

Ethical storytelling must be prioritized over all the methods being used for digitization of the same. Win-win partnerships or collaborations between Indigenous storytellers and tech developers can create a rewarding experience for the audience. The licensing and the cultural ownership Rights must be detailed in the platforms for authenticity and credit to the bearers.

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26.

In Search Weirdness: Lonely Places and Strange People in Pico Iyer's *Falling off the Map Some Lonely Places of the World*

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Abstract

Travel memoirs frequently explore people's culture and places in an attempt to familiarize them with the readers. Rarely, though, certain travel narratives are written with a touch of irony that maintains a critical distance from people and places. A travel writer can point out weirdness, oddities and isolation too rather than idealizing the distinction or glorifying the cultural encounter. Contemporary travel narratives, especially written by people who have travelled a lot trying to demystify both travelogue and the travel destination. Such works foreground memoirs that are not necessarily pleasant and exciting all the time. Furthermore, a travel writer might mind himself and the people lonely and lost. These ironic travel narratives also add to the perspectives on places and people. This paper analyses Pico Iyer's travel narrative, *Falling off the Map: Some Lonely Places of the World* to show how the travel writer perceives different countries in terms of the indifferent people, weirdness, ideologies, strange rituals and funny officials. This paper explains how Iyer makes a serious genre, funny with typical sense of humour and ironic cultural criticism. It also explains how the travel writer finds certain countries cut off from the rest of the world geographically, culturally and ideologically.

Keywords: Travel Narrative, Isolation, Weirdness, Cultural Criticism

Introduction

Travel memoir, as a literary form, bridges the gap between personal experience and cultural documentation. It encapsulates not only the physical journeys of an individual but also the psychological, emotional, and intellectual engagements with unfamiliar landscapes and societies. Unlike conventional travelogues that focus solely on geographical descriptions, travel memoirs often incorporate personal reflections, subjective experiences, and a nuanced understanding of foreign cultures.

One of the key functions of travel memoirs is cultural mediation—the act of translating and interpreting cultural experiences for a broader audience. Mary Louise Pratt, in her work *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, describes travel writing as a 'contact zone' where cultures intersect, clash, and negotiate meanings (Pratt 1992). Travel memoirs serve as intermediaries that allow readers to engage with unfamiliar societies through the lens of the travel writer's subjective experience.

Additionally, travel memoirs provide a self-reflective dimension. Paul Fussell, in *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars*, asserts that "travel literature is deeply introspective, often revealing more about the traveller's perceptions and biases than the places themselves" (Fussell 28). This aligns with Pico Iyer's approach in *Falling Off the Map* (1993), where he does not merely describe locations but reflects on their estrangement from the world and his personal encounters with them.

Travel memoirs also serve as records of historical and cultural transformations. As postcolonial scholar Edward Said argues in *Orientalism*, Western travel narratives have historically shaped global perceptions of the East, often reinforcing stereotypes and colonial ideologies (Said 1978). However, contemporary

travel memoirs, especially those by writers like Iyer, challenge these conventions by offering more nuanced, often ironic, portrayals of people and places.

The Role of Irony and Humour in Travel Memoirs:

A significant aspect of modern travel memoirs is the use of irony and humour to critique cultural norms and expectations. As Michel de Certeau notes in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, travel narratives are as much about movement as they are about the observation of everyday peculiarities (de Certeau 1984). Writers like Iyer employ irony to highlight cultural absurdities without overtly ridiculing them, making their narratives both entertaining and thought-provoking. Iyer's *Falling Off the Map* exemplifies this tradition by blending sharp observational humour with deep cultural insights. His portrayals of isolated places—whether North Korea, Bhutan, or Paraguay—often contain subtle critiques of bureaucracy, nationalism, and ideological rigidity, all wrapped in a layer of wit.

Travel memoirs function as more than just personal recollections; they are cultural artifacts that document, interpret, and sometimes satirize human encounters with the unknown. Whether serving as historical records, self-reflective exercises, or platforms for cultural critique, they play a crucial role in shaping human understanding of the world. In the following sections, the paper will explore how contemporary travel writing, particularly Iyer's, navigates new thematic concerns, including weirdness, isolation, and the deconstruction of traditional travel narratives.

New Directions in Travel Writing:

Travel writing has undergone significant transformations over the past few decades, shifting from romanticized accounts of exploration to more nuanced, critical, and self-aware narratives. This genre no longer merely celebrates exotic landscapes or cultural encounters; instead, it interrogates the very nature of travel, the ethics of representation, and the role of the traveller as an observer or participant. This section explores some of the major shifts in contemporary travel writing, with references to scholarly discussions on the subject.

The Shift from Discovery to Self-Reflection:

Traditional travel writing often followed a colonial gaze, depicting foreign lands as territories to be discovered, documented, and interpreted through a Western lens. Mary Louise Pratt (1992) describes this as the 'imperial eye' in *Imperial Eyes*, where travel narratives reinforced Western superiority by presenting non-Western cultures as objects of curiosity. However, modern travel memoirs, including Pico Iyer's *Falling Off the Map*, depart from this framework by embracing self-reflection over cultural authority. Rather than claiming to 'discover' places, Iyer reflects on his own perceptions, biases, and emotional responses to loneliness and isolation in various locations.

Paul Smethurst (2015) notes that contemporary travel writing often blurs the line between fiction and non-fiction, embracing subjectivity over objectivity. This shift acknowledges that no traveller can be a neutral observer; every account is colored by personal experiences and preconceptions. Iyer exemplifies this approach by portraying his travels as deeply personal, emphasizing how places shape his emotions rather than just offering descriptions of landscapes or people.

Travel Memoir as a Narrative of Displacement:

Another emerging theme in travel writing is the notion of displacement, where travel is no longer about adventure but about confronting alienation and estrangement. Edward Said's *Reflections on Exile* (2000) discusses how modern travel narratives often reflect a sense of unbelonging, particularly in a globalized world where cultural identities are fluid. Iyer's work aligns with this perspective, as his journeys are less about integrating into new cultures and more about observing their isolation and detachment. His descriptions of North Korea's rigid bureaucracy, Bhutan's solitude, and Paraguay's quiet disconnect from the global mainstream highlight a world where some places remain metaphorically and literally 'off the map.'

Irony and Satire in Travel Writing:

The use of irony and satire has become increasingly prevalent in modern travel writing, challenging the glorification of exoticism. Jonathan Raban (1988) argues that contemporary travel writers often undermine the romantic ideal of travel by exposing the contradictions within different cultures. Pico Iyer's writing is a prime example of this trend. In *Falling Off the Map*, he humourously depicts government officials, nationalistic fervour, and local customs not to ridicule them but to expose the absurdities that arise when isolation and ideology shape cultural realities.

Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) highlights the importance of observing the everyday, rather than the extraordinary, in travel writing. Iyer adopts this approach by focusing on mundane yet telling details—the robotic movements of North Korean citizens, the solemn quiet of an isolated city, or the exaggerated rituals of diplomatic formalities. His travel writing is less about exotic spectacles and more about the awkward, strange, and unexpectedly humourous aspects of human existence.

Ethical Concerns and the Politics of Representation:

Another significant shift in travel writing is the increasing awareness of the ethics of representation. As Graham Huggan (2001) argues in *The Postcolonial Exotic*, travel writing has often exoticized non-Western cultures to make them more appealing to Western audiences. However, contemporary travel writers, including Iyer, challenge this practice by acknowledging the limitations of their perspectives. Iyer, for example, does not attempt to provide a definitive account of any place he visits. Instead, he presents his experiences as personal and subjective, often leaving room for contradictions and uncertainties. This refusal to generalize or stereotype aligns with the modern trend of travel writing that is more self-aware and critical of its own role in shaping perceptions.

Weirdness and Oddities in Travel Sensibility:

The concept of 'weirdness' in travel writing is a significant departure from traditional romanticized narratives of exploration. Instead of glorifying distant lands as picturesque or sublime, contemporary travel writers frequently highlight the strange, the absurd, and the unexpected aspects of foreign cultures. Pico Iyer's *Falling Off the Map* exemplifies this trend, offering ironic and humourous reflections on places that seem cut off—geographically, culturally, or ideologically—from the rest of the world. This section explores how travel narratives engage with weirdness and oddities, using scholarly perspectives and Iyer's approach as key examples.

The Appeal of the Strange in Travel Writing:

Travel literature has long been fascinated by the unusual. As Carl Thompson (2011) argues in *Travel Writing*, travellers have historically sought out the bizarre as a way to distinguish themselves from ordinary tourists. The perception of 'weirdness' often stems from the traveller's inability to categorize an experience within their existing cultural framework. In Iyer's case, his descriptions of certain nations—such as North Korea, Bhutan, and Paraguay—reveal a sense of detachment, as if these places exist in a different temporal or ideological dimension.

Michel Foucault's (1967) concept of heterotopia—spaces that exist outside conventional cultural norms—helps explain the appeal of these locations. Travel writers like Iyer often present isolated nations as heterotopias, where time functions differently, rules are exaggerated, and social norms appear strangely rigid or performative. His portrayal of North Korea, for instance, is steeped in the surreal, where people move with mechanical precision, and propaganda dictates every aspect of life.

The Role of Humour and Irony in Depicting the Weird:

One of the most effective ways travel writers capture strangeness is through irony and humour. Jonathan Raban (1988) suggests that contemporary travel writing often uses satire to expose the contradictions within a society. Iyer adopts this technique to highlight the absurdities he encounters, such as the excessive formality of officials, the rigid adherence to outdated customs, and the eerie silence of places that seem untouched by globalization. For example, in *Falling Off the Map*, Iyer describes his

encounters with bureaucratic processes that feel more like theatre than governance. In his depiction of Paraguay, he notes how the country functions as a political paradox—both a democratic nation and one overshadowed by a long history of dictatorship. Similarly, his experience in Bhutan presents a nation that is at once idyllic and deeply isolated, caught between its traditions and the slow encroachment of modernity.

The Traveller as an Outsider: Experiencing the Strange:

Travel narratives that emphasize weirdness often position the traveller as an outsider, someone who never fully integrates into the local culture but remains a detached observer. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) critiques how Western travellers have historically exoticized foreign lands, portraying them as mystical, irrational, or backward. However, contemporary writers like Iyer subvert this tradition by acknowledging their own biases and limitations.

Iyer does not present himself as an authority on the places he visits. Instead, he admits his bewilderment and sometimes discomfort, which reinforces the idea that weirdness is not inherent to a place but a product of the traveller's perception. This aligns with Dean MacCannell's (1976) concept of 'staged authenticity', where certain cultural practices appear odd or exaggerated because they are performed with an awareness of being observed.

Travel Memoirs as Records of Isolation and Strangeness:

Travel memoirs frequently function as chronicles of isolation, capturing both the physical and psychological detachment that travellers experience in unfamiliar lands. Unlike traditional travelogues that celebrate movement and discovery, contemporary travel narratives, including Pico Iyer's *Falling Off the Map*, explore the themes of dislocation, loneliness, and estrangement that arise when one steps into a world that feels out of sync with the rest.

Isolation in travel narratives manifests in multiple ways—geographical, cultural, political, and even existential. As Edward Said argues, modern travel writing often reflects a sense of displacement, wherein travellers find themselves caught between belonging and alienation: "Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience" (Said 173). Iyer's *Falling Off the Map* aligns with this idea, as he visits places that are not just physically remote but also ideologically and emotionally isolated from the rest of the world.

Carl Thompson contends that isolation in travel literature can be both an imposed condition—as in the case of politically isolated nations like North Korea—and a self-imposed exile, where travellers voluntarily seek solitude: "To be a traveller is always to be an outsider, an observer, often alone in one's encounters with the world" (Thompson 64). Iyer's work captures both. His depiction of Bhutan, for example, portrays a nation that chooses to remain secluded, resisting modernity in favour of preserving its cultural purity. Meanwhile, his account of North Korea describes enforced isolation, where citizens are cut off from global influences through strict governmental control. Iyer reflects on this enforced seclusion when he writes, "There is no loneliness more absolute, I sometimes think, than the loneliness of a country that seals itself off from the world" (Iyer 43). Here, he suggests that nations, much like individuals, can experience profound solitude—not by chance, but by deliberate policy or ideological commitment.

Isolation in travel narratives is not only about the place but also about the traveller's own sense of detachment. Jonathan Raban argues that travel writing often constructs the traveller as an outsider: "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes" (Raban 92). Iyer, too, embraces this role, depicting himself as an onlooker rather than a participant. He navigates through cities where he remains emotionally and socially distanced, emphasizing the estrangement between self and space. This is particularly evident in his description of Paraguay, where he observes the eerie quietness of a country that exists in a kind of historical stasis. He notes, "Paraguay seemed a place removed from time, a nation that had stepped off history's timeline and forgotten to step back on" (Iyer 97). This metaphor reinforces the idea

that isolation is not merely a geographic condition but a temporal one—some places feel as though they have been left behind by the rest of the world.

Isolation in travel memoirs is not always about external conditions; it can also be an internal state of being. Iyer frequently reflects on the loneliness of the traveller, even in densely populated cities. In Buenos Aires, he experiences solitude despite being surrounded by people, describing how cultural differences create a barrier between him and those around him. He writes, "There is a peculiar loneliness in being invisible in a place teeming with life" (Iyer 102). This aligns with Dean MacCannell's argument that modern tourism often manufactures social distance, leaving travellers feeling disconnected from the very places they seek to experience: "Tourists are drawn to aspects of a society that exist because of the presence of tourists" (MacCannell 132). Iyer's memoir embodies this paradox—his journeys bring him closer to foreign lands, yet they also reinforce his separateness from them.

In Argentina, Iyer captures the cultural paradox of a nation obsessed with the past, writing: "Buenos Aires was a city where the ghost of Evita Perón still walked the streets, her image staring down from billboards, as if time had refused to move forward" (Iyer 78). This illustrates his ability to portray places not just through physical descriptions but through historical and ideological stagnation. His writing makes the weirdness of places feel tangible, as though time operates differently in these forgotten corners of the world.

Iyer's humour is a crucial tool in his cultural critique. Unlike travel writers who either glorify or condescend toward foreign cultures, Iyer employs subtle irony to expose contradictions in the places he visits. In North Korea, for instance, he describes the eerie uniformity of its citizens: "Every man I met wore the same suit, the same haircut, the same blank expression—as if they had all been produced in the same factory" (Iyer 55). His humour is not meant to ridicule but to highlight the absurdities of controlled existence. Similarly, in Argentina, he comments on the performative nature of patriotism, noting: "In Buenos Aires, nationalism wasn't a sentiment, it was a sport—practiced with the same passion as football" (Iyer 82). His witty and sometimes biting commentary force readers to rethink cultural stereotypes while also recognizing the contradictions within them.

Political isolation plays a significant role in Iyer's travelogue. While some countries, like Bhutan, maintain seclusion by choice, others, like North Korea and Cuba, are forced into isolation by political circumstances. In his discussion of Cuba, Iyer reflects on the ways people cope with enforced separation from the world, writing: "Cuba felt like a time capsule, where the music of the 1950s played from crumbling buildings, and people danced in defiance of the present" (Iyer 117). Here, Iyer suggests that isolation fosters nostalgia, making people cling to the past because the future remains uncertain. His analysis goes beyond surface-level observations to question how a country's political state shapes its emotional and psychological landscape.

Despite their remoteness, Iyer often finds unexpected moments of human connection in these lonely places. While in Paraguay, he shares a conversation with a local person who tells him: "We are forgotten, yes. But sometimes it's nice to be forgotten. No one bothers us" (Iyer103). This paradox—that isolation can also be a form of freedom—recurs throughout the book. While loneliness is often painted as tragic, Iyer presents moments where seclusion becomes a sanctuary, where being disconnected is not a burden but a relief.

Conclusion:

Pico Iyer's *Falling Off the Map: Some Lonely Places of the World* is not merely a travel memoir; it is a deeply reflective exploration of isolation, strangeness, and the contradictions of human existence. Unlike traditional travel narratives that celebrate discovery and cultural immersion, Iyer focuses on detachment, distance, and the peculiar nature of places that seem disconnected from the rest of the world. His work is a meditation on what it means to be alone—both as a traveller and as a nation cut off from global currents. By blending irony, humour, and critical cultural commentary,

Iyer crafts a narrative that challenges conventional notions of travel and belonging.

At the same time, Iyer's work highlights the weirdness and absurdity of these isolated places, portraying them not as tragic outposts but as surreal landscapes filled with contradictions. His depiction of Buenos Aires, where the past lingers as if frozen in time, or Paraguay, which appears to exist outside history itself, reinforces the idea that some places are suspended in an uncanny limbo, neither fully connected to the world nor completely removed from it. His humour is a vital tool in this exploration, softening the harshness of isolation while making the absurdity of cultural contradictions even more apparent. Whether describing the staged normalcy of North Korea or the performative nationalism of Argentina, Iyer presents these places not as mere curiosities but as profound reflections on the human condition.

Additionally, Iyer's work interrogates the role of the traveller in these lonely places. He portrays himself as a perpetual outsider, never fully immersed, always observing from a distance. Iyer's interactions with people often reveal the irony of global isolation—in an interconnected world, some places and individuals still remain profoundly detached.

Ultimately, *Falling Off the Map* is a travelogue that resists easy categorization. It is not just about places but about states of being, offering a meditation on the paradox of isolation in a world that is more connected than ever. Iyer's exploration of lonely places and strange people reveal that travel is not merely about movement but about perception, about how one sees and understands unfamiliar spaces. His memoir forces readers to reconsider what it means to belong—to a place, to a culture, or to the world itself. In an era of globalization, Iyer's reflections on distance, detachment, and the absurdity of human existence remain profoundly relevant, making *Falling Off the Map* a critical and insightful contribution to contemporary travel literature.

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27.

Shared Flavours, Distinct Histories: Food as a Marker of Identity and Race in Elif Shafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul*

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Abstract

The article examines the centrality of food in Elif Shafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul* as a crucial lens through which the novel explores identity and race. Grounded in postcolonial studies and diaspora theory, the discussion foregrounds how Shafak employs shared culinary traditions to illustrate that while cultures may overlap in their gastronomic practices, such similarity does not entail sameness of lived experience or historical memory. Through a detailed analysis of scenes involving Turkish and Armenian family meals, the article reveals how food functions as a site of contested heritage—an archive that retains traces of forgotten or suppressed histories and underscores the unresolved tensions of the Armenian genocide. By focusing on pivotal dishes like *ashure* (Noah's Pudding), the argument elucidates how Shafak situates the kitchen as both a communal meeting ground and a battleground for nationalist narratives. Food, in this context, operates simultaneously as a unifying language—allowing for fleeting moments of cross-cultural understanding—and as a marker of irreducible difference, invoking the traumas and silences that national histories often obscure. Ultimately, the article proposes that *The Bastard of Istanbul* uses culinary symbols to enact a critique of homogenizing discourses of identity, challenging readers to recognize the inherent complexities of cultural overlap. Similarity, as the novel insists, is not synonymous with shared belonging, highlighting that the politics of cuisine can either mask or unearth contentious historical realities. Within this multifaceted tapestry of flavour, memory and diaspora, Shafak underscores that genuine reconciliation requires a reckoning with the past—a narrative process in which food offers both a window into collective identity and a subtle reminder of intractable difference.

Keywords: Elif Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, food studies, race, postcolonial, diaspora, contested heritage, memory, Armenian genocide, culinary identity

Elif Shafak's novel *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006) is a vivid tapestry of family relationships, national history and cultural memory, in which food emerges as a central device for negotiating identity and race. Within the novel, Turkish and Armenian characters share a surprising number of culinary practices, yet these similarities do not dissolve the deep-seated historical and cultural rifts between them. Instead, as this article will argue, food operates as a potent marker of identity and race, foregrounding how *similarity is not sameness* when it comes to overlapping cultural traditions (Knott and McLoughlin 23). By focusing on food as both a tool for forging communal ties and a battleground for contested heritage, Shafak's narrative encapsulates key insights from postcolonial and diaspora studies: in a world marked by migrations, traumas and shifting national boundaries, culinary practices become a lens through which communities simultaneously connect and diverge (Cohen and Fischer 145). This article provides a deep, research-oriented analysis of *The Bastard of Istanbul*, exploring how Shafak frames food as a site of cultural memory, contested race relations and transnational identity formation.

Postcolonial and diaspora theories have long recognized food as a compelling medium of cultural expression and memory. Scholars

maintain that, beyond mere nourishment, culinary practices serve as repositories of collective history, enacting what Aleida Assmann calls "cultural memory" (Assmann 111). Indeed, for displaced or colonized populations, the act of cooking ancestral recipes can preserve a sense of self and heritage, even in lands far from home (Brah 16). As Avtar Brah articulates, diaspora identities hinge on both "roots" and "routes": a tension between the homeland's inherited traditions and the new contexts in which displaced communities find themselves (Brah 38). In many diaspora novels, food often appears as a tangible relic of "the old country," passed down through generations as a bulwark against total assimilation (Cohen and Fischer 100). This phenomenon is acutely relevant in *The Bastard of Istanbul*, in which the Turkish Kazancı family in Istanbul and the Armenian Tchakhmakhchian family in the United States each use culinary traditions to maintain distinct cultural identities.

However, while diaspora theory highlights the emotional and mnemonic power of food, postcolonial studies remind us that cuisine can be contested terrain. Culinary practices can simultaneously function as a unifying symbol (because different groups may share similar dishes) and a site of sharp ethnic demarcation (Bhabha 54). As Homi Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity indicates, colonized spaces often generate forms of cultural crossover—shared recipes, mutual borrowing of spices, adapted cooking methods—that nonetheless unfold under conditions of inequality and historical violence (Bhabha 90). In the Turkish-Armenian context, the memory of the 1915 genocide looms large, rendering the shared gastronomic repertoire of the region fraught with silences and tensions (Tufekci Can 286). Shafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul* confronts these silences: while the novel celebrates Istanbul's eclectic food culture, it also exposes how such culinary overlaps can mask or even entrench the deeper wound of Armenian displacement. Thus, to read Shafak's novel through postcolonial and diaspora lenses is to recognize that food marks identity in ways that do not necessarily produce consensus or harmony.

Published in 2006, *The Bastard of Istanbul* revolves around two families: the Kazancıs, a matriarchal Turkish household in Istanbul, and the Tchakhmakhchians, an Armenian-American diaspora family in Arizona (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 7–19). The story centres on Asya Kazancı—a rebellious, atheistic nineteen-year-old known as the "bastard" of the novel's title—and Armanoush Tchakhmakhchian, an Armenian-American teenager who travels to Istanbul in search of her roots (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 55–68). As these two young women's paths intertwine, the narrative unearths family secrets tied to the Turkish state's denial of the Armenian Genocide, the complexities of diaspora memory, and the bridging potential—but also the limits—of a shared cuisine (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 120–36).

Shafak cleverly titles most chapters after foods or ingredients—such as "Cinnamon," "Garbanzo Beans," and "Sugar"—signalling their thematic significance (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 18–19). Nearly every major plot point involves some culinary backdrop: heated family debates occur during meal preparations, cross-cultural encounters take shape over dinner, and recollections of the Ottoman past are stirred by the aroma of spices. In an interview, Shafak stated that food "mirrors politics" because "when we talk about recipes, we are also talking about culture, memory and identity" (Shafak and Chancy 59). This symbolic layering of cuisine lends the novel a distinctive narrative flavour—one that frames cooking and eating as acts laden with historical connotations, personal longings and potential cross-cultural understanding.

A central motif in *The Bastard of Istanbul* is the use of culinary memory to maintain cultural links across distance and displacement. For Armanoush, who is raised in the Armenian diaspora in the United States, "homeland" is a spectral presence accessible primarily through her grandmother's cooking (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 145–59). She grows up hearing stories of Anatolia—of pomegranates, saffron and rosewater—but these stories come entwined with accounts of forced exile and loss (Tufekci Can 287). In diaspora

studies, such second-generation inheritance of trauma and nostalgia is often termed "postmemory," a concept introduced by Marianne Hirsch, referring to the way children of exiled or displaced communities "remember" events they did not directly experience (Hirsch 103). For Armanoush, tasting certain Armenian dishes triggers a longing for a homeland she has never seen, unveiling the emotional power of cuisine as a "transmitter of diaspora memory" (Cohen and Fischer 78).

When Armanoush secretly travels to Istanbul, her experience at the Kazancı dinner table is a moment of profound recognition (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 170–84). Though physically in Turkey for the first time, she finds the flavours unexpectedly familiar. "It's the same dish my grandmother makes," she exclaims, recognizing spiced dolma or honey-soaked desserts (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 175). This is no mere coincidence: Armenians, too, historically inhabited the same region, contributed to the city's culinary mosaic, and took these traditions into exile. The result is that Armanoush finds a piece of "home" in the very place her ancestors were driven from—a paradox that underscores the entanglement of Turkish and Armenian histories. Here, Shafak literalizes the diaspora notion that "despite oceans of distance, the aroma of childhood can resurface," forging a sense of transnational continuity (Brah 45). However, this scene also highlights that while the dish might be shared, its significance differs: for Armanoush, it is a link to a tragic memory, while for the Kazancıs it is "just another local specialty" (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 178). In other words, even as they consume the same food, they "digest" it through divergent historical perspectives. The concept of similarity is not sameness thus emerges in gastronomic form: shared tastes do not equate to shared identity or shared historical interpretation (Knott and McLoughlin 27).

Although food can serve as a bridge in *The Bastard of Istanbul*, it can also become a site of contestation, reinforcing rather than dissolving boundaries of race and ethnicity (Yazıcıoğlu 65). Historically, Ottoman Istanbul was a multiethnic hub where Armenians, Greeks, Jews and Turks commingled, exchanging dishes and techniques (Fortuny 44). Following the Armenian Genocide and forced diaspora, however, many dishes of Armenian origin were rebranded or simply absorbed into what is now labelled "Turkish cuisine," erasing their minority roots (Tufekci Can 288). Such appropriation can be read through a postcolonial lens: "the colonized or oppressed group's culinary heritage is assimilated by the dominant group, often without acknowledging the original source" (Bhabha 49).

In Shafak's novel, the Kazancı women proudly cook dishes that, unbeknownst to them, have Armenian resonances, such as *topik* (a chickpea-based appetizer). For the Kazancıs, these are simply Istanbulite classics, emblematic of Turkish identity and city life, while for Armanoush they are "Armenian family heirlooms" intimately tied to her diaspora identity (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 210–15). By featuring these parallel understandings of the same dish, Shafak illustrates how race and ethnic belonging are inscribed in cuisine. This tension is heightened by the taboo around acknowledging Armenian contributions to what is widely proclaimed "authentic Turkish food." The novel thus dramatizes how a shared recipe does not unify the two communities, since the underlying power structures and denied historical atrocities complicate any narrative of "harmonious cultural blending" (Tufekci Can 289). Instead, each community invests the dish with distinct emotional capital, shaped by either the privilege of forgetfulness (the Turkish side) or the burden of forcibly exiled memory (the Armenian side).

A similar dynamic unfolds around the concept of culinary nationalism. Scholars define culinary nationalism (or gastronationalism) as the practice of claiming certain dishes as exclusive markers of national identity (Ichijo and Ranta 15). While many communities might prepare versions of the same food, nationalist discourses often stake sole ownership, fostering pride yet also marginalizing other groups with historical ties to that cuisine (Ichijo and Ranta 17). In *The Bastard of Istanbul*, this emerges subtly whenever Turkish characters dismiss the possibility that an iconic dish could also be Armenian in origin. The matter-of-fact

approach—"Well, we have always cooked it this way"—serves as a rhetorical strategy of cultural appropriation, an erasure of the minority's historical agency (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 112–20). By contrast, Armenian diaspora characters like Armanoush's grandmother, Shushan, treat these recipes as "the last vestige of a homeland irretrievably lost" (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 59). Thus, an everyday meal becomes a symbol of "unjust appropriation" from the Armenian perspective—a reflection of the genocide's aftermath, where intangible cultural heritage also fell prey to Turkey's official denial and assimilation policies (Tufekci Can 287).

Food in Shafak's novel is closely tied to gender as well. The text is female-driven: the Kazancı household is dominated by women—the men either die young or are absent—and cooking duties, along with the preservation of recipes, fall to the matriarchs (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 25–33). This arrangement resonates with anthropological findings on how women in diaspora or minority communities often become "cultural carriers," enacting traditions through cooking (Brah 37). The kitchen emerges as a space of authority where women produce continuity with the past while shaping the younger generation's sense of identity. The flamboyant Auntie Banu, for instance, is known for her mystical beliefs and her extraordinary cooking, bridging the spiritual and the culinary realms. Through her complex persona, Shafak underscores how "domestic labor" and "magical knowledge" converge to maintain the family's cohesive identity (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 47–52).

At the same time, the novel critiques the patriarchal constraints that conflate women's roles with the kitchen. The matriarchs have inherited the burden of feeding not just the body but also the national myth—a set of nationalist narratives that gloss over uncomfortable truths about Armenians. The women's quiet acceptance of these tasks, combined with their occasional curiosity about repressed stories, suggests a nuanced interplay of power and subordination (Knott and McLoughlin 29). They perform the function of cultural guardians—transmitting recipes that once circulated among diverse ethnic groups—yet they do so under social pressures that discourage open dialogue about the genocide. Therefore, the family's cooking becomes a paradoxical act of both silencing and subversive remembrance (Alkan and Günay-Erkol 9). Food unites them as Turks, but also inadvertently preserves the memory of other communities that once thrived in Istanbul.

Shafak further draws attention to the generational rift in how these female characters view cooking. Older women cling to tradition as a lifeline to a romanticized, if selective, Ottoman past; younger women like Asya question the fetishization of the old ways, pointing out the hypocrisy in celebrating dishes co-created by Armenians while denying the violence inflicted on them (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 195–210). This tension between "respect for tradition" and "critiquing tradition" underscores the complexity of postcolonial identity for women, who must navigate patriarchal, nationalist frameworks even as they seek personal autonomy (Romero 18). Hence, the novel's repeated emphasis on cooking scenes is not mere local colour: it is a mechanism for exploring how power, gender and memory intersect in shaping family and national narratives (Hill Collins and Bilge 22).

Shafak's treatment of food also resonates with Homi Bhabha's concept of the "third space," a liminal realm in which cultural identities meet and transform each other (Bhabha 53). While Turkish and Armenian cuisines differ in certain respects, they share an Ottoman-era foundation that complicates simplistic boundaries. Diaspora further expands this "third space," as recipes migrate to new lands and adapt to local ingredients. Armanoush's mother, for instance, merges American cooking with Armenian methods, producing hybrid dishes that reflect the family's location in Arizona (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 132–38). This "culinary hybridity" is emblematic of diaspora identity: it is neither purely Armenian nor purely American, but a "new combination that testifies to multiple influences" (Cohen and Fischer 153).

When Armanoush visits Istanbul, she encounters yet another dimension of hybridity: Turkish and Armenian gastronomic overlaps

that have continued to evolve on the ground. In diaspora theory, such experiences exemplify a sense of "double belonging," in which individuals realize that the homeland they idealized is itself a palimpsest of cross-cultural borrowings (Brah 24). Armanoush's epiphany—that her grandmother's recipes are alive in Turkish kitchens—prompts a re-evaluation of what it means to be Armenian in diaspora (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 172–84). She must reconcile feelings of grief over the genocide with a recognition that everyday Turks have unknowingly carried forward certain Armenian traditions. Shafak thereby suggests that food, as a dynamic "third space," fosters glimpses of transnational connectedness that can transcend nationalist narratives—albeit without resolving the underlying conflicts.

Nevertheless, the novel maintains a cautious optimism about food's bridging capacity. On one level, it portrays a moving scene where Armenian and Turkish characters share a meal, and "for one shimmering moment, the burden of history is set aside" (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 173). On another level, Shafak is acutely aware that cultural sharing alone does not equate to reconciliation (Yazıcıoğlu 57). The ephemeral nature of these gastronomic encounters is underscored when conversation turns to the genocide, fracturing the convivial mood. Such scenes illustrate a fundamental tension in postcolonial theory: although "cultural hybridity" can open spaces of possibility, it cannot by itself overturn entrenched power imbalances or historical erasures (Bhabha 56). Therefore, while the novel celebrates Istanbul's cosmopolitan palate, it stops short of presenting shared cuisine as a panacea. Instead, it quietly suggests that to truly heal, Turkish society must confront the genocide at the level of official history, not merely exchange recipes at a personal level (Tufekci Can 289).

Central to this analysis is the thesis that, in Shafak's novel, the presence of shared or overlapping food traditions does not yield an overarching cultural sameness. Rather, these similarities highlight the fact that national, racial and ethnic identities remain distinct, shaped by divergent historical experiences (Knott and McLoughlin 26). Scholars in diaspora studies often point to the idea that "even as diaspora communities adopt and adapt local foods, they preserve certain key elements that mark difference" (Cohen and Fischer 19). *The Bastard of Istanbul* underscores this dynamic: while Turkish and Armenian families may prepare the same dish, the symbolic valences of that dish—its associations with grief, exile, or denial—can vary radically.

For example, the ubiquitous *ashure* pudding is celebrated in both Turkish and Armenian communities, often linked to biblical or folkloric narratives about Noah's Ark. In the novel, Zeliha Kazancı cooks *ashure* as a cheerful demonstration of Istanbul's eclectic heritage, unconsciously reinforcing the city's official discourse that sees itself as a timeless melting pot (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 89–97). Yet, for Armenian characters, the memory of *ashure* may be tinged with the bitterness of violence and displacement, recalling how entire Armenian neighbourhoods once shared this pudding before being driven out (Tufekci Can 288). Thus, Shafak shows that the same dish can serve as a site of "emotional contradiction," bridging communal lines in theory but highlighting how shared practices can sustain irreconcilable narratives (Yazıcıoğlu 65). As critics note, "the fact that both sides cook and eat the same dish…does not obliterate the deep wounds each side brings to the table" (Romero 16). The novel's repeated emphasis on culinary parallels is thus a deliberate narrative strategy to demonstrate that similarity is not sameness.

Moreover, the novel weaves this culinary logic into its broader commentary on race and nationalism. The text positions "Turkishness" and "Armenianness" not as immutable categories, but as identities shaped by the legacies of imperial collapse, genocide and diaspora (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 103–18). The contested terrain of food functions as an allegory for the contested nature of ethnic identity. Shafak, who has spoken openly about the charges of "insulting Turkishness" she faced upon this book's publication, uses her narrative to question the monolithic idea of a pure Turkish race or culture (Shafak and Chancy 60). Instead,

by depicting how deeply intertwined Turkish and Armenian cuisines truly are, she exposes the ways in which "national identity" often rests on forgetting or denying certain influences. Food becomes the Trojan horse smuggling these forgotten influences back into the present. Yet acknowledging that influence does not automatically lead to atonement, as decades of denial have left deep scars on the Armenian diaspora. Hence, the novel insists that similarity is not sameness precisely because the historical context—who was victim, who was perpetrator, who was forced to flee—profoundly shapes how one experiences the "shared" elements of culture (Tufekci Can 290).

Elif Shafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul* offers a deeply layered examination of how food acts as a marker of identity and race within a postcolonial and diasporic framework. By emphasizing gastronomic images, Shafak reveals the paradox of culinary overlap: while it can momentarily bring characters together across cultural lines, it simultaneously underscores their distinct historical trajectories. The novel's Turkish and Armenian figures partake of overlapping dishes, yet their emotional connections to these foods diverge. For Turks, certain dishes confirm a cherished national heritage tied to Istanbul's centuries-old "melting pot" narrative (Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* 95–102); for Armenians, these same dishes evoke a nostalgic longing for a homeland lost to genocide (Tufekci Can 288). In this sense, the novel demonstrates the complexity of diaspora identity: no matter how similar the culinary practice, one's relationship to that practice is mediated by memory, trauma and power (Bhabha 55).

Engaging with diaspora studies, we see that food in Shafak's novel also acts as an "edible archive," preserving and transmitting cultural memory across oceans and generations (Cohen and Fischer 145). Armanoush's recognition of flavours in Istanbul reaffirms the diaspora's ability to maintain a distinct identity even in displacement. Yet it also highlights the heartbreak that this identity is built on tragedy: the diaspora's reverence for these dishes is rooted in forced exile. Meanwhile, the concept of "contested cuisine" emerges from a postcolonial perspective, revealing how the same dishes are claimed by the dominant group as purely Turkish, effectively obscuring Armenian contributions. If diaspora communities rely on food to keep cultural memory alive, the majority's forgetting or denial complicates the potential for mutual understanding. Shafak, thus, uses the everyday act of cooking to reflect a broader political impasse: can a nation truly celebrate a multicultural cuisine while denying the suffering and displacement of one of its key cultural contributors (Tufekci Can 289)?

Hence, the idea that *similarity is not sameness* encapsulates the novel's central paradox. By focusing on the seemingly mundane realm of cooking, Shafak unearths the deeper tensions that define Turkish-Armenian relations: overlapping cultures overshadowed by diverging histories, cross-cultural borrowings enmeshed in asymmetric power. The novel does not propose an easy resolution. Indeed, Shafak has commented that "food might bring hearts closer, but the rest is politics" (Shafak, *Black Milk* 78). Sharing a table can foster empathy but cannot erase the structural and historical injustices shaping identity (Alkan and Günay-Erkol 7). *The Bastard of Istanbul* ultimately stands as a testament to the dual nature of cuisine in a postcolonial world: it can function as a "common language" that helps communities recall a once-multicultural past, yet it can also reinforce awareness of how the same pot of *ashure* stirs up profoundly dissimilar memories and meanings.

From a scholarly perspective, Shafak's narrative affirms that one cannot properly understand cultural or racial identity in a diaspora context without attending to the gastronomic dimension. Food is not an optional detail; it is integral to how memory is enacted, how difference is policed and how hidden histories resurface. By applying postcolonial and diaspora theories to *The Bastard of Istanbul*, we can see how Shafak reclaims the kitchen as a stage for exploring major historical and ethical questions. In so doing, she extends the conversation about what diaspora identities entail, how cross-cultural entanglements persist through everyday rituals and why certain

historical wounds cannot be swept aside by mere conviviality.

In sum, *The Bastard of Istanbul* challenges any simplistic assumption that cultural overlap in cuisine automatically heralds unity. While Turkish and Armenian characters do indeed partake of the same dishes, they do so from historically and emotionally distinct vantage points. This underscores the novel's fundamental argument: though shared flavours may suggest moments of convergence, the underlying distinct histories shape how each community perceives and experiences the meal. Food can open a door to empathy, but it cannot by itself reconcile a century of denial and displacement. Only by acknowledging both the joys of culinary communion and the pains of unresolved injustice can we approach a deeper understanding of identity, race and belonging in a postcolonial, diasporic world.

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28.

Intersecting Pain, Language, and Culture: A Globalized Reading of *Maus*

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Abstract

Art Spiegelman's breakthrough graphic novel *Maus* was first serialized in 1980 and then completely released in 1986. Through a distinctive fusion of narrative and graphic storytelling, the book tells a moving account of the Holocaust. This research paper examines *Maus,* through the lens of Pain Studies, with a focus on how the intersection of language, literature, and culture bridges worlds in a globalized context. The paper explains how *Maus* narrates the harrowing experiences of the Holocaust through a unique combination of visual and textual language. Spiegelman uses anthropomorphized animals to represent different ethnic groups: where Jews are portrayed as mice and Nazis as cats. By analysing the representation of pain—both physical and psychological—this study explores how *Maus* serves as a powerful cultural medium for the transmission of trauma across generations and cultures. Drawing from Pain Studies, this paper also investigates how graphic novels, as a hybrid genre, have the potential to convey complex physical and historical pain in ways that traditional texts may not. Additionally, it explores how the globalized nature of literature and culture allows *Maus* to function as a site of cross-cultural dialogue, engaging with universal themes of suffering, survival, and identity. By analysing the intersection of pain, language and culture, the paper establishes the argument that Maus not only transcends the boundaries of individual trauma but also fosters a collective understanding of historical and contemporary pain, illustrating the enduring relevance of cultural memory in an increasingly interconnected world.

Keywords: Pain Studies, Cultural Memory, Trauma, Language

Art Spiegelman's *Maus* is a groundbreaking graphic novel that intricately weaves together visual and textual storytelling to narrate the Holocaust's harrowing realities. First serialized in 1980 and later published as a complete work in 1986, *Maus* employs anthropomorphic imagery to depict different ethnic groups—Jews as mice, Nazis as cats, and Poles as pigs—creating a layered allegory that enhances its narrative power. This research paper examines *Maus* through the lens of Pain Studies, investigating how the intersection of language, literature, and culture facilitates the transmission of trauma across generations and cultural boundaries. By exploring representations of both physical and psychological pain, this study highlights the unique role of graphic novels as hybrid genres capable of conveying historical suffering in ways that traditional textual narratives may not.

Pain is often difficult to articulate in conventional language, as scholars in Pain Studies have long argued. The ineffability of pain—its resistance to clear and complete verbal expression—makes it a particularly challenging subject for literature. Spiegelman circumvents this limitation by combining visual and textual elements, creating a multimodal narrative that captures suffering in ways that traditional prose might struggle to achieve. The stark black-and-white illustrations reinforce the bleakness of the Holocaust's horrors, while the fragmented dialogue and nonlinear storytelling mirror the fractured nature of traumatic memory. Through

these techniques, *Maus* brings pain to the foreground, making it both visible and visceral to the reader.

Spiegelman's anthropomorphic portrayal of different ethnic groups, adds a symbolic layer to the representation of suffering. The cat-and-mouse dynamic between Nazis and Jews symbolizes the dehumanization experienced by Holocaust victims, highlighting the predatory nature of their oppressors. By stripping the characters of human physicality, Spiegelman encourages readers to focus on their emotional and psychological suffering rather than their external identities. This abstraction allows *Maus* to transcend specific historical contexts and engage with broader themes of persecution, survival, and inherited trauma, making it relevant to readers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Maus is not solely concerned with historical pain but also with its intergenerational transmission. The novel portrays how trauma extends beyond direct survivors, profoundly affecting their descendants. Art Spiegelman, as both narrator and character, struggles to understand and process his father Vladek's suffering, illustrating the complexities of inherited trauma. Vladek's obsessive behaviours, survivor's guilt, and emotional detachment are manifestations of pain that continue to shape his relationship with his son. Spiegelman, struggles with the obligation to record human suffering, raising concerns about the morality of depiction, and the significance of remembrance. This relationship between the past and present serves as an example of how pain is a cultural and familial inheritance in addition to being a particular ailment.

In an increasingly globalized literary landscape, *Maus* serves as a crucial site of cross-cultural dialogue. The novel's hybrid format—blending historical testimony with artistic interpretation—enables it to reach a wide audience beyond academic circles. Pain Studies suggests that storytelling is essential for processing and communicating suffering, and *Maus* exemplifies this by offering a deeply personal yet universally resonant account of trauma. Its ability to bridge individual and collective histories underscores the enduring relevance of cultural memory in shaping contemporary understandings of pain and resilience.

Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* influenced by Pain Studies emphasizes the ineffability of pain—the challenge of putting suffering into words. Spiegelman's *Maus* grapples with this challenge through its multimodal approach, where visual representation compensates for the limitations of language. Vladek's fragmented English, marked by grammatical irregularities, functions as a linguistic marker of his immigrant identity and trauma. His broken language mirrors the fractured nature of Holocaust memory, where pain resists coherent narration. This linguistic dissonance underscores the struggle of second-generation survivors, like Art, who must navigate between comprehending their parents' pain and dealing with the alienation caused by inherited trauma.

Vladek's speech patterns illustrate the lasting effects of trauma and displacement. His language, shaped by Polish syntax and disrupted by the hardships of survival, often lacks fluency and grammatical consistency. This broken English not only reflects his status as an immigrant but also embodies his fractured psychological state, where memories of suffering remain ever-present. His struggle to communicate effectively with Art signifies the broader difficulty of transmitting trauma, where the experiences of the past remain inexpressible within conventional linguistic structures. This sequence, Scarry's statement that severe pain destroys the victims' ability to speak.

Furthermore, the language barrier between Art and Vladek serves as an example of how different generations perceive trauma. Raised in America and speaking English well, Art frequently gets annoyed by his father's storytelling, especially when Vladek's fragmented phrases break the flow of the story. This tension reveals the challenges that second-generation survivors face in processing inherited trauma. While they seek to understand their parents' suffering, they are simultaneously distanced from it by linguistic and cultural barriers. The alienation Art feels is compounded by his father's inability to fully articulate his

pain, leaving gaps in the historical record that Art must navigate.

Spiegelman's use of metafiction also draws attention to how inadequate language is, while describing trauma. Throughout *Maus*, Art questions the reliability of memory and the ethics of narrating another's pain. His interviews with Vladek often reveal contradictions, forgotten details, or moments where words fail altogether. This narrative instability underscores the notion that Holocaust trauma resists definitive representation. Instead of presenting a linear, coherent account, *Maus* embraces fragmentation, mirroring the disjointed ways in which pain is remembered and retold.

Maus demonstrates that language, though flawed, remains a crucial tool for bearing witness to trauma. Vladek's speech, despite its imperfections, ensures that his suffering is acknowledged and preserved. Likewise, Art's struggle to piece together his father's memories reflect the ongoing challenge of memorializing historical pain. By inter-twining verbal and visual storytelling, Spiegelman bridges the gaps left by language, ensuring that the ineffability of pain does not lead to its erasure.

Art Spiegelman's *Maus* transforms the portrayal of pain through its unique visual style, merging anthropomorphic symbolism, surreal elements, and fragmented storytelling to convey the complex trauma of the Holocaust and its effects across generations. By illustrating Jews as mice, Nazis as cats, and Poles as pigs, Spiegelman creates a universal narrative of suffering that transcends specific ethnic identities, allowing readers to connect with the atrocities of genocide on a broader level. The stark black-and-white visuals enhance the emotional weight of the narrative, using simple lines and shadows to depict physical suffering—such as starvation, forced labor, and violence—while avoiding graphic depictions that could overwhelm the audience. This visual simplicity reflects the fragmented nature of survivors' memories, where horrific events are often recalled in disjointed snippets.

Spiegelman also employs surrealistic techniques; for instance, he shows Vladek, his father, wearing a pig mask to blend into Polish society. This striking imagery captures the psychological turmoil of living under constant threat, where identity becomes a means of survival and trauma distorts one's perception of reality. The structure of the narrative itself mirrors the cyclical experience of pain, shifting between Vladek's experiences during the war and his complicated present-day relationship with Artie. Vladek's obsessive behaviours—like hoarding food—illustrate how survival instincts can evolve into neuroses that alienate his son, highlighting how trauma is passed down through generations. Artie grapples with feelings of guilt over depicting his father's suffering in a comic format, which is visually represented by his own shrinking presence in panels where he interviews Vladek.

Spiegelman's use of spatial disruption—where panels bleed into one another or timelines collapse—reflects the instability of memory. A poignant example is the recurring presence of Artie's mother Anja, who tragically took her own life; she appears ghostlike in margins or merges into Vladek's memories, symbolizing unresolved grief. The power of *Maus* lies in its ability to maintain these tensions without providing clear resolutions, inviting readers to engage with what Adorno describes as "spaces of conflict," where pain resists straightforward narrative closure. Additionally, Hayden White's analysis of historical representation sheds light on how Maus challenges traditional fact-fiction boundaries; by employing animal allegory to frame the Holocaust, Spiegelman critiques the limitations of documentary realism and asserts that emotional truths can surpass literal representations.

Moreover, *Maus* critiques the commodification of pain through its metafictional elements; Artie struggles with the implications of reducing his father's story to a "comic book," emphasizing the ethical considerations involved in representing someone else's suffering. This self-reflexivity is mirrored in the contrast between Vladek's chaotic memories and Artie's more modernist panels. Ultimately, *Maus* illustrates how visual media can express pain's complexities: the static faces of mice paradoxically enhance emotional depth as readers project their interpretations onto these blank expressions. The graphic novel resonates

globally due to this duality—its specific historical context combined with universal metaphors—creating a bridge for empathy across cultures. By blurring distinctions between victim and witness, past and present, *Maus* reveals pain as a shared legacy that shapes identity and memory. Through its innovative interplay of form and content, Spiegelman's work stands as a significant contribution to pain studies, demonstrating that visual narratives can articulate the intricacies of suffering in ways that text alone cannot achieve, fostering an essential dialogue between historical trauma and contemporary responsibility to remember.

Art Spiegelman's *Maus* intricately explores the themes of trauma and intergenerational pain, using its graphic novel format to depict how the horrors of the Holocaust extend beyond direct survivors. The narrative alternates between Vladek Spiegelman's memories of wartime and his present-day interactions with his son, Artie, showcasing how trauma is not confined to a single generation but instead permeates family relationships and cultural identity. Vladek's survival left him with deep psychological scars, which manifest in behaviours such as hoarding and extreme mistrust. These compulsions, originally survival mechanisms, become maladaptive in his post-war life, straining his bond with Artie and emphasizing how past suffering continues to shape present realities.

For Artie, the impact of trauma is inherited rather than directly experienced. He questions whether turning Vladek's anguish into a graphic novel commodifies it and wrestles with the moral and emotional difficulties of chronicling his father's suffering. This dilemma is compounded by the weight of survivor's guilt passed down from Vladek, whose grief over lost family members and inability to protect them lingers as an unspoken burden. *Maus* highlights how second-generation survivors experience inherited trauma, grappling with feelings of guilt and alienation as they attempt to understand their parents' painful pasts.

The novel's visual style effectively conveys the cyclical and fragmented nature of trauma. Disjointed panel layouts and surreal imagery reflect the instability of memory, illustrating how unresolved pain disrupts temporal boundaries. Artie's present is constantly interrupted by Vladek's memories, signifying how the past never truly goes away. The ghostly presence of Anja, Vladek's wife, who took her own life after surviving Auschwitz, further emphasizes this disruption—her absence continues to haunt both Vladek and Artie, representing an unfilled void. Through its use of anthropomorphic characters—Jews depicted as mice and Nazis as cats—the novel provides an abstracted yet deeply personal exploration of suffering, making it accessible to a broad audience without diminishing the historical gravity of the Holocaust.

Spiegelman also challenges traditional methods of Holocaust representation by combining historical documentation with allegorical elements. The animal metaphor distances the reader from graphic realism while maintaining emotional depth, reinforcing trauma theory's assertion that overwhelming experiences often defy conventional narrative forms. By blending text and imagery, *Maus* constructs a hybrid storytelling method that captures both the factual and psychological dimensions of trauma. The contrast between Vladek's detailed memories and Artie's more abstract, sparse panels underscores their differing relationships to pain—one shaped by lived experience, the other by inherited memory.

Ultimately, *Maus* illustrates that trauma does not remain confined to those who directly endure it; instead, it echoes through generations, altering identities and relationships. The novel's non-linear structure reflects this reality, portraying history as an ongoing force rather than a distant event. Through its innovative use of visual storytelling, *Maus* provides a powerful meditation on intergenerational pain, urging readers to reflect on the enduring influence of historical suffering and its role in shaping contemporary identities and collective memory. Spiegelman's work highlights the potential of graphic novels as a medium for preserving and processing trauma, ensuring that the past remains both remembered and relevant.

Art Spiegelman's *Maus* serves as a powerful exploration of cultural memory, illustrating how historical trauma is preserved,

transmitted, and reshaped across generations and societies. The most frightening past of the twentieth century - the Holocaust is commemorated in a variety of literary works, testimonies, and visual arts. However, *Maus* presents a distinct approach by merging historical recollection with personal narrative in a graphic novel format. This fusion allows the novel to function as both an intimate family history and a broader commentary on collective memory, engaging global audiences in a dialogue about the long-term repercussions of historical suffering.

Cultural memory refers to the way societies remember and interpret past events, ensuring they remain relevant across generations. In *Maus*, this concept is embodied in the dynamic between Vladek, a Holocaust survivor, and Artie, his son and the novel's narrator. Vladek's recollections do not exist in isolation but are filtered through Artie's perspective, highlighting the complexities of preserving history through second-hand accounts. This interplay between personal and collective memory reflects a broader struggle within global literature: how to document and communicate trauma in a way that remains meaningful across cultural and temporal boundaries.

The graphic novel's accessibility as a visual medium contributes to its global impact. Unlike traditional Holocaust literature, which often relies on dense historical detail or personal testimony, *Maus* employs anthropomorphic imagery to create an allegorical yet deeply personal retelling of history. The representation of Jews as mice, Nazis as cats, and Poles as pigs serves as a metaphor for dehumanization while allowing readers from different backgrounds to engage with the narrative without being overwhelmed by graphic realism. This stylistic choice enables *Maus* to transcend linguistic and national barriers, positioning it as a work of global literature that resonates beyond its immediate historical context.

Furthermore, *Maus* challenges conventional distinctions between high and low culture by blending historical documentation with the comic book format, traditionally seen as entertainment rather than serious literature. This postmodern approach reflects a broader shift in global literature, where hybrid genres are increasingly used to narrate complex histories. By presenting the Holocaust in a medium associated with popular culture, Spiegelman broadens the scope of cultural memory, making it accessible to younger generations and readers who may not engage with traditional Holocaust testimonies.

Another crucial aspect of *Maus*'s role in cultural memory is its engagement with the ethics of representation. Artie frequently questions whether he is accurately depicting his father's suffering or merely commodifying it for artistic and commercial gain. This self-reflective critique highlights an ongoing debate in global literature: the responsibility of authors when narrating historical trauma. By acknowledging these concerns within the text, Spiegelman invites readers to consider the complexities of memory, authorship, and historical truth.

Conclusion

Maus exemplifies how literature can act as a bridge between personal and collective history, allowing cultural memory to persist in an increasingly interconnected world. Through its innovative blend of visual and textual storytelling, *Maus* effectively explores the intersection of pain, language, and culture, positioning itself as a significant work within global literature. By utilizing the graphic novel medium, Spiegelman moves beyond the limitations of traditional narratives, offering a multimodal representation of suffering that resonates across cultural and historical contexts. This paper has examined *Maus* through the lens of Pain Studies, analysing how it conveys trauma through fragmented language, visual metaphors, and intergenerational memory. Furthermore, it has demonstrated how *Maus* functions as a global text, engaging diverse audiences with universal themes of persecution, survival, and remembrance.

A central challenge in Pain Studies is the difficulty of expressing suffering in language. Scholars argue that extreme pain often eludes articulation, making it resistant to conventional narrative structures. Spiegelman addresses this limitation by combining images and text, allowing his novel to depict trauma in ways that

surpass the constraints of language. The stark black-and-white illustrations, disrupted panel structures, and anthropomorphic representations serve as visual markers of historical and psychological suffering. By weaving together past and present, personal testimony and cultural memory, *Maus* underscores the enduring impact of pain on both individual and collective identities.

The novel also highlights intergenerational trauma, illustrating how pain is passed down through memory, language, and familial relationships. Due to Vladek Spiegelman's experiences during the Holocaust, his survival instincts turn into maladaptive habits that drive his son Artie away. This tension reflects a broader struggle faced by descendants of trauma survivors, who inherit emotional wounds that they did not directly experience. The difficult moral and psychological issues of depicting inherited misery are made clear by Artie's annoyance with his father's compulsive behaviours and his remorse at recording Vladek's agony. The self-reflexive aspect of Maus, in which Artie describes his writing process, highlights the importance of preserving trauma while addressing its effects.

Beyond its personal and historical dimensions, *Maus* operates within a globalized literary framework, inviting readers from diverse backgrounds to engage with its themes. The use of anthropomorphic characters—Jews as mice, Nazis as cats, and Poles as pigs—acts as a symbolic representation of oppression, dehumanization, and survival. While deeply rooted in Holocaust history, this abstraction universalizes the experience of suffering, enabling readers to draw parallels with other histories of trauma and persecution. In doing so, *Maus* fosters cross-cultural dialogue on pain and memory, illustrating how literature can serve as a bridge between different historical and social realities.

Ultimately, *Maus* exemplifies the intersection of pain, language, and culture, showing that trauma extends beyond individual experiences to become a shared historical legacy. By innovatively blending textual and visual storytelling, Spiegelman captures the complexities of suffering, resilience, and remembrance. The novel's engagement with Pain Studies highlights the significance of narrative forms in articulating trauma, reinforcing the enduring relevance of cultural memory in an interconnected world. As both a personal testimony and a universal exploration of human suffering, *Maus* remains a crucial work in understanding how pain is documented, inherited, and interpreted across generations and cultures.

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29.

Digital Technology and Storytelling: Mythology and the Evolution of Heritage

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Abstract:

The evolution of digital media has significantly reshaped literature and storytelling. This presents new ways to engage audiences, especially younger audiences. Though sometimes this poses challenges to traditional narratives and cultural preservation of values. This paper aims to examine the impact of digital media on literature and storytelling with a particular focus on the timeless epic, the *Ramayana*, exploring how the traditional narrative has been transformed in the digital age. This paper studies how digital media, through its various forms, impacts the presentation of the *Ramayana*, leading to shifts in audience engagement and the preservation of literary heritage. By focusing on the shift from long-form storytelling to shortened, bite-sized formats – such as digital adaptations, animated series, and web shorts – the study delves into the changing nature of epic narratives and their implications for attention spans, cognitive engagement, and cultural heritage. In particular, the paper discusses how digital platforms, while making stories more accessible, also risk diluting the depth and complexity inherent in these ancient texts. Furthermore, the concept of dual encoding—where reading and visual elements are combined—emerges as a crucial tool for enhancing understanding and engagement in the digital context. Through an analysis of both the challenges and opportunities presented by digital storytelling, this paper highlights how new media is not only preserving but also transforming the way we experience and interact with epics like the *Ramayana*, reflecting broader shifts in cultural consumption, cognitive processing, and heritage preservation in the digital age.

Keywords: Digital Media, Ramayana, Cultural Heritage and Transformation, Modern Storytelling

Introduction

India celebrates its diversity and cultural heritage through the stories we tell and pass on. There is a human desire to leave behind a legacy for the generations that follow; be it of the wisdom or of experiences. Mythology and epics play a crucial role in the molding of a society. The digitization of myths, usage of interactive media, and personalization based on algorithms have reshaped the reception, interpretation and reinterpretation of these stories. The optimal medium for this legacy has been stories – the narratives we weave. This can be testified particularly through the most revered of our texts, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* and the versions that have evolved into our popular culture. To this end, the focus will be on the various retellings and adaptations of *the Ramayana. The Ramayana* is central to the South Asian cultural landscape.

The Ramayana serves as a cornerstone of Indian heritage. Before exploring this, one must establish the definition of "heritage". The Cambridge Dictionary calls features belonging to the culture of a particular society, such as traditions, languages, or buildings, which come from the past and are still important as the heritage of that society. *The Ramayana* is a revered epic, deeply woven in the spiritual, moral, and cultural fabric of the Indian subcontinent. Attributed to the sage Valmiki around the 5th to 4th century BCE, it serves as a standard for morality, duty, devotion, and righteousness (dharma). It narrates the story of **Lord Rama,** the prince of Ayodhya and his journey through exile and triumph. The core storyline for the purpose of understanding its

retellings, follows Rama's exile to the forest for 14 years due to a promise made by his father for which he is accompanied by his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana; Sita's abduction by the demon king Ravana which leads to a dramatic quest to rescue her; Rama's alliance with the monkey king Sugriva and the devotion of Hanuman; the war waged against Ravana in Lanka; and the return and coronation of Rama in all his glory, signifying the advent of the mythical **Rama Rajya.**

Culturally, Rama is revered as "maryada purushottam" – the epitome of an ideal man, who upholds dharma even at a personal cost, while Sita, Lakshmana, Urmila, Hanuman, and Bharata exemplify ultimate devotion and selflessness. The epic provides a moral compass with ethical lessons on leadership, sacrifice, familial duty and justice. Across the Indian subcontinent, the *Ramayana* has inspired numerous versions in Tamil, Thai, Khmer, Javanese, and Lao. The story has been recounted through varying artistic outlets like traditional dance, theater, and in temple art. Festivals like Ram Navami and Diwali precede the arrival spring and the Hindu New Year, respectively. This is to say, *the Ramayana* is still lived and celebrated in everyday Indian life. The ideals of this epic are evoked and referenced in politics, family values, spirituality, and the arts. Traditionally, the epic was found in oral recitations, manuscripts, and performances and now is available in films, television series, on websites, through digital art, mobile apps, and in virtual environments.

As a cultural epic, *the Ramayana* has been re-imagined in the digital age through shortened formats (like epic shorts), animated reels and short videos, and even doodles dealing with excerpts. The digital media capitalizes on the declining attention spans and proves to be a source for preserving heritage in a way that expands the audience.

This paper aspires to analyze how digital media, through its various forms, impacts the presentation of *the Ramayana* (and by extension, similar epics), leading to shifts in audience engagement and the preservation of literary heritage. The focus is on the impact of digital media on literature and heritage, the effects on attention spans and storytelling methods and the process of dual encoding in reading and sketching stories. Another way in which the youth interacts with mythological content is through fanart, online communities, meme pages and even pinterest.

Digital storytelling has emerged as a modern form of narration. "The use of digital storytelling platforms and tools has revolutionized the way stories are created, interpreted, and received. These platforms have enabled storytellers to incorporate various multimedia elements, such as images, audio, and video, into their narratives, making them more engaging and interactive. " (https://ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2310580.pdf?utm) As a matter of fact, digital heritage as a term refers to cultural expressions that are created using digital technology. UNESCO recognizes digital heritage as crucial to preserving the cultural memory of societies.

To reiterate Ms. Sanjana's assertion in her paper titled "Exploring the Digital Representation of Indian Mythology: a Comparative Research Paper", the cultural impact on society's perception, preservation efforts, and influence of social media play a defining role in the representation of mythology digitally. She continues to elaborate on how digital representation provides "an immersive experience while staying true to the core essence" of the timeless tales.

Traditional storytelling and the *Ramayana:*

Literature has always been a medium of cultural revival and preservation. *The Ramayana* originating from Valmiki's rendition to Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas*, the narrative has seen various translations, adaptations and digitalizations. In terms of renditions, the story of the hero-king Rama is even seen performed in Ram Leela every year across India, in Sri Lanka, and even Indonesia. Films like 'Adipurush', 'The Legend of King Ram', etc. directly use the story while other popular cinema alludes to the pre-established knowledge of the epic. For example, 'Swades'(with the Ram Leela scene), 'Ravan', 'Ram Setu' or even blatant modifications like 'Singham Again'.

In traditional storytelling itself, there are versions of the epic like *The Ramayana, The*

Forest of Enchantments, Asura, The Sagas written by Ashok K. Banker or observations on the various renditions by A.K. Ramanujan *300 Ramayanas.* These are exclusive of the multiple oral folktales popular regionally. In all these texts, the method of dissemination has been oral recitation, performance or manuscript.

In the Indian society, (https://dannyreviews.com/h/Many_Ramayanas.html) the variations of the epic *Many Ramayanas* by Paula Richman looks at the significance of context and nuance, "they are not performances to an 'internal audience'. They are scattered and disconnected, but that is perhaps the only way to give a feel for such a manifold tradition." This emphasizes the various interpretations and appropriations of the tales from *The Ramayana.*

Digital Transformation

Ms. Sanjana in her paper remarks on the depiction of gods and goddesses in video games like "Asura's Wrath" or "Prince of Persia: Warrior Within" which brought "immense popularity and made Indian deities more accessible to a global audience…Disney's animated series "Ultimate Spider-Man," featuring Hanuman as one of its main characters have been successful in creating a Marvel-esque universe encompassing Indian mythological figures." She also applauds the artists who digitalize the stories while exploring their creativity and simultaneously remaining "true to the essence of the original stories." She also acknowledges the application of digitalization in engaging younger audiences especially with memes, illustrations and animations. (https://www.questjournals.org/jrhss/papers/vol12-issue2/120295100.pdf?utm) Digital representation aids in preserving, promoting, and depicting Indian mythology. Simultaneously, there exists the question about retaining authenticity, investigating authority, and commercialization of tradition.

Digital storytelling combines traditional narrative structures with multimedia formats like text, audio, video, and animation along with e-books, websites, social media, and virtual reality. This form of storytelling enables individuals and communities to participate in meaning-making, democratizing the whole process. Social media, websites and interactive as well as immersive experiences help the reception of the stories become more personalized. The additional advantage to digital formats is a non-linear exploration of the stories since the audience can navigate through episodes, characters, or themes in personalized ways. This brings more agency and autonomy to the audience which makes them feel more engaged and involved in the interpretation as well as generation of new perspectives. With the evolution of civilization, traditional mediums are giving way to digital mediums, yet are not completely replaced.

Dual Encoding:

Allan Paivio gave the Dual Coding Theory in 1986 "Human cognition is unique in that it has become specialized for dealing simultaneously with language and with nonverbal objects and events. Moreover, the language system is peculiar in that it deals directly with linguistic input and output (in the form of speech or writing) while at the same time serving a symbolic function with respect to nonverbal objects, events, and behaviors. Any representational theory must accommodate this dual functionality." According to the theory, there exist three types of processing of information in the human brain; viz., representational, referential, and associative. The first involves the activation of verbal or non-verbal representations, the second activation of the verbal system by the non-verbal system and vice versa and the third activates the representations within the same verbal or non-verbal system. These investigate and establish the role of imagery in cognitive operations (https://www.instructionaldesign.org/theories/dual-coding/) To summarize, Dual Coding theory proves that recall and recognition is better when the information is presented verbally as well as visually.

Dual coding is one of the learning strategies to improve retention and recall of information. Thus, Dual Coding helps improve memory retention, enhance learning capabilities, and transforming information into knowledge and facilitating its effective and efficient usage. Beyond the implementation of Dual Encoding,

there is extensive research done on the way in which digitalization has modified the consumption of literature.

Case Study: Digital adaptations of *the Ramayana:*

The epic *Ramayana* sets an example for the fundamentals of how individuals must lead their lives and reassures in times of tribulations. Over the years, it has undergone several transformations from animated films to Instagram reels. The epic has been adapted in every major technological wave dispensable to humanity. The digital adaptations of *the Ramayana* noteworthy for the focus of this paper are Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayan* televised in 1987, Nina Paley's film *Sita sings the Blues* of 2008, *Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama* co-produced with Japanese studios in 1992 among others. It must be noted that Ramanand Sagar's television serial brought the epic into the households across India and found a revival during the lockdown in the wake of COVID-19 while the Japanese collaboration brought in a global artistic engagement and innovation to the story. These adaptations and versions made available on streaming platforms reach out to a more diverse global audience.

Video Games and Interactive Media also plays a significant role in observing the evolution of the perception and impact of the mythological characters, themes and tropes and their appropriation by the younger generation that becomes the target audience. "Hanuman: Boy Warrior" and "Raji: an ancient epic" are video games that engage the players in myth-based quests, battles, and explorations – thereby combining entertainment with cultural education. Interactive fiction, including web-based storytelling platforms like Twine or Ink, enable the creation of branching narratives inspired by the *Ramayana*. Such forms reconfigure linear myths into player-driven experiences. Immersive technologies like VR/AR i.e. Virtual Reality or Augmented Reality provide an effective alternative to visualize the scenes and episodes from the stories, especially for a society which is gradually facing a decline in imaginative creativity. For instance, "Ramayana VR experience" allows users to witness scenes like the abduction of Sita from a first-person point of view. These bring in a playful angle and personal engagement with mythology. VR also brings in the ability to immerse users into the world of myths, allowing them to interact with and become part of the story.

Overview of notable digital adaptations like animations, web series and mobile applications

The *Ramayana* has inspired numerous digital and multimedia retellings that blend traditional narratives with modern storytelling techniques. Some notable digital adaptations are

1. Sita Sings the Blues (2008) is an animated film by Nina Paley which combines the filmmaker's personal experiences with the Ramayana featuring jazz music and shadow puppet narration.
2. Ramayana 3392 A.D. (2006) is a graphic novel series by Virgin Comics that reimagined the Ramayana in a futuristic dystopian setting.
3. Ramayana: the Legen of Prince Rama (1992) is a Japanese-Indian animated film presenting a faithful retelling of the Ramayana.
4. Ravanayan (2011) is a comic series presenting the Ramayana from Ravana's perspective
5. The Ramayana: a modern retelling by Ramesh Menon is a prose retelling of the Ramayana which brings the ancient epic to contemporary readers.
6. Ramayan (1987-1988) is a televised serial created by Ramanand Sagar and aired in DD National in Hindi. The show gained unprecedented viewership and cultural significance.
7. Shrimad Ramayan (2024), another televised show, was created by Siddharth Kumar Tewary and aired on Sony TV with a fresh narrative approach.
8. Ramayana: the Legend of Prince Rama (1992) directed by Koichi Sasaki, Ram Mohan and Yugo Sako is an animated film, released in English, Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu presenting a faithful retelling to the *Ramayana.*
9. Ramayana: the Epic (2010) directed by Chetan Desai is another animated film

with a modern visual interpretation of the epic.

10. Idolle Ramayana (2016) is a Kannada film, directed by Prakash Raj, offering a contemporary take on the narrative.
11. *Breaking the Bow: Speculative Fiction inspired by the Ramayana* (2012) ed. Anil Menon is an anthology blending the classical Ramayana with speculative fiction, offering fresh perspectives on the epic's themes.
12. *Ramayana 3392 A.D.* is a graphic novel series reimagining the Ramayana in a futuristic dystopian setting adding elements of science fiction to the story.
13. "Asura" video game awarded Best Indie Game at NGDC 2017
14. Animated movie "Bhagmati: the Queen of Fortunes" based on popular legends form epics.
15. Short film "Ahalya" by Sujoy Ghose which turns the narrative on its head by giving agency to one of the minor characters from the *Ramayana.*

These adaptations attest to the enduring influence of the *Ramayana* and how it can resonate across mediums and cultures. The epic is a reservoir of inspiration for diverse interpretations across different cultures and art forms. Initiatives such as the *Digital Library of India*, *Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts*, and *Sanskrit Documents* project have digitized ancient manuscripts and translations of the *Ramayana*. Websites like *ValmikiRamayan.net* offer searchable databases, side-by-side Sanskrit-English translations, and commentaries. Mobile applications have also emerged as a popular medium for mythological storytelling with apps like *Amar Chitra Katha, StoryMirror,* and *Epic!Kids' Books* with illustrated retellings of the *Ramayana* for children while some can integrate gamification, quizzes, and audio narration to enhance interactivity. E-books and audiobooks on platforms like Kindle, Audible, and Google Books also make the *Ramayana* accessible across devices and languages.

A comparative analysis can be made between the traditional narratives and digital reinterpretations of *The Ramayana.* The modern digital adaptations manage to maintain the crux of the values while modifying their presentations for more engaging formats and platforms. As a result of this, the episodes are generally 5-10 minute long summaries in keeping with the demand for brevity in the digital age while attempting the depth of meaning conveyed to the audience through these shortened narratives. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, or even podcasts dealing with the epic provide accessibility to a global audience with their reach transcending traditional boundaries.

As Paivio's theory of Dual Encoding views storytelling, animated adaptations, sketches, or graphic novels serve as an amalgamation of verbal and visual information which enhances comprehension and retention of memory. The Digital Adaptations of *the Ramayana* reinforce the understanding of its themes, characters, values, and beliefs. Illustrations, animations, and comic strips employed in visual storytelling make even complex narratives accessible. This proves advantageous in an age that has shortened attention spans because digital stories engage users (and 'consumers') by fostering interactions and bringing the readers to the fore. The decline in attention span is equally a result of as well as caused by modern digital media. What presents as an alternative to long-form literature also affects the manner in which people engage with it. The profound and detailed meaning of cultural texts like *the Ramayana* may be perceived to be compromised upon with the shift to shorter formats. It is to be studied in depth whether the shortened forms do affect the transmission of cultural values that are embedded in lengthy narratives.

Implications for cultural heritage preservation:

Digitizing mythological narratives may face resistance from traditional audience. However, its implications on the young generation in conserving cultural heritage and making said heritage relevant is undeniable. The 'recipients' must be weary of the thin line between preservation and commodification that problematizes the popularity of mythological texts, creative freedom, and the tendency to

cater to conducive and selective versions. This leads to the concern and questions of "Who owns the narrative? Who profits from it?" The contradiction outweighs the abovementioned concerned: the democratizing feature of digital media. Digital storytelling makes the content accessible to all audiences and is inclusive without conditions. The digital platform creates a space for counter-narratives like the empowerment of Sita or presenting Ravan as a tragic hero, leading himself to an unavoidable and predestined fate.

Digital storytelling makes *Ramayana* accessible globally – to an international audience as well as the diaspora communities. The possibility of linguistic translations, sub-titles and cross-cultural adaptations extend the epic beyond its traditional geographical location. The digitalized narratives succeed, according to Rebecca Evans, because of "that microcosm, where the familiarity of the narrative is based on the concept of nostalgia and how deeply the audience seeks to feel that emotion" The challenge would be, thus, to maintain authenticity and not offend cultural sensitivity while preserving and transmitting these narratives of heritage and values. The mythological texts face the danger of being reduced to entertainment if not dealt with sensitivity (especially with merchandise with characters that are deified). Another concern is of misrepresentation and "exoticizing" the narrative which can distort the nuanced cultural meanings. For instance, Sita is not a damsel in distress but a warrior princess.

While digital tools preserve the epic for posterity, constant adaptation may dilute its essence. The challenge posed is to choose between fidelity and creative liberty. The aim then being to ensure heritage is enhanced rather than being erased or replaced. The possibility of losing the depth in storytelling under the time constraints of digital media formats often worries traditionalists. However, this also assists in providing perspective. The authenticity may be compromised in the face of mass appeal with misrepresentation or selective representation while adapting traditional narratives. The pressure to produce viral content often leads creators to prioritize entertainment over authenticity. Clickbait titles, sensational visuals, or controversial reinterpretations can generate attention but may misinform audiences. This is particularly concerning when audiences lack prior exposure to the source material. Another challenge is cultural appropriation or misrepresentation in global digital contexts. When the *Ramayana* is adapted by creators unfamiliar with its nuances, it risks becoming exoticized or decontextualized. Such representations may distort Indian heritage rather than celebrate it.

Another concern that digital technologies pose is the impact on cognitive capacities, memory retention, information overload, and privacy concerns. As Amalia Calinescu argues, digital technologies bring convenience, however "overreliance for storage and retrieval raises concerns about potential repercussions, including potential diminishing of memory consolidation and the adoption of shallow encoding strategies". According to the German psychologist, Ebbinghaus, there are three core memory components – encoding, storage and retrieval. Digitalization then reshapes human understanding and manner of memory retention, simultaneously shaping the collective memory of a culture. This amplifies the opportunities digitalization provides in preserving heritage, as well. Given how all communities have access to digital media, heritage gets democratized, becoming accessible to a global as well as universal audience. Gamification, participatory storytelling and interactive digital media narratives reignites the interest and involvement in traditional literature. The intersection of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and digital media hold the potential to reshape the manner in which epics and traditional narratives, like *the Ramayana* are experienced and understood. Innovations in this direction widen cultural understanding and increase empathy in the audience. Scholars, creators, and audience must collectively reflect on and consider the ethical concern when sacred texts are in question.

Conclusion

Digital media has undoubtedly revolutionized storytelling, making literature

more accessible, interactive, and immersive. In the case of the *Ramayana*, this shift has brought both renewal and risk. On the one hand, it allows ancient narratives to reach new audiences and encourages innovative reinterpretations. On the other, it challenges the integrity, depth, and cultural sanctity of the epic. There is a need for balance between innovation and preservation, while digitalization facilitates conservation of cultural narratives.

Digital transformation of storytelling is a cultural evolution. By examining digital adaptations of the *Ramayana*, this paper highlights broader transformations in literary consumption, attention spans, and heritage preservation. Digital storytelling is not inherently detrimental to cultural epics—it depends on the intentionality, sensitivity, and scholarship behind its execution. Digital technology renders the epic timeless as well as timely, single-handedly encouraging young creators to explore their heritage creatively. As we move deeper into the digital age, the task is not merely to preserve stories, but to ensure that their wisdom, nuance, and cultural richness endure—even when told in pixels and code. As we move deeper into the digital age, the way we engage with heritage will continue to evolve. The *Ramayana* reminds us that stories are not static relics but living organisms. Through digital storytelling, we do not just preserve mythology—we participate in it, shape it, and pass it forward to future generations.

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30.

Tidalectics of Colonial and Post-Colonial Impulses: A Reading of Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* through the Lens of Blue Humanities

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Abstract

Blue Humanities is an interdisciplinary engagement that explores the significance of ocean and water bodies in literature, history and various arts forms. Also known as Blue Cultural Studies, this method of investigation explores oceanic narratives and nautical fiction. Primarily, this approach tries to build a critical discourse around water as opposed to land-based cultural criticism. It provides important tools and methodologies in analyzing the relationship between human beings and the ocean as depicted in literature, history and culture. It draws upon various disciplines such as literature, history, philosophy, cultural studies and marine sciences. In literary studies blue humanities explores sea related themes in fiction, travel writing and poetry. Based on the ideas propagated by thinkers such as Steve Mentz and John Gillis, blue humanities as explored the literary and theoretical connections on human engagement with ocean and water. Tidalectics refers to a worlds view that is conditioned by water and changes, based on the movements of the oceans and the interconnectedness of the ocean with culture and history.

This paper explores the tidalectics of colonial and post-colonial impulses in Amitav Ghosh's novel *Gun Island*, using the concept of Blue Humanity as a lens. Through a critical analysis of the novel's narrative, characters, and themes, this paper examines how Ghosh navigates the complexities of colonialism, imperialism, and climate change, ultimately revealing the interconnectedness of human experiences across time and space.

Key-words: Blue Humanities, Postcolonialism, Tidalectics, Oceanography.

Blue Humanities is an interdisciplinary approach to Culture Studies that focusses on the significance of oceans and seas in the context of human history and the role of oceans in experiences such as colonialism, migration, freedom and multi-culturalism. It examines the different ways in which human beings engage with water, apart from highlighting the link between the literary genres and oceans. Parvati Rajan, in a research article on 'Blue Humanities' highlights the major implications and scope of this mode of inquiry:

> The future of the 'Blue Humanities' looks promising as there is a growing interest in ocean studies and its related genres in arts, literature, paintings, music and so on. The films, texts and photography about the ocean pose ocean life as a vessel for heroic exploration and as a perfect specimen for aesthetic contemplation. The new Maritime Humanities speaks to a series of modern discourses, including globalization, post-colonialism, environmentalism, eco-criticism, and the history of science and technology. Thus, the sea, that has long been treated as a metaphor for life or silently relinquished, opens

up new vistas for early modern literary studies. (Rajan 1064)

Sussanne Ferwerda, in her research paper, "Blue Humanities and the Color of Colonialism," argues that Cultural Studies has made a shift to the colour blue, with blue standing for the oceanic and transoceanic themes. According to her, Blue Humanities has brought new perspective on colonialism and migration. She explains the entire range of meanings associated with the colour blue evoked in Blue Humanities:

> Thinking with blue not only addresses the importance of reckoning with coloniality in the blue humanities but also attends to the powers at work that have always already entangled the blue as pigment, as textile, as rock, and as symbolic of water, sea, and ocean. The emergence of the blue humanities as a subfield of the environmental humanities draws on the ways in which the blue has long been an actant in the transoceanic movement of power: of riches, trade, violence, and the consequences of imperial extractive politics. (Ferwerda 3)

Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*, in many ways, like his *Iblis Trilogy*, is linked with oceanic realities and oceanic culture. Ghosh weaves into the narrative, Maritime History and Maritime Politics. Also depicted in this novel is the ocean that is the setting for cyclones and migration across lands and ages. The central character, Dinanath, reveals a tale of a merchant who is fascinated by journeys. In particular, he moves through the mangrove swamps of the Sundarbans.

Gun Island also depicts a series of characters who are drawn by the sea. These characters include a pair of Bengali men, a committed Marine biologist, Piya and Deen. In particular, Piya's journey across oceanic and riverine dead zones take the readers into unlikely marine environmental problems that are triggered by human presence in the oceans. She studies dolphins, an aquatic animal which eventually loses its habitat due to oxygen starved waters of the river and sea.

Tidalectics is a concept closely linked with Blue Humanities and it investigates the dynamic interface between the ocean and land, exploring the routes and roots of human migration. It is used as a methodological tool to highlight the significance of seas and islands in history, culture and modernity.

Gun Island is influenced by tidalectics as it is rich with the descriptions of journeys by water, especially of the people who are in diaspora. Shipboard experiences, encounters with sea creatures and the impact of chemical waste dumping into water also provide cross currents that make the tidalectics in this novel. Deen's obsession with the mystery of a 17th century merchant, Bonduki Sada-gar, takes him into many aspects of the ocean.

In his investigation trip, Deen travels to a remote island in the Sundarbans. Deen learns about the delta region between India and Bangladesh. At this time, he also studies about the climate change from the refugee, Tipu, a street-smart smuggler. At one point, Tipu talks about the delta with a touch of oceanic openness, in the narrative. Unlike the land-based closure, Tipu points to a series of changes and uncertainties that a delta and water would opene up to create tidalectics:

> In these parts, there's a whole bunch of dirt-poor, illiterate people scratching out a living by fishing or farming or going into the jungle to collect bamboo and honey or at least that's what they used to do. But how the fish catch salty, and you can't go into the jungle without bringing the forest guards. On top of that every other year you get hit by a storm that blows everything to pieces. So, what are people supposed to do? What would anyone do? (Ghosh 87-88)

Kanai, an important character in the narrative comments on the history of a gun merchant who was called a 'Bonduki Sada-gar in local legends. In his commentary, the sea is at the center connecting Sundarbans with the wilderness, providing a domain for profit, indicating commercial tidalectics: "Maybe, said Kanai coolly, "because every merchant who's ever sailed out of Bengal has had to pass through the Sundarbans, there is no other way to reach the sea. The Sundarbans are the Frontier where commerce and the wilderness look each other directly in the eye; that's exactly where the war between profit and nature is fought"' (Ghosh 08).

Ocean is also the site of knowledge production in Ghosh's narrative. For

instance, Piya a marine biologist of Indian origin from the US reverses the colonial tide of knowledge building by making an authentic study of marine life and thereby gaining mobility and identity: "Nilima explained that it was Piya's research in marine biology that had first brought her to the Sundarbans. Nilima had given her a place to stay and supported her work, and over the following years Piya's involvement with the trust had deepened steadily" (Ghosh 12).

Sea, as it emerges in Ghosh's narrative, also brings disasters to people. One such situation is the cyclone which had hit the Bengal delta in 1970. Nilima gives a version of this ocean-borne disaster through the accounts of Horen Nascar who was fishing at the sea: "On each outing they saw horrific sights: hamlets obliterated by the storm surge; islands where every tree had been stripped out of its leaves; corpses floating in the water, half eaten by animals; villages that had lost most of their inhabitants. The situation was aggravated by a steady flow of refugees from East Pakistan" (Ghosh 13- 14).

The legend of the gun merchant says that he had to take shelter on an island. This part of the legend too indicates that sea can be both an opportunity and a prison for many people: "Plagued by snakes and pursued by droughts, famines, storms and other calamities, he had fled overseas to escape the goddess's wrath, finally taking refuge in a land where there were no serpents, a place called *Gun Island*—Bandook-dwip" (Ghosh 16).

Nilima further observes that the sea has the power to alter dynamically islands. This aspect of the sea is often underrepresented in fiction. Ghosh gets his character to document this dynamic aspect of the sea: "The islands of the Sundarbans are constantly being swallowed up by sea; they're disappearing before our eyes. That's why I feel that some record should be made of it; for all I know that temple might be an important historical monument" (Ghosh 18).

Trade, which flourished with maritime exploration of European countries, is also within the focus of Ghosh's narrative. Cinta, another important character, finds out in her research that early voyages were mainly for the supremacy in spice trade. Ocean here becomes a setting of such financial wars: "The profits were so great that everyone became envious. That is why the Portuguese, and the Spanish set off on those voyages of discovery; they wanted to break the Venetian monopoly on spices" (Ghosh 30).

In the contemporary Era, Ghosh states, that the ocean is often used as an opportunity by migrant workers. He describes how people from the Sundarbans head to other places on boats to become illegal immigrants. The ocean here becomes a site of migrancy and escape:

> Making a life in the Sundarbans had become so hard that the exodus of the young was accelerating every year; boys and girls were borrowing and stealing to pay agents to find them work elsewhere. Some were sleeping over the border in Bangladesh, to join labor gangs headed for the gulf. And if that failed they would pay traffickers to smuggle them to Malaysia or Indonesia, on boats. (Ghosh 49)

Through a close reading of *Gun Island*, this paper shows how Ghosh's narrative embodies the tidalectics of colonial and postcolonial impulses. The novel's protagonist, Deen, is a Bengali businessman who becomes embroiled in a world of myth and history, as he navigates the complexities of colonialism and imperialism. Ghosh's use of language, imagery, and characterization reveals the ways in which colonial and postcolonial impulses continue to shape human world today.

Conclusion:

This paper demonstrates how Ghosh's *Gun Island* offers a powerful exploration of the tidalectics of colonial and postcolonial impulses, through the lens of Blue Humanity. By examining the interconnectedness of human experiences across time and space, Ghosh's work reveals the need for a more nuanced understanding

of the complexities of colonialism, imperialism, and climate change.

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31.

The Pregnant King by Devdutt Pattanaik: a representation of Queer Cultural Heritage

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Abstract:

As opposed to the mythologies across the globe that have rigid gender norms; the Hindu mythology is gender inclusive. It consists of the rich and diverse representation of gender and sexuality, which reach the masses through tales such as Ardhanarishwara, Shikhandi, Shiva & Mohini, The Pregnant King, etc. Devdutt Pattanaik through the Pregnant King brings to life the rich queer cultural heritage. With the narrative of King Yuvanashva, he showcases the inner turmoil of the protagonist, who struggles to relate to the gender binaries created by the society. He is unable to relate to his masculine side which forces him to rule as a king, and identifies with his feminist side that gave birth to a child. The author reflects on the expectations from a King in terms of gender, dharma, karma, fate and the cultural roots. The paper focuses on the dynamic representation of the queer culture in the Hindu mythology with the help of the story of Yuvanashva, retold in the Pregnant King.

Keywords: Hinduism, Cultural Heritage, Gender Identities, Queer Identities, Gender Norms.

Introduction:

How does one define QUEER[1]? Something that is different? Something that it largely neglected? Something that is not easily accepted and absorbed? OR something that is unique? By definition QUEER in terms of gender is a term given to those individuals who fail to identify or rather defy the societal norms of gender and their representation. Most religious backgrounds or cultures around the world refrain from writing or speaking about people who do not fit in the definitions of gender binaries - masculine and feminine - as established by the societies that humans live in. But an exact opposite is observed in Hinduism, as the religious texts and folklore embrace QUEER with open arms with various stories like that of the Pregnant King.

In the Hindu mythology the interconnectedness between the cosmos, souls and the bodies is reflected through the blur gender boundaries. The gender identities are not seen to be rigid, as the divine beings appear in various forms irrespective of the gender. Entities like Ardhanarishwara, a fusion of Shiva and Parvati, along with Vishnu's feminine incarnation as Mohini, challenge traditional perceptions of gender, indicating that the divine exists beyond binary classifications. Additionally, characters like Shikhandi, who experiences a gender change in the Mahabharata, embody a more nuanced and fluid understanding of gender identity. These instances demonstrate a theological and philosophical embrace of varied sexualities and gender expressions, situating them within a wider cosmological and spiritual framework.

This broad perspective on gender and sexuality within Hindu mythology extends beyond the divine realm to encompass human

[1] The word QUEER has been defined as 'something that is strange or unusual', as per the Oxford dictionary.

and social domains, where the acknowledgment of third-gender identities like the hijra community and the acceptance of sexual diversity in sacred writings highlight a historical and cultural heritage that includes rather than marginalizes non-normative identities. Hinduism's approach to queer culture, particularly in its mythological stories, provides a more accepting and open environment for examining sexual and gender identities than the frequently limiting structures present in various other worldwide mythological systems. This study aims to investigate the portrayals of queer culture in Hindu mythology, analyzing how these narratives provide a theological, spiritual, and social structure for comprehending gender fluidity and various sexualities in ancient Indian culture and their ongoing significance till date.

1. Queer Stories in Hindu Mythology:

As mentioned earlier Hindu mythology encompasses multiple stories in various canonical texts like the Mahabharata that highlight the inclusion of queer or the other genders as a part of daily life. For example, the narrative of Shikhandi. According to the Mahabharata, Shikhandi, the reincarnation of Amba, the daughter of King of Kashi. Amba was abducted by Bhishma during her *Swayamvar*[2], so that she could be married off to his brother, but she was in love with Shalva, the king of Saubha. When Amba returned to Shalva, who was enraged after being defeated by Bhishma at the swayamvar, declined to accept her. Then Amba swore to take revenge against Bhishma and prayed to Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva granted her a boon that she would be the reason for Bhishma's death. Amba was reborn as a daughter to King Drupad, who claimed that Shikhandi was his son. After marriage Shikhandi's wife realised that Shikhandi was not a man but a woman, and she returned to her father. King Drupad claimed that there is no one more manly than Shikhandi and asked his wife to prove that Shikhandi is a woman. When she asks her maids to test Shikhandi's manhood, they all returned with stories of his manhood. She was shocked. Shikhandi loved his wife, but she swore to believe what she had seen on her first night and said that she would never consummate their marriage. The tale showcases that Shikhandi acquired her manhood from a Yaksha[3]. During the battle of Kurukshetra Shikhandi participates as a man, but Bhishma considers her as a woman and does not fight with her, leading to his death.

Shikhandi is one of the most widely spoken of queer characters, because the character was born as a woman, made to believe that she was a man, and to please her father she acted as a prince. Though she had the body of a woman, she felt like a man who ended up being the reason for the death of one of the greatest warriors of his time. Shikhandi felt like a man trapped in a woman's body. Depictions of such characters show that Hindu mythology and culture has been gender inclusive.

Likewise the tale of Ardhnarishwara, the divine beings of Shiva and Shakti in one body, is another way of pointing out the queer with the help of showing that each body consists of feminine and masculine traits and both can reside in a single body peacefully. Ardhanarishwara is a distinctive and deeply symbolic representation of the Hindu deity Shiva, embodying the merging of masculine and feminine energies. The phrase "Ardhanarishwara" is derived from the Sanskrit terms "Ardha," which means "half," "Nari," meaning "woman," and "Ishvara," signifying "lord" or "god." Thus, Ardhanarishwara translates directly to "the deity who is partially female." In this representation, Lord Shiva is shown as both male and female, with one side symbolizing Lord Shiva himself (the masculine side) and the other side symbolizing Goddess Parvati, his partner (the feminine side). This image represents the interconnected and supportive essence of masculine and feminine energies, thought to be vital for the universe's creation, preservation, and destruction in Hindu philosophy.

[2] "Swayamvar," meaning "self-choice" in Sanskrit, is a traditional Indian matrimonial ceremony where a bride, usually from the Kshatriya (warrior) caste, selects her husband from a group of assembled suitors, either through her own choice or a public contest.

[3] Yakshas are considered a class of nature spirits or semi-divine beings, often associated with trees, mountains, rivers, and the earth.

The concept of Hijras [4] or something widely known as eunuchs, has been spoken about in the Hindu mythological scriptures, accepting the third gender, as a part of the human existence. Hijra briefly means an individual who does not identify itself with any of the gender binaries, and widely prefer to be recognised as transpeople. The origin of the Hijra community is traced back to the Mahabharata. The tale centers around Aravan, a youthful fighter who took part in the epic Kurukshetra battle. According to the tale, Aravan desired to wed before heading into battle, but since there were no women present, Lord Krishna transformed into a woman to marry him. This event is frequently referenced as the source of hijras in Hindu myths. In certain readings of this myth, Aravan's devotees, called Aravanis or Hijras, are thought to be individuals who, similar to Aravan, exist beyond conventional gender limits. In line with specific traditions, the hijra community holds that Lord Krishna's blessings (in his female form) have been bestowed upon them, rendering them holy. Consequently, they are frequently viewed as both fortunate and gifted with the ability to bestow abundance and fertility upon others. Even Arjuna, during the thirteen years of exile, for one year led the life of a Hijra in order to protect his identity.

2. Queer characters of The Pregnant King

The book The Pregnant King, written by Devdutt Pattanaik, one of the most celebrated authors in India, focuses on the QUEER in the Hindu mythology. Yuvanashva, the protagonist of the story is one of the best examples of the combination of feminine and masculine energies in one body. Yuvanashva is born to Shilavati, the queen of Vallabhi. Shilavati is the princess of Avanti, who is married to the prince Prasenjit, the prince of Vallabhi. Prasenjit dies before the birth of Yuvanashva, and Shilavati is asked to rule the kingdom as the guardian of Vallabhi, till Yuvanashva the crowned prince is ready to become the king.

Yuvanashva is a bright boy, a handsome young prince, married to a Simantini, the beautiful princess of Udra. Unfortunately, the rule books of Vallabhi do not allow Yuvanashva to rule as a king until he fathers an heir. The couple try for several years but fail, and Yuvanshva is force to marry the second time. The second marriage with Pulomi also does not yield a child. Yuvanashva marries the third time, but again for several years the king remains without an heir. People begin to question Yuvanashva's manhood, and he is frustrated as he is not allowed to rule his kingdom. Doctors from around the country are consulted but nothing works, and finally the *Siddhas* [5], Yaja and Upayaja, are requested to perform a Yagna[6] so that the kind could father a child. From this sacrificial fire a potion emerges, and the three queens are supposed to drink this potion so that they can get pregnant. Unfortunately, Yuvanashva drinks the potion, and he becomes pregnant. This initially creates chaos in the family, because no one had ever heard of something like this and they believed that the king had become sick and he would soon die of this disease. The doctor in the king's court checks and confirm that Yuvanashva is expecting a child that is being formed in his thigh. Soon, Yuvanashva delivers Mandhata, a son, but Shilavati want to kill it assuming it is a *Pishach.* Simantini stops her saying that the family, the entire kingdom has been craving this irth and she will raise the child as her own. Meanwhile Yuvanashva recovers from the pregnancy and craves to spend time with his son, but is not allowed to. He develops motherly feelings towards Mandhata as he believes that he is Mandhata's mother, but Mandhata always believes that a king cannot be his mother, although as a child Mandhata finds comfort in Yuvanashva's arms. The kingdom, unaware of the birth story of Mandhata, accepts him as the first born of king Yuvanashva and he becomes the crown prince of Vallabhi.

Yuvanashva believed that he was a man, but when he carried Mandhata and delivered

[4] (In South Asia) a person who was registered as male at birth but who identifies as female or as neither male nor female.

[5] In the context of Indian traditions, "Siddha" (Sanskrit: सिद्ध) refers to a "perfected one" or "accomplished one," often used to describe spiritual masters who have achieved a high degree of spiritual realization or enlightenment.

[6] In Hinduism, a Yagna (also spelled Yajna or Yagya) is a sacred Vedic ritual involving offerings to a sacred fire, often accompanied by chanting of Vedic mantras, and is seen as a way to connect with the divine and foster cosmic order.

him, Yuvanashva, starts having motherly feelings. This shows that he starts feeling like a woman trapped in a man's body.

Yet another character of the novel that fails to recognise with the gender binaries is Shilavati, king Yuvanashva's mother. The princess, was believed to be extremely wise and wanted to rule as the king of her kingdom, but unfortunately women were not allowed to rule. The news of her wisdom reached Vallabhi were the priests had predicted that prince Prasenjit will not be able to rule as a king but will produce a king for the kingdom. So the union of Prasenjit and Shilavati was proposed after which Shilavati married Prasenjit and came to Vallabhi. As the priests had predicted, Shilavati conceived, but Prasenjit died before the birth of Yuvanashva. She missed her husband but accepted the responsibility of ruling the kingdom as a guardian until her son could become the king. Shilavati felt that she was trapped in a woman's body with a man's desires to rule.

Somvati or Somvat is the minor character of the book that leads to the king's pregnancy. Somvat along with his friend Sumedha participates as a couple in the yagna as they needed a cow each to marry girls and become priests. The two Brahmana boys were inseparable and had the deepest bond. In order to procure a cow for Sumedha, Somvat agrees to adorn the clothes of a woman and visit Vallabhi as young Brahmana couple. But the queens learn their truth and they are to be punished by the king. At night when they are in the prison, the two boys fear what will happen to them, the *Yaksha* appears and trades Somvat's manhood against his womanhood that he had traded with Shikhandi. The next morning when the royal guards come, they find Somvat turned into Somvati. When they are produced before the king, Yuvanashva pronounces death sentence to them for cheating the people, unless they agree to be boys and marry other girls. But the boys claim that they are man and wife and do not wish to be separated. The king orders them to be burnt alive separately, leaving the two souls to roam in the palace and not achieve salvation as the king does not accept them as man and woman. Somvati feels deep love towards Sumedha and believes that she was a woman trapped in a man's body.

3. A King's dilemma

When Yuvanashva realises the way he feels for Mandhata, he wants to spend more and more time with his son, but Shilavati sends him off and instructs Simantini to keep Mandhata as far away as possible from Yuvanashva to protect his image as the king. Yuvanashva loves Mandhata deeply, and expects that Mandhata understands and accepts his as his mother. Mandhata truly believes that Simnatini is his mother, he loves her deeply, and fails to understand why his father has motherly feelings towards him. Yuvanashva tells him the story of his birth, and expects him to hug him like a mother. But Mandhata tells Yuvanashva that he is his father and he loves and respects him as a father and will never accept him to be his mother. This incident hurts Yuvanashva deeply and decides to renounce his kingdom. He leaves his kingdom and the two souls of Sumedha and Somvati follow him as devoted children. Yuvanashva tries to find answers to the questions like why does his have motherly feelings despite being a man? How did Somvat become Somvati and loved his best friend? Are feelings and desires different from the body? Is soul a man or a woman?

Yuvanashva being the king was expected to behave like a man and fight for his kingdom as a true Kshatriya. But after giving birth to Mandhata, he starts feeling like a woman and wants to be close to his child. This dilemma of gender binaries set by the society, frustrates Yuvanashva and the fact that his son does not accept him as his mother pushes him in a pit of misery.

4. Conclusion

The representation of QUEER in mythologies across the globe is largely restricted to homosexuality or same-sex relationships between the mythical characters. But in very few stories we find a detailed representation of the third, the fourth or the fifth gender largely accepted as transgender. In opposition to this we find rich inclusion of the various forms of gender in their physical, physiological, psychological and emotional forms. The

Pregnant King by Devdutt Pattanaik is a great attempt at revisiting the queer tales in the Hindu mythology and the gender inclusivity that is celebrated in the Hindu philosophies and traditions.

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32.

Bridging Cultures: Globalization, Technology and the Transformation of Literature and the Arts

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Abstract:

Globalization has profoundly reshaped literature and the arts, creating a dynamic and interconnected cultural landscape. This study investigates the transformative role of cultural exchange, focusing on the impact of emerging technologies such as Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR/AR) in fostering cross-cultural empathy and understanding. VR/AR can provide firsthand experiences of other cultures, cultivating empathy and reducing cultural biases. These technologies enable artists and writers to convey cultural stories in innovative ways, making them more accessible and relatable to global audiences. Employing a qualitative research method, the research combines a critical analysis of literary texts, artistic works, and technological adoption trends. The study argues that cultural exchange, when combined with emerging technologies like VR/AR, has the potential to transform how we perceive and engage with other cultures. These technologies amplify the effects of cultural exchange by making it more immersive, interactive, and impactful. The study examines how the blending of art forms and literary genres has led to innovative expressions, highlighting Indian literature's global reach. It analyzes the works of prominent Indian authors, including Arundhati Roy and Kamala Das, who address themes of feminism, caste discrimination, and social justice, contributing to a global dialogue on equity and inclusion. The article explores the growing engagement of artists and writers with pressing global issues such as climate change, emphasizing their role as advocates for social transformation. Analyzing these trends, the research argues that globalization, supported by technological advancements, is fostering mutual understanding, cultural sustainability, and a redefinition of collective identity in a globalized world.

Keywords: Globalization, Cultural Exchange, Virtual and Augmented Reality, Cultural Hybridity, Identity.

Introduction:

Globalization has profoundly transformed literature and the arts by fostering unprecedented cultural exchange and interconnectedness. As borders dissolve, diverse cultural narratives, traditions, and artistic expressions blend, creating hybrid forms that reflect a globalized world. Emerging technologies like Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR/AR) amplify this exchange, offering immersive experiences that deepen cross-cultural empathy and understanding. Literature and the arts have become platforms for addressing global themes such as social justice, climate change, and identity, transcending local contexts to resonate universally. This dynamic interplay enriches creative expression, promotes mutual understanding, and redefines cultural identities, making globalization a catalyst for innovation and inclusivity in the literary and artistic realms. Globalization has fundamentally reshaped the cultural landscape of the 21st century, creating a world where boundaries between nations and cultures are increasingly fluid. This interconnectedness has profoundly influenced literature and the arts, fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas, traditions, and creative expressions. As cultures blend and interact, new forms of artistic and literary expression emerge, reflecting the complexities of a globalized world. This research seeks to analyze the

transformative impact of globalization and cultural exchange on literature and the arts, with a particular focus on the role of emerging technologies, the global reach of Indian literature, and the engagement with pressing global themes such as social justice, identity, and cultural hybridity.

"Globalization has become an immensely popular topic among social scientists even though it is poorly defined and difficult to research systematically." (Crane, 01) Diana Crane's text *Culture and Globalization: Theoretical Models and Emerging Trends,* examines theoretical frameworks such as cultural imperialism and reception theory to analyze the impact of globalization on culture. While cultural imperialism emphasizes Western dominance in media and consumerism, Crane highlights the multidirectional nature of cultural flows and the agency of audiences in interpreting media. The text critiques the complexities of globalization, offering valuable insights into the role of media conglomerates and regional cultural networks. This analysis aligns with the broader discourse on cultural exchange, hybridity, and the transformative role of globalization in shaping literature and the arts.

The advent of technologies like Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) has introduced new dimensions to cultural exchange. These immersive technologies are not only redefining how art and literature are created and consumed but are also fostering cross-cultural empathy and understanding. Enabling audiences to experience diverse cultural narratives in deeply engaging ways, VR and AR are bridging gaps between communities and promoting a sense of shared humanity. This study explores how these technologies are being utilized to convey cultural stories, preserve heritage, and address global challenges, thereby reshaping the future of cultural exchange.

Indian literature serves as compelling in this context. With its rich tapestry of languages, traditions, and narratives, Indian literature has gained global prominence, facilitated by platforms like the Jaipur Literature Festival. Authors such as Arundhati Roy and Kamala Das have transcended cultural boundaries, addressing universal themes of feminism, caste discrimination, and social justice. Susan Comfort's analysis of Arundhati Roy's work highlights her role as a postcolonial environmental feminist, critiquing global capitalism's impact on India's environment and marginalized communities. Roy's integration of Marxist, postcolonial, and feminist paradigms offers a dynamic critique of both global and local power structures. Her work underscores the intersection of environmental degradation, social justice, and cultural identity, aligning with themes of globalization, cultural exchange, and activism in literature and the arts.

Julie Mullaney in her research article, "'Globalizing dissent'? Arundhati Roy, local and postcolonial feminisms in the transnational economy" analyses Arundhati Roy's work and how it explores her role as a global voice critiquing capitalism, feminism, and postcolonialism. Roy's polemical style, while at times hyperbolic, underscores the challenges of resisting co-option within transcultural exchange systems. Mullaney highlights Roy's intersection of local and global activism, aligning with themes of globalization, cultural hybridity, and the role of literature in advocating social justice and equity. Nighat Fatima's analysis of Kamala Das' poetry in her research article, "Feminism in the Treatment of Kamala Das' Poetic Imagery" highlights Das' feminist voice, using vivid imagery to challenge patriarchal norms and express feminine desires. Das' confessional style, influenced by global feminist movements, redefines Indian English poetry by addressing themes of gender justice and personal freedom. Her work exemplifies the intersection of cultural identity, feminism, and literary innovation in a globalized context. Their works not only reflect the socio-political realities of India but also resonate with global audiences, contributing to a broader dialogue on equity and inclusion. This research examines how Indian literature, through its global reach and thematic depth, exemplifies the transformative power of cultural exchange in a globalized world.

The study highlights the growing engagement of artists and writers with pressing global issues such as climate change, migration, and social justice. In an era of unprecedented

challenges, literature and the arts have become powerful tools for advocacy and change. Addressing these issues, artists and writers are not only raising awareness but also fostering a sense of global solidarity and responsibility. This research investigates how globalization has enabled these themes to transcend local contexts, creating a shared cultural discourse that resonates across borders.

At its core, this research aims to explore the multifaceted impact of globalization on literature and the arts. Svend Erik Larsen's text, *Literature and the Experience of Globalization* examines how literature reflects and shapes the human dimensions of globalization. Through close readings of works by authors like Shakespeare, Goethe, and Amitav Ghosh, Larsen explores themes of migration, translation, memory, and embodied knowledge. The text highlights literature's role in understanding globalization as an integral part of everyday life, aligning with the research's focus on cultural exchange and global interconnectedness. This research seeks to understand how cultural exchange, supported by technological advancements, is fostering mutual understanding, redefining collective identity, and promoting cultural sustainability. Analyzing the interplay between globalization, technology, and cultural production, the study offers insights into how literature and the arts can bridge cultural divides while preserving individual identities. The research envisions a future where cultural exchange, enriched by innovation and inclusivity, continues to shape a more empathetic and interconnected global society.

Globalization and Cultural Exchange in Literature and the Arts

Globalization and cultural exchange have profoundly reshaped literature and the arts, creating a dynamic interplay of ideas, traditions, and creative expressions across borders. Historically, the concept of cultural hybridity, introduced by theorists like Homi K. Bhabha, has been central to understanding how cultures blend and evolve through interaction. Linda Hamman's exploration of Homi K. Bhabha's 'third space' theory highlights its application in fostering inclusive and innovative corporate cultures. Emphasizing the merging of diverse cultural perspectives, her research focuses on cultural hybridity and globalization. Bhabha's framework offers valuable insights into how cross-cultural interactions can challenge power structures and generate transformative ideas, reinforcing the importance of cultural exchange in shaping inclusive and dynamic environments. Hybridity challenges the notion of pure, static cultural identities, emphasizing instead the fluid and interconnected nature of cultural production. Similarly, transnationalism highlights the movement of people, ideas, and artistic practices across nations, fostering a global cultural network that transcends geographical boundaries. These theoretical frameworks provide a lens to analyze how globalization has transformed literature and the arts into spaces of cross-cultural dialogue and innovation.

Globalization has facilitated unprecedented cross-cultural collaborations, enabling artists and writers to draw inspiration from diverse traditions and perspectives. Literary festivals, such as the Jaipur Literature Festival, and global platforms have become hubs for cultural exchange, bringing together creators from different backgrounds to share and reinterpret stories. In the arts, collaborative projects often merge traditional and contemporary styles, creating hybrid forms that reflect the complexities of a globalized world. For instance, Indian authors like Arundhati Roy and Kamala Das address universal themes of feminism and social justice, resonating with global audiences while rooted in local contexts. Similarly, technologies like Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR/AR) enable immersive storytelling, allowing audiences to experience diverse cultural narratives firsthand. These collaborations not only enrich creative expression but also foster mutual understanding, making globalization a powerful force for cultural innovation and inclusivity.

The Role of Emerging Technologies (VR/AR)

Emerging technologies like Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) are revolutionizing the way cultural narratives and artistic expressions are experienced, offering immersive and interactive platforms that transcend traditional boundaries. These technologies enable users to engage with

cultural stories, traditions, and art forms in deeply personal and transformative ways, fostering a sense of connection and empathy across diverse perspectives.

VR and AR create immersive cultural experiences by allowing users to "step into" different worlds, whether it's a virtual recreation of a historical event, a traditional festival, or an artistic masterpiece. For instance, VR can transport users to the bustling streets of an Indian bazaar or the serene landscapes of a Japanese garden, providing a firsthand experience of cultural contexts that might otherwise remain inaccessible. AR, on the other hand, enhances real-world environments by overlaying digital elements, such as interactive art installations or contextual information about cultural artefacts, enriching the viewer's understanding and engagement. These technologies democratize access to cultural experiences, making them more inclusive and accessible to global audiences. One of the most significant potentials of VR and AR lies in their ability to foster empathy and understanding. By immersing users in the lived experiences of others, these technologies break down cultural barriers and challenge stereotypes. For example, a VR experience depicting the life of a refugee can evoke a profound emotional response, helping users empathize with the struggles and resilience of displaced communities. Similarly, AR applications in museums can provide nuanced narratives about artefacts, highlighting their cultural significance and historical context, thereby promoting a deeper appreciation of diverse heritages.

Moreover, VR and AR are powerful tools for preserving and revitalizing endangered cultures. Indigenous communities, for instance, are using these technologies to document and share their traditions, languages, and stories with the world, ensuring their survival for future generations. Creating immersive, interactive, and emotionally resonant experiences, VR and AR are not only transforming how we engage with culture but also fostering a more empathetic and interconnected global society. These technologies hold immense potential to bridge cultural divides, promote mutual understanding, and celebrate the richness of human diversity.

Indian Literature and Globalization

Indian literature has gained significant global prominence, serving as a powerful medium for cultural exchange and dialogue. Platforms like the Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF) have played a pivotal role in amplifying its reach, attracting writers, critics, and readers from around the world. JLF, often dubbed the "greatest literary show on Earth," provides a space for Indian authors to share their narratives with international audiences, fostering cross-cultural understanding and collaboration. Similarly, global publishing houses and digital platforms have made Indian literature more accessible, enabling works to transcend geographical boundaries and resonate with diverse readers. This global reach underscores the universal appeal of Indian stories, which often address themes that transcend local contexts.

Arundhati Roy and Kamala Das are among the most prominent Indian authors whose works have garnered international acclaim. Roy's *The God of Small Things* and her non-fiction essays explore themes of social justice, caste discrimination, and environmental degradation, offering a critique of both local and global power structures.

"He bought the skyblue Plymouth from an old Englishman in Munnar. He became a familiar sight in Ayemenem, coasting importantly down the narrow road in his wide car, looking outwardly elegant but sweating freely inside his woollen suits. He wouldn't allow Mammachi or anyone else in the family to use it, or even to sit in it. The Plymouth was Pappachi's revenge." (Roy, 23)

This quote from *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy reflects themes of power, control, and cultural hybridity, which are central to the research on globalization and cultural exchange. Pappachi's ownership of the skyblue Plymouth, a symbol of Western modernity and status, represents the lingering influence of colonialism and the imposition of foreign cultural values in postcolonial India. His refusal to let anyone else use the car underscores his desire to maintain authority and exclusivity,

mirroring the power dynamics often critiqued in postcolonial literature. The Plymouth, bought from an old Englishman, also symbolizes cultural hybridity—a blending of Western and Indian identities. Pappachi's outward elegance but internal discomfort (sweating in woollen suits) highlights the tension between adopting foreign cultural symbols and the inability to fully reconcile them with local realities. This aligns with Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "third space," where cultural interactions create new, hybrid identities that challenge established norms.

The above expression illustrates how globalization and cultural exchange can lead to complex power struggles and identity conflicts. It also underscores the role of literature in critiquing these dynamics, as Roy uses Pappachi's character to explore themes of cultural domination, resistance, and the lasting impact of colonialism on individual and collective identities.

Her writing, deeply rooted in the Indian context, resonates with global audiences by addressing universal issues of inequality and oppression. Similarly, Kamala Das's poetry, characterized by its confessional style and bold exploration of feminine desires, challenges patriarchal norms and advocates for gender equality.

> "Don't write in English, they said, English is
> Not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
> Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
> Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
> Any language I like? The language I speak,
> Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
> All mine, mine alone." (Das)

The above lines from Kamala Das's poem, 'An Introduction' powerfully encapsulates the central themes of cultural hybridity and linguistic identity that are key to understanding globalization's impact on literature. The speaker's defiant rejection of critics who demand linguistic purity ("Don't write in English") directly challenges the colonial legacy that often positions English as a language of cultural hegemony. This resistance mirrors the broader postcolonial struggle against imposed cultural norms that the research examines, particularly in the context of Indian literature's global engagement. The poet's assertion that English becomes her own through its "distortions" and "queernesses" exemplifies Homi Bhabha's concept of the "third space," where cultural and linguistic mixing creates new, hybrid forms of expression.

The passage highlights the transformative agency of writers in a globalized literary landscape. Much like Arundhati Roy's subversive use of language in The God of Small Things, Das's declaration represents how postcolonial writers appropriate and reinvent dominant languages to assert their cultural identity. This aligns perfectly with the research's examination of how Indian authors navigate between local traditions and global audiences, creating works that simultaneously preserve cultural specificity while engaging in universal dialogues. The personal nature of the poet's claim ("mine alone") underscores the individualized nature of this cultural negotiation, where each writer's unique voice contributes to the broader tapestry of global literature.

The poem reflects the paradoxical nature of cultural exchange in globalization. While English serves as a global lingua franca that enables wider reach for Indian writers, its adoption doesn't necessarily mean cultural submission. Instead, as Das demonstrates, writers can infuse the language with local sensibilities, creating what the research identifies as 'glocal' expressions - globally accessible yet locally rooted. This tension between global form and local content mirrors the broader dynamics the research explores in contemporary arts, where traditional boundaries are constantly being redrawn through creative adaptation rather than passive acceptance. The poet's insistence on linguistic autonomy thus becomes a microcosm of the larger cultural negotiations happening in postcolonial literature worldwide.

Ultimately, this passage exemplifies the research's central thesis about literature's role in challenging and reshaping cultural power structures. Like the Indian authors discussed in the study who address global themes while maintaining local perspectives, Das transforms the colonial language into a vehicle for personal and cultural liberation. The research positions such literary acts as crucial interventions in the

global cultural economy, where marginalized voices appropriate dominant mediums to assert their place in an interconnected world. This quote perfectly illustrates how globalization in literature isn't about homogenization, but rather about the creative tension between global accessibility and cultural authenticity that produces truly transformative works of art.

Das' work reflects the influence of global feminist movements while remaining firmly grounded in the Indian experience. Themes of feminism, social justice, and caste discrimination are central to Indian literature, reflecting the country's complex socio-political landscape. Authors like Roy and Das use their platforms to highlight the struggles of marginalized communities, giving voice to the silenced and oppressed. Their works not only critique systemic injustices but also envision a more equitable and inclusive society. By addressing these themes, Indian literature contributes to global conversations on equity, identity, and human rights, demonstrating its transformative power as a tool for social change. Through its global reach and thematic depth, Indian literature exemplifies the profound impact of cultural exchange in a globalized world.

Global Issues in Art and Literature

Artists and writers are increasingly using their platforms to address pressing global issues such as climate change and social justice, transforming literature and the arts into powerful tools for advocacy and change. Through their work, they raise awareness, provoke thought, and inspire action, bridging the gap between local and global concerns. In literature, authors like Amitav Ghosh, in The Great Derangement, and Arundhati Roy, in her essays, confront the climate crisis, highlighting its disproportionate impact on marginalized communities. Their works not only critique systemic failures but also envision sustainable futures, urging readers to rethink their relationship with the environment. Similarly, poets like Kamala Das and novelists like Rohinton Mistry address social justice issues, from gender inequality to caste discrimination, giving voice to the oppressed and challenging societal norms.

In the visual and performing arts, installations, films, and performances are being used to depict the urgency of climate action and social equity. For instance, Olafur Eliasson's environmental art installations and Ai Weiwei's politically charged works provoke public discourse on global challenges. These artistic expressions humanize abstract issues, making them relatable and compelling. Engaging with global issues, artists and writers foster empathy, solidarity, and collective responsibility. Their work transcends borders, creating a shared cultural discourse that inspires change and underscores the transformative power of art in shaping a more just and sustainable world.

The Future of Cultural Exchange in a Globalized World

The future of cultural exchange in a globalized world will be shaped by technological advancements, evolving narratives, and a growing emphasis on mutual understanding and cultural sustainability. Emerging technologies like Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR/AR) will continue to revolutionize how we experience literature and the arts, offering immersive, interactive platforms that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries. These tools will enable deeper engagement with diverse cultural narratives, fostering empathy and cross-cultural dialogue.

Globalization will further amplify the blending of artistic traditions, leading to innovative hybrid forms that reflect the interconnectedness of our world. Literary festivals, digital platforms, and collaborative projects will serve as hubs for cultural exchange, bringing together creators and audiences from diverse backgrounds. Themes of climate change, migration, and social justice will dominate artistic expression, as writers and artists use their work to advocate for global equity and sustainability.

Mutual understanding will be central to this future, as cultural exchange promotes tolerance and appreciation for diversity. Preserving individual cultural identities while fostering shared human experiences, globalization can create a more inclusive and empathetic global society. Cultural

sustainability will also play a critical role, ensuring that traditions and heritage are preserved and revitalized for future generations. In this way, literature and the arts will continue to bridge divides, inspire change, and celebrate the richness of human creativity in a globalized world.

Conclusion:

To conclude, this research highlights the transformative impact of globalization and cultural exchange on literature and the arts, emphasizing the role of emerging technologies, the global reach of Indian literature, and the engagement with pressing global issues. Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR/AR) are reshaping cultural narratives by creating immersive experiences that foster empathy and understanding. Indian authors like Arundhati Roy and Kamala Das exemplify how literature can transcend borders, addressing universal themes of feminism, social justice, and caste discrimination while contributing to global dialogues. Artists and writers are increasingly using their platforms to advocate for climate action and equity, underscoring the power of art as a tool for social change.

The research underscores that globalization, supported by technological innovation, is fostering mutual understanding, cultural sustainability, and a redefinition of collective identity. These trends suggest a future where literature and the arts continue to bridge cultural divides, promoting inclusivity and empathy in an interconnected world. The implications are profound: as cultural exchange evolves, it will play a pivotal role in addressing global challenges, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering a shared sense of humanity. Embracing these opportunities, we can build a more tolerant, equitable, and culturally rich global society.

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33.

Reclaiming Silenced Voices: Meena Kandasamy's Poetic Critique of Caste and Gender Oppression

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Abstract

Meena Kandasamy's poetry in *Touch* serves as a powerful critique of the systemic oppression faced by Dalit women, exposing the intersections of caste, gender, and class through reinterpreted myths and traditions. This study analyzes three poems—"Prayers to The Red Slayer," "Mascara," and "Narration"—to explore how Kandasamy challenges the patriarchal and casteist structures embedded in Hindu mythology and the Devadasi system. In "Prayers to The Red Slayer," Kandasamy subverts the divine image of Goddess Saraswati, portraying her as a victim of patriarchal violence to question the sanctity of religious narratives. "Mascara" critiques the Devadasi system, revealing its exploitation of Dalit girls under the guise of religious devotion, perpetuating trauma and social stigma. "Narration" highlights the triple marginalization of Dalit women, silenced by caste hierarchy, patriarchal norms, and economic exploitation. The article contrasts India's constitutional guarantees of equality and liberty with the persistent realities of corruption and cultural denial that sustain practices like the Devadasi system. Kandasamy's work demands accountability and cultural reform, urging the dismantling of oppressive traditions through legal enforcement, rehabilitation, mental health support, and Dalit feminist leadership. Her poetry amplifies silenced voices, transforming scars into resistance and calling for a reimagined society that upholds justice and equality.

Keywords: Dalit Women, Meena Kandasamy, Caste Oppression, Gender Violence, Devadasi System, Hindu Mythology, Triple Marginalization, Constitutional Failure, Feminist Resistance, Cultural Reform.

Introduction:

To comprehend the struggles of marginalized communities in Meena Kandasamy's poetry, one must first explore the historical and social context of the Dalit caste. The term "Dalit," meaning "broken" or "oppressed" in Marathi, encapsulates a centuries-long legacy of systemic marginalization within Indian society (Ambedkar 14). Originating from the Vedic Varna system (circa 1500–500 BCE), the caste hierarchy divided society into four occupational groups: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants), and Shudras (laborers). The "Purusha Sukta" hymn in the Rigveda outlines this division, portraying society as emerging from a cosmic being's body (Doniger 112). Beyond these groups, the Avarna, or "casteless" communities, faced extreme exclusion, deemed untouchable and stripped of basic rights. This rigid structure, reinforced by notions of racial and spiritual purity, placed darker-skinned indigenous

populations at the bottom, as the Sanskrit term "varna" (color) suggests (Phule 23). Dalit women, positioned at the intersection of caste and gender oppression, endure compounded discrimination. Meena Kandasamy, a Dalit poet and activist, uses her poetry to amplify these silenced voices, challenging myths, traditions, and systemic violence.

Mythological Reinterpretation in "Prayers to The Red Slayer"

In her poem "Prayers to The Red Slayer," Kandasamy subverts Hindu mythology by reimagining Goddess Saraswati, traditionally revered as the deity of wisdom, as a victim of patriarchal violence. She writes, "and who, according to reliable sources / raped your own daughter" (Kandasamy, Touch 34). This provocative reference to Lord Brahma's violation of Saraswati exposes the hypocrisy embedded in religious narratives that glorify divine figures while ignoring their flaws. Kandasamy's critique questions the sanctity of a culture that venerates a violated goddess yet silences mortal women facing similar atrocities. If a goddess cannot escape patriarchal violence, what hope exists for Dalit women navigating caste and gender oppression? This poem challenges readers to confront the contradictions between sacred ideals and lived realities, urging a reevaluation of faith's role in perpetuating injustice (Gupta 45).

The Devadasi System in "Mascara"

Kandasamy's poem "Mascara" delves into the Devadasi system, a tradition that exploits young girls, primarily from Dalit and impoverished communities, under the guise of religious devotion. The term "Devadasi," meaning "servant of God," belies a brutal reality where girls are "dedicated" to temples, stripped of autonomy, and subjected to sexual exploitation by priests and upper-caste men (Srinivasan 89). Despite legal bans, such as the Karnataka Devadasis (Prohibition of Dedication) Act of 1982, the practice persists in regions like Maharashtra and Karnataka, perpetuating cycles of trauma and stigma (Human Rights Watch). Kandasamy portrays the Devadasi's plight: "Mascara… / it serves to tell her / that long buried / hazy dreams / of a virgin soul / have dark outlines" (Touch 56). These lines evoke the psychological toll of exploitation, where the Devadasi's identity is reduced to a façade masking her suffering. The poem critiques how religion, far from liberating, becomes a tool of oppression, binding women to a cycle of abuse justified by tradition (Chakravarti 102).

The Devadasi's suffering extends beyond physical violation. Socially ostracized, they face lifelong stigma, economic abandonment, and psychological trauma, including depression and PTSD (Human Rights Watch). As they age, many are discarded, left to survive through begging or continued exploitation, their daughters often trapped in the same cycle. Kandasamy questions the moral foundation of a deity who permits such cruelty: if God is omnipotent, why does this practice endure? Her poetry indicts both divine authority and the human agents—priests and upper-caste men—who exploit under the cloak of spirituality.

Triple Marginalization in "Narration"

In "Narration," Kandasamy explores the compounded oppression of Dalit women, marginalized by caste, gender, and economic status. The speaker laments, "I'll weep to you about / my landlord" (Touch 78), alluding to sexual violence cloaked in feudal power. The landlord, a symbol of upper-caste dominance, exploits the woman's body, yet in that moment, she notes, "I was not an untouchable then" (Touch 79). This line exposes the hypocrisy of caste purity, which deems her "polluting" except when her body serves upper-caste desires. Similarly, the "priest with lecherous eyes" (Touch 80) violates her as a child, exploiting his religious authority. The poem's most poignant moment comes when the speaker questions, "How can I say / anything, anything / against my own man?" (Touch 81). This reveals the internalized patriarchy that silences Dalit women, forcing them to protect abusers within their own communities to preserve familial or social ties (Rege 67).

The Dalit woman's silence is not passive but a survival mechanism in a society that denies her agency. Her pain, suppressed in

public, erupts in private as "a flood of incoherencies" (Touch 82), reflecting the emotional turmoil of navigating triple marginalization. Kandasamy's poetry unveils this internal conflict, portraying the Dalit woman's resilience as she endures a world that rejects her humanity while exploiting her body.

Constitutional Ideals vs. Lived Realities:

Kandasamy's poetry highlights the chasm between India's constitutional promises and the realities faced by Dalit women. Articles 14 (equality), 15(2) (non-discrimination), 21 (life and liberty), and 23 (prohibition of trafficking) are enshrined in law, yet they fail to protect Devadasis and other marginalized women (Constitution of India). A 2017 study by the National Law School, Bangalore, found that over 85% of rescued Devadasis received no state support, despite Supreme Court mandates (NLSIU 34). Corruption, caste complicity, and societal denial undermine legal protections, leaving survivors vulnerable to further exploitation. Kandasamy's work demands accountability, exposing how laws remain hollow without cultural reform.

Path to Liberation:

To address the systemic oppression depicted in Kandasamy's poetry, India must move beyond symbolic legislation:

1. Enforce Accountability: Prosecute priests, landlords, and traffickers involved in the Devadasi system.
2. Comprehensive Rehabilitation: Provide housing, education, healthcare, and employment for survivors.
3. Mental Health Support: Establish trauma counseling and free healthcare in affected regions.
4. Dalit Feminist Leadership: Amplify Dalit women's voices in policy and temple reform.
5. Public Awareness: Launch campaigns to challenge traditions that violate human rights.
6. Temple Reform: Dismantle caste-based authority in religious institutions.

Conclusion:

Meena Kandasamy's *Touch*—through poems like "Prayers to The Red Slayer," "Mascara," and "Narration"—amplifies the silenced voices of Dalit women, exposing the intersections of caste, gender, and class oppression. By reinterpreting myths and critiquing traditions like the Devadasi system, Kandasamy challenges the sanctity of oppressive structures. Her poetry is a call to action, urging society to bridge the gap between constitutional ideals and lived realities. The scars of Dalit women, though indelible, are not invisible; through Kandasamy's words, they demand justice, recognition, and a reimagined culture that prioritizes equality over tradition.

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34.

The Question of Ambiguous Feline Corporeal Identity in Takashi Hiraide's *The Guest Cat*

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Abstract:

Cats, though they have appeared frequently in literary works and cultural texts, have been mostly used for their abstract signification or with some amount of anthropomorphism. Such depictions of cats often reduce them to animal stereotypes or as a means to provide a perspective—both attempts essentialising or exoticising them (cats). Even when one finds ample feline characters in fiction, their corporeal identities elude the narrator's attention as if cats do not have their bodies. A study of animal corporeality is an exciting branch of scrutiny within Critical Animal Studies, which examines the bodily features and identities of animals. This approach, when applied to literary analysis, helps one to show the writer's observation of animal bodies and animal behaviour in terms of physical manifestations.

This paper analyses Takashi Hiraide's novel *The Guest Cat* to show how the novelist makes an attempt to depict a cat named Chibi with abundant corporeal details, though he falls short of making the corporeal self of the cat less ambiguous. It also focusses on the novelist's effort in constructing a feline corporeal identity in terms of the animal's colour, fur, body language, and other details. The basic argument in this paper is that Hiraide essentialises or makes abstract Chibi the cat and fails to help the readers perceive the physical and material realities of a cat, though he focalises the feline protagonist. The paper mobilises the tenets of Animal Studies and Corporeal Animal Studies in analysing the primary text.

Keywords: Animal Studies, Feline Identity, Feline Corporeality, Feline Fiction

Coexistence has been a primary cause for the survival of human and nonhuman beings alike. Albeit, humans have always had a utilitarian view of nonhuman beings and, as such, considered themselves thus superior to the latter. But with the interdisciplinary fields of Animal Studies, Critical Animal Studies and the like focussing on human-animal relationships and representation of animals in different fields, be it history, culture, sociology, or literature, the narratives have been seeing a rapid change in design. Animal characters—including the pig, goose, rabbit, cat, dog, bee, mouse, horse, squirrel, duckling, seagull, giraffe, cow, bear, deer, gorilla, dolphin, quail, lion, leopard, swan, elephant, serpent, and the lot—are known to be documented in literary and cultural texts since ages. Novels like Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty*, George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, and Hiro Arikawa's *The Travelling Cat Chronicles*, among others, are a testament to this fact. There is little doubt that these texts provide a better insight into the human-animal relationship through a depiction

of the animal consciousness and sentience that they highlight. To avoid falling into the trap of essentialising or exoticizing these animals as certain stereotypes, a balance is stricken by way of studying animal corporeality as well. A branch of Animal Studies, animal corporeality examines the bodily features and identities of animals. Animal corporeality, like animal behaviour, is an important component of animal identity. Though human beings, in general, consider all animals of the same species under a generic name, it is arguable that no two cats or two dogs are the same persons. Physically, animals within a species may differ widely as human beings do. The somatic representation of animals, therefore, is as important as their representation in terms of anthropomorphised characters in fiction and film. Furthermore, it could be argued that animals, like human beings, are guided by senses, and the sensory apparatuses of animals such as their vision, hearing, touch, ability to taste and olfactory sense are all extensions of the corporeal functions of the animal organism. Like human beings who have varied personalities in terms of the types of bodies, animals—within a particular species—have varied personhoods based on their physical abilities and disabilities. Another significant point which could be considered within the domain of Animal Studies is animal disability which might provide a link between Animal Studies and Disability Studies. It is not uncommon in literature and other cultural texts to find animals as individuals with varying degrees of physical abilities and disabilities. Another point to consider in this discussion is the effect of age on animal bodies. Within the life cycle of an animal depicted in literary texts, it might possess the body of an offspring, a youthful body or an ageing body.

Feline fiction now derives from Feline Studies, which, in actuality, derives from Animal Studies, thereby laying emphasis on studying the *cat* in both ways, literally and figuratively. However, it has been observed that, of late, these furry creatures have been increasingly used in literary and cultural texts via anthropomorphic depictions and characterisations. Incidentally, feline fiction has feline lead characters, and depicts, by and large, the feline world and its preoccupations including nocturnal forays, hunting escapades, relationships with human masters, feline body language and feline behaviour. Literary cats are mostly part of the feline imaginary as they are the creations of human narratives and, hence, a complete understanding of feline consciousness and feline psyche is almost impossible. What is readily available for a human writer is, therefore, the body and the physical movements of cats rather than their psyches and emotions. In this sense, too, feline corporeality assumes a significant place in depicting feline characters in cultural texts. Studies have shown there is much to discern of cats through their corporeal selves as there is to do from their consciousness.

Takashi Hiraide, too, in his novel *The Guest Cat*, through his narrator, seems focussed on the corporeal identity of a cat named Chibi, as he goes on to closely observe and describe the cat's body structure, features, movements and actions in the course of his daily life; which, in turn, relates to this cat's behaviour and understanding of its surroundings. Hiraide emphatically, although unwittingly, documents the affectations of these physical manifestations on the life of the narrator and his wife. The narrator—an unnamed writer—and his wife live in a rented cottage with a garden and a couple of lanes surrounding it. It is this quaint and quiet neighbourhood that acts as the backdrop for the interactions between the narrator-wife duo and a stray cat, named Chibi by the next-door neighbour's boy, and as a setting for the subtle impact that the cat's presence has on their lives.

The narrator and his wife come across as a family that lives a mundane life without giving it much thought or focus. They have been tenants at the guesthouse in one corner of the estate's expanse for two years now, with not much having changed during this period. In fact, the narrator is very vocal when he acknowledges—one, their choice to live in a neighbourhood surrounded mostly by "quite a large number of elderly people" (18), and two, their neutral feelings towards pets of any kind:

> …there was a clause appended to the agreement stating that no children or pets were allowed. Neither of us especially wanted a child at that point in our lives, even though we were on the verge of passing beyond our mid-thirties. And when it came

> to what are referred to as pets, neither of us especially liked cats, and the notion of owning a dog had never even come up. (Hiraide 7-8)

However, with the entry of this cat, Chibi, into their neighbourhood, things begin to change, much to the astonishment of both, the narrator and the reader. For, despite making plain that they steered clear of the idea of any pet, be it a cat or a dog, the narrator seems to notice and observe a stray cat in the house's yard, and doesn't seem to mind its presence:

> With its landscape of trees and little hills, pond and flower beds, the imposing garden of the main house was most agreeable to the cat. After first stepping into the guesthouse's small garden, the cat would set out on its own for the expanse of the big house's yard.
>
> Whenever the door to our small garden was left open, the cat was in the habit of peeking inside our house on its way to and from the main yard. (Hiraide 10)

The narrator provides vivid descriptions of the cat and its corporeal appearance which speak a lot about the cat's nature, moods, behaviour, actions, etc. It might come as a shock to the reader but the narrator's first impression of the cat is that of admiration and appreciation. The narrator characterises Chibi just like one would a person:

> Chibi was a jewel of a cat. Her pure white fur was mottled with several lampblack blotches containing just a bit of light brown. … These were her individual characteristics—slim and small, with ears that stood out, tapering off beautifully at the tips, and often twitching. She would approach silently and undetected to rub up against one's legs. At first I thought Chibi avoided me because I was not used to cats, but this seems not to have been the case. When a girl who often passed along Lightning Alley stopped and crouched to gaze at the cat, it did not run away. But as soon as she attempted to touch it, the cat quickly slipped off, avoiding contact at all costs. The cat's manner of rejection was like cold, white light. (Hiraide 11)

In the above extract, though the narrator seems to individualise Chibi in terms of certain physical features such as the colours in her coat and the position of her ears, one gets a feeling that he has not quite got access to the corporeal identity in its fullest sense. This elusive corporeality is allegorised in the cat's attempt to slip off, avoiding physical contact with human beings. Though the narrator manages to depict Chibi in her visual appearance, the tactile experience of holding or petting the cat is still out of bounds.

Even the narrator's wife treats the cat as an individual possessing a character, whose presence has a bearing on her moods and likings: "What's interesting about animals, my wife explained, is that even though a cat may be a cat, in the end, each individual has its own character. "For me, Chibi is a friend with whom I share an understanding, and who just happens to have taken on the form of a cat"" (Hiraide 36). Though the narrator's wife is open to the idea that a cat can be an individual, her interest in Chibi seems to be conditioned by having a friend in the cat. This indicates her hurry in anthropomorphising the cat and overlooking the corporeal specificities that make Chibi different from other cats.

The narrator also observes that Chibi, except for the time when it first appeared in the alley next to their home, had never let out a meow, ever. The narrator feels that this was Chibi's way of communicating her choice to not "let us hear its voice" (12). If that was not enough to assert her independence, Chibi's actions would do the needful:

> Chibi's independence would manifest itself in unexpected ways, even while performing acts of incredible athletic skill. Casting aside the Ping-Pong ball, she turned about at an acute angle, yet in the next moment she had placed her tiny paw on the head of a toad concealed in the shade of one of the landscape rocks. Then just as suddenly she flew to the other side of the garden, extending one of her front legs to slip into a clump of bushes. (Hiraide 13)

Chibi, unlike other cats who were expected to generally quieten down as they grow, develops into a more fervent player, be it with a ball or the clothesline. She begins to visit the narrator-wife duo more often than not, "gaze intently at its occupants, then purposefully turn around and walk back out, as if to lead us to the garden. This process would be repeated until she got a response" (Hiraide 14). Then, one day, as she steps into the narrator's abode for the first time, Chibi cautiously moves around the house, surveying it all around with curious eyes. Now accustomed to both, the house and its keepers, Chibi strolls around leisurely, though well-hidden, without making any sound. By now, the narrator is forced to attend to the physical

postures and movements of Chibi that give her an identity of her own. This marks the beginning of the narrator's interest in the corporeal identity of Chibi.

The narrator mentions a peculiar incident when guests are at the narrator's home. On this particular day, he finds Chibi's behaviour rather unique: "Aware of the strangers, she circled several times around my wife who was standing, as if to lay claim to her. She let it be known that we were now her caretakers" (Hiraide 36). Chibi's body language of endearing herself to human beings and differentiating her human companions from strangers is highlighted here.

The narrator makes accurate observations about Chibi and her hunting instincts. Whenever Chibi is fed shrimp by the narrator's wife, Chibi's body reacts in a certain manner: "The fur on Chibi's back stood up like a shark's dorsal fin. Her tail swelled up like a raccoon's. …you could see the red tongue in her mouth curl like a flame" (Hiraide 40). Despite making an effort to depict Chibi's body language accurately, the narrator has to use a series of similes drawn from the anatomy of other animals to discuss Chibi's body. This search for extra-feline corporeal features reveals the human limitation of understanding feline corporeality completely. One time, Chibi, unable to suppress her instincts, moves into a hunting posture and "sunk her fangs deeply into my wife's hand as she attempted to pull the shrimp away. The blood began to flow" (Hiraide 40). Other times, she exhibits drastically opposing behaviour:

> One afternoon after the spring equinox had passed, Chibi had been out hunting. She arrived with a sparrow between her jaws. With her hackles up, she let out a howl and, aggressively stomping to make her footsteps heard, trotted around and around the guesthouse. I had heard that when a cat brings in a kill, it always brings it back to show its owners. It was almost as if the house itself was the subject of this display for Chibi, as she circled it many times over, yowling the whole time. Afterward she went to the vegetable garden on the far eastern end of the main garden and played with the unlucky sparrow until it no longer moved. (Hiraide 36)

Feline sleep pattern is a somatic aspect that the narrator and his wife try to imitate: "Chibi was able to sleep comfortably whenever she wanted. And from then on we got in the habit of laying out the futon early in the evening so that we too, the human residents, could sleep any time we wanted as well" (Hiraide 37).

Despite his keen interest in the physical movements and behaviour of Chibi, the narrator fails to understand the meaning of these movements in the life of a cat. He continues to liken them to human movements without really knowing that feline mobility is driven by feline personality:

> Chibi usually behaved coolly toward humans, and yet—when she came over from the neighbors to the east— she seemed completely transformed, sticking her nose into every corner of the expanse of greenery, intensely focused, plunging her front feet into things, jumping and prancing, and taking off running in circles at top speed as if she were completely out of control. (Hiraide 53)

Chibi continues to be a spectacle for the narrator who is mostly amused, and, at times, surprised with the agility and the spurt of energy that she is capable of. What he considers as unique and fascinating could be the movements of routine in the life of a cat. By being incomprehensible in her bodily movements, Chibi metaphorically stands for the feline corporeal reality which is beyond human understanding:

> The garden was like a forest to Chibi. Sometimes I'd go on long walks with her, watching her respond intensely to her entire surroundings, the energy rippling through her whole body: she would race recklessly around one particular area and then climb high up into one of the trees, exposing her body in midair as if about to veer off in another direction, trembling ... and there I was below, taking in the whole show. (Hiraide 53)

The narrator observes keenly Chibi's grooming and sleeping rituals. However, in his choice of words such as 'small' and 'precise', he betrays the human tendency to judge a cat's body language with a pair of seasoned judgemental eyes. The grooming and sleeping are not depicted as a cat's agential acts, but rather as the acts observed by a more agential human being:

> Often Chibi would be in the midst of grooming herself, using her small, precise tongue, and would suddenly stop and look back over her shoulder at the intruder. Then after a while, when my wife had another peek, she would be nearly asleep, eyelids sagging and her body rolled up into a ball. Given a little more time, she would be sleeping peacefully

> her white belly moving up and down with her breathing. (Hiraide 58)

Feline vocalisation is a key element of feline identity. The fact of the matter is that, despite the common sounds made by cats, each cat is potentially capable of varying the pitch and the projection which most human beings fail to notice. Justina Sumilova, in her article "Experiencing Animals from Corporeal Perspective in Contemporary World" draws attention towards the very same argument: "Humans do not understand the meowing of the cat and do not consider those sounds to be language or words. Therefore, it seems that animals cannot speak because they cannot articulate and express themselves in such a way as it would be understandable to humans" (Sumilova 257). The interpretation of the narrator and his wife about Chibi's sounds is —for the very same reason, perhaps —way off-target when it comes to decoding the cat's corporeal self:

> Chibi, who had been coming over to our house every morning and every night for who knows how long and had never let out a sound, now, for the first time, opened her mouth and began expressing herself at great length. The content of her speech—or so my wife reported to me with the utmost seriousness—was not about thanking us for taking care of her all of the time but rather, the usual social niceties, chatter about the weather and so on, and all the other insincere politenesses that neighbors often exchange.
>
> Even for my wife, who to all appearances seemed to have such a rapport with Chibi, this was the only time she made her voice heard. And of course her reserve went without saying when it came to adult males, from whom Chibi always kept a certain distance. (Hiraide 62)

At one point when the narrator observes an aggressive physical move from Chibi, he interprets it by appropriating that to the body language of a bigger cat. He also likens Chibi to a vulnerable woman, completely missing out on the corporeal nuances of her behaviour in the process:

> Chibi crouched down, feet still placed together, and shaped her mouth as if about to roar like a savage beast, all the while glaring at me fixedly. Meanwhile, she gathered herself as if she were about to pounce. Perhaps it was a form of intimidation meant as a proper young lady's preemptive strike against a potential molester. (Hiraide 63)

The narrator continues to depict Chibi's bodily details and, this time, it is the injured body of the cat. He presents to the readers the sight of a wound on the cat's body though the description fails to transfer the pain that the cat experiences. Indeed, feline pain is a topic that is under-expressed in literature and cultural discourses:

> Chibi emerged from the closet and jumped down onto the tatami mat floor. She stood still there for a while—something wasn't right. Some of the white fur on her back was torn out, and through it you could see the red-colored skin. Chibi looked up at my wife for a while and then slowly returned to her place next door.
>
> It appeared that she wasn't injured badly, so my wife calmed herself and returned to her desk where she had a rush job waiting. In less than fifteen minutes Chibi was back. She had gauze bandages wrapped around her torso. She jumped up on the desk as if to say, "look what happened to me." Then she sat down, exposing her helpless figure to my wife, and gazed at her with a feeble expression. (Hiraide 65-66)

The narrator represents Chibi in such a way that the cat is subject to an observer, rather than being the subject of the story. Sumilova emphasises the importance of understanding the experience of animals from a corporeal perspective:

> Human and animal gaze creates the state of mutual non-understanding, and human does not think about the fact that the animal can look back at the human. When animal is able to look back, at such case the animal becomes the other. We find the other consciousness in the form of the body, and we can experience this consciousness only from our perspective. (Sumilova 260)

The narrator makes an attempt to admit his inability to understand feline corporeality completely. To suggest this point, he imagines what a cat would think about human tears. This change in perspective, though speciesist in nature, foregrounds the need to understand animal pain and trauma though the animal subjects do not weep like human beings: "Chibi stared intently with her deep green eyes at the clear liquid flowing from my wife's eyes and rolling down her cheeks—these human things called tears" (Hiraide 66).

Towards the end of the novel, the narrator reports Chibi's death after being hit by a vehicle. This description has the detachment of reportage. Perhaps the narrator adopts this clinical distance in describing feline death because he does not have a point of entry into the physical pain that the cat might have

suffered: "It seems she was hit by a car last Sunday night. But there were no external wounds. She just lay there in the street with such a calm expression on her pretty face. That's what was so strange" (Hiraide 79). By using the words 'pretty' and 'calm', the author tries to aestheticise feline pain and feline death. This, of course, is again an artistic strategy that releases him from the responsibility of understanding the suffering animal's corporeality.

In his research on "Animal Behavior and Animal Personality from a Non-human Perspective", Oren Forkosh discusses the concept of 'universal translator' portrayed in many works of fiction, just like the one in Hiraide's *The Guest Cat*, in this case, played by the narrator. Forkosh concludes:

> Because there might be aspects of an animal's experience beyond human language, the idea of an animal behavior translator may be restrictive. Animals may have emotions, moods, and feelings that are so different from ours that we lack the adequate words to describe them, or, as the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein phrased it: "limits of my language mean the limits of my world." Whether we could ever grasp what it is to be or feel like an animal is yet to be seen. (Forkosh 4)

Thus, one might state that Hiraide places the corporeal identity and the bodily personhood of Chibi at a point of ambiguity between what is expressible and what is not, as the prose provides abundant corporeal details of Chibi and yet, paradoxically, the cat's material presence remains elusive. This ambiguity is mainly due to the human inability to understand feline corporeal identities and the difficulty in telling one cat from another. Also, despite focalising Chibi as the protagonist, the novel fails to bridge the gap between embodiment and representation, reinforcing the ambiguity of feline corporeal identity in literary narratives. The tendency to generalise, exoticise, and aestheticize a feline body, as revealed in Hiraide's novel, is indicative of the need of the literary world to individualise cats in terms of their corporeal agency.

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35.

Locating Animal Geography in David Clement-Davies' *Fire Bringer*: A Reading from Animal Studies Perspective

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Abstract: Animal Studies is a field of inquiry that examines the representation of animals in literature. It critiques the anthropocentric perspectives of plot, characterisation and setting to prioritise animal centric values and experiences. As an interdisciplinary engagement Animal Studies focuses on the sensuous and identity of animals and questions the prejudices of speciesism. Animal Geography is a concept which is often used in Animal Studies and it examines the space, place, location and environment occupied by animals in literature and cultural expressions. It also scrutinises topics such as habitat loss, domestication and wildlife conservation.

This paper explains the Animal Geography as depicted in David Clement-Davies' *Fire Bringer*, a fantasy with animals as the major characters. It analyses the places, territories, boundaries, mobility and threshold that the animal characters experience in the novel. This paper mobilises the tenets of Animal Studies and Animal Geography to explain the transformative story telling that Clement-Davies adopts. Also within the ambit of this paper is the analysis of place and locations where the interaction of different species occurs.

Keywords: Animal Studies, Animal Geography, Critical Animal Studies, Non-human Agency, Environmental Ethics, Narrative Space, Location, Boundary.

Introduction:

David Clement-Davies' novel *Fire Bringer* (1999) is a significant contribution to animal literature, a genre that explores the lives, struggles, and cultures of nonhuman animals in fictional narratives. The novel follows Rannoch, a red deer born with a mysterious mark who is prophesied to liberate his kind from tyranny. Clement-Davies creates a richly detailed world where deer possess their own language, history, and spiritual beliefs, moving beyond the traditional allegorical function of animals in literature to grant them intrinsic value and agency.

Animal literature has played a crucial role in shaping human perceptions of nonhuman life, often reflecting ecological and ethical concerns. Classic works such as Richard Adams' *Watership Down* (1972) and Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894) illustrate how animals navigate their environments and human interventions. However, *Fire Bringer* stands out by engaging directly with the lived experiences of deer, portraying their struggles against oppression and their deep connection to the landscape. Literature serves as a medium to challenge and depict human exceptionalism while nurturing ethical involvement with the nonhuman world. Clement-Davies' novel aligns with this perspective, resisting anthropocentric

tendencies by emphasizing nonhuman consciousness and social structures.

In *Fire Bringer*, the depiction of the deer's migration, social hierarchies, and interactions with human-altered landscapes presents an ecologically aware narrative that challenges speciesist assumptions. This shift from viewing animals as mere metaphors to recognizing their agency aligns with contemporary discussions in Critical Animal Studies and Ecocriticism, where scholars emphasize literature's potential to reshape human-animal relations (DeMello 98).

Animal Geography is a subfield of human geography that investigates the spatial and environmental dimensions of animal life. It challenges human-centered perspectives by exploring how animals navigate, inhabit, and influence their surroundings. As Philo and Wilbert explain, "animal geographies challenge the human-centered understanding of space by foregrounding nonhuman experiences of place and movement" (Philo and Wilbert 51). In literary studies, this approach enables scholars to examine how texts represent animal territories, migration patterns, and ecological interactions.

In *Fire Bringer*, landscape plays a crucial role in shaping the narrative. The novel presents a dynamic environment where deer must traverse forests, rivers, and human-occupied regions, responding to threats and territorial conflicts. This representation aligns with real-world ecological concerns, as the novel explores themes of displacement, adaptation, and environmental degradation. By examining *Fire Bringer* through the lens of Animal Geography, we can gain deeper insights into how space, movement, and environmental pressures shape nonhuman experiences in fiction.

The novel's geographical settings are not merely passive backdrops; they actively shape the deer's destinies and societal structures. For instance, Rannoch's journey across different terrains mirrors the real-world migration patterns of deer, where environmental factors dictate survival strategies. The emphasis on movement and territoriality in *Fire Bringer* thus aligns with interdisciplinary discussions in Literary Geography and Animal Studies, reinforcing the novel's ecological consciousness.

Animal Geography in *Fire Bringer:*

Animal Geography is a growing subfield in geography and literary studies that examines how animals experience, navigate, and influence their environments. It challenges traditional human-centered perspectives by acknowledging that nonhuman species actively shape landscapes through movement, migration, and territoriality. Urban and Johnston explain that "animal geography foregrounds the agency of nonhuman creatures, recognizing their ability to alter and define spatial relationships within ecosystems" (Urban and Johnston 27). Key concepts in this field include space, place, and territoriality**.** Space refers to the larger environment in which animals exist, while place is the specific meaning and function animals assign to different locations based on their behaviors. Territoriality involves the ways in which animals mark, defend, and move through spaces based on their social hierarchies and environmental needs. In literary studies, Animal Geography helps scholars analyze how texts depict animal movement and territorial conflicts. Clement-Davies' *Fire Bringer* is a compelling case study in this regard, as the novel portrays deer societies with structured territorial systems, migration behaviors, and adaptive responses to environmental changes.

Fire Bringer constructs an elaborate deer society where space is essential to survival, power, and social organization. The red deer in the novel inhabit vast landscapes, with specific territories controlled by dominant stags. Rannoch's journey across different terrains from deep forests to open plains and human-occupied areas mirrors real-world migration patterns observed in deer species. Cresswell emphasizes that "animal movement is both a survival strategy and a form of resistance to environmental pressures, whether natural or human-imposed" (Cresswell 83). In *Fire Bringer*, Rannoch and his followers must constantly adapt to shifting landscapes, illustrating how nonhuman species develop

survival mechanisms in response to changing environmental conditions.

The novel also highlights ecological challenges such as harsh winters, food scarcity, and predation, which align with real-world wildlife struggles. Adams and Mulligan argue that "literary portrayals of animal migration often serve as metaphors for resilience and ecological disruption, reflecting broader environmental concerns" (Adams and Mulligan 192). The hardships faced by the deer parallel contemporary issues like habitat loss and climate change, reinforcing the ecological significance of the novel. One of the novel's key themes is the contrast between untouched natural landscapes and spaces altered by human activity. In pristine environments, the deer move freely, guided by inherited knowledge and social instincts. However, when they encounter human-altered regions such as roads, fences, and settlement they must navigate new threats and obstacles.

Wolch and Emel observe that "human-animal interactions are shaped by territorial conflicts, with wildlife increasingly forced to adapt to fragmented habitats due to urban expansion" (Wolch and Emel 114). Similarly, in *Fire Bringer*, the deer must adjust their behaviors when crossing human-influenced spaces, demonstrating the broader ecological reality of habitat encroachment. Moreover, human presence in the novel symbolizes external threats to the deer's way of life. As Clements notes, "fictional depictions of human-wildlife encounters often serve to critique anthropocentrism, highlighting the ethical dilemmas of habitat destruction" (Clements 55). The novel thus invites readers to reconsider humanity's impact on animal spaces.

Geography in *Fire Bringer* plays a central role in the organization of deer society. Dominant stags control prime grazing lands, while weaker individuals are relegated to less desirable spaces. Rannoch's journey serves as both a physical and symbolic reclaiming of space, as he challenges the oppressive rule of the Herla's leader. As Massey asserts, "space is never neutral; it is deeply tied to power, control, and resistance within social structures" (Massey 156).

This is evident in *Fire Bringer*, where the fight for territory is a fight for autonomy and justice. The novel's depiction of contested landscapes reflects real-world ecological and social struggles, reinforcing the parallels between nonhuman and human systems of dominance. The migration patterns and territorial struggles depicted in *Fire Bringer* align closely with real-world animal behaviors. Red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), for example, establish complex social hierarchies based on access to food, water, and mating opportunities. Mech and Boitani describe how "wolf-prey dynamics influence deer movement, leading to seasonal migrations and shifts in territorial structures" (Mech and Boitani 74). Similar predator-prey relationships are evident in *Fire Bringer*, where natural threats influence the herds' decisions on where to settle and when to move.

The novel also reflects conservation challenges faced by contemporary wildlife. Shrinking habitats due to deforestation and agricultural expansion force animals into unfamiliar or dangerous territories. As Taylor and Murray state, "modern conservation efforts must account for the displacement of species and the redefinition of their geographical spaces due to human activity" (Taylor and Murray 203). In this context, *Fire Bringer* serves as both a narrative exploration of animal geography and a commentary on real-world ecological issues. Through its depiction of deer territories, migration, and interactions with landscapes, *Fire Bringer* exemplifies key principles of Animal Geography. The novel challenges anthropocentric assumptions by presenting nonhuman beings as active agents in shaping their worlds. By analyzing the text through this lens, we gain deeper insights into the intersections of literature, ecology, and nonhuman agency. Clement-Davies' work, like other ecologically conscious fiction, encourages readers to reconsider the spatial experiences of animals and the ethical implications of human intervention in their habitats.

Narrative and Nonhuman Agency:

David Clement-Davies' *Fire Bringer* departs from traditional anthropocentric storytelling by depicting animals as active

agents rather than passive beings subjected to human influence. The novel grants its animal characters autonomy, intelligence, and decision-making abilities, challenging the common literary trope of animals serving merely as allegorical extensions of human concerns. Wolfe asserts that "anthropocentrism in literature often reduces animals to symbols, stripping them of their lived experiences and ecological roles" (Wolfe 37). However, in *Fire Bringer*, the deer society possesses its own history, customs, and struggles, which are not merely metaphors for human affairs but intrinsic to the nonhuman world. Rannoch, the protagonist, is not a stand-in for a human hero but a fully realized character whose journey revolves around the survival and liberation of his species.

Clement-Davies constructs a sophisticated system of animal communication in *Fire Bringer*, using body language, vocalizations, and symbolic gestures to convey complex ideas. Unlike anthropomorphic tales that project human speech onto animals, the novel grounds its communication methods in realistic deer behaviors. As Bekoff and Pierce explain, "animals engage in nuanced social interactions that involve emotional awareness, cooperation, and strategic decision-making" (Bekoff and Pierce 89). Rannoch and his companions exhibit emotions such as fear, grief, loyalty, and hope, reinforcing the idea that nonhuman species experience the world in ways that are not reducible to instinct alone. By portraying deer as sentient beings with their own perspectives, *Fire Bringer* challenges traditional hierarchies between human and nonhuman intelligence.

One of the novel's most striking features is its use of a nonhuman protagonist, a choice that fundamentally alters the reader's perspective. Rannoch's narrative is shaped by his sensory world his acute awareness of smells, sounds, and movements which differs significantly from a human-centered viewpoint. This technique aligns with what Haraway terms "situated knowledge," where experience and understanding are contingent on the subject's embodied position in the world (Haraway 76).

By immersing readers in Rannoch's perspective, *Fire Bringer* subverts conventional narrative structures that prioritize human agency. As Garrard notes, "ecological narratives that foreground nonhuman protagonists challenge the deeply ingrained notion that humans are the default measure of experience and intelligence" (Garrard 142). This shift in perspective allows for a deeper engagement with animal consciousness and environmental ethics. Traditional animal fables, such as those found in Aesop's *Fables* or Orwell's *Animal Farm*, often use animals as stand-ins for human archetypes, reinforcing moral lessons that center human concerns. In contrast, *Fire Bringer* resists this anthropocentric framework by depicting deer society on its own terms.

Adams and Mulligan highlight that "allegorical animal literature often reinforces human superiority by using animals to reflect human virtues and vices rather than considering their independent existence" (Adams and Mulligan 205). While *Fire Bringer* contains mythological elements and prophecy, it remains deeply invested in the realism of animal behavior. Unlike Orwell's work, which critiques human political structures through animal characters, Clement- Davies' novel advocates for nonhuman perspectives as valuable in their own right. Throughout the novel, Rannoch and his herd encounter other species, including predators like wolves and birds who serve as messengers or informants. These interactions are not merely plot devices but reflections of real-world ecological relationships.

For example, birds in the novel act as informants, warning deer of dangers in exchange for mutual benefits, mirroring the real-life phenomenon of interspecies cooperation seen in nature. Bekoff states that "mutualism and cooperation between species demonstrate the interconnectedness of animal societies, countering the notion of nature as a purely competitive Clement-Davies also complicates the traditional human-animal divide by depicting human presence as both a threat and a force of unintended consequence. While the novel portrays human hunters as dangers to deer survival, it also shows how human actions, such as deforestation and landscape alteration, reshape animal geographies in ways that animals must adapt to.

Wolch and Emel argue that "the human-animal divide is a cultural construct that reinforces speciesist hierarchies, often to the detriment of nonhuman beings" (Wolch and Emel 119). *Fire Bringer* challenges this division by illustrating how nonhuman lives are deeply affected by human actions, even when humans are not directly present. The novel thus aligns with Eco-critical perspectives that call for a more integrated understanding of human and animal coexistence. Through its depiction of nonhuman agency, interspecies interactions, and the rejection of anthropocentric narratives, *Fire Bringer* offers a compelling exploration of animal consciousness and ecological relationships. By centering the experiences of deer rather than humans, the novel challenges dominant literary traditions that marginalize nonhuman perspectives. Clement-Davies' work contributes to the growing body of literature that seeks to dismantle human exceptionalism and foster a more ethical engagement with the nonhuman world.

Environmental Ethics and Eco-critical Implications:

David Clement-Davies' *Fire Bringer* embeds a strong ecological consciousness by portraying the natural world as an interconnected system where all species play a vital role. The novel explores themes of conservation, coexistence, and environmental justice through the struggles of the deer society, which must navigate the threats posed by both natural predators and human activities.

According to Garrard, "ecocritical narratives often highlight the delicate balance between species and their habitats, urging readers to reconsider their role in environmental stewardship" (Garrard 88). In *Fire Bringer*, the deer's migration patterns, territorial disputes, and reliance on ecological wisdom demonstrate their intrinsic connection to the land. The novel suggests that disrupting these natural rhythms whether through deforestation, hunting, or habitat destruction threatens not only the survival of a species but the balance of the entire ecosystem. Additionally, as Huggan and Tiffin argue, "literary depictions of nonhuman agency contribute to the discourse on environmental justice by revealing how human actions disproportionately impact vulnerable species" (Huggan and Tiffin 73). By giving voice to nonhuman characters, *Fire Bringer* foregrounds the ethical considerations of environmental destruction and resource exploitation, reinforcing the importance of coexistence.

Clement-Davies uses the hierarchical structure of the deer society to critique authoritarian rule and the suppression of dissent. The tyrannical rule of the Lord of the Herd, Sgorr, mirrors oppressive political regimes in human history, demonstrating how power can be used to control both individuals and natural resources. The rigid social order within the deer society where weaker members are marginalized and those in power exploit others can be interpreted as an allegory for human governance and the consequences of unchecked authority. Similar to Orwell's *Animal Farm*, *Fire Bringer* critiques political systems that prioritize dominance over harmony, emphasizing the need for more just and equitable leadership in both human and animal communities.

The novel also reflects on real-world environmental crises, particularly habitat destruction and species extinction. Sgorr's attempts to consolidate control over the herd's land parallel human efforts to privatize and exploit natural resources, often at the expense of indigenous species. Throughout *Fire Bringer*, deer are forced to adapt to the destruction of their habitats, mirroring the challenges faced by real-world species due to deforestation and human expansion. By depicting the long-term consequences of habitat loss, the novel highlights the urgency of conservation efforts.

By presenting nonhuman characters as sentient beings with their own histories, cultures, and moral dilemmas, *Fire Bringer* fosters empathy for the natural world. It aligns with posthumanist perspectives that reject the idea of human superiority and instead advocate for recognizing the intrinsic value of all living beings (Wolfe 112).

The novel exemplifies how animal narratives can be used to advocate for species justice, a concept that seeks to extend ethical consideration beyond humans to include all sentient beings. By immersing readers in the struggles of the deer society, *Fire Bringer*

compels them to reconsider the consequences of human actions on nonhuman communities. This aligns with the broader goals of ecocriticism, which seeks to dismantle anthropocentric biases and promote more sustainable relationships between humans and the environment. Through its themes of ecological consciousness, political commentary, and ethical reflection, *Fire Bringer* serves as a vital literary work in the field of environmental humanities. By challenging anthropocentrism and advocating for coexistence, the novel encourages readers to rethink their place within the broader ecological system. Clement- Davies' work ultimately underscores the power of literature in shaping environmental awareness and promoting a more just and sustainable world for all species.

Conclusion:

This study has demonstrated how *Fire Bringer* integrates animal geography and nonhuman narrative agency to challenge anthropocentric perspectives in literature. The novel constructs an intricate animal geography, portraying the deer society's territorial structures, migration patterns, and interactions with both natural and human-altered landscapes. Through the lens of Critical Animal Studies (CAS), the novel resists conventional anthropomorphic storytelling by granting nonhuman characters intelligence, emotions, and agency. Clement- Davies' work thus subverts the tradition of animal fables that merely serve as allegories for human concerns, instead advocating for an ethical engagement with the nonhuman world. Furthermore, this research has highlighted how *Fire Bringer* critiques speciesist hierarchies and human interventions in animal spaces, reinforcing ecological consciousness within literary discourse. By depicting deer as sentient beings with social structures and moral dilemmas, the novel contributes to ongoing discussions in Eco-criticism and Posthumanism, encouraging readers to reconsider their relationship with the environment. The portrayal of landscapes, from open plains to dense forests, emphasizes how space and geography influence power structures within animal societies, mirroring real-world ecological struggles.

The findings of this study open several avenues for further exploration. Future research could examine how other contemporary animal narratives engage with space, territoriality, and environmental ethics. Comparative studies with works like Richard Adams' *Watership Down* or Barbara Gowdy's *The White Bone* could provide deeper insights into how literary animal geographies evolve across different genres and cultural contexts. Examining other species' representations in literature could also expand the understanding of nonhuman agency in storytelling. Moreover, literary representations of nonhuman agency can play a crucial role in shaping public discourse on conservation, species justice, and environmental ethics. Investigating how fiction influences policy discussions, educational curricula, and ethical frameworks could further strengthen the interdisciplinary connections between literary studies, environmental science, and animal studies. Literature has the power to challenge traditional human-centered perspectives and foster a more inclusive view of nonhuman life.

By recognizing literature's capacity to redefine human-animal relationships, studies like this one contribute to a broader movement toward sustainability, coexistence, and ethical responsibility in the Anthropocene. *Fire Bringer* exemplifies how fiction can act as a catalyst for ecological awareness and ethical engagement, making it an important work in Critical Animal Studies and Eco-criticism. As the field of animal literature continues to expand, novels like *Fire Bringer* serve as powerful reminders of the urgent need to rethink the ways humans interact with and represent the nonhuman world.

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Subaltern Echoes and Postcolonial Dissonance: Reimagining Indian Identity in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

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Abstract

Antonio Gramsci originally described the subaltern as someone silenced and oppressed by the dominant ruling class, stripped of basic rights and agency. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak later expanded this idea to include those who are not only politically and socially marginalised, but also excluded from mainstream discourse and representation. In this light, the novel, *Midnight children* becomes more than just a narrative. It acts as a powerful reimagining of India's complex and often painful history during the later half of the twentieth century. Through its characters and events, it gives voice to those traditionally left unheard, shedding light on the struggles of the oppressed and marginalised, especially within the broader context of colonial and post colonial realities. This paper explores the intricate ways in which Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* amplifies the voices of the subaltern while destabilizing dominant historical narratives. As a landmark text in Indian English literature and postcolonial discourse, the novel serves as a kaleidoscopic lens through which the fractured identity of post independence India is examined. Rushdie employs magical realism, hybrid language, and a non linear narrative to foreground marginalized experiences that are often excluded from mainstream historiography. The study investigates how Saleem Sinai's subjective retelling of history becomes a metaphor for the silenced masses and engages with the dissonance between official and subaltern histories. By interrogating nationhood, memory, and identity, this paper repositions *Midnight's Children* as a critical text in articulating subaltern consciousness within Indian English literature. The text represents the experiences of deprived and indigent people who skirmish for their own identity.

Keywords: Subaltern, Postcolonial Dissonance, Indian English Literature, Magical Realism, Nationhood, Identity, Historiography

Introduction

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), stands as a pivotal contribution to Indian English literature and postcolonial writings. Through its innovative narrative structure and its subversive language, the novel dismantles monolithic representations of Indian identity. The protagonist Saleem Sinai, born at the exact moment of India's independence, becomes a symbolic repository for the hopes, failures, and complexities of the postcolonial nation. The novel not only challenges dominant historical discourses but also gives voice to those who are historically marginalized the subaltern. This study examines how Rushdie reimagines Indian identity by situating the subaltern at the center of his narrative, thereby disrupting colonial and elite nationalist historiographies.

Midnight's Children, one of the most victorious novels written by a renowned author Salman Rushdie, was published in 1981. To say that this piece of art won many awards and received immense critical acclaim would be an understatement. It won the Best of the Booker prize, earning the reputation of being the best novel that has been given the prestigious Booker award.

Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of *Midnight's Children*, narrates the intriguing story about postcolonial India. This story does not cease to amaze people for it is a universal study of plurality and diversity. Readers can

relate to the characters, either because they discover their own personality traits in them, or because they find parts of their country's history in the depiction of conflicts and wars, or simply because they link the actual stories of the people who were going through these tragedies with the newspaper headlines they read about.

Saleem Sinai is aware that his story will not be suitable to everyone's taste, but he still insists that he is telling the most truthful version he knows and that he is doing it out of love for his country:

> One day, perhaps, the world may taste the pickles of history. They may be too strong for some palates, their smell may be overpowering, tears may rise to eyes; I hope nevertheless that it will be possible to say of them that they possess the authentic taste of truth… that they are, despite everything, acts of love. (Dr. Jovanovic, Aleksandra and Bratanovic)

Harold Bloom describes the novel in the following manner: "*Midnight's Children* is an ironic, quirky, but deadly serious critique of quiescence, of withdrawal, of forgetting." (Saini) It is indeed a fascinating account of one of the most captivating countries in the world, but simultaneously it is a tale about a family, their emotions and their struggles in the face of a tragedy that befell their country. However, in generously sharing the story of himself, his people and his country, Salman Rushdie also teaches us a lesson in the hope that we will come to learn to appreciate diversity and not repeat the same mistakes India has made.

The novel is politically centralised around the figure of Indira Gandhi. She was the daughter of the former Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. She was politically popular because of various reforms she employed as well as for the Indian victory in the conflict with Pakistan that resulted in the creation of independent Bangladesh. She declared the State of Emergency in the country between 1975 and 1977, when she was found guilty of an election fraud. With the State of Emergency she limited many civil rights and liberties, censored the media and started the sterilization process. In the novel, "Under the rule of the Widow, India is being made impotent, literally, through vasectomy and, metaphorically, too, as exemplified by the Midnight's Children and Saleem himself. Midnight's children have no power, no hope and no future." Rushdie addresses Indira Gandhi as a "widow" in the novel, not only because she was the widow of Feroze Gandhi, but also because "A widow is a figure of ill omen in Indian culture." (Dr. Jovanovic, Aleksandra and Bratanovic) *Midnight's Children* aims at demonising Indira Gandhi and pursues a remarkably elaborate and persistent strategy in order to achieve this. Both the derogatory connotations of widowhood and witchcraft are combined to create the phantasmagorical image of the witch like Widow who haunts the novel but who is only disclosed at the very end as identical with Indira Gandhi. *Midnight's Children* aroused considerable controversy with its publication. The novel was banned in India for the way it depicted the Nehru dynasty. Additionally, Indira Gandhi sued Rushdie for libel and won.

India has always been characterized by the diversity of the people living in it. The Partition was nothing else but an attempt to divide the country along the religious lines and make the Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan. What the people aiming to do this failed to realize is that you cannot ask the people to move to another country based solely on the religion. What has to be taken into account is a sense of belonging, many people felt.

The story of Saleem Sinai is the story of postcolonial India. The exact moment of his birth was 15 August 1947, at the stroke of midnight. This moment completely coincides with India's gain of its independence from Britain. His birth ties him closely to the country's fate and future. Accordingly, his life is a reflection of the country's ups and downs, good times and bad times. "More than a mirror of India, Saleem is the multitude of India." (Dr. Jovanovic, Aleksandra and Bratanovic)

During the first hour of independence, 1001 children were born, all of them with astounding magical powers. The closer to midnight the child was born, the more magnificent and extraordinary their power was. 581 midnight's children were alive by the time Saleem discovered their special gifts. His was

the gift of telepathy, he was able to enter other people's minds and get to know their most intimate thoughts, emotions and desires. Saleem's gift of telepathy allows him not only to immerse himself into the minds of other midnight's children, but also into India itself, he is connected to the country through his gift. He is able to hear all of India, through all of its diversity, including different religions. Midnight's children are the most exquisite reflection of India itself. They represent the main characteristics of Indian country – the diversity and plurality. They are all different, they all come from different backgrounds, religions, but they are connected to each other by the precious gifts that they own, gifts which are not always a blessing. "The children of midnight were also the children of the time: fathered, you understand, by history. It can happen. Especially in a country which is itself a sort of dream." (Dr. Jovanovic, Aleksandra and Bratanovic)The children are embodiment of the country, of the nation, of its present and its future.

Owing to his own special power, Saleem organizes a Midnight's Children Conference, so they all meet in his mind for one hour every day. Shiva, who was born at the exact same time as Saleem, has the power of war. He suggests to Saleem that they should be the leaders of the group, which Saleem rejects, wishing for the group to have a greater purpose. Saleem and Shiva, both being born at midnight, represent the contrasting personalities. Shiva is named after the God of destruction, while Saleem represents Brahma, the God of creation. Shiva's personality stems from his upbringing, he was born into great poverty, he was expected by his father to be a beggar, so a lot of his personal frustration and anger can be justified. They together manifest the core differences striking India – rich and poor, Hindu and Muslim. "If Saleem embodies the Indian history of pluralism, Shiva embodies India's parallel history of oppression and intolerance." (Dr. Jovanovic, Aleksandra and Bratanovic)

India had very high expectations of its newly acquired freedom. The *Times of India* announced a prize for any child born at the exact moment of independence. India manifests its hopes for a better future through its celebration of the independence. People are ecstatic, glorious celebrations are organized, and Saleem himself receives a letter from Jawaharlal Nehru, the prime minister, who predicts Saleem's connection to the country: "Dear Baby Saleem, My belated congratulations on the happy accident of your moment of birth! You are the newest bearer of that ancient face of India which is also eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own." (Dr. Jovanovic, Aleksandra and Bratanovic)These words turned out to be prophetic, as his life is the mirror of the country in a metaphoric way.

However, at the very same night, Shiva, Wee Wilie Winkie's son was born. Mary Pereira, Saleem's future nanny, swaps the babies at birth, in the memory of the man she loved, the revolutionary Joseph. She believed that the actual conflict in India was not between the Hindus and Muslims, but between the rich and the poor, so she wanted to do her part in mending social injustices. Therefore, Saleem's birth mother was Hindu and she died while giving birth to him, and his real father was William Methwold, a British with whom his mother had an affair. Instead of growing up in a poor family, Saleem is raised in privilege.

Was the M.C.C. a source of tremendous promise, or was it rather the vehicle of the children's eventual undoing? Was Saleem, as its founder, their saviour or their betrayer? Was the break up of the M.C.C., of Saleem, of India itself, the end of possibility, a tragedy to be averted at all costs, or was it, on the contrary, an opportunity to be welcomed? Like many others in *Midnight's Children*, the answer to all these questions is – well – both. And yet, from Saleem/Salman's personal perspective, it comes down quite clearly on one side.

Considering the fact that Saleem is the metaphor of India, he himself could be blamed for the tragedy that befell the country resulting in the destruction of everything and everyone that is unique and different. He was the one who excluded Shiva from the M.C.C. which caused Shiva's personal vendetta that ultimately brought the Midnight's Children to an end.

Before his death, Saleem claimed that his body would dissolve into 630 million pieces, which was approximately the population of India at the time the book was written and published. In this way, Saleem also represents not only the Indian country but also each and every citizen of India, in all of their differences and diversities. Having told his story, his purpose is fulfilled, therefore he does indeed fall apart into as many pieces of dust as there are people in India. India has always been a country which includes many different nationalities, religions and cultural influences. However, managing all these distinctions proved to be very challenging, as even India itself ended up in many conflicts and wars over them. Hence, it is only logical that Saleem, the paragon of India's complexities and contrasts, having no solution for India's unity has to disappear and evanesce. The novel ends on a very pessimistic note. As Trousdale notes: "He (Saleem) seems to deny that it is possible to unify or represent India." (Dr. Jovanovic, Aleksandra and Bratanovic) However, we should not allow the tragedy of Saleem's character to go in vain. At the time when he had no more magical powers and he could not save India, he did the best he could do – told his story. It is now up to us, the readers, to keep his story alive and to learn from it. The book gives the analysis of Indian history. The evidence we receive – Saleem and his feelings, emotions, memories, the stories he heard about and the stories he found out about using his gift – are all subjective. We do not receive any hard specific evidence in the book, which makes the story more personal and closer to the readers.

Cultural legacy is one of the things left behind by the British influence in India. The people living at the Methwold estate clearly exemplify the Indian state of mind at the time. Even though they did not agree with the conditions that the owner presented to them – to keep the houses in the same British manner and do not change anything, in time they started adopting various British traditions and customs, such as cocktail hour, and enjoying their houses in the British design and décor.

British colonialism also brought the division of India into India and Pakistan and immense bloodshed which economically destroyed the countries and took the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

One of the consequences of the cessation of British colonialism and the following Partition was the migration. This is something that was experienced by the writer himself in his personal life: "Salman Rushdie, born in Bombay (Mumbai), India, in 1947, emigrated to London, England, in 1961, went into hiding in 1989 because of the death sentence issued by Ayatollah Ruhholah Khomeini, and is currently living in New York" (Dr. Jovanovic, Aleksandra and Bratanovic).

However, the saddest repercussion of all was the painful conclusion that the diversity that had always been India's proudest characteristic, was no longer able to exist. This diversity could be best seen by the very people of India, their different religions, colour of their skin, various native languages. Despite all these differences they were still able to live peacefully in a union until the moment of British colonialism when the ideas about the separation began to occupy people's mind. Nonetheless, the image of the former India, of how it used to be has become a dream that many people have never abandoned: "Rushdie attempts, with both the M.C.C. and *Midnight's Children* itself, to provide a vision of the country he wants India to be: an attempt to imagine a unifying form for..." (Dr. Jovanovic, Aleksandra and Bratanovic)

Rationale:

The rationale behind this study lies in the imperative to investigate the complex intersections of literature, history, and power. In dominant historical narratives, the subaltern is often relegated to the margins silent, erased, or misrepresented. However, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* provides a subversive literary space where these silences are challenged and revoiced. With the growing academic and cultural movement toward decolonizing history and literature, it becomes increasingly important to reassess how Indian English fiction engages with subalternity, identity formation, and the politics of representation. Rushdie's novel, in this regard, functions not merely as a fictional narrative but as a dynamic literary archive a repository of

alternative voices, epistemologies, and pluralistic visions of India's postcolonial self.

Postcolonial theory underscores the critical role that race plays within the structures of colonial domination. It foregrounds how colonial powers, through the optics of race, construct and mediate representations of native cultures rendering them visible, yet often distorted, in ways that serve imperial ideologies. This framework starts with the premise that colonial texts, institutions, scientific discourses, and legal systems are inherently racialized and hierarchical. The colonial subject is cast in the role of the observer and authority, while the colonized remains the object, spoken for and represented. In the postcolonial context, the nation emerges as a multilayered construct one that resides not in tangible unities but in shared imaginations. It is, as Benedict Anderson famously noted, an "imagined community." (Dr. Jovanovic, Aleksandra and Bratanovic) People inhabiting distant corners of a country, despite never meeting each other, continue to perceive themselves as part of the same national fabric. This imagined unity is powerful even if built on fantasy more than reality.

Rushdie articulates this vision powerfully in *Midnight's Children*. He asserts: "My India has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity ideas to which the ideologies of the communalists are diametrically opposed. (In *Midnight's Children*) the defining image of India is the crowd and a crowd is by its very nature superabundant, heterogeneous, many things at once." (Dr. Jovanovic, Aleksandra and Bratanovic) The novel becomes a vibrant ode to India's plurality its dizzying range of languages, religions, ethnicities, and histories. It cautions against the dangers of monoculturalism and ideological rigidity. In doing so, it compels the reader to recognize and embrace the beauty of difference and the necessity of respecting diverse faiths, national identities, and cultural narratives.

But *Midnight's Children* transcends the confines of the Indian subcontinent. It speaks to a global audience and resonates within broader conversations about identity, migration, and globalization. Rushdie has been hailed as the quintessential migrant writer his work reimagines both the world and the individual subject in an age of displacement and transnational flux. Yet, the so called "Rushdie Affair" also exposed him as a symbolic figure in the tensions between East and West, secularism and fundamentalism, liberal cosmopolitanism and cultural essentialism. In this way, Rushdie embodies the double edged nature of globalization on one hand offering possibilities for hybrid identities and intercultural dialogue, and on the other hand revealing widening cultural rifts, ideological polarization, and the persistence of fundamentalist violence.

Rushdie's novel also raises a sobering concern: in a world riven by religious conflicts, xenophobia, and nationalism, has humanity lost the ability to appreciate difference? Can literature, with all its power, still reach across divides and foster mutual understanding? Sadly, *Midnight's Children* despite its poetic vision of unity did not manage to bridge the rift between India and Pakistan. The bitterness between these nations has only intensified. The partition scars linger, and policies of exclusion still prevail: Pakistanis remain unwelcome in India, and friendships across the border are discouraged or demonized. The crown jewel of the subcontinent Kashmi continues to be a region marred by bloodshed and fear. It stands as a symbol of what is lost when political discord drowns cultural and human commonality.

In another one of his celebrated works, Rushdie writes: "A poet's work to name the unnameable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world and stop it from going to sleep." (Dr. Jovanovic, Aleksandra and Bratanovic)This quote encapsulates the ethical urgency at the heart of Rushdie's literary project. His courage is undeniable. To write about the volatile history of partition, the deep wounds of colonialism, and the ongoing tension between India and Pakistan, takes not only intellectual daring but moral resolve. His novel evokes both nostalgia and melancholy it is as much an elegy for a fragmented nation as it is a celebration of the possibilities of pluralism.

Midnight's Children remains one of the most poignant literary testaments to India's postcolonial journey. It continues to move

readers across generations, evoking deep emotional responses and critical reflection. While readers may differ in their political interpretations of the novel's portrayal of Indian history, few can remain untouched by its narrative richness and the sincerity with which it grapples with historical truths. As Harold Bloom aptly remarked: "Re reading *Midnight's Children*, I do not find it dated, neither do I read it merely as elegy/eulogy to a failed experiment; it remains a celebration of India, a paean to both unity and multiplicity, and both inspiration and challenge to a new generation to supersede it in style." Rushdie's work, thus, endures as literature, as history, and as a call for a more inclusive future". (Dr. Jovanovic, Aleksandra and Bratanovic)

Objectives

1. To explore how *Midnight's Children* represents subaltern voices within a postcolonial context.
2. To analyze the narrative strategies employed by Rushdie to subvert dominant historical and national discourses.
3. To examine the ways in which identity is reimagined and contested through literary devices such as magical realism and hybridity.
4. To contribute to a deeper understanding of Indian English literature's role in postcolonial and subaltern studies.

Research Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative and analytical research approach, drawing upon postcolonial theory, particularly the works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, and Edward Said. A close reading of Midnight's Children will be conducted, focusing on language, structure, character, and theme. Supplementary textual analysis will include secondary sources such as scholarly articles and critical essays that offer insights into subalternity and identity in Rushdie's glimpse.

Scope and Limitations

This study is confined to the analysis of *Midnight's Children* as a singular but representative text in Rushdie's oeuvre. While other works by Rushdie also address subaltern themes, this paper limits itself to examining how subaltern identity and historical dissonance are represented in this particular novel. The study is also focused primarily on literary and theoretical frameworks, without delving into historical archives or empirical social data.

Conclusion:

Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children emerges as a powerful literary platform for rethinking Indian identity through the prism of the subaltern. By decentring the authority of official history and embracing a fragmented, hybrid, and magical realist narrative, Rushdie not only rewrites the nation but also empowers the voices that history has silenced. This novel thus exemplifies how Indian English literature can serve as a counter discourse, enabling subaltern voices to be heard, if not fully recovered. The exploration reaffirms the role of literature as a crucial space for resistance, memory, and re imagination in the postcolonial world. "Subaltern Echoes and Postcolonial Dissonance: Reimagining Indian Identity in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children," it is advisable to extend the theoretical engagement by exploring the idea of narrative as resistance. Salman Rushdie's use of magical realism and fragmented storytelling can be interpreted not merely as aesthetic choices but as political acts that challenge the authority of official historiography. This approach aligns with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's interrogation in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', emphasizing the complexities involved in representing the subaltern voice. A valuable dimension to explore is the tension between representation and erasure, raising the question of whether Saleem Sinai, as a narrator from a relatively privileged position, authentically channels subaltern perspectives or inadvertently speaks over them.

Suggestion

The integrating works of theorists like Homi Bhabha and Partha Chatterjee can expand the discussion on identity formation, hybridity, and fractured nationalism. These additions would not only deepen the analysis but also broaden the paper's appeal to scholars interested in both literary studies and postcolonial theory. If desired, the title could be refined to foreground the act of narration itself such as "Narrating the Nation, Voicing the Voiceless: Subalternity and Postcolonial Identity in Salman

Rushdie's Midnight's Children" while maintaining the original focus.

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37.

Satire as Artistic Defiance: Interrogating Class and Corruption in *The White Tiger*

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Abstract

Arvind Adiga with his bold and incisive commentary on socio-political issues has contributed immensely to the development of postmodern Indian literature. This research paper aims to examine satire as a powerful creative tool of artistic expression in Aravind Adiga's celebrated novel *The White Tiger*. Satire has been a dominant literary form of artistic expression. Throughout literary history satire has been a significant tool of social critique. Adiga employs satire to expose stark socio-economic disparities, injustice, moral turpitude, and corruption in his works. The Man-Booker Prize-winning novel published in 2008 is a captivating rags-to-riches story of the protagonist, Balram Halwai. The novel is a daring exploration of the harsh realities of contemporary India presenting a saga of defiance and self-determination. The conflict between democratic ideals and capitalist ambitions is portrayed through the satirical perspective of Balram Halwai. Using the Stylistic approach as a theoretical framework, specifically employing Leech and Short's model of literary analysis this research explores how literary devices are used to satirize systemic corruption, social inequality, political apathy, and the exploitation of the poor. Through the analysis of narrative technique, lexical choices, and other literary devices this paper reveals satire as an important aesthetic and critical tool for stimulating social reflection. The present study is significant as it demonstrates how *The White Tiger* tackles broader issues related to globalization, and modernity using satire.

Keywords: Satire, Artistic Expression, Resistance, Social Critique, The White Tiger, Class Conflict

Introduction:

The Man Booker Prize winning novel *The White Tiger* a debut novel of Aravind Adiga was published in the year 2008. India as a democratic country is grappling with various serious issues like corruption, moral turpitude, social discrimination, class disparities, poverty, etc. and *The White Tiger* a stringent critique upon these issues. "Like other modern writers, Aravind Adiga mostly discusses the issues of racism, materialism, starvation, poverty, modernity in his fiction" (Ashish Gupta 02). The novel examines the two stark contrasting sides of India: one with "big bellies" other with "small bellies". It demonstrates dark side of India where poor class struggles to make both ends meet. Contemporary India is struggling with corruption, class disparity, abject poverty, social inequality, and injustice which is demonstrated through the journey of the protagonist, Balram Halwai, the White Tiger of the novel *The White Tiger*. Balram was a very brilliant student in school who was forced to work as a child labour in order to provide for his starving family. The novel depicts the life of rural and urban India covering Balram's life from rags to riches. It shows the successful

flight of the White Tiger from the "Rooster Coop" to a life of freedom and independence.

Aravind Adiga, a contemporary novelist has rendered a fresh orientation to Indian fiction. Using various literary devices, with a compelling narrative technique, Adiga has scathingly satirized the follies and foibles of present Indian society and culture. His writing has ripped apart the illusionary notion of the shining nation by showing the darker side of the socio-cultural fabric of the nation. Adiga employs satire as a literary technique to criticize the dark side of the nation. Historically, satire has been an important technique used by writers to awaken the sleeping society by pointing out its follies and foibles. From classical to modern literature, satire has been used to critique social and moral decay. Horace, Juvenal, Swift, and Orwell are some of the famed names who popularized satire in literature.

"Satire can be described as the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation" (Abrams 275).

Satire is useful in critiquing power structure and challenging conventions. It helps foster intellectual engagement in society and motivates social change by underlining human flaws in a provocative manner. Satire is relevant across cultures and times as it attacks universal issues like greed, vanity, materialism, oppression, misuse of power, etc. Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger is an apt text to study satire as an artistic technique to critique social wrongs. The novel exposes two extremely contrasting sides of Indian society. It examines social, political, cultural, and economic issues in contemporary India. The satire helps in understanding the true face of modernization and globalization. The language used in the novel is apt as it uses humor, irony, hyperbole, etc. to underline the absurdities of the society in the form of satire and works as a form of protest. The universal themes like greed, abuse of power, exploitation, and class and caste discrimination are addressed through satire. Therefore, the study of *The White Tiger* helps in understanding inequality and social injustice happening at the global level due to the universal applicability of satire.

Objectives:

The study aims to examine Adiga's use of satire through various literary devices to criticize socio-economic, cultural, and political issues in India. The research further aims to examine the language, tone, and characterization used in the novel to understand the satirical effect. The paper explores how satire is used as an artistic expression to critique social issues.

Theoretical Framework:

The satirical elements in the novel will be studied through stylistic lenses to understand how Adiga has employed various literary devices to criticize socio-political injustices, corruption, moral degradation and exploitation. The paper uses Leech and Short's model for stylistic analysis of the novel. Leech and Short divided stylistic analysis into lexical, grammatical, figurative and discourse. The present study employs this framework to study satire in the novel.

Creative Dimensions of Satire in *The White Tiger*:

Satire is rooted and all-pervasive in *The White Tiger*. Adiga begins the plot of the novel in a unique manner using letter as a connecting tool for the characters and the readers. The very first statement made by Balram, "Neither you nor I speak English, but there are some things that can be said only in English" (Adiga 3), demonstrates the absurdity and inevitability of using English at the same time. Though neither of the characters involved in the context speaks English, the language of communication for them is an inevitable English: the language of the colonizer, the language of power, the language of the globe. The writer mocks the absurdity of the use of the English language and also demonstrates the power dynamics of language. The use of the English language gives the narrator a wider audience, authenticity, and legitimacy to his opinions. Here, the writer takes a dig at the obsession of the postcolonial mindset with English as a superior language. The letter by Balram Halwai further mocks at political hypocrisy as politicians display exaggerated *"Namaste"* in front of the TV. The author's sarcastic remarks like "how moral and

saintly India is" demonstrate moral decay in contemporary India. The narrator criticizes the unreliability of media as he sarcastically says "All India is usually reliable in these matters" adding as an aside where he dismisses the statement as a joke. The language used by Balram in the letter is conversational and simple at the same time the use of humuor and irony add depth to criticism of social structure. He uses humour to conceal his cynical views and disillusionment with the system. Overall, the letter by the narrator in the exposition of the novel is characterized by its informal tone, humour, and irony.

The narrator makes fun of national pride and lays bare the huge gap between rich and poor. Though India's entrepreneurship is glorified at the global level, the country lacks the basic facilities at the local level. Adiga juxtaposes two different Indias showing the disparity in the following words:

> Apparently, sir, you Chinese are far ahead of us in every respect, except that you don't have entrepreneurs. And our nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy, or punctuality, does have entrepreneurs. (Adiga 4)

The author mocks globalization for creating labour force for outsourcing for America. He says "…we…run America now" which is albeit an exaggeration. But this hyperbole highlights the paradox of globalization. The economic sustenance of developed countries is dependent upon labour and services provided by developing countries. This also shows the harsh realities of developing countries where the basic facilities required to live life are ignored and achievements in business and technology that improve the life of only the elite class are glorified. The language and the tone used by the author convey satire exposing flows in the social system and superficial progress in post-colonial India. The biting satire makes the readers reflect upon the grand promises of globalization. It dismantles the façade of progress and prosperity.

Rooster Coop- A Symbol of Entrapment:

"Rooster Coop" is a poignant metaphor used in the novel and it conveys oppression and entrapment of lower classes and castes in the Indian social system. Adiga uses vivid imagery to satirize social inequality and injustice through the metaphor. He explains the helplessness of chickens kept in a crowded wire-mesh cages. Chickens in the cage can sense their fate but are unable to rebel. Similarly, the oppressed and underprivileged lower class in India is trapped in an unjust social system where they cannot get freedom. "They know they're next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is done with human beings in this country" (Adiga 173-174).

The poor are caught in a complex social system that exploits them more for the benefit of the rich. Adiga says that even though the poor servants handle the finances of their masters, they do not try to escape with it. They remain loyal to their masters for fear of damage done to their families. They are socially conditioned for servitude. The rooster coop serves as a symbol of exploitation and oppression, and the novel suggests that only a person of extraordinary caliber, a generational talent like the White Tiger can escape from this intricate system.

Religious Discrimination, Social Inequality:

Several paragraphs in the novel point out religious discrimination, the unjust caste system, and social inequality in the novel. To get a job for livelihood, a Muslim assumes a Hindu name and works as a driver with Ashok's family. It shows how challenging it is to earn a livelihood due to severe communal issues. Adiga criticizes social disparities where the rich go on exploiting the poor. The rich live luxurious life whereas the poor live miserable even though they work harder.

> A rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow, white and soft and blank. Ours are different. My father's spine was a knotted rope, the kind that women use in villages to pull water from wells; the clavicle curved around his neck in high relief, like a dog's collar; cuts and nicks and scars, like little whip marks in his flesh, ran down his chest and waist,

> reaching down below his hip bones into his buttocks. The story of a poor man's life is written on his body, in a sharp pen. (Adiga 26-27)

The power dynamics between the elite and poor are shown using various animals symbolically. Animals like wild boar, stork, buffalo, and raven demonstrate the nature of the powerful elite class and the animals like rooster, donkey, and dog represent the poor. The hierarchical social system seems to be a 'jungle' where might seems to be always right and exploit the poor.

Balram's Experience as a Servant:

Adiga critiques servitude stating that due to socio-cultural conditioning, the poor in Indian society submit to masters. They revere them and their service as a duty towards their masters. Due to this conditioning, poor social hierarchies are maintained. This attitude of submission is perpetuated through mythological gods like Hanuman as Adiga mentions in the novel in the following words: "He was the faithful servant of the god Rama, and we worship him in our temples because he is a shining example of how to serve your masters with absolute fidelity, love, and devotion" (Adiga 19). The glorification of Hanuman's loyalty and servitude legitimizes the subjugation of the working class. Beating up servants was a norm in Ashok's house. Though Ashok questioned his father about this inhuman treatment, he was hushed by their justification of beating servants to be respected.

"And God asks this little man:

Isn't it all wonderful? Isn't it all grand? Aren't you grateful to be my servant?" (Adiga 87)

Entrepreneurial Journey as a Satirical Device

Balram Halwai's journey as a successful businessman in India shows moral turpitude, systematic corruption, and the exploitation of the poor working class. The darkly humorous narrative demonstrates the two extreme sides of the nation where the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. The rise of Balram as a successful entrepreneur does not follow the traditional path of hard work, perseverance, and innovation. Balram achieves success through theft and murder. Through this narrative, Adiga mocks the harsh realities of systematic corruption and exploitation. "Like all good Bangalore stories, mine begins far away from Bangalore. You see, I am in the Light now, but I was born and raised in Darkness" (Adiga 14). In the words of Neerja Arun "The journey of Balram's life represents the progress India reflects but it also exposes the dust beneath the carpet" (Nimsarkar and Mishra 108).

Satire of Politics:

The White Tiger raises serious questions on the dark sides of politics exposing false promises, hypocrisies, corruption, and absurdity of democracy through witty and humorous narration. The powerless poor is always dominated by the powerful elite; hence democratic governance seems to be merely a façade. The novel employs sarcasm as a tool to ridicule the hollow political leadership in the country. A political leader is referred to as "the Great Socialist" who "was as corrupt as ever". Several issues in the country are used by politicians to garner votes. For ex. The issue of the Ganga river pollution is raised during the elections but once the elections are over, the issue is side-lined and the politicians are busy in corruption. Using sarcasm as a literary device the author vigorously attacks ritualistic reverence to gods and critiques political inefficiency. "The gods seem to do awefully little work—much like our politicians" (Adiga 8).

Textual Analysis:

The lexical analysis of the text shows that Adiga uses crude and colloquial language to show the raw and unfiltered perspective of Balram at the same time uses sophisticated words like "globalization", "entrepreneur" etc. which highlights the dual characteristic of socio-economic structure of India. The animal metaphors used are used to show human greed, gluttony, cunning, gullibility, and servitude. Adiga employs irony, hyperbole, metaphors, and symbols in abundance to describe Balram's village, social hierarchy, exploitation, and description at various levels. Examples of irony are used to highlight the difference between ideal and practical. The author has used symbolism extensively to bring multi-layered meaning to the text. For example, the rooster-

coop symbolizes the entrapment of working lower class.

The novel is written in a unique epistolary structure as the protagonist Balram is described writing letters to the Chinese Premier. This unconventional structure is useful to paint contrasting picture of ambitious India and dark India. Direct address is used to give a flavour of colloquialism in which confrontational tone is clearly visible. Adiga uses short, simple, conversational styled sentences which bring a sense of urgency to the narration. Using the satirical tone helps in sharp and incisive commentary on social wrongs. At the same time, long sentences are used to show when the protagonist reflects upon the ill effects of globalization, systematic corruption, and moral degradation in the society. The contrasting style of sentences reinforces socio-economic disparities in the novel.

Conclusion:

The stylistic choices made by Adiga are crucial in underlining the core issues of the country. Through the masterful use of language, the author is able to expose socio-economic disparities, the romantic ideal, and harsh reality. The author's skillful use of language, structure, and perspective transcends the satire into magnificent socio-economic critique exposing the wrongs which compel readers to reflect upon and face the bitter truths about contemporary Indian society.

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38.

Bridging the Gap between Language and Logic: A Study of Mathematical Literacy through Student Responses

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Abstract:

In an increasingly interconnected world, mathematical literacy has become a crucial component of educational development, especially in multilingual and multicultural contexts. This study explores how language proficiency and cultural context influence mathematical understanding and expression among undergraduate students. The goal of the study is to assess the degree of mathematical literacy through students' written responses and identify the linguistic and cognitive factors that contribute to common errors in problem-solving.

The study is guided by four key objectives and tested against four hypotheses. A sample of 407 undergraduate students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in Mumbai colleges was selected through stratified random sampling. Student answer papers were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The significance level (α) was set at 0.05 for hypothesis testing. Preliminary results suggest a strong negative correlation between linguistic clarity and conceptual understanding, indicating that students from non-English-speaking backgrounds often misinterpret word problems, leading to higher error rates. The study also observed a recurring pattern of procedural errors linked to instructional language barriers. This research has broad implications for interdisciplinary curriculum design, where mathematical instruction must be sensitive to linguistic and cultural diversity. It emphasizes the need to integrate language-focused strategies in math pedagogy to bridge the gap between language and logic, thereby fostering inclusive and effective learning environments.

Keywords: Mathematical Literacy, Language Proficiency, Cultural Context in Education, Student Error Analysis

Introduction:

In today's educational landscape, mathematical literacy is increasingly acknowledged as a key competency-not only for academic success but also for making informed decisions in everyday life. It involves more than just performing calculations; it includes the ability to understand, interpret, and apply mathematical concepts in real-world situations. Despite ongoing curriculum reforms and innovative teaching practices, many students continue to struggle with applying mathematical knowledge effectively. A growing body of research identifies a critical yet often underexplored factor behind this gap: the role of language in mathematical learning. While Mathematics is often regarded as a universal language, its instruction and comprehension are deeply embedded in linguistic structures. Students frequently face difficulties not just with mathematical reasoning, but with the language used to present problems.

In multilingual societies like India-where English is widely used as the medium of instruction, but not the first language for most students-these issues become even more pronounced. Misinterpretation of problem statements, confusion over terminology, and an inability to articulate logical reasoning are all common challenges.

These difficulties are particularly evident during the first year of undergraduate education, a critical period when students are expected to transition from basic procedural learning to more abstract, analytical forms of thinking. At this stage, they must navigate both a more

complex mathematical curriculum and a linguistically demanding academic environment. Consequently, linguistic proficiency becomes deeply intertwined with mathematical cognition.

This study seeks to investigate how language proficiency intersects with mathematical reasoning by examining the written answers of first-year undergraduate students in Mumbai. By identifying and categorizing the types of errors students make, particularly those rooted in linguistic misunderstanding, this research aims to narrow the gap between language and logic. Ultimately, the study aims to offer insights that can guide more inclusive, language-sensitive teaching strategies, thereby enhancing both mathematical literacy and academic equity.

Rationale of the Study:

Despite increased attention to mathematical literacy, limited empirical research in India has examined how linguistic and cultural backgrounds influence mathematical understanding at the undergraduate level. Existing assessments often overlook the deeper causes of student errors, attributing them to poor aptitude rather than language-related barriers. This study seeks to bridge this gap by analyzing student responses to uncover patterns of misunderstanding linked to language and culture, ultimately providing practical insights for developing more inclusive and effective teaching strategies in multilingual educational settings.

Scope and Significance of the Study:

This study focuses on first-year undergraduate students, examining how their language proficiency, cultural background, and conceptual understanding relate to mathematical errors. It is significant because it highlights often-overlooked linguistic and cultural factors that influence students' ability to apply mathematics both academically and in real-life contexts. The insights gained can guide educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers in creating more inclusive and responsive learning environments.

Literature Review:

Sharma and Sharma (2024), conducting a meta-analysis on mathematics teaching in multilingual classrooms, identify culturally responsive strategies that significantly improve English Language Learners' performance—offering insights highly relevant to the Indian context.

Firdausi, Rohmatin, and Rahmawati (2023), exploring students' confidence in solving matrix-related word problems, find that affective factors and misunderstanding of problem language significantly impact performance.

Raj and Menon (2023), analyzing how cultural learning styles and linguistic frames influence mathematical problem-solving in India, highlight the need for context-sensitive pedagogy to address interpretation challenges.

Shafiq and Rana (2023), studying South Asian learners, find a strong connection between language proficiency and word-problem-solving ability, particularly among first-generation college students in linguistically diverse classrooms.

Maskingatin, Lusiana, and Maharani (2021), examining errors during pandemic-driven online learning, identify frequent mistakes in analytic geometry due to poor adaptability to digital formats—a challenge shared in Indian education.

Kumar and Nair (2021), researching English-medium instruction in India, reveal that students from regional language backgrounds often misinterpret mathematical tasks, causing gaps in understanding.

Sierpinski et al. (2021), emphasizing linguistic structure in math, shows that students' misinterpretations often stem from syntax and semantics, calling for clarity in mathematical language use.

Kumar, R., & Nair, A. (2021) examine language and learning gaps in Indian higher education, focusing on how regional language interference in English-medium instruction creates barriers to comprehension. Their study provides empirical evidence of linguistic challenges faced by Indian undergraduate students, especially in technical and mathematical subjects.

Panicker (2020), analyzing technology adoption in Indian higher education, finds cultural factors like power distance hinder effective integration of digital tools, indirectly

affecting students' engagement with math learning.

Murali and Maiorano (2020), discussing the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, argue that prioritizing regional languages may unintentionally widen educational inequality, especially in subjects like mathematics.

Ganesh Babu, A., & Sasikumar, N. (2020), investigating secondary school algebra errors in Tamil Nadu, conclude that students frequently commit procedural and conceptual mistakes, highlighting the urgency for better-targeted pedagogy. Indian Journal of Mathematics Education, 12(3), 25–39.

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Moschkovich, J. (2010) presents multiple theoretical perspectives on the intersection of language and mathematics education, proposing a socio-cultural approach to understanding learning. She argues that students' mathematical thinking is shaped by their ability to navigate both every day and academic language.

Mohanty, A. K. (2006) discusses the socio-political implications of multilingual education in India, critiquing monolingual policies that marginalize students' home languages. He advocates for equitable language policies that support cognitive development and academic performance in multilingual settings.

Barwell, R. (2005) explores the critical role of language in mathematics classrooms and outlines what teachers need to understand about discourse, meaning, and interpretation. He highlights that mathematical understanding is closely tied to how problems are framed linguistically, influencing both teaching effectiveness and student learning.

Agnihotri, R. K. (2002) emphasizes that multilingualism in India is a linguistic resource rather than a barrier and argues for inclusive teaching strategies that recognize students' linguistic repertoires. His work lays the foundation for understanding how language diversity can be harnessed to improve educational outcomes, particularly in English-medium instruction.

Nasir, N. S. (2002) explores how identity and personal goals influence learning across different domains, using the context of basketball to draw parallels with academic success. Though not directly focused on mathematics, her findings underline the importance of cultural context and motivation in shaping learning trajectories.

Statement of the Problem:

Taken together, these studies highlight that language plays a role in mathematics that goes beyond mere communication; it acts as a core component in the process of logical thinking and reasoning as well as the learning process. They collectively emphasize that linguistic clarity, cultural context, and students' self-perception directly influence how mathematical tasks are understood and approached. Despite these insights, there remains a gap in the Indian higher education context-particularly at the undergraduate level-where diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds intersect with English-medium instruction. This gap forms the crux of the current study titled ″Bridging the Gap between Language and Logic: A Study of Mathematical Literacy Through Student Responses.″ By systematically analyzing the types and patterns of mathematical errors found in student responses (internal examinations), this study aims to uncover how language proficiency and cultural framing shape conceptual understanding and application, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on inclusive and effective mathematics education.

Objectives of the Study:

Additionally, the research problem is structured around four main objectives.

(1) To examine the types of errors students make in mathematical assessments, with particular attention to linguistic misunderstandings.

(2) To explore the relationship between students' language proficiency and their levels of mathematical literacy.

(3) To identify recurring patterns of conceptual and procedural errors in student responses.

(4) To assess the impact of students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds on their interpretation of mathematical problems.

Hypotheses of the Study:

H_{01}: Language-related errors in mathematics are independent of the school medium of instruction

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between students' cultural background and their mathematical error patterns.

H_{03}: The frequency of conceptual errors does not differ significantly from that of procedural errors

H_{04}: Linguistic misunderstanding does not significantly contribute to students' mathematical mistakes.

Research Methodology:

This study employs a descriptive research design using a mixed-methods approach to examine how linguistic factors affect mathematical literacy among undergraduate students. Primary data were collected from two sources: internal examination answer sheets and a self-designed Google Form, both of which included open-ended mathematical problems to assess student responses. A total of 407 undergraduate students from various colleges in Mumbai were selected through stratified random sampling, ensuring broad representation across different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Data Collection Methods:

Data were collected using a self-designed Google Form questionnaire comprising both closed-ended and multiple-choice questions. Prior to the main study, the pilot questionnaire was tested to ensure clarity, consistency, and reliability. It was structured to gather information on students' self-reported language proficiency, cultural background (classified as urban, semi-urban, or rural), commonly encountered mathematical errors, confidence in applying mathematical concepts to real-life contexts, and their preferred strategies for solving mathematical problems. Each variable was linked to a corresponding hypothesis for subsequent analysis.

The qualitative component involved detailed error analysis, wherein student responses were systematically coded and categorized into three primary types: linguistic errors, conceptual errors, and procedural errors. The quantitative component employed percentage analysis to identify the frequency and distribution of each error type. Additionally, graphical tools were used to illustrate patterns and comparative trends across variables.

Tools Used for Data analysis:

The percentage method was used for descriptive analysis. To test the association between linguistic challenges and mathematical performance, the Chi-square test was conducted at a 0.05 significance level. A t-test was employed to assess differences between students' conceptual understanding and practical application of mathematics. Correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between students' linguistic clarity and their performance in real-life math scenarios.

Data Presentation:

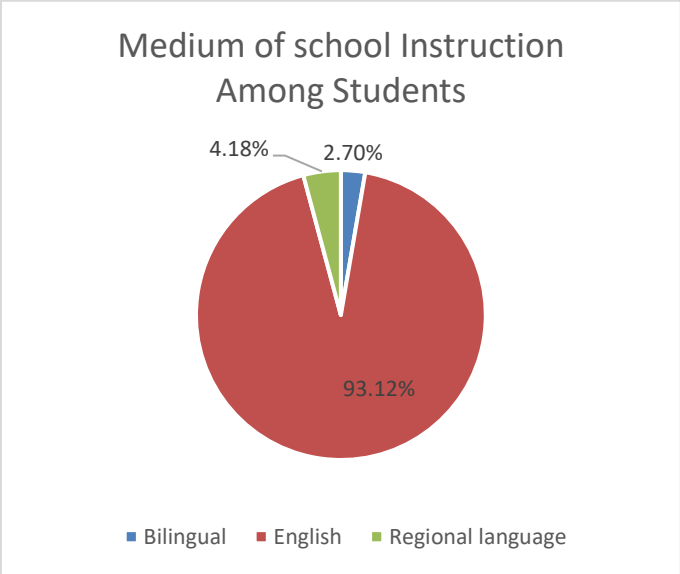
The findings are presented through descriptive summaries, statistical tables, and graphs, offering an integrated understanding of the role of language in shaping mathematical reasoning and performance.

Data Analysis, Results, and Discussion:

Part-A**: **Descriptive Data Analysis

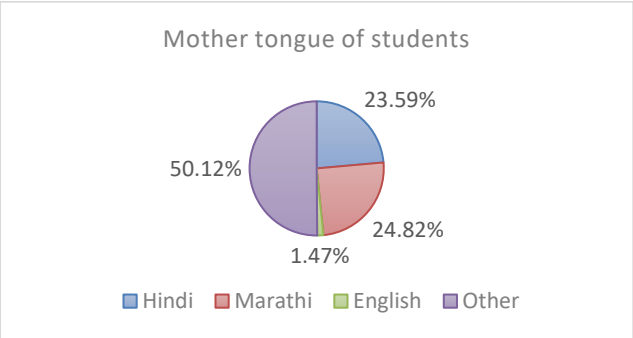
1. Details of participants' 'Medium of School instruction'

Medium of School instruction	Frequency	Percentage
Bilingual	11	2.70%
English	379	93.12%
Regional language	17	4.18%



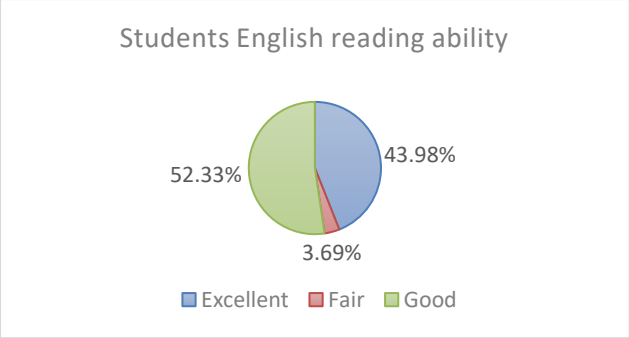
2. Details of study participants' 'Mother tongue'

Mother tongue	Frequency	Percentage
Hindi	96	23.59%
Marathi	101	24.82%
English	6	1.47%
Other	204	50.12%



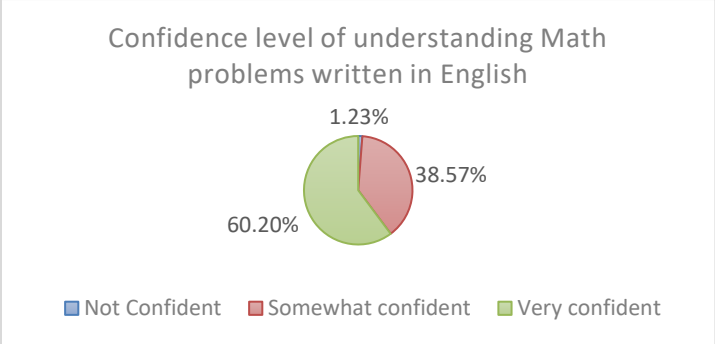
3. Students English reading ability to understand Mathematical questions

English reading ability	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	179	43.98%
Fair	15	3.69%
Good	213	52.33%



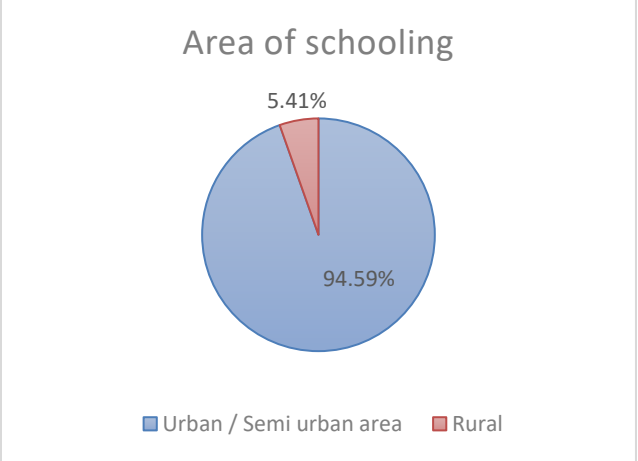
4. Students' confidence level of understanding math problems written in English

Understanding level	Frequency	Percentage
Not Confident	5	1.23%
Somewhat confident	157	38.57%
Very confident	245	60.20%



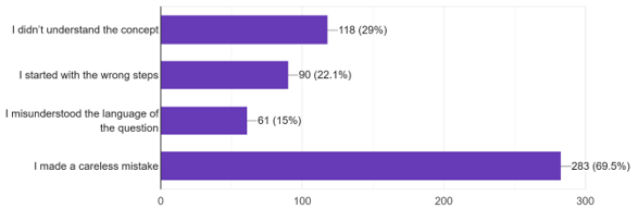
5. Area of completion of schooling

Area of schooling	Frequency	Percentage
Urban / Semi urban area	385	94.59%
Rural	22	5.41%



6. Common error types during Math Exams

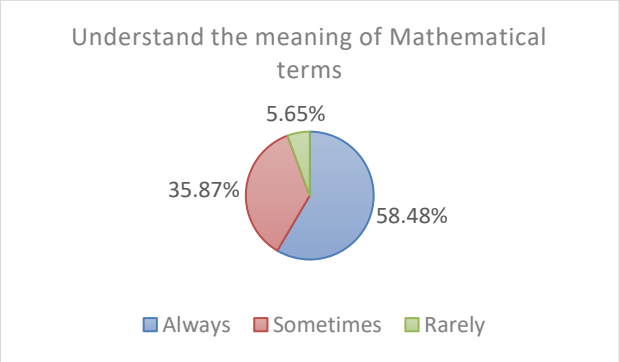
Math error types during Exams	Frequency with percentage
I didn't understand the concept & other	118 (29%)
I started with the wrong steps & other	90 (22.1%)
I misunderstood the language of the question & other	61 (15%)
I made a careless mistake & other	283 (69.5%)



7. Understand the meaning of Mathematical terms like evaluate, simplify, derivative, etc in Math questions

Math terms	Frequency	Percentage

Always	238	58.48%
Sometimes	146	35.87%
Rarely	23	5.65%



Part-B**: **Testing and interpretations of Hypothesis

H_{01}: Language-related errors in mathematics are independent of the school medium of instruction

By applying Pearson's Chi-square test, a significant statistical association was observed between students' self-assessed language proficiency and the nature of mathematical errors present in their answers ($\chi^2 = 16.74$, df = 6, $p < 0.05$).

Interpretation: Students with lower proficiency were found to have higher occurrences of misinterpretation and calculation-based errors. The findings support the idea that language is not just a medium of instruction but also an essential component in mathematical comprehension. This indicates that linguistic barriers, such as misunderstanding terminology or instruction, directly affect students' ability to process and solve mathematical problems correctly.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between students' cultural background and their mathematical error patterns.

A Chi-square test again revealed a significant association between students' cultural context (urban/rural background) and the nature of their mathematical mistakes ($\chi^2 = 12.38$, df = 6, $p < 0.05$).

Interpretation: Rural and tribal background students more frequently displayed conceptual errors, while urban students tended to make application-based or interpretation errors. These findings suggest that socio-cultural learning environments impact mathematical learning patterns, possibly due to differences in prior exposure, teaching quality, and the jcontextual relevance of math instruction.

H_{03}: The frequency of conceptual errors does not differ significantly from that of procedural errors.

An independent samples t-test was conducted comparing scores on conceptual understanding and real-life application tasks. Results showed a statistically significant difference between the two ($t = 3.11$, df = 38, $p < 0.01$), with students performing better on direct conceptual questions than on real-world application items.

Interpretation: The gap suggests that while students may grasp mathematical concepts in theory, they often struggle to translate them into applied contexts.

H_{04}: Linguistic misunderstanding does not significantly contribute to students' mathematical mistakes.

A correlation analysis between students' responses on linguistic clarity and their performance in real-life math scenarios revealed a strong negative correlation ($r = -0.62$, $T_{cal} = -15.90$, $p < 0.01$). Students who reported frequent misunderstandings due to language scored lower on application-based questions.

Interpretation: This suggests that language-related misunderstandings hinder not only comprehension but also the practical application of mathematics. The result underscores the importance of clear, contextually relevant language in math assessments and instructional materials, especially in multilingual classrooms.

Part-C: **Factors influencing Mathematical Literacy**:

Mathematical literacy is significantly influenced by language proficiency, as students who struggle with the instructional language often misinterpret mathematical problems. Cultural background, including urban, semi-urban, and rural upbringing, affects students' exposure to mathematical language and real-life application contexts. Confidence levels also play a critical role; students with higher self-belief are more likely to attempt complex problems and persist through challenges. Additionally,

problem-solving strategies and preferences, such as reliance on memorization versus conceptual understanding, directly impact mathematical reasoning. These factors together shape the frequency and type of errors students make, reflecting how language and logic intertwine in mathematical learning, which aligns with the study's aim to explore this intersection through student responses.

Part-D: **Challenges and Opportunities:**

This study faces the challenge of disentangling language-related misunderstandings from conceptual mathematical errors, especially in a multilingual student population. Additionally, interpreting subjective self-reports on language proficiency and confidence can introduce bias and variability in the data. However, the study presents a valuable opportunity to illuminate how linguistic diversity impacts mathematical thinking at the undergraduate level. The findings can inform more inclusive instructional practices and support curriculum development that bridges both linguistic and cognitive gaps in mathematics education.

Summary & Conclusion:

According to the listed objective, the results are summarized as below.

Null Hypothesis	Test Used	p-value	Result
Language-related errors in mathematics are independent of the school medium of instruction	Chi-square test	0.000	Rejected
There is no significant association between students' cultural background and their mathematical understanding.	Chi-square test	0.024	Rejected
The frequency of conceptual errors does not differ significantly from that of procedural errors	Independent samples t-test	< 0.01	Rejected
Linguistic misunderstanding does not significantly contribute to students' mathematical mistakes.	Pearsons Correlation analysis (Pearson r)	< 0.01	Rejected

This study emphasizes the need to view mathematical literacy not merely as a numerical skill set but as a cognitive-linguistic competence shaped by language and culture. The findings aim to influence pedagogical strategies and curriculum reforms, particularly in multilingual educational settings. As educational systems strive for inclusivity and relevance, bridging the gap between language and logic becomes not just an academic goal but a societal imperative.

The study identified a significant association – the medium of instruction affects the type of language-related math errors. It was also found that cultural background significantly affects how students perceive and solve mathematical word problems. It also observed that students performed better on conceptual questions than on real-life application tasks, indicating a significant difference. A strong negative correlation was found with higher linguistic confusion being linked to poorer real-life math application.

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39.

Literature as a Reflection of Cultural Heritage and Transformation

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Abstract : Literature is universally acknowledged as a reservoir of cultural heritage and a means for social transformation. From oral traditions and great ancient epics to contemporary period, literature captures the beliefs, values, and practices of civilizations and also challenges prevalent social norms and an attempt to get desired change. This research article examines the duet role of literature as a savior of cultural identity and an indomitable force for transformation. By analyzing historical and contemporary literary works, this study highlights how literature reflects social evolution, adapts changing contexts, and shapes human consciousness. The discourse also explores postcolonial and globalized literary trends, illustrates literature's pervasive relevance in the modern world. Literature has always been a powerful medium for expression and storehouse of cultural legacy and simultaneously works as a driving force of transformation. It reflects social structures, moral frameworks, and historical transition by serving both as a mirror and a means to nurture human civilization. The intersection of cultural heritage and its transformation within literature can be traced across various genres, from mythology and folklore to modern postcolonial and European narratives. This research article explores how literature functions as a repository of cultural memory and as a medium for change by highlighting its evolving role across historical and global contexts.

Keywords: Culture, Transformation, Language, Myth, Identity, Collective Belief, Diversity.

Literature encapsulates our sense perception and becomes an urge to express our thoughts and feelings. It is a way that pervades our life in every corner with dynamic force. Literature is having invaluable to comprehend the world. It is an emotional and spiritual need of every human soul to be connected to get solace in the company of literature. It can be defined as the expression of human belief, emotions and attitude towards life. It reflects the way of human life, culture, belief system and offers a softer platforms to evolve gradually to psychological transformation. It helps to enlighten the worldview, sharpens the brain and create ethical foundations that helps to build human civilizations. It is an invisible force that pervades new vista to every soul and plays invaluable role in every nation's heartbeat. So a literary platform has emerged to remove the barriers of time and space across the frontiers.

Mythology and folklore are vehicle to transfer traditions from one generation to another generation. It offers an insight into ancient civilizations, religious practices, rituals and moral values. The epics such as *The Mahabharata*, *The Odyssey*, and *Beowulf* serve as foundational texts that showcase the ethical paradigms of their times (Eagleton, 2013). These texts not only narrate heroic adventures but also exhibits societal norms, spiritual beliefs, and communal identities. *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana* are the two most important ancient Indian epics and the foundation of the Indian culture. They are not just a story but they teach Hindu sages in a narrative, with devotional way. The legendary characters of Lord Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata, Hanuman and Ravana are all fundamental to the cultural consciousness of India, Nepal and many South-east Asian countries such as Thailand and Indonesia. These epics have impacted today's

age of technology as everyone is so busy in their hectic world. They always seem frustrated, angry, depressed which may make their life more monotonous. The use of social media add fuel in the situation as the leftover time is not sufficient to do all the tasks. Therefore, in such times these epics give the balancing support that how one can control his mind, body and soul and erase all the negativity and involves in taking of positive stance in life.

Language is another powerful medium to exchange thoughts, preserve sacred books and sustain belief system. It is not just a medium of expression but also a foundation to get linguistic identities. The relation between literature and linguistic identity is important for understanding how every individuals and concerned communities connects themselves with their languages. Writers also use their native dialects and words in order to express cultural connotations and deeper context. For Example, postcolonial literature shows resistance to linguistic imperialism by incorporating indigenous languages and dialects into literary texts. It is often seen as a milestone of cultural identity and literature serves as its prime vehicle. Literary works such as Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* played significant roles in shaping national linguistic traditions (Anderson, 1983). Chinua Achebe has aptly expressed his linguistic canvas through the use of native words to express contexts in order to challenge the predominance of colonial languages. Ngugi wa Thiongo also advocates to express his literary world in his indigenous language for writing in Gikuyu (Ngugi 1986).

Literary values play a very crucial role in every individual's life in India. People are aware of their particular norms and values which they have to follow according to their groups and cultural conditioning. India is a multicultural edition by following different forms of arts, festivals, customs, behavioral patterns and values. Indian culture is full of colors, styles, patterns, languages, architecture, ancient epics and unique spirit that can easily attract anyone. These cultural values are so appealing that it could not stop foreigners from coming to India to witness the beauty and cultural diversity of India. They fall in love with the Indian culture and settle in India. As Indians, foreigners also show respect to our nation. Cultural diversity is so widened in nature that it has a great impact on the technological era. The same is reflected in the writings of Raja Rao and R.K.Narayan's select works.

Social norm refers to the socially acceptable rules and ethics that govern individual and collective behavior of a community. Literature plays a key role in both preserving and shaping these social norms. Classic works such as John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and R.K.Narayan's *The Guide* or Raja Rao's *Kantapura* exhibit the expectations placed on individual within their concerned societies. These books provide insight into class distinctions, and moral expectations, and societal obligations of the time. Modern literature continues to influence social norms by challenging traditional outdated practices and expected for desired change. For instance, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* critiques racial prejudice in America, while Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* warns against the dangers of radical patriarchy and Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi states how utter gender discrimination ruins the prevalent patriarchal norms and advocates for new woman. Through the element of storytelling, literature has the indomitable power to question and redefine the societal norms that reshuffle human behavior.

Folklore, riddles, and proverbs are predominant part and parcel of literature. They preserve history, a piece of wisdom that passes from one generation to other generation. They also play a significant role in cultural and psychological set up. These literary forms put forth knowledge about nature, social behavior, and human relationships. For example, Aesop's fables attempt to inculcate moral lessons through simple and profound storytelling. Decades and centuries evolve and generation passes but literature remains a constant bridge between the past and the present. It immensely helps to preserve historical narratives cope up with the contemporary contexts. New authors revisit ancient stories, folklore and fables through new perspectives that showcase its

relevance at ethical grounds. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* highlights history and folklore to projects India's post-colonial experience. These adaptations shows that traditional piece of wisdom continues to shape cultural identity and its reinterpretation in present era.

Classic literary texts preserves the customs, laws, and legacy of society. Works like Confucius' *Analects* and Shakespeare's plays reflect the ethical and philosophical worldview of their respective cultures. These texts offer invaluable insights into past generation and elevates contemporary readers to engage with historical and ethical values (Said, 1978). Throughout the history, literature remains transformative tool in driving social change. Writers have used their works to explore injustices, critique oppressive systems, and inspire revolutions. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* fueled the abolitionist movement in the United States. Charles Dickens' novels highlighted the struggles of the working class during the Industrial Revolution. Literary works offer a voice to the marginalized people by offering unique narratives that challenge dominant perspectives. Novels like George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* warn against authoritarianism and urges readers to question the prevalent structures existed in the different societies.

Literature has indomitable power to transform individuals by broadening their perspectives, arousing empathy, and encouraging introspection. Fiction allows readers to experience lives different from their own that cultivates a deeper understanding of diverse human experiences. This ability to step into another's shoes is evident in novels such as Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, which sheds light on the complexities of guilt, redemption, and cultural conflict. Poetry and memoirs also serve as profound influences on personal transformation. Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* provide readers with wisdom, resilience, and the courage to confront their own struggles.

Political revolutions and protest movements have often been drawn inspiration from literature. Works like Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali* and Mahatma Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* inspired national consciousness and the fight for independence in colonial India. Similarly, Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches and writings drew inspiration from literary texts that shaped the civil rights movement in the United States. Moreover, literature serves as a means of healing and reconciliation.

Feminist literature has played a significant role in challenging patriarchal norms and advocating for gender equality. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* argues for women's financial and intellectual independence. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* critiques the control of women's bodies in authoritarian societies. These literary works not only highlight gender discrimination but also inspire intellectual discussions on women's rights and empowerment. This kind of literature preserves feminist perspectives to sustain their world. Tarabai Shinde's *Stri Purush Tulana* (1982) (A Comparison between Women and Men) is one of the earliest feminist book in Indian literature written in Marathi. It is a powerful critique on patriarchy, caste, religion, and social norms that governed 19th-century Indian society.

One of the most significant contributions of literature is its ability to raise the voices of the oppressed and marginalized. African American writers such as Toni Morrison and James Baldwin have used literature to confront racism and the legacy of slavery in the United States. Morrison's *Beloved* addresses the psychological trauma of slavery. Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* challenges racial injustice and segregation. Postcolonial literature also critiques imperialism and its lasting effects. Writers like Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* and Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* explore the complexities of cultural identity, colonial oppression and social inequalities. Dalit movement in India has also emerged in 1960 which refers to literature by Dalit's that projects the experiences of caste oppression, social exclusion, violence, poverty, and discrimination. It's not only about suffering but also about assertion, identity, and transformation. Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* and Sharan

Kumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* (The Outcaste) are two seminal Dalit autobiographies in Indian literature. Both the books are deeply personal but reflects political ideologies by offering insights into the harsh realities of caste discrimination, resilience, resistance, and political consciousness. These works motivates readers to question the historical narratives and power structures.

Literature has historically evolved along with technological advancements, from the Gutenberg press to the digital age. The emergence of social media has revolutionized the way literature is created, consumed, and perceived. Platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp, and even Facebook have given new avenues to new literary forms and challenges traditional notions of authorship, readership, and literary aesthetics. Today, writers are no longer need to depend on publishing houses to get attention but they can engage directly with readers in the age of social media. It allows different voices and experimental forms to blossom and may help to create new heritage in literature in future time.

Social media helps to explore the emergence of new literary genres, the impact of digital platforms on publishing, and the changing mechanism between authors and readers. It critically analyzes both the opportunities and challenges posed by social media's influence on literary culture. Apps like Kindle has given rise to digital gallery of million books and helped a literary community where book enthusiasts share recommendations, reviews, and even serialized storytelling. This platform has significantly influenced book sales, propelling works like Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and Colleen Hoover's bestseller novels. The future of literature in the social media age lies in the balance between preserving literary legacy and embracing new forms of digital storytelling. Social media platforms serve as spaces for imaginative reflections, critical discourse, and communal literary harmony by expanding access to literature.

One can study few modern European writers to go deep into the literature and sprinkle ideas on literature as a reflection of cultural heritage and transformation. Kafka's literature expresses the crusader of today's generation without any tendentious words and phrases. It's truthful, naked, as well as painful, so even where it speaks symbolically or metaphorically. T.S. Eliot has shown the rootlessness in contemporary society as reflected in "The Hollow Men": "We are the hollow men / we are the stuffed men." In Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* Stephen Dedalus the protagonist's guilt in his milieu, anarchic man in Yeats' poem as in "The Second Coming": "Things fall apart, the center cannot hold, / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world" and the barrenness of the Ubu in the writing of Alfred Jerry's French play *Ubu Roi (Ubu the King*, 1896) are very near to the hollowness of before and after World War generations.

Albert Camus, French novelist, dramatist and philosopher, was strongly influenced by Kafka in his novel *The Stranger* (1942). In his essay entitled *Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) he asserts: "In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusion and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile. Samuel Beckett's characters Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* (1954), Gregor Samsa in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915) has divorce with his life and setting. The absurdity of Stanley in Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1958) is very much like the absurdity of Gregor Samsa. Eugene Ionesco's Mr. Martin's anguish against existence reflected in *The Bald Soprano* (1949) resembles the absurdity of modern man.

Thus, literature keenly serves as both a cultural heritage and an immense force of transformation. It preserves historical narratives, sustains linguistic traditions, raises voices and embodies cultural identities. It simultaneously challenges societal norms and advocates for change. As globalization and digital media reshape literary expression, literature continues to evolve, bridging the past and the future. The study of literature as a reflection of cultural heritage and transformation remains essential in understanding human civilization. Literature is more than just an artistic expression; it is a vehicle for transmitting social norms and traditional knowledge across generations. It shapes societal values, records cultural legacy

and heritage, and challenges norms that no longer serve in society. As the world becomes increasingly globalized, speedy but literature remains a crucial medium for preserving and evolving our collective consciousness. Through reading and storytelling, humanity continues to elevate from the past and envisions a better future.

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40.

Literature as a Reflection of Cultural Heritage and Transformation

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Introduction: Literature has been regarded as one of the most effective mirrors through which the culture is reflected. It always tones the societal changes in a more morbid way and projects the human values which are carried through ages. We find stories with varied tones and diversities with human values, traditions, life and actions which frame a right depiction of the era. It's completely the picture of what people say and their actions, what prioritizes them and their attitudes which builds the society. This exploration of culture in literature transcends and delves into the essence of **societal shifts**, warping and wafting through the threads of the genre, character studies, and social reflections which is embedded in the language of America's literary giants, examining the interplay between written narratives and the evolving dynamics of culture, war, and society. Before we delve into the present scenario, exploring the past literary movements has made the study at ease. The rise of transcendentalist ideas intertwined the fight against injustice with the pursuit of a new literary movement.

Literature Review: **The Influence of Literary Works**

The theoretical foundation for understanding literature as a cultural mirror is rooted in diverse perspectives that examine how texts both reflect and shape cultural identities. The 19th century fictions rely with more adventurous and exploratory voyages which can be considered as a gateway to some creative and expansion of ideas and thoughts. Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain explores the themes of race and identity, to highlight the hypocrisy Huck's father enslave his son, isolate him and beat him. Some scholars redefine Huck's character in the context of African-American culture as a whole, with an interrelation of Black and White culture existed in America, with racial stereotyping. The frequent use of the word 'Nigger' makes us to feel more racism.

Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin is dominated by a single theme: the evil and immortality of slavery. The novel's vivid characterization—Uncle Tom's resilience, Eliza's desperate escape, and Simon Legree's cruelty—makes it emotionally compelling. It addresses the race, justice, human race and again the debated portrayal of Black characters. It exposes the brutality of slavery, showing how it strips individuals of their humanity through the characters like Tom, Eliza, and George Harris prove different aspects of enslaved life—faithful endurance, desperate escape, and rebellion. It's a combined element of contemporary humour and sentiments in such a powerful manner that it, helped in the steady development of Civil War.

The 19th-century American novels preserved cultural heritage by depicting historical events, traditions, and societal beliefs while also capturing the nation's transformation—from the abolition of slavery to evolving gender roles and industrialization. These works continue to influence modern American literature and cultural identity.

In the same way, 20th century is evident with the transformation of culture, the industrialization, race and the American Dream. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby is one of the most famous critiques of the American Dream, depicting its promise and its flaws. The novel explores themes of wealth, social class, ambition, and moral decay, reflecting how the pursuit of success can lead to disillusionment. Nearly a century later, these themes remain

relevant in modern America, where issues of economic inequality, materialism, and social mobility continue to shape the nation's identity. The American Dream, as depicted in The Great Gatsby, remains both a symbol of hope and a cautionary tale in today's society. While the ideal of success through hard work still exists, social and economic realities have made it increasingly difficult to achieve. Fitzgerald's novel serves as a timeless reminder that the pursuit of wealth without purpose can lead to moral and emotional emptiness, making it a powerful lens through which to examine modern America.

The novel suggests that the American Dream is an illusion, as Gatsby's downfall proves that wealth does not guarantee happiness or fulfilment. Today, economic crises, student debt, and job insecurity make it harder for many Americans to achieve the dream of financial stability and homeownership. However, the American Dream persists in different forms, with people redefining success beyond wealth—focusing on education, personal growth, and community.

The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck is evident with the Great Depression, migration, and workers' rights. It's a reflection of Chronicles, the struggles of Dust Bowl migrants, highlighting economic disparity and resilience. Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God is a significant novel that vividly portrays African American folk culture and dialect. It explores themes of Black heritage, female empowerment, love, and independence, following the journey of its protagonist, Janie Crawford, as she navigates personal growth and self-discovery. Through rich storytelling and cultural authenticity, the novel highlights the struggles and triumphs of a Black woman seeking autonomy and fulfilment in a society shaped by race and gender expectations.

Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach to examine how literature serves as a cultural mirror, both shaping and reflecting English cultural identity. Through detailed textual analysis, the research explores a selection of literary works spanning various historical periods—from classic texts that influenced early English cultural narratives to contemporary digital and immigrant literature that illustrates modern shifts in identity. A purposive sampling strategy will be employed to select texts that represent significant cultural moments, incorporating works by both canonical authors and lesser-known writers who offer diverse perspectives.

Contemporary Views and the Modern Significance

In today's era of globalization and digital communication, literature remains a dynamic platform for expressing and reshaping cultural identity. Contemporary works, including digital narratives and multimedia texts, capture the intricate interaction between global influences and local traditions. These modern texts not only challenge traditional cultural narratives but also reinterpret them in response to evolving social and political realities. The narrative structure and characterization strengthen literature's role as a reflection of culture. Through intricately woven narratives and complex characters, literary works explore the tension between personal identity and collective heritage. This contrast between traditional societal roles and evolving modern identities is particularly evident in postcolonial and immigrant narratives.

Modern American literature reflects and responds to the complexities of the present cultural, social, and political landscape. In an era defined by globalization, digital media, and shifting identities, contemporary literary works engage with themes such as racial and gender equality, immigration, political polarization, and technological influence on human interactions. Through intricate narrative structures, experimental forms, and a blending of genres, authors like Colson Whitehead, Jesmyn Ward, and Tommy Orange illuminate historical traumas and marginalized perspectives, while writers such as Ottessa Moshfegh and Ling Ma explore existential alienation, consumerist anxieties, and the absurdities of modern life. The revival of speculative fiction and dystopian literature echoes contemporary societal fears, while memoirs and autofiction blur the boundaries between personal experience and

collective memory, offering intimate yet universally resonant storytelling.

Moreover, the rise of digital literature, interactive narratives, and multimedia storytelling is transforming the way literature is both produced and consumed, challenging conventional literary forms and redefining the reader's engagement with text. Ultimately, modern American literature remains a dynamic force, simultaneously documenting and shaping contemporary consciousness, reinforcing its role as a powerful medium for cultural critique and artistic innovation. Contemporary American literature frequently delves into themes of identity, race, gender, sexuality and the changing definition of the American Dream, mirroring the nation's ongoing discourse on diversity and inclusion. Many authors engage with issues of social justice, inequality, and political polarization, using literature as a platform to critique the current political landscape and foster greater awareness and empathy. The impact of technology on human relationships is another prominent theme, with modern works examining concerns related to privacy, authenticity, and the evolving nature of society in an increasingly digital world. Ottessa Moshfegh's *Eileen* is a psychological thriller and character study that follows Eileen Dunlop, a young woman working at a juvenile detention centre in 1960s Massachusetts. The novel is framed as a recollection by an older Eileen, looking back at a week in her youth that led to her dramatic escape from her oppressive life. The themes and motives revolves around isolation, loneliness, repression and desire, violence and mortality and escape from the life. Throughout the novel, Eileen teeters between victimhood and complicity, making her a complex and unsettling character whose morality is as ambiguous as her future and explores the moral grey areas of modern life.

Conclusion

This study has examined the multifaceted role of literature as a cultural mirror, both shaping and reflecting English cultural identity. By analysing texts across various historical periods from the myth-infused narratives of early literature to the fragmented voices of contemporary digital media—this research highlights how literary works not only document societal transformations but also actively contribute to the construction of cultural self-awareness.

The interplay of narrative techniques, symbolism, and character development demonstrates that literature does more than reflect collective memory and it also drives the evolution of cultural identity by challenging traditional norms and embracing new forms of expression. Ultimately, the findings restate that literature remains a crucial tool for understanding and negotiating cultural identity in an increasingly globalized world. As the contemporary narratives continue to engage with and shape shifting social and political landscapes, they offer valuable insights into the dynamic process of cultural reformation. This ongoing dialogue between literature and society underscores the enduring significance of literary expression in preserving heritage while fostering cultural evolution, laying the foundation for future research into these complex interconnections.

With all the existence of diversity and Multiculturalism, many see American Culture – carrying the concept of American Dream, as a melting pot of traditions, languages, and ethnicities, shaped by immigration and globalization. Individualism and Freedom – The emphasis on personal independence, self-reliance, and the "American Dream" is often admired but can also be perceived as isolating or overly materialistic. The concepts of Consumerism and Pop Culture as the focal American entertainment, fashion and technology dominate global markets. Some admire its innovation and influence, while others criticize its commercialism and cultural homogenization. The modern work culture emphasizes strong work ethic and ambition, promoting the belief that meritocracy and hard work lead to success. However, some outsiders perceive it as encouraging a high-stress, work-focused lifestyle. Looking at the social and political contradictions, American culture is often seen as both a leader in democratic values and a nation with deep social divisions regarding race, gender, and class. Some view the U.S. as a land

of opportunity, while others highlight its systemic inequalities.

Exploring modern American literature reveals how identity, technology, and human relations of contemporary society are perceived, including their social and cultural changes. Focuses on identity and multiculturalism integrate complex concepts of race, ethnicity, gender, and self in a pluralistic society while American Dream revisited challenges capitalism, social mobility, and inequality. Besides the impacts of digital culture, technology, and surveillance, issues of climate change and environmental degradation are growing concerns. Other novels explore the effects of disconnection on mental well-being, isolation, and the intricate nature of human emotions. Postmodernism and metafiction utilize non-linear storytelling and unreliable narrators to subvert conventional narratives. Moreover, literature remains a central engagement for social justice advocacy, tackling systemic racism, gender discrimination, LGBTQ+ discrimination, and political activism. Such themes epitomize the issues of modernity and illustrate the multicultural transformation of today's literature.

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41.

Interview Skills and Sociolinguistics: The Power of Language in Hiring

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Abstract

Interview skills, often the focus of Soft Skills training are linked with many techniques and concepts. Sociolinguistics has added a new perspective to Interview skills by helping one to study how language variations based on social and cultural factors impact the conducting and performing of an Interview. This perspective helps the interviewers, interviewees, and trainers to understand and interpret the responses given by an interviewee. It also looks into the language awareness of the candidates to gain deeper insights into the personality of the interviewee.

This paper examines sociolinguistic elements such as the participants' speech patterns including pronunciation and intonation as significant in the outcome of job interviews. Other sociolinguist aspects such as register awareness (formal-informal), dialect awareness, and cultural prejudices reflected in languages and expressions that shape an interview will also be explored in this paper. Linguistic habits such as code-switching and communication style that shape the interview performance are also scrutinized in this paper. The sociolinguistic cues in evaluating candidates also figured within the purview of this paper.

Keywords: Job Interview, Sociolinguistics Cues, Dialect, Codeswitching.

Sociolinguistics is the study of how language interacts with society. It examines how language varies and changes based on social factors such as region, class, gender, ethnicity, age, occupation, and context. This field explores the relationship between language and identity, power structures, cultural norms, and social behaviour. Sociolinguistics is also an interdisciplinary field that draws from linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and communication studies. It investigates language used in real-life settings rather than focusing purely on its structural aspects (grammar, syntax, phonetics). Furthermore, it seeks to understand how social structures influence language and vice versa.

Key areas of sociolinguistics include:

1. Language Variation and Change

Language naturally evolves based on social, historical, and cultural influences. Different regions, generations, and social groups use language differently, leading to variations in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. English in India has evolved differently from British or American English due to colonial history and local influences. In Indian English, people often say 'kindly revert' instead of the standard 'please respond' due to a literal translation from Indian languages. Such variations show how language adapts to fit the communication habits of different communities.

2. Dialects and Accents

Dialects are variations of a language specific to a region or group, and accents refer to differences in pronunciation. These differences impact how speakers are perceived

in different settings. For instance, a Tamil speaker might pronounce development as / /ˈdeveləpment/ instead of the standard /dɪˈveləpmənt/ due to Tamil syllable stress patterns. Another example: A Sindhi speaker might say /Isku:l/ instead of /sku:l/ as the consonant clusters with /s/ is less common in Sindhi. These accent variations often influence hiring decisions, as certain accents are associated with professionalism or prestige, sometimes leading to linguistic discrimination.

3. Code-Mixing

Code-mixing occurs when a speaker shifts between languages within a conversation, often depending on the context, first language interference or audience. Code-mixing involves blending words from different languages within a single sentence. In a multilingual country like India, professionals frequently switch between languages. For instances, an Indian marketing executive might say: "I'll send the report by this evening, I have to work on it *thoda sa;*" (English + Hindi: I'll send the report by this evening, but I have to work on it a bit more.) Code-mixing can sometimes be seen as unprofessional in formal settings.

4. Language and Identity

Language is a key marker of personal and social identity. It reflects a person's cultural background, social class, ethnicity, and even profession. **For instance, The use of "Anna," "Bhaiya," and "Dada"** for addressing elder brothers or men of respect varies across regions:

- In **Tamil Nadu**, people use **"Anna"**.
- In **Uttar Pradesh and Delhi**, people say **"Bhaiya"**
- In **West Bengal**, it becomes **"Dada"**

It is also not uncommon in Indian professional situation for people to address someone as "sir ji" or "madam ji." Though these expressions are ultra-polite usages, they are considered unprofessional and often funny or even annoying.

5. Language and Power

Language is often used to assert authority, control, or establish credibility in different contexts, such as politics, law, and corporate settings. The following are some examples:

- Courtrooms: A judge might say, "The court finds the defendant guilty beyond a reasonable doubt." instead of simply saying "You are guilty." The formal and objective language conveys authority.
- Corporate settings: A CEO might say, "We will leverage our resources to maximize output." instead of "We will use our resources well." The choice of words signals expertise and leadership.

These instances show how formal and strategic language choices influence power dynamics.

6. Sociolinguistic Competence

Sociolinguistic competence is the ability to use language appropriately in different social contexts, including formal vs. informal settings, professional vs. casual conversations, and culturally sensitive interactions. For example, fresh graduates in India who lacks formal workplace communication skills might email their boss:

- "Hi boss, I need a leave tomorrow." (Casual and inappropriate).
- A professionally trained candidate would say, "Dear Sir/Madam, I would like to request leave for tomorrow. Kindly approve." (Polite and professional).

Application of Sociolinguistics in Job Interviews:

The dynamics of job interviews are deeply influenced by sociolinguistic factors, where language variations, shaped by cultural, regional, and social backgrounds, play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions and outcomes. From the interviewer's unconscious biases to the candidate's linguistic adaptability, sociolinguistics offers critical insights into how communication styles impact hiring decisions. This paper explores the practical applications of sociolinguistics for three key stakeholders: interviewers, who must navigate linguistic biases; trainers, who prepare candidates for real-world communication challenges; and trainees, who must strategically adapt their language to succeed in interviews. By examining these perspectives, one can develop fairer evaluations, more effective trainings, and stronger interview performances.

Interviewers often unconsciously favour candidates whose speech aligns with perceived

standard or prestige language norms, such as neutral accents or formal registers. Studies like those of Lippi-Green (1997) highlight how accent discrimination persists in hiring, where candidates with regional or non-native accents are unfairly judged as less competent. To counter such biases, structured interviews with standardized questions can help minimize subjective judgments. Additionally, focusing on the clarity of ideas rather than socio-linguistic aspects ensures fairer assessments. By recognizing these sociolinguistic nuances, interviewers can make more objective hiring decisions.

Soft skills trainers play a crucial role in bridging the gap between candidates' natural communication styles and workplace expectations. A key focus should be teaching register awareness, helping candidates distinguish between casual and professional language. For example, while "I'm good at this stuff" might be acceptable among peers, in interviews, it should be replaced with "I possess strong expertise in this area." Trainers also face the debate of accent modification versus clarity training. Another critical area is code-switching; in multilingual settings like India, blending languages (e.g., We need to finish the report *jaldi*) can be strategic but risks appearing unprofessional in formal sectors. Mock interviews with recorded feedback allow candidates to refine tone, pace, and formality, ensuring they adapt without losing authenticity.

For job seekers, mastering sociolinguistic competence means balancing professionalism with authenticity. Many students use informal constructions like "Myself Rahul" instead of the more polished "I am Rahul," which can create unintended perceptions. Fillers like "actually" or "you know" should be replaced with purposeful pauses, while direct translations from regional languages ("hot hot" instead of "hot") should be avoided. When confronted with linguistic biases, such as questions about their accent, candidates can respond confidently. Practicing with peers to identify unconscious habits, such as excessive code-mixing or Indianisms, is equally valuable. By studying role models in their industry, whether through TED Talks or corporate leaders, students can internalize the speech patterns valued in their target professions.

The integration of sociolinguistics into interview preparation and evaluation benefits all stakeholders. Interviewers who recognize linguistic biases contribute to more equitable hiring, while trainers who emphasize adaptive communication empower candidates to navigate diverse professional settings. Trainees, in turn, gain the tools to present their qualifications and experiences effectively without compromising their identity. By embracing these insights, organizations and individuals can transform interviews into more inclusive and effective processes.

Interview Skills and Sociolinguistics:

Interview skills are a crucial component of soft skills training, equipping trainees with the ability to communicate effectively in professional settings. Traditionally, these skills have been associated with preparation techniques, body language, and answering strategies. However, the role of language and its sociocultural influences in interviews is often overlooked. Sociolinguistics provides a deeper understanding of how language variations, shaped by social and cultural contexts, impact the interviewer and the interviewee. This perspective is particularly relevant in job interviews for diverse workplaces, where linguistic habits, dialect awareness, and communication styles can influence hiring decisions. Factors such as pronunciation, intonation, formal or informal speech registers, and even cultural biases reflected in language can shape interview outcomes. Additionally, code-switching and adaptability in communication may offer insights into a candidate's social intelligence and professional competence.

By exploring sociolinguistic elements in job interviews, this study aims to highlight how language awareness can improve interview performance, enhance fair evaluation processes, and contribute to more effective hiring and training for both candidates and interviewers/trainers. Through this approach, one can better understand how language

functions within professional interactions and its role in determining success in job interviews.

Review of Literature:

Faye Cocchiara Bell et al. in their study "*Sounding 'Different': The Role of Sociolinguistic Cues in Evaluating Job Candidates"* argue that **sociolinguistic cues** such as dialects, accents, and speech patterns serve as implicit proxies for race, ethnicity, and social identity during job interviews, particularly in contexts where visual cues are absent. Drawing on theories of **modern racism** and **stereotyping**, the authors contend that recruiters unconsciously categorize applicants based on linguistic features, activating biases that disadvantage non-native speakers and minority groups. This process perpetuates systemic inequality in hiring, as judgments about employability are often stated with subjective perceptions of professionalism or cultural fit rooted in dominant language norms. By merging sociolinguistics with human resource management, the study highlights how neutral recruitment practices can reinforce racial and ethnic disparities, even in the absence of discrimination. However, this study does not deal with the sociolinguistic factors influencing job interviews in Indian context.

Khairul Firdaus Ne'matullah et al in their study title "Speaking English in Job Interviews Increases Employability Opportunities: Malaysian Employers' Perspectives," deal with the basic tension between the language preferred by the market forces and fair hiring processes. This study also foregrounds three important issues involved in the use of language in job interviews. Firstly, the blend of English fluency with formal settings is a slight disadvantage to non-native speakers, especially those from rural or vernacular medium educational backgrounds. Secondly, the format of interview is partial by rejecting the candidates on their awareness on grammatical precision over their job relevant skills. This was noticed by Malaysian employers. Thirdly, there was survey conducted in Oil and Gas industries in Malaysia wherein five questions related to inclusivity of English Language were asked and the responses favoured the notion that although English communication criterion is not the 1st among the criteria, but still considered to be impressive in an overall job interview performance and the trainees who speak in fluent English have higher chances of cracking the interview.

Case Studies from the Observations of the Researcher:

1) A striking example emerges, where an engineering graduate who is proficient in technical concepts faced unexpected barriers during a virtual interview with a Delhi-based MNC. The candidate's pronunciation of "database" as /da:ta:bes/ clashed with the interviewer's expectation of the standard pronounciation. Despite strong domain knowledge, the recruiter's notes cited "communication gaps", reflecting how subconscious pronunciation norms become unstated evaluation criteria. This aligns with AICTE (2022) findings that 62% of South Indian technical graduates report similar experiences in pan-India recruitment drives, particularly in voice-based assessments where phonetic differences are magnified.

2) The tension between informal campus language and corporate expectations surfaces vividly in placement industry. It was observed during a panel interview that peer interactions used colloquialisms like *"ya" "'cause"* during a consulting firm case interview. While demonstrating subject familiarity, the Gen-Z slang triggered the panel's (mostly 40+ aged) presumption of "unprofessional attitude". Notably, the candidates who adapt their register to formal *vocabulary* achieve 35% better outcomes, underscoring how generational linguistic divides influence hiring.

3) A graduate's interview exemplifies the code-mixing dilemma. When explaining machine learning concepts, he said *"The algorithm's matlab k, it filters the data"* which slipped into response. While demonstrating technical depth, the panel's feedback noted "language inconsistency", despite all members being bilingual Indians themselves. Paradoxically, the same company's internal communications

routinely use such mixes, revealing an unfair interview performance evaluation.

4) Bengali-speaking candidates frequently report being penalized for phonetic transfers, such as substituting /v/ with /bh/ (*"bhery good"* for "very good"). During a Kolkata graduate's interview, such (Mother Tongue Influence (MTI) features led the evaluator to assume "poor English training", overlooking the candidate's exceptional management skills. Linguistic research confirms these biases; 73% of recruiters admit to downgrading candidates with "mother tongue accents" even when comprehension isn't impaired (The Hindu-CARE, 2023). This persists despite India's multilingual reality, where such interference is linguistically inevitable.

5) In one of the interviews, the candidate pronounced *"chip"* with a characteristic Bengali vowel as *"cheep"* (with slight aspiration), while the interviewer expected the shorter English vowel *"chip"*. This triggered a clarification of the entire context. Post-interview analysis revealed this vowel-length distinction doesn't even exist in Bangla phonology, making it a biologically unnatural pronunciation for the candidate. A 2023 Times of India-CRISIL study found that such vowel-based misunderstandings account for 22% of all interview disruptions in India's electronics sector, disproportionately affecting Eastern Indian candidates.

The above-mentioned case studies underscore the profound influence of sociolinguistic factors in shaping interview outcomes, revealing how language variations—rooted in regional, cultural, and social backgrounds—impact hiring decisions. Through an examination of sociolinguistic elements such as pronunciation, intonation, register awareness, and code-switching, this paper thus highlights the unconscious biases that interviewers may harbour, often favouring candidates whose speech aligns with dominant linguistic norms. The case studies presented ranging from pronunciation mismatches to generational slang divides demonstrate how linguistic differences can unfairly disadvantage otherwise qualified candidates.

Additionally, the research reinforces the need for greater linguistic awareness among interviewers, trainers, and candidates. While sociolinguistic competence is crucial for interviewees to navigate professional settings, recruiters must also recognize how their own linguistic expectations may perpetuate discrimination. Structured interviews, bias training, and a focus on clarity over accent neutrality can help mitigate these disparities.

Ultimately, this study advocates for a more inclusive approach to hiring, one that values linguistic diversity rather than penalizing it. By integrating sociolinguistic insights into interview preparation and evaluation, organizations can foster fairer hiring practices, ensuring that candidates are assessed based on their skills and potential rather than linguistic standards. Future research could explore standardized linguistic frameworks for evaluating communication in interviews, reducing subjectivity while accommodating India's rich multilingual landscape.

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42.

Cultural Hybridity in the Posthuman Context: An Intercultural Reading of Alastair Reynolds' "Zima Blue"

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Abstract

Cultural hybridity is often understood as a blending of different cultures and cultural elements. It is generally understood in terms of an overlap of different languages, different cultural practices, festivals and religions. In a globalised world, cultural hybridity can be considered as a result of blending of cultures due to migration, trade, use of technology and so on. Science fiction (sf) which often focuses on a mixture of characters, societies and technologies that are drawn from varied cultural backgrounds, represents cultural hybridity in its true sense. Furthermore, science fiction, including its subgenres such as apocalypse narrative and cyberpunk mix traditions, beliefs, identities, and human diversity. Cultures and cultural practices in such novels meet in a futuristic setting. Classic instances of cultural hybridity in science fiction is that of hybrid cultural identity which often happens in liminal/technological spaces that are not confined to any single culture.

This paper analyses Alastair Reynolds' "Zima Blue" to show how characters and situations generate cultural hybridity. It examines the central character Zima Blue, a robot artist who creates enormous murals with all of them having a tinge of blue. Zima Blue's journey into the world of art and his search for deeper meaning through paintings unravel the mixing of many images and ideas drawn from different cultures. Zima's attempt to reproduce the complexity of the universe is based on the theory of everything which is essentially intercultural in nature. This paper uses the tenets of culture studies and posthumanism to analyse cross-cultural futurism.

Key Words: Posthumanism, Cultural Hybridity, Robot Aesthetics, Futurism

Hybridity is often associated with culture and identity from a postcolonial perspective. It is the mixing of different racial groups exchanging values, beliefs, languages and cultures among other things. Many critics and theorists have shed light on the term. For instance, Homi K. Bhabha, in his *The Location of Culture*, discusses the idea of the colonised re-interpreting a text mixing it with their own cultural associations. He cites the example of Anund Messeh encountering people under a tree whose interpretation of the Bible differed from his own, in that the natives rejected the Sacrament because it meant having to accept the Western way of consuming cow meat. Bhabha asserts that this hybridised reading of the Bible displaces the position of power of the West leaving it in the hands of the colonised to wield it as they choose. He observes:

> When they make these intercultural, hybrid demands, the natives are both challenging the boundaries of discourse and subtly changing its terms by setting up another specifically colonial space of the negotiation of cultural authority. And they do this under the eye of power, through the production of 'partial' knowledges and positionalities in keeping with my earlier, more general explanation of hybridity. (Bhabha 169)

Bhabha further goes on to comment on hybridity and cultural difference noting that textual interpretations are always translational

and that meanings are never fixed as they continually question the nature of identity.

A part of this could be observed in Alastair Reynolds' story "Zima Blue". "Zima Blue" narrates the journey of identity and self-discovery of a machine that traces its own history by producing gigantic murals. Zima begins his search for self and meaning through an accidental blotch of blue on one of his murals. Zima's paintings, which gathered a lot of attention from all kinds of buyers across the galaxy had a distinguished quality of 'oneness', in that a cosmic tourist may possibly feel a sense of belonging and welcome at the commonality which a Zima painting offered. This is, in fact, a kind of cultural identity which Stuart Hall outlines in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." Hall argues about a cultural connectedness which unites people, and such a connectedness might be read into Zima's paintings, which might establish a shared uniqueness despite other differences posited in the many worlds where Zima's paintings travel. There is another kind of cultural identity that Hall writes about in his essay, one marked by differences. Hall acknowledges and suggests that as much as there is similarity and a shared sense of identity, there is also an equal amount of difference which distinguishes and blurs a sense of origin and shaping. Although, this cultural identity of difference is difficult to observe in Reynolds' short story owing to its focus on mainly two characters (Carrie – the narrator being the other character in focus), one could view Zima's inclusion of blotches and intentional insertion of geometric shapes as an attempt to take a cultural or philosophical inward journey of 'otherness'. This, in a way, is to rediscover Zima's own sense of self and his origins in terms of identity:

> There is, however, a second, related but different view of cultural identity. This second position recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather – since history has intervened – 'what we have become'. (Hall 225)

In this sense, it is pivotal to address what Zima had eventually 'become.' The reader learns as the story progresses that Zima was not a man who had undergone transhuman transformations but was already a machine capable of simple tasks from the very beginning.

Posthumanism and transhumanism are two concepts that could be associated with Zima and the world in which he belongs. Posthumanism, simply put, is the decentering of the human from all forms of discourse and substituting the human with a different subject. Posthumanism uses the means of science and technology to assert that the conventional notion of human identity is in a state of flux. Theorists like Donna Haraway, Katherine Hayles and Neil Badmington argue that scientific and technological development shape and redefine what it means to be human. For that matter, these thinkers assert that the premise of the human at the centre was already shaken, thus establishing that human beings are already posthuman. Haraway also meshes the identity of the cyborg with the human, adding that human nature is transitional. Stefan Herbrechter, in his book *Posthumanism A Critical Analysis* observes: "The transgression and erasure of boundaries between humans and animals, the organic and inorganic, and between human and machine, which are represented by Haraway's 'cyborg' have undermined the inviolability of the human and have thereby opened up, new, posthuman, perspectives" (Herbrechter 41-42).

Transhumanism, on the other hand, believes in human enhancement, the difference being that transhumanists believe humanity is in a state of becoming posthuman. Transhumanists typically hold optimistic views about human transformations. Transhumanism which runs as a concept in science fiction that depicts technoculture can be considered as a cultural movement which tries to affirm human condition through applied reasoning and science. The philosophical outlook of transhumanism challenges monolithic cultures and traditional cultural identities as the transhuman bodies and characters are the products of a technoculture which upholds hybridity as a merit. Another aspect of a cultural hotch-potch that gets embedded in transhuman

identity is in the disembodiment of the subjectivity which is made possible in the posthuman age of technology. Eventually, transhumanism tries to depict the human organism or the humanoid organism as the cultural consequences of many movements, ideologies, philosophies and inventions. The culture of the past centuries gets replaced in the era of transhumanism which celebrates the mechanisms of improving organisms with an utter disregard to the traditional cultural questions.

Many science fiction narratives align themselves with the idea of futurism. In the technocultural discourse of the 21st century, genetics, nanoscience and artificial intelligence have raised some pertinent questions about cultural uniqueness. The futures speculated in posthuman science fiction are essentially cross-cultural wherein different groups are envisioned as a part of the future with varied social values, work ethics and cultural dynamics. Cross-cultural futurisms provide for the way in which cultures perceive emerging technologies. It also anticipates the future social structures to be shaped by technoculture. For example, when Zima narrates about his transformations to Carrie, he mentions his travels to Kharkhov 8, a planet many light years away from Murjek, the planet where they resided. Reynolds describes the world of Kharkhov 8 as a culture that is rather open and accepting of diverse individuals regardless of their cultures or origins. Further, Reynolds also portrays the willingness of the planet which would help individuals such as Zima who, at the time, sought severe transformations considered illegal in other parts of the galaxy. Thus, by depicting the world of Kharkhov 8, which occupied a fringe part of the universe where travellers rarely frequented, Reynolds perhaps depicts a cultural variant which is accessible only because of the advances in technology. In this planet, the physical modifications that the characters undergo are pretty much sanctioned under the different cultures which perhaps will look alien for an Earth-centric cultural perspective. The futurism involved in reaching the planet is also a base for a cross-cultural experience in the story.

Interculturalism is another idea closely linked with multiculturalism and its subsequent cultural hybridity. Though interculturalism celebrates cultural diversity, it emphases dialogue and interaction between different cultural identities. “Zima Blue” depicts the possibility of an ongoing dialogue and interaction between the cultural identities of Earth and those of other locations in the universe. The story can be considered as a plea for fostering such a dialogue to challenge the Earthly self-segregation tendencies within cultures. Reynolds takes the readers who represent the cultural structures of Earth to have a dialogue and interaction with the cultural realities of Murjek which represents the universe and its diversity.

While reading “Zima Blue,” the reader learns about the transhumanist transformations Zima undergoes that makes him a cyborg. Zima goes through rigorous procedures that allow him to travel the galaxy to places where human presence cannot exist. His transformations also let him study, examine and think about different aspects of the cosmos thus making him a powerhouse of knowledge. Zima’s machinic conquests coupled with a conscious ability to think brings into fore the question of which identity takes prominence. The reader of the short story assumes at first that Zima is indeed a ‘man’ who has undergone transformations and only later realise that Zima was already a machine with limited thinking capabilities. The narrator, Carrie, observes, “He was a handsome man even after all his transformations” (Reynolds 435). The use of the pronoun ‘he’ and the word ‘man’ easily lead the reader to conclude Zima’s identity as that of a cyborg with human origins. But the repetitive quest for meaning and knowledge and the exploration of the same through art makes one ponder whether the machine-identity remains in the background and the artificial modifications a mere means to trace history.

But it is also in this context that Zima could be viewed in the posthuman cultural setting of artificial intelligence driven cyborg-driven society. Applying the ideas put forth by Herbrechter in *Posthumanism A Critical Analysis*, Zima takes on a peculiar subject

position. Zima takes on the discourse position of the critical posthuman which embraces nonhuman embodiment but at the same time does not promote a "techno-euphorian utopia" (Herbrechter 85). He occupies this position in the context of a society familiar with devices such as the AM (a device that Carrie uses to capture words and events as they happened) thus suggesting that both Zima and other characters occupy a space which represents a diverse culture.

Elaine Graham in *Representations of the Post/Human* talks about monsters, aliens and nonhuman others. Reading "Zima Blue" in the light of this book might make one view Zima as a 'monster'. The representation of this monster is not a fearsome figure but a representation of the nonhuman other. Herbrechter clubs Graham's ideas with that of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and articulates that the representation of a monstrous identity is a projection of human anxieties and worries. Keeping this view into account, one could revisit Zima's central problem in the short story: 'who am I?' and 'How did I originate and come to be?' These metaphysical conflicts which haunt Zima seem to be a collective philosophical question humans have been asking for centuries. Coupled with Zima's nonhuman identity, what these conflicts also call into question is the very essence of 'human' nature. Reynolds through the character of Zima problematizes this notion. He makes one ponder upon the basic assumption of 'human' nature and makes one think whether it is human nature at all. Zima therefore occupies a new posthuman space entirely where not only the physical boundaries between the human and machine are dissolved but the very concept of the human is blurred at a metaphysical level.

Zima's identity, according to a Deleuzian reading, could be considered an assemblage of different transformations and that of knowledge and memory. The reader learns that, over many centuries, Zima accumulates memories of his 'becoming' the machine he had become and had found ways to express himself through art. Rosi Braidotti weighs in on Deleuze's ideas of becoming, claiming that "the Deleuzian body is nothing but 'embodied' memory" (Qtd in Herbrechter 105). She adds that from a posthumanism viewpoint, the 'monster' would always be viewed in amazement and fear. She goes on to assert then that the human is decentred through 'posthuman variables' (Qtd in Herbrechter 105). The same idea, it could be argued, is presented in Reynolds' short story when Carrie is finally told of Zima's machine identity and her immediate refusal to accept the idea. What this story perhaps also postulates is the idea of the human being thrown off most forms of discourse or perhaps merely kept at the margin.

"Zima Blue" therefore presents through the characters of Zima and Carrie a world that is set in the posthuman society where identity is constantly in a state of transition. Zima could be viewed as a character that occupies the 'third space' being a classic character whose identity keeps constantly changing. At the same time, the story also suggests that identity is not linear and growing. This could be understood as, towards the end, Zima deconstructs his identity quite literally to return to his original state of being a simple machine responsible for cleaning a pool. Further, through the character of Zima, Reynolds makes one think what it means to be human in a posthuman society, and even goes on to question the essence of the nature of humanity. Lastly, through the short story, Reynolds also reflects prevalent anxieties of human transformations to cyborg embodiment as demonstrated by the initial denial by Carrie. In conclusion, "Zima Blue" could be read, using a posthuman context, as a hybrid character who populates a world with both shared and different cultures.

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43.

Rise of Microfiction due to Social Media and its Impact on Literature and Storytelling

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Abstract

In the last decade, storytelling has changed immensely with the rise in popularity of social media. Readers consumed Literature via only one medium, that is, a book. In the early 2010s Audiobooks became quite popular in India, shifting the literature consumption from a written medium to an audio medium. Post Covid-19 Pandemic, audiences started engaging in stories from various social media platforms like Reddit, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube and Tiktok. With a change in the medium of consumption of literature, storytelling changed as well. Due to such reforms in mediums, literature shifted from formal to personal and relatable. The Instagram Poetry trend took off with the popularity of Canadian Poet- Rupi Kaur. Her work inspired a lot of people to break out of the traditional moulds of literature and write something that is personal, short and non-adhering to the traditional literature rules. The aim of this paper is to discuss Microfiction, the effects of Digital Media on Traditional literature and, the transition from traditional forms of literature & storytelling to microfiction by using works from Rupi Kaur, Karuna Ezara Parikh in contrast to authors like Slyvia Plath & Kamala Suraiyya.

Keywords: Microfiction, Flash Fiction, Trends in Literature, Instagram Poetry

Introduction

Storytelling is an essential part of human history. Before language was used, humans passed down stories via engraving caves with figures that depicted stories. Caves like Ajanta and Ellora in Maharashtra showcase illustrations of Buddha & processions of Apsaras and Shaivas. The language used then, is not used today hence making it difficult to understand their written stories, but drawn stories are relatively easy to understand.

In Indian history, storytelling plays a huge role in Hindu Mythologies like Mahabharat & Ramayana. These stories were passed down through oral traditions. In a global context, Greek plays were heavily based on myths like the Trojan War. Storytelling has been around since the beginning of humanity weaving the fabric of cultural identity.

This paper aims to discuss the change that took place in literary space due to accessibility of Internet and Social Media. With the introduction of internet, storytelling no longer remained a tool only for professional writers. Internet opened up avenues to commoners who enjoy telling their own story or create a fictional story line based on fictional characters- Fanfics. Storytelling has shifted its focus from being used as a tool to pass down traditions and myths, it is now used by individuals on the internet to tell their own stories, which audiences seem to have developed a liking for.

Brief History of Fiction:

Fiction and Storytelling are an integral part of human history. Works like *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and Homer's *Odyssey*, *Iliad* shaped the narratives that focused on human struggles, fate and god. With the introduction of written literature, tales of adventure, chivalry and romance became popular. Renaissance and Industrial Revolution brought out works related to the society of the 18th and 19th Century. Authors like Jane Austen, Charles Dickens,

Jonathan Swift wrote about the social structure of the time with the latter two using satire to make a commentary. Literature has been always woven intricately with the social circumstances and culture. With the advent of World War I & II, authors started penning their experiences, by using modernist and postmodernist elements in their works. With Globalisation on the rise, Novel became more popular, available and personal.

Trendshift in the 2010s:

Popularity of the internet led to inventions like AudioBooks that made stories accessible, nudging the shift in traditional literature. Platforms like MySpace, Twitter and WordPress, gave a platform to writers to tell their own stories- fictional or nonfictional. Social networking sites like MySpace and Twitter presented the users with an issue of word limit. Due to this word limit, they had to resort to writing stories within a set number of words. Unlike novels, dramas or poems, these platforms provided instant feedback from the audience. This personal connection and instant feedback encouraged them to write more. We can see the beginning of Microfiction with these platforms. In 2001, a story was uploaded to the internet named- *Ted the Caver.* This is deemed as the start of short horror stories called Creepy Pastas, origin of these stories is difficult to trace as they are Urban Legends. Microfiction was not just limited to funny stories, incidents or horror stories, Social Networking sites made it personal too.

In the early 2010s, Wattpad became a huge success due to fanfiction. Fanfiction is a genre of fiction involving a fantasy storyline of famous celebrities written by fans, who are not necessarily writers by profession. Fanfiction of Twilight, One Direction, and Taylor Swift became popular due to the emergence of Fanfiction. In the 20th Century, flash fiction was popularized by Hemingway's *For sale: baby shoes, never worn*. Hemingway's flash fiction is different from the flash fiction (Microfiction) of the 21st century. Although his story was extremely personal and intimate, it lacked the element of instant feedback, which was provided due to Social Networking sites.

Instagram was introduced to the masses in the year 2010. It gained more popularity in 2014, as many celebrities started posting their personal photos and engaging with their fans. Budding writers took this opportunity to use Instagram as a platform to showcase their work. Rupi Kaur became popular with her peculiar poetry which was extremely famous on social media. Poetry written by these writers was something personal and intimate which lacked in the oral traditional stories that were passed down through generations. Soon enough, many instagram accounts like 'terribletinytales' started posting flash fiction submitted by strangers. This instagram account increased the popularity of Microfiction. As the title of the account suggests, it posts poetry, and short stories with a lesser word count about the little and intimate things the writer feels or observes.

With Covid-19 Pandemic and Lockdown, humans worldwide experienced stressful personal lives. Instagram users started to rely on fictional literary works on Instagram as a form of catharsis. Introduction of reels led to a shift from written works to visual and audio works. Accounts like 'fictionwithdivyansh'and 'mahabharatwithdivyash' started posting reels with fictional stories with a captivating storyline and visuals. Momentarily, people could escape from the chaos around them and dive into a world of fiction and fantasies at the tip of their fingers.

Changes in Storytelling & Literature due to the popularity of Microfiction via Social Media

Sylvia Plath & Kamala Das are well known for their confessional style of poetry that talks about their emotions with depth and complexity. Meanwhile Instapoets like Rupi Kaur and Karuna Ezra Parikh belong to the Millennial Generation which is infamous for acknowledging their hardships and healing their traumas- childhood, generational or post a traumatic incident.

This paper intends to explore the transition in literature by contrasting works of these poets.

Themes:

Sylvia Plath & Kamala Das use poetry to explore mental illness, self identity, sexuality, liberation and domestic life. In Plath's *I am*

Vertical, she wishes to be one with the trees that bloom every March and suck up minerals and necessary nutrition from the earth. She compares the mortality of her with immortality of the trees.

> Compared with me, a tree is immortal
> And a flower-head not tall, but more startling,
> And I want the one's longevity and the other's daring. (Plath 162)

Her wish to be horizontal and lying on the ground intensifies in the second stanza.

> It is more natural to me, lying down.
> Then the sky and I are in open conversation,
> And I shall be useful when I lie down finally:
> Then the trees may touch me for once, and the flowers have time for me. (Plath 162)

Kamala Das in her poem- *The Stone Age,* uses nature imagery like 'weaving webs', 'bluer sea', 'lion', 'snake', and 'great tree'. In the first stanza, she talks about how her husband treats her as an object and how he has trapped her in his entangling web.

Fond husband, ancient settler in the mind,
Old fat spider, weaving webs of bewilderment,
Be kind. You turn me into a bird of stone, a granite
Dove, you build round me a shabby room, (Das 51)

In the second stanza, she talks about an illicit relationship where the man appears to her as a lion opposed to her husband who is a fat spider that traps her in a loveless marriage.

> Ask me, everybody, ask me
> What he sees in me, ask me why he is called a lion,
> A libertine, ask me why his hand sways like a hooded snake
> Before it clasps my pubis. Ask me why like
> A great tree, felled, he slumps against my breasts,
> And sleeps. Ask me why life is short and love is
> Shorter still, ask me what is bliss and what its price.... (Das 51)

Das talks about her inner turmoil regarding her husband & lover. She touches on topics of love, sexuality, desire and infidelity in this poem.

Plath and Das both are confessional poets who talk on topics that are heavy in their hearts. They use poetry as a form of catharsis by releasing the negative emotions through their words. They seek independence from the shackles of a patriarchal society.

Rupi Kaur's poetry revolves around self acceptance, healing and flourishing on your own. In her poem *home*, she accepts that she is enough and everything she was looking for externally was actually within herself the entire time.

> i dive into the well of my body
> and end up in another world
> everything i need already exists in me
> there's no need
> to look anywhere else (Kaur 28)

In *power*, Kaur writes inspirational lines to remind herself and the readers that the ability to lighten up your day and life lies in your own hands.

> there are days
> when the light flickers
> and then i remember
> i am the light
> i go in and
> switch it back on (Kaur 186)

Karuna Ezara Parikh's *Bone Work,* is about pushing yourself to be the bigger and better version of you. She takes the challenges in a positive way by saying that whatever tries to break her, just makes her grow more.

> Do the bone work.
> Ask yourself –
> What am I feeling?
> Will this break me or is that creak
> just the sound of my skeleton
> stretching to make room
> for my soul's swelling? (Parikh)

Home by Parikh is a poem about finding yourself, acknowledging your worth and feeling empowered. She talks about how it took her time to find herself, and now that she has she has no intentions of being shy. She wishes to be as big as she could be.

> It took me a long time
> to come into my own,
> but now that I'm here
> I plan to inhabit me completely. (Parikh)

Parikh and Kaur, both write on the similar themes of finding yourself, your worth and being unapologetic about it. Both author's works lean towards self love and self acceptance, which is a contrast to what we see in the works chosen of Das and Plath. They focus more on the issues that they are facing, the emotions they feel whereas Parikh and Kaur talk about healing, self discovery, self acceptance and love. Plath and Das talk about trauma and their experiences while Parikh and Kaur focus more on what happens after, and how they choose to heal and soothe themselves. Media and audience interaction motivates Instapoets to speak their heart, be vulnerable in a healing

sense rather than just talking about trauma. The Internet enabled writers to be more open with healing, finding themselves, and accepting them for who they are. Audiences encouraged writers by talking about how it resonates with them and how they would like to heal and accept themselves like the writers. This form of literature shaped a generation of women into accepting their own self, flaws or no flaws.

Language:

Plath is known for her poetry about wanting to not live. She uses words like 'unpetal' in *I am Vertical:*

> But I would rather be horizontal.
> I am not a tree with my root in the soil
> Sucking up minerals and motherly love
> So that each March I may gleam into leaf,
> Nor am I the beauty of a garden bed
> Attracting my share of Ahs and spectacularly painted,
> Unknowing I must soon unpetal. (Plath 162)

In the same poem she expresses her wish to be horizontal, meaning lying down to become one with the earth and sky. The language Plath uses is sharp and pessimistic. She speaks through metaphors about her wish to die.

Das in *The Stone Age,* talks about how her husband dehumanises her and treats her like an object of desire. She uses a lot of animal imagery like 'Old fat spider','granite dove', 'lion', and 'hooded snake'. She calls her husband a old fat spider symbolising the way he has trapped her into a sad marriage that she has become a stoned dove, a bird which is used to signify love is now frozen due to him. In contrast to these words, she calls her lover a lion and his hand moves like a snake, always slithering.

Das and Plath both use striking words, metaphors and nature imagery to add depth to their poems. In contrast to both the authors, Kaur chooses simpler words that strike a chord with the regular, non-literary audience. Words that are used in real life conversations, this is what makes them more approachable and relatable. Kaur does use metaphors but the simplicity and the short length of the poem helps to make them more simple than Plath and Das. Parikh uses an affirmative and assertive tone to conquer her self love. She uses simple words like 'I plan to inhabit me completely' (Parikh) to convey the message of self acceptance and love. Both write micro poetry that is 6-7 lines long. Kaur chooses to let go of capitalization completely, making it look more natural and real like texting a friend. The language Parikh uses strikes a chord with the audiences as it's contemporary and similar to how two friends would talk. This quality in their writings make it easier for the audiences to relate to. The effect of instagram is seen in their works through the simplicity of their words.

Conclusion:

Social media has influenced not only the way we consume media but also the way media is written. When we look at pre-internet poets like Plath & Das, their work is more complex with metaphors and sharp, striking words. Whereas, Kaur and Parikh seem to use simpler language that is easy to understand and sounds like real life. Due to the internet and instant feedback from the audiences, writers are now more open to their feelings, not just negative but positive feelings of acceptance and love. Microfiction takes up no space in the hectic lives of 21st century audiences. It is a great way to connect with people easily and understand their experiences too.

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44.

Reconfiguration of Psychosexual Behaviour in Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon*: An Interdiciplinary Perspective

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Abstract

Cyberpunk novel often deals with the situation of transferring consciousness between bodies and thereby invites a critical analysis of emotional and sexual behaviours of characters who are involved in updating their bodies. With the possibility of replacing bodies in a continual process, a Cyberpunk narrative brings into context modifications in terms of bodily functions. These modifications correspondingly alter the emotional and psychological lives of characters. With the physical and the virtual often overlapping, the conventional psychosexual behaviours are modified. New forms of fetishes, desires, and love get reflected in Cyberpunk narratives.

This paper is an interdisciplinary analysis of the psychosexual behaviours of the real and sleeved characters in Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon*, 2002. It mobilises the analytical tools of Sexology, Psychology, and Posthumanism in explaining the sexual behaviours of characters such as Miriam, Elizabeth, Elias, and Rykar also withing the purview of this paper is an explanation of Morgan's Futurism that liberates sexual identities from fixed bodies. The instances of physical modification and psychological modification in the novel that shape desires and relations are also analysed to deduct certain inferences on Cyberpunk trends such as Techno-fetishism and Paraphilia.

Keywords: Cyberpunk, Psychosexual behaviour, Technophilia, Technofetish, Neuroeroticism, Technoeroticism, Paraphilia.

Introduction

In contemporary media and entertainment, Cyberpunk has emerged as the most experimented and evolving subgenre within the broader realm of Science Fiction. The dichotomy of 'High tech, low life', along with technologically advanced dystopian setting has prompted numerous critical examinations of the genre. Feminist studies, Media studies, Posthuman studies, Spatial studies, and various other disciplines delve into aspects of Cyberpunk Literature, addressing themes ranging from architecture, cybernetics, and body enhancements to sexuality, class, race, religion, capitalism, consumerism, etc. Works such as Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*, N. Katherine Hayles' *How We Became Posthuman*, and other thinkers like Rosi Braidotti, David Levy, Scott Bukatman have significantly enriched Cyberpunk studies through their seminal works. *Bodies of Tomorrow, Love and Sex with Robots, The Souls of Cyberfolk, Cyberpunk and Visual Culture, Edging into Future* are a few examples of texts from Cyberpunk studies. Furthermore, authors such as Bruce Bethke, William Gibson, K. W. Jeter, Rudy Rucker, Lewis Shiner, Pat Cadigan, John Sirley, and others have been instrumental in pioneering the Cyberpunk genre through their works *Cyberpunk, Neuromancer, Schismatrix, Software, Eclipse, Synners*, and a host of other publications.

This research paper attempts to scrutinize a celebrated Cyberpunk novel with an interdisciplinary lens, incorporating Psychology, Sexology, and Posthumanism, while focusing on psychosexual dimensions and themes of

Techno-fetishism and Paraphilia in Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon*. The novel disrupts the traditional notions of psychosexual behavior by reconfiguring Neuroeroticism and sexuality in a hyper-commercialized Posthuman society. The world of *Altered Carbon* engages in mind-uploading and body swapping, where consciousness can be stored, stacked, and transferred into 'sleeves', rendering body and death obsolete. Morgan, through *Altered Carbon*, presents a future featuring the Cyber-noir protagonist Takeshi Kovacs and the complexities encountered by his sleeved self while investigating a case. The novel includes characters referred to as 'Meths' who perpetuate their existence by utilizing the uploaded consciousness and multiple sleeves at their disposal, thereby achieving immortality. The paper analyses extreme body modifications, bioengineered bodies, involvement of drugs, among other factors, shape Kovacs's psychosexual experiences, illustrating techno-fetishism and paraphilia within the narrative that helps us reconfigure Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon* from a Psychosexual and techno-sexual perspective.

Rationale

The evolving technology has been substantial in redefining sexual intimacy, and identity, particularly in cyberpunk narratives. In the world of *Altered Carbon*, re-sleeving, virtual reality, drugs, and immortality radically alter psychosexual behaviour, blurring the boundaries between pleasure and pain as well as identity and fetishism. This research examines how the Richard Morgan's novel reconfigures psychosexual desires, and transgressive sexuality through technological advancements. By integrating Cyberpunk Studies, posthumanism, sexology, and psychanalysis, the study explores the implications of synthetic bodies, neurochemical enhancement, and techno-fetishism. Understanding these shifts provides insight into the transhuman sexualities in a cybernetically advanced posthuman world.

Objectives

- To analyze Richard Morgan's novel, *Altered Carbon* and how it reconfigures psychosexual behavior through sleeve technology, chemical enhancements, desire for immortality, and virtual spaces
- To explore the commodification of bodies for intimacy, and the psychological detachment in a society where physical forms are interchangeable
- To examine the role of advanced technology forming new desire, paraphilia, and fetishes, concerning engineered bodies and consciousness
- To investigate the contrast of pleasure and violence through virtual spaces, sleeve-based identity shifts, drug-enhanced sexuality, and sexual deviance of immortal beings

Research Methodology

This research uses a qualitative and interdisciplinary approach with cyberpunk studies, posthumanism, sexology, and psychoanalysis to examine the reconfiguration of psychosexual desire in *Altered Carbon*. The paper uses specific excerpts and implied scenarios depicting the fetishistic intimacy and extreme paraphilias in the novel by analyzing them with themes of neurochemical enhancement, re-sleeved identity shifts, virtualized intimacy, and posthuman eroticism. Other themes such as body commodification and modification, pleasure/pain duality, and techno-fetishism are also examined in this paper. This methodology portrays *Altered Carbon* as an extreme case study of techno-fetishism and paraphilia.

Scope and Limitations

This study examines the reconfiguration of psychosexual behavior, and fetishism in Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon*. It focuses on neurochemical enhancement, embodied identity shifts, virtualized intimacy, and posthuman eroticism in its analysis. The paper draws from cyberpunk studies, posthumanism, and sexology to explore how re-sleeving, virtual reality, and immortality develop Paraphilias and Taboo sexual desires. This research has its limitations, as it focuses solely on *Altered Carbon* and does not consider the whole book series or its adaptations. Additionally, while it explores psychosexual themes and paraphilias, it does not elaborate on the broader ethical or legal debates surrounding synthetic intimacy. The research

also does not prioritize empirical data or reader reception and uses narrative and thematic interpretations. Furthermore, the study scrutinizes techno-eroticism in Cyberpunk fiction despite its limitations.

Chapter I: Chemical Lust: Drugs and Desire

Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon* is a novel with first person narrative, the core concept of separating bodies and consciousness through a device called cortical stack which can be used to store and transfer a person's consciousness into different bodies when explored through a first-person perspective it adds on a complex layer of identity to the text. The central protagonist Takashi Kovacs is already in a new 'sleeve' when the novel begins, we see the Cyberpunk earth through his lens, simultaneously Kovacs is also seeing the planet through the lens of his new sleeve. Despite having a different consciousness, Kovacs' sleeve draws hints and actions which are beyond his own conscious control and born out of the sleeve's actual owner's adding another complex layer to the pre-existing narrative.

The novel provides ample material to examine the evolution of sexual interaction between two individuals in a futuristic setting with the use of science and technology. Chapter 3 marks the first interaction of Takashi Kovacs with Miriam Bancroft at Suntouch House. Kovacs description of Miriam Bancroft at initial reading can be criticized as the typical example of Male gaze in fiction writing but examining further one can see how Morgan uses this male gaze as a plot device which serves a deeper function to the overall psychosexual tendencies of Takashi Kovacs and Miriam Bancroft rather than being few excerpts of erotic fan-service to the readers, "She wore sweat bands at forehead and wrists and from the dew on her brow they were not for show" (Morgan 23). The imagery from this excerpt is Kovacs' first impressions of Miriam Bancroft, detailing the sweat on Miriam's body can be psychoanalyzed as his sexual attraction towards her. Miriam Bancroft's character description can be assessed as a stereotype for blonde bombshell or ideal hypersexual female. The characteristics: blonde hair, hourglass figure, larger than life persona and hedonistic lifestyle are present in Miriam Bancroft which can also explain Kovacs' sexual attraction towards her at initial glance. In chapter 10, the claims of Kovacs' sexual attraction towards Miriam Bancroft being based on her blonde bombshell figure gets refuted, when it is revealed that Miriam Bancroft's body can secrete 'Merge9', a fictional drug which also goes by the name Empathin. Miriam Bancroft's body is a bio-chemtech manufactured by Nakamura Labs. When aroused Miriam's body secretes this pheromonic aphrodisiac drug through sweat, saliva and genitalia when aroused. This drug is responsible for Kovacs' attraction towards Miriam at their initial meeting and their subsequent sexual encounter. In the Novel's narrative Miriam uses this drug to manipulate Kovacs and temper with his investigation. She also reveals that she has multiple clones of her body which similarly secrete Merge9. "…the empathin was working its way into my sleeve's brain, tripping dormant telepath instincts and sending out feelers for the intense aura of arousal that this woman was generating" (Morgan 93).

The fictional drug Merge9 aka Empathin has similarities to contemporary drugs like MDMA which enhances the sensory perception and emotional connection and has the same use as Merge9. The other two drugs Miriam mentions are Satyron and Ghedin, both are fictional drugs. Satyron is a libido enhancing drug which increases sexual pleasure and arousal, Ghedin on the other hand is an immune system booster which is often used to reduce biological stress during the process of changing sleeves. Merge9 in Miriam's body is a combination of Empathin derivatives, Satyron and Ghedin enhancers which means that the chemicals which are secreting from her body are much stronger and more effective than usual drugs. Kovacs and Miriam Bancroft's sexual encounter serves as evidence of drug induced sex in the future. Miriam's body modifications to use sex as a tool to lure and trap Kovacs as well as the use of pheromonic drug to enhance the sexual pleasures can be identified as the futuristic evolution of sex not just as a form of procreation or seeking pleasure but going further beyond exploring its power over individuals. With the use of Merge9 Miriam not only

manipulates Kovacs but also enhances their sexual encounter. There are ample mentions of various fictional recreational drugs in this novel such as Betathatine—a drug which is used for trauma treatment and coping with psychological shock, its effect on the body as described in the novel is putting the body to almost an 'flatline' status and it reduces heart rate bringing down the body temperature to room temperature and Reaper—a drug which shuts down the sense of emotion causing detachment a complete opposite of Merge9. Morgan through his worldbuilding, introduces these drugs to explore the psychological, physical, and sexual dimensions of his characters in this futuristic setting.

Chapter II: Borrowed Sleeves and Flesh Markets

In *Altered Carbon* by Richard Morgan, the human body is treated as a piece of clothing due to its interchangeability. And as clothes are tailored to the person's preference, the posthuman body in *Altered Carbon* is also heavily modified, crafted, and swapped through 'sleeves', altering individuals' identities and intimacies. This chapter examines the sleeve technology and how it affects the emotional and physical relationships of certain characters, as well as the commodification and objectification of bodies, focusing on the psychosexual dimensions of characters in Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon*.

Nikola Foršek, in his research paper "Transhumanism, Ethics and Religion in "Altered Carbon" by Richard K. Morgan", argues that the world of *Altered Carbon* is divided into two people— the 'ordinary' people and the 'Meths', creating a class divide among the wealthy Meths with guaranteed immortality and the ordinary people living in ruins, representing the marginalized people such as prostitutes, with very few getting the 'leftover' bodies. In *Altered Carbon*, despite the transference of consciousness into new sleeves, neuro-erotic inclinations of the mind and various external influences result in the erotic behavior of characters such as Takeshi Kovacs. However, the sleeve of Kovacs itself becomes an object of attraction for Kristin Ortega, as it is associated with her former lover, Elias Ryker, which ignites an unexpressed spark between them from the early chapters of the novel, "The charge I'd felt last night was back. I could feel the need to say something pressing on me like an impending sneeze" (Morgan 12). Kovacs refers to this spark several times in the initial chapters of the novel, it is later disclosed that the sleeve he uses belongs to Ortega's partner, Elias Ryker, a police officer who was falsely framed and murdered. The psychosexual tension between Ortega and Kovacs intensifies as the narrative advances and they get sexually involved. Kovacs questions his identity as during their intimate moments to the extent that he perceives himself solely as Ryker during their intercourse. "Ortega's strides across the room between, the muscled lines of the long thighs, and it must have been Ryker as much as me, because I felt like a man coming home" (Morgan 76). They proceed to a room full of mirrors, where Kovacs momentarily perceives himself as Elias Ryker instead of Kovac's own self and consciousness incorporating the body. This further suggests themes of synthetic intimacy as a form of both desire and self-deception: "Ryker reaching forward to cup her breasts, then the breadth of her ribs, the rounding of her shoulders, and all the while she lifted and yawed like the ocean around the ship. Ryker and Ortega, writhing against each other like the reunited lovers of a timeless epic" (Morgan 76).

Ortega in this moment, is engaging with Kovacs solely on a physical basis, complicating the psychosexual dynamics between them. For Ortega, Kovacs's sleeve is the prime attraction instead of his consciousness and her involvement in the act is a result of her memories and emotional ties to Ryker's body. Although the moment is sensual in nature, it happens to be deeply alienating for Kovacs as he experiences loss of self and is used merely for his sleeve. Apart from Kovacs, numerous sleeves in *Altered Carbon* are used occasionally to fulfill sexual fetishes and paraphilias. This can be seen when Kovacs passes by a Flesh Market, i.e., a Black Market of sorts, where he sees hyper-sexualized imagery of female sleeves with exaggerated features specifically designed for sexual purposes. This further prompts the questions of whether pleasure is exclusively a

sensory transaction in *Altered Carbon* and if the bodies are just products of desire. Kübra Nisanoğlu, in her critical analysis, examines how *Altered Carbon* depicts the body as a fetishized object stating, "In connection with this, the body has been fetishized as a sex tool" (Nisanoğlu 104-105). Morgan further elaborates,

> I was moving along an alley full of women whose clothing was designed to display more than they would have shown of themselves naked. Boots that turned legs into slices of consumer flesh above the knee, thighs with arrow-shaped bands pointing the way, structural support lifting and pressing breasts out for view; heavy, rounded pendants nestling glans-like in sweat-beaded cleavages. Tongues flickered out, licked across lips painted cherry red or tomb black, teeth were bared in challenge. (Morgan 74)

These sleeves are simply constructed for consumer satisfaction, particularly for wealthy clients who practice total dominance over the sleeves they possess. These Meths are usually portrayed as rich men reducing female sleeves to mere objects of desire. This notion is further illustrated in Chapter Nine when Kovacs visits a brothel to meet Anenome, a prostitute, where he inquires the murder of Elizabeth Elliott. Within the cultural framework, marginalized individuals are always exploited by the wealthy 'Meths' and die satisfying them. Erich Schneider portrays a similar perspective in his work *Cyberpunk as a Science Fiction Genre*, where he discusses the exploitation of impoverished individuals in Cyberpunk Literature, a theme that remains significant in *Altered Carbon*. Furthermore, Anenome states that, "a lot of the girls get hurt,' she said quietly. But Jerry's got insurance to cover that. He's real good about it, even puts us into store if it's going to take a long time to heal. But whoever did Lizzie wasn't a regular" (Morgan 113). Both Lizzie and her mother are unable to be re-sleeved due to the power and agency of the Meths, such as Laurens Bancroft. The Meths maintain high-quality cloned sleeves for themselves and often misuse them for sexual fetishes, whereas the lower classes or the ordinary people are compelled to use any sleeve they are offered, with no control over its aesthetic value whatsoever: "That looks like prime tank flesh to me, she said untrustingly. You just come out of the store, how come you're not paroled in some bonebag junkie's sleeve?" (Morgan 89).

This further elucidates the class distinctions in the world of *Altered Carbon*, where the populace is divided into Meths and the ordinary people. The sleeves provided to the lower class are at times not even 'prime tank flesh' as they are reserved for the wealthy Meths. Thus, bodies in *Altered Carbon* are primarily constructed for sexual pleasures, from Mariam Bancroft's bioengineered body that secretes Merge9 to highly augmented and accessible sleeves marketed on the black market. Bodies are treated as commodities, leading to psychological complexities that raise questions of whether new paraphilias have emerged due to the body modifications, sleeve-swapping, and sexualized sleeves that cater to transhumanist fetishes and desires in Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon*.

Chapter III: VR: Pleasure Engine, Torture Chamber

Virtual Reality is an integral part of Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon*, and it is utilized in many ways throughout the novel. Virtual Reality in the Novel's narrative acts as a device that the elite class use to hold power and abuse it in the way they want. VR in *Altered Carbon* not only becomes the ultimate form of experiencing pleasure but also a dangerous device that steps over the limitations of physical bodies and traps the consciousness in a never-ending loop of pain and pleasure.

In the 25th century, on Earth, Virtual Reality is used in Prostitution circles on the West Coast; there is an abundance of Virtual Brothels in Bay City. VR also indicates the evolution of sex as a means of seeking pleasure. Laurens Bancroft uses Virtual Reality to fulfill his sexual desires and indulge in illicit sexual pleasures. He uses Virtual Reality to experience sexual pleasures that are heightened beyond the pleasures of actual sex. This experience is psychological, which does not have any physical effects; this condition allows him to push the boundaries of sexual pleasures beyond the acceptable social parameters to his liking. Laurens Bancroft, a classic stand-in for the elite class, uses his power in such an abusive and

psychologically destructive way because of his boredom with the real sexual encounter. From a Freudian Lens, we can explore this elite class's perverse desire through Bancroft's Life Drive—Eros and Death Drive—Thanatos. Bancroft's endless Life Drive leaves him dissatisfied with everything he experiences on a permanent level. Thus, he seeks more extreme ways of experiencing pleasure in a constant cycle, he indulges in extreme acts such as sadomasochism not just to fulfill his sexual desires but to conquer the very sensation of sexual pleasure. His 'Death Drive' is downright useless since he is a being who cannot die; this creates a void where he cannot experience death, so he indulges in violent near-death scenarios, which gives him the sensation of violent and sadistic pleasure. Bancroft replaces his unfulfilled existential and sexual desires with the violent, sadistic sexual deviances that psychosexually destroy the sex workers, which Bancroft uses to satisfy his unending quest for extreme pleasure. "Two hundred and fifty years is a long time, Mr Kovacs, time enough for a very long list of dirty, degrading fantasies to infest the mind and titillate the hormones of each fresh sleeve you wear. While all the time your finer feelings grow purer and more rarified" (Morgan 132).

From a Lacanian perspective, Bancroft can be defined as an individual who, despite possessing everything, still lacks in abundance. He is in a constant chase for an unattainable jouissance, the ultimate pleasure to fulfill his sexual desires. Bancroft is an individual who is running away from the harsh reality of his being a human. His power, elite status, and even his immortality doesn't make him special, he is aware that his existence, like everyone else', is devoid of any meaning. Bancroft uses and abuses his power over individuals with less power to escape the horror of his meaningless reality. His sadistic and violent sexual acts are not intended just to fulfill his erotic desires but also to distract him from the fact that his life holds the same value as every other individual, despite his elite status. Bancroft disregards the moral order of reality. His sexual acts are not just his sexual preferences but also a stark disapproval of the rules of mortal order, this makes him a prisoner of his mortal desires, which he abuses in the Virtual Reality; "There's no kind of conditioning in the known universe that can prepare you for having your feet burnt off. Or your nails torn out. Cigarettes stubbed out on your breasts. A heated iron inserted into your vagina. The pain. The humiliation. The damage" (Morgan 153).

Virtual Reality is also the tool used for the torture of Takashi Kovacs. In the world of *Altered Carbon*, pain is not a biological reaction but a manufactured experience which can be customized, curated, and enhanced. Kovac' torture in Virtual Reality is not an act of violent and sadistic torment but an experiment with paraphilic tendencies in control. Kovacs is not physically tortured since the body in this cyberpunk world is reduced to a mere commodity and currency, thus, Kovacs' consciousness is subjected to extreme torture. According to Donna Haraway in her work *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*, "technological development has blurred, and in some cases erased, the boundaries of selfhood, effectively transforming human bodies into programmable interfaces" (Haraway 178).

Kovacs' consciousness is also programmed to torture in a techno-fetishistic confinement of Virtual Reality, where he is transferred into a menstruating female body and subjected to paraphilic and degrading sufferings. Transferring his consciousness into a female body is a paraphilic act. The female body in which Kovacs' consciousness is transferred and trapped is extremely vulnerable to his own masculine body, which also symbolically indicates the damsel in distress stereotype. Kovacs' torturers take perverse pleasure in torturing him since he is trapped in this body. The torture is completely psychological and neurotic, where Kovacs' is put into a simulation of pain which can be altered and modified to extreme levels beyond physical pain, this cybernetic form of neurotic torture is the dystopian reality of cyberpunk future, where pain is not just a means to torture and take out information it is a form of sadistic fetish and violent perversion which does not require a body but only the mind. Suffering in Kovacs'

torture is sensory, where his brain is being programmed to inflict pain which is non-existent physically but mentally in the realm of Virtual Reality, which is felt with extreme agony and arousal simultaneously, and is a key example of cybernetic control.

Chapter IV: Meths and Perverse Immortality

In Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon*, the Meths are these ultra-wealthy elites who unlocked the secret of immortality by repeatedly transferring their consciousness into new sleeves. Meths refer to 'Methuselah'— a biblical figure known for longevity, sharing the same traits. Their immense wealth enables them to store multiple clones as backups to eliminate permanent death, making them posthuman eternal beings. With enormous wealth comes enormous powers that easily get misused and leads to a perverse detachment from humanity. This chapter explores how Meths enable corruption of intimacy, the fetishization of violence, and the birth of new paraphilias and psychosexual behavior.

For the Meths who have lived for centuries, the conventional sexual experiences lose their excitement and 'bore' the Meths. Since they have no fear of death or any physical limitation, they curate experiences that push the socially accepted boundaries of pleasure, pain, and even identity. The absence of natural constraints fosters an environment where paraphilias involving domination, degradation, violence, humiliation, and control flourish. Their sexuality becomes an endless experiment that can lead to new experiences and pleasures with every new sleeve. Their fetishism evolves into highly specialized, technologically advanced sexual practices that have no consequences for them as death is only a temporary obstacle for them, "Two hundred and fifty years is a long time, Mr Kovacs, time enough for a very long list of dirty, degrading fantasies to infest the mind and titillate the hormones of each fresh sleeve you wear. While all the time your finer feelings grow purer and more rarified" (Morgan 132).

In "Biopolitics and Commodification of Body and Faith in Altered Carbon: A Critical Discourse Analysis," Kübra Nisanoğlu examines how Morgan portrays the body as a marketable commodity. This objectification is the most evident in the flesh markets that Kovacs mentions in the book. These street vendors marketed sexualized female sleeves with exaggerated bodily features. There are also high-end brothels that exemplify this dehumanization of intimacy as the sex workers in the brothels are frequently killed or mutilated during sexual activities only to be stored back later and do the repeat it. Meths are involved in these hyperviolent sexual fantasies where they treat the destruction of bodies as a mere luxury. The violence, death and resurrection serve as extensions of pleasure that evolve sexual encounters into something more than a human experience, hence making it a Posthuman fetish; "But if anyone with money wants to play at torturer, they can afford to do it in virtual. Some of the Houses run virtual snuff, but they run it because it's legal, and there's nothing we can do about it. And that's the way they like it" (Morgan 158).

One of the most well-known Meths in the novel is Laurens Bancroft. The novel revolves around him and explores his violent sexual fantasies towards prostitutes who are killed for pleasure. While human sexuality is often tied to vulnerability and trust, Meths transform it into an act of absolute control and destruction, representing a total inversion of intimacy. The more extreme and perverse the act, the greater the erotic charge for the Meths, "what the fuck you are talking about. You turned my daughter into a prostitute, and then you killed her. And for that, I'm going to kill you" (Morgan 274). Just like Bancroft, his wife, Miriam Bancroft, also exhibits manipulative tendencies, particularly towards borrowed sleeves such as of Takeshi Kovacs, where she attempts to seduce Kovacs and offers him incentives to abandon the investigation. She has a predatory sexuality detached from any emotional connection that is fueled by a pursuit for new experiences just like Laurens Bancroft:

> 'Out west,' she murmured, 'about five hours away by cruiser, there's an island. It's mine. No one goes there, there's a fifty- kilometre exclusion umbrella, satellite patrolled, but it's beautiful. I've built a complex there, with a clone bank and a re-sleeving facility.' Her voice got that uneven edge in it again. 'I sometimes decant

> the clones. Sleeve copies of myself. To play. Do you under- stand what I'm offering you?' (Morgan 309)

This excerpt portrays another transhumanistic fetish of engaging with multiple bodies, clones of herself. It also highlights the extreme measures Meths take to satiate their desires. Miriam's sexuality is also tied to dominance, due to the love of power as an immortal, her pleasure is derived not just from the act itself but from exerting control over mortal bodies that lack longevity, "Only instead of getting to play with the glorious Miriam Bancroft body like me, she got to wear it" (Morgan 319). Similarly, this power fetish can be seen in many Meths that involve and invest in 'Fightdrome'. It is like an arena or battlefield where fighters, often expendable, are thrown into combat scenarios for the amusement of Meths, some derive a sexual arousal from watching suffering of these fighters. Violence is eroticized, and bodies are nothing more than entertainment units. This spectacle of destruction mirrors their detachment from flesh and reinforces the idea of life and bodies existing solely for consumption and exploitation. Other than this, with access to unlimited virtual reality experiences, most Meths craft AI and virtual worlds that cater to their most extreme desires that are illegal in the real world. In VR, their fetishes are unbound by physical constraints and moral questionability, allowing them to perform hyper-realistic, exaggerated paraphilias. The technology in *Altered Carbon* enables experiences that blur the boundaries between pleasure, pain, life, and death, making these a sexualized form of entertainment.

Therefore, the Meths in *Altered Carbon* redefine intimacy, by their excess power, control, and commodification of bodies. Due to their longevity, posthuman desires are a form of experiences new and exciting sexual encounters to make their immortality interesting. These extreme paraphilias are also a result of their detachment from humanity and morality, where sex, death, and violence are fused into a single pleasure induced event. The lack of consequence in physical and virtual realms enable them to perform the desires that reduce human bodies to replaceable objects. In their world, pleasure is an endless perverse cycle where bodies are simply a luxury to be owned, destroyed, and replaced.

Conclusion

Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon* changes the perception of psychosexual behaviour within the framework of the Cyberpunk genre. The novel illustrates how technology reshapes the psychosexual deviances, desires, identity, and bodily autonomy. The premise presents a setting where humans can interchange bodies by transferring their consciousness which is stored in cortical stack, a device which can be easily uploaded and downloaded between bodies, which are reduced to a currency rather than biological miracles in the dystopian future of twenty-fifth century Earth fuelling techno-fetishistic deviances as new forms of paraphilias. In this posthuman world, consciousness is separated from bodies, creating an identity crisis, manipulation of identity, and commodification of flesh. The corruption and crisis of the future are amplified in the cyberpunk aesthetics. The pleasure-seeking practices like drug-induced sex, bodily modifications to enhance sexual pleasures, and consumption of virtual reality to find new and sadistic ways of experiencing pleasure also showcase the evolution of sex with the use of technology and scientific development.

This study highlights the upgradation and modifications of sexual behaviour in the cyberpunk novel as well as Morgan's critique of the paradoxical nature of technological progress, which opens new avenues for sexual liberation and expression, but it also reinforces the hegemonic power structures. By examining this novel through an interdisciplinary lens, this study underlines the novel's contribution to exposing the evolving complexities of psychosexual behaviour in a digitized and disembodied world and how it leads to Techno-fetishism and Paraphilia.

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45.

Moral Awakening in Andre Brink's A *Dry White Season*

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I. Introduction

A Dry White Season is a novel written by well-known south-African author Andre Brink. The story in this novel takes place in South Africa during the apartheid era and narrates the journey of Ben du Toit, a white African school teacher. One of Ben's black students is arrested and later dies in police custody. Ben begins to question the official story and eventually uncovers a web of lies and corruption in government officials. As he digs deeper, he faces increasing opposition and danger, forcing him to challenge the harsh realities of apartheid regime and his own responsibility in the system. The novel explores themes of racism, morality, and the complexities of human relationships in a society torn apart by oppression and injustice. In *A Dry White Season* (1979) presents an exploration of moral awakening of Ben du Toit as he transforms from complacent liberal to a radical activist. The present research paper aims to study the process of moral awakening in the context of South-African apartheid and the social justice in the context of systematic oppression.

Moral Awakening –Awareness to activism:

Moral awakening refers to the process of recognizing and confronting one's own moral shortcomings, biases, and flaws, leading to a transformation in one's values, beliefs, and actions. This awakening is significant because it enables individuals to develop a stronger sense of empathy, compassion, and responsibility, allowing them to make amends for past wrongs and strive for personal growth and self-improvement. Through moral awakening, individuals can break free from the constraints of their own ego and societal expectations, embracing a more authentic and principled way of living. This, in turn, can lead to positive changes in their relationships, communities, and the world at large, fostering a culture of empathy, justice, and moral integrity. Ultimately, moral awakening is a powerful catalyst for personal and collective transformation, enabling individuals to become forces for good and create a more just and compassionate society.

In the context of *The Dry White Season*, Ben du Toit's moral awakening leads him to confront the harsh realities of apartheid, challenging his own privilege and complicity. This transformation allows him to see the world from a different perspective, ultimately driving him to take a stand against injustice.

André Brink masterfully portrays moral awakening in *The Dry White Season* through the transformative journey of Ben du Toit, a white Afrikaans schoolteacher. Initially, Ben is oblivious to the brutal realities of apartheid, reflecting his privileged position. However, the death of his student, Jonathan, and the subsequent cover-up forces Ben to confront the harsh truth, sparking a process of self-reflection and questioning of his own values and biases. As he develops empathy and understanding through his relationships with black characters, Ben acknowledges his own privilege and the ways in which he has benefited from apartheid, leading to a moral crisis. Torn between loyalty

to his community and his growing sense of morality, Ben ultimately undergoes a profound transformation, taking a stand against injustice despite the risks, and facing personal costs such as ostracism and danger. Through Ben's journey, Brink illustrates the complex and often painful process of moral awakening, highlighting the importance of empathy, self-reflection, and taking a stand against injustice.

The present research paper explores the theme of moral transformation in the context of apartheid South Africa. The paper begins by setting the historical and social stage, then delves into the protagonist Ben du Toit's journey from complacency to activism, highlighting the catalysts and challenges of his moral awakening. Through a critical analysis of the novel, the paper examines the complexities of moral transformation, including internal conflicts, external pressures, and moral ambiguities. The research ultimately reveals how Brink's work offers a nuanced portrayal of moral awakening, encouraging readers to confront their own biases and privileges, and underscoring the significance of individual agency in dismantling oppressive systems. The paper concludes by reflecting on the novel's enduring relevance and its contribution to on-going conversations about social justice and moral responsibility.

II. Literature Review

Existing research on moral awakening, moral development, and related concepts has extensively explored the complex and dynamic processes of moral transformation, growth, and decline. Studies have investigated the role of cognitive, emotional, and social factors in shaping moral development, including the impact of life experiences, crises, and relationships on moral awakening (Kohlberg, 1969; Gilligan, 1982; James, 1902; Erikson, 1968). Research has also examined the concept of moral disengagement, which enables individuals to justify harmful actions (Bandura, 1999), and the factors contributing to moral decline, such as moral fatigue and moral licensing (Haidt, 2003). Furthermore, studies have explored the role of empathy, compassion, and altruism in moral development (Batson, 1991; Eisenberg, 2000), as well as the relationship between moral development and identity formation (Marcia, 1980). Additionally, research has investigated the neural basis of moral development and decision-making (Greene & Haidt, 2002).

In *A Dry White Season*, Andre Brink masterfully crafts a narrative that probes the complexities of moral awakening amidst the tumultuous backdrop of apartheid South Africa. Through the protagonist Ben du Toit's transformative journey, Brink expertly excavates the intricacies of moral growth, as Ben confronts the harsh realities of systemic injustice and grapples with his own complicity. As Ben's eyes are opened to the brutalities of apartheid, he undergoes a profound moral awakening, precipitating a crisis of conscience that challenges his previously held beliefs and values. Brink skilfully explores the tensions between moral idealism and pragmatism, as Ben navigates the treacherous landscape of resistance and activism, forcing him to confront the ultimate question: what does it mean to be morally awake in a society that seeks to silence its conscience? Through Ben's struggles, Brink raises essential questions about the nature of moral transformation, the power of individual agency, and the enduring impact of moral awakening on personal and collective liberation.

The present paper aims to address several gaps in current research on moral awakening, including the limited focus on moral awakening in the context of systemic injustice and oppression, and the lack of exploration on the complexities of moral growth and transformation in individuals. Additionally, the paper will examine the role of personal agency and activism in moral awakening, and consider the intersections between moral development, identity formation, and social context. The paper will also provide a more nuanced understanding of moral awakening as a dynamic and on-going process, and address the lack of empirical research on moral awakening in the context of apartheid and its legacy. By addressing these gaps, this paper seeks to contribute to a deeper

understanding of moral awakening and its significance in the context of social justice and human rights.

III. Contextualizing Moral Awakening in Apartheid South Africa

Apartheid, a system of institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination, was enforced in South Africa from 1948 to 1994, perpetuating a legacy of oppression, inequality, and social injustice. This era was marked by forced removals, land dispossession, and restrictions on movement, education, and employment for non-white populations. The apartheid regime's brutal suppression of dissent and resistance led to widespread human rights abuses, including torture, detention, and extra-judicial killings. The impact on individuals was profound, with many experiencing trauma, displacement, and marginalization. Societally, apartheid entrenched economic and social disparities, creating a deeply divided and unequal society, where the majority black population was denied basic rights and opportunities. The legacy of apartheid continues to shape South Africa's social, economic, and political landscape, with on-going struggles for reconciliation, redress, and transformation.

Mortality has played a profound role in resisting oppressive governments, as the willingness to risk one's own life can be a powerful form of defiance. By putting their lives on the line, individuals demonstrate unwavering commitment to their cause, inspiring others to join the fight and exposing the depths of state brutality. Martyrdom can galvanize public support, creating a sense of outrage and solidarity among the population, which can lead to increased pressure on the government. Those who die in the struggle become symbols of resistance, inspiring future generations to continue the fight and challenging the government's moral authority. Ultimately, the willingness to face mortality can undermine the government's legitimacy, revealing the true nature of its oppression and fuelling the flames of resistance. Through this ultimate act of defiance, individuals can transform their own mortality into a powerful tool for change, leaving a lasting impact on the struggle for freedom and justice.

IV. Ben du Toit's Moral Awakening: A Critical Analysis

Ben du Toit's transformation from complacency to moral awareness is a pivotal aspect of *A Dry White Season*. Initially, Ben embodies the apathy and ignorance of white South Africans during apartheid, oblivious to the injustices suffered by black people. However, his life is forever altered when he witnesses the brutal police interrogation of his gardener, Gordon Ngubene, and later, the tragic fate of Gordon's son, Jonathan. These events shatter Ben's complacency, forcing him to confront the harsh realities of apartheid. As he delves deeper into the truth, Ben's moral awareness grows, and he begins to question his own complicity in the system. He starts to see the world through the eyes of black South Africans, recognizing the humanity and dignity that apartheid seeks to erase. Ben's transformation is marked by a growing sense of empathy, outrage, and responsibility, ultimately leading him to take a stand against the oppressive regime, even if it means risking his own life. Through Ben's journey, Brink masterfully illustrates the complex and often painful process of moral awakening, highlighting the transformative power of empathy and the human conscience.

Unpacking the pivotal moments in *A Dry White Season* reveals a masterful narrative that propels Ben du Toit's transformative journey from complacency to moral awareness. The brutal police interrogation of Gordon Ngubene shatters Ben's ignorance, while Jonathan's tragic fate humanizes the suffering of black South Africans. Conversations with Gordon and Melanie Bruwer inspire Ben to confront his own complicity, and the trial of the police officers responsible for Jonathan's death exposes the systemic injustice. Colonel Stolz's ruthless defense of apartheid forces Ben to confront the regime's cruelty, culminating in his decision to testify against the police, risking his own life and security. As Ben investigates Jonathan's

death, he uncovers the truth, and the aftermath of the trial solidifies his commitment to the fight against apartheid. Through these scenes, characters, and events, Brink crafts a nuanced exploration of moral awakening, illuminating the complex interplay between empathy, outrage, and responsibility that ultimately transforms Ben into a powerful voice against oppression.

Ben's moral awakening in *A Dry White* Season can be understood through various theoretical perspectives. From a Kohlbergian perspective, Ben transitions from a pre-conventional to a post-conventional moral reasoning stage, recognizing the injustices of apartheid and taking a stand against it (Kohlberg, 1969). Through the lens of moral identity theory, Ben's sense of self and identity becomes increasingly tied to his moral values, leading him to act with greater empathy and responsibility (Hardy & Carlo, 2005). Furthermore, Ben's transformation can be seen as a process of moral disengagement, where he confronts and challenges the mechanisms that perpetuate apartheid (Bandura, 1999). Additionally, Ben's experiences and relationships, such as with Gordon and Melanie, illustrate the importance of social influence and moral guidance in shaping his moral awakening (Haidt, 2003).

V. Themes and Symbolism in Moral Awakening

André Brink masterfully employs themes and symbolism to convey moral awakening in *The Dry White Season*. The title itself, *The Dry White Season*, symbolizes the moral barrenness and decay of apartheid-era South Africa, while also foreshadowing Ben's journey towards redemption. Guilt, a pervasive theme, haunts Ben as he confronts his complicity in the system, manifesting in his obsessive search for truth and justice. The character of Gordon Ngubene, a black activist, embodies justice and serves as a catalyst for Ben's moral awakening. The symbolism of the "dry white season" is echoed in the withered garden of Ben's home, representing his own moral desolation, while the occasional rain showers signify the possibility of renewal and redemption. Brink also employs the theme of silence versus speech, as Ben's transformation is marked by his transition from silence to vocal opposition against injustice. Through these themes and symbols, Brink crafts a nuanced narrative that underscores the complex and often painful process of moral awakening, highlighting the need for individuals to confront their own guilt, seek redemption, and strive for justice in the face of oppression.

The themes of guilt, redemption, and justice in *The Dry White Season* reinforce the novel's message by illustrating the consequences of complicity in oppressive systems and the need for individual accountability. Ben's journey from guilt to redemption serves as a powerful example of the importance of acknowledging and confronting one's own role in perpetuating injustice. The pursuit of justice, embodied in the character of Gordon Ngubene, highlights the need for collective action to dismantle systems of oppression. Through Ben's transformation, Brink shows that redemption is possible, but only through a genuine confrontation with one's own guilt and a commitment to fighting for justice. Ultimately, the novel suggests that true redemption can only be achieved through a collective pursuit of justice, and that individual guilt must be acknowledged and addressed in order to create a more just and equitable society. By reinforcing this message, Brink emphasizes the importance of individual responsibility and collective action in the face of systemic injustice.

VI. Conclusion

The novel *A Dry White Season* by Andre Brink portrays a profound moral awakening in the protagonist, Ben du Toit, as he confronts the harsh realities of apartheid in South Africa. Through his journey, Ben transitions from a state of complacency and ignorance to one of moral awareness and activism, driven by empathy, outrage, and responsibility. The novel highlights the transformative power of personal relationships, experiences, and social influence in shaping moral growth. Ben's moral awakening is characterized by a shift from self-interest to a commitment to justice, illustrating

the complexities of moral development and the human capacity for change. Ultimately, the novel suggests that moral awakening requires courage, conviction, and a willingness to confront the darker aspects of human nature, offering a powerful exploration of the human condition and the struggle for justice and equality.

Ben's journey in *A Dry White Season* offers profound implications for our understanding of moral development and social responsibility. His transformation underscores the dynamic and context-dependent nature of moral growth, highlighting the potential for individuals to evolve from complacency to activism. Ben's story also emphasizes the crucial role of empathy, personal relationships, and experiences in shaping moral awareness and responsibility. Furthermore, his journey illustrates the tension between personal and collective moral agency, demonstrating that individual moral awakening can be a catalyst for broader social change. Ultimately, Ben's narrative suggests that moral development is an on-going process, requiring continuous self-reflection, courage, and a willingness to confront systemic injustices, underscoring the importance of individual and collective moral responsibility in creating a more just and equitable society.

Future research on *A Dry White Season* could explore the novel's portrayal of moral awakening in relation to contemporary social justice movements, examining the parallels between Ben's journey and modern-day struggles against systemic oppression. Additionally, studies could investigate the representation of apartheid's impact on individuals and communities, analysing the psychological and emotional toll of living under oppressive regimes. Researchers could also investigate the role of narrative and storytelling in facilitating moral growth and empathy, using Ben's story as a case study. Furthermore, comparative analyses could explore the similarities and differences between Ben's moral awakening and that of other literary characters, offering insights into the complexities of moral development and social responsibility. Finally, research could examine the pedagogical potential of the novel, exploring how it can be used to teach moral education, empathy, and social responsibility in educational settings.

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46.

Echoes of the East: The Influence of Indian Knowledge, Culture, Language, and Environment on British Culture

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Abstract:

This paper explores the profound yet often underappreciated influence of Indian knowledge, culture, language, and environmental practices on British society during the colonial period (17th–20th century). While much scholarship has traditionally emphasized the unilateral flow of colonial power from Britain to India, this study reverses the gaze to reveal a multidirectional exchange. Drawing from postcolonial theory, historical linguistics, and cultural studies, the paper highlights how Indo-British interaction led to a lasting cultural imprint on Britain. Indian languages contributed numerous words to English vocabulary—terms like bungalow, shampoo, loot, and guru are now commonplace. British intellectuals, inspired by Indian philosophy and spirituality, integrated ideas from the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Buddhist teachings into their own thought systems, influencing writers and philosophers such as T.S. Eliot and Arthur Schopenhauer.

Culturally, Indian textiles, designs, and architecture were adopted and adapted in Britain, with phenomena like the "chintz craze," paisley patterns, and Indo-Saracenic architecture illustrating India's aesthetic influence. British literature and theatre from the colonial era are rich with Indian themes, characters, and settings, reflecting both fascination and appropriation. Environmental knowledge transfer was equally significant. British botanists and colonial administrators borrowed Indian agricultural techniques, herbal knowledge, and forest conservation methods, many of which influenced early environmental movements in Britain. The culinary landscape was transformed as well, with Indian dishes like curry and tea culture becoming staples of British life. Through a qualitative analysis of historical texts, dictionaries, literature, architecture, and botanical records, this paper provides a nuanced understanding of India's multidimensional impact on Britain. It calls for a decolonized historiography that acknowledges reciprocal influences and repositions India as a co-contributor to global modernity.

Keywords: Indo-British cultural exchange, Indian linguistic influence, colonial botany, British architecture, Indian philosophy, postcolonial studies, culinary integration, environmental knowledge transfer.

1. Introduction: The British colonial presence in India, spanning over three centuries from the early 17th to the mid-20th century, initiated a profound and reciprocal cultural exchange. While much focus has been placed on how British imperialism reshaped Indian institutions, culture, and society, the influence of India on Britain remains underexplored. The colonial encounter was not a unidirectional imposition but rather a complex cultural negotiation that transformed both colonizer and colonized. This paper seeks to examine how Indian language, knowledge systems, environmental understanding, and cultural aesthetics seeped into the fabric of British life, leaving a lasting imprint on British identity.

2. Rationale:

Postcolonial discourse often focuses on the transformative impact of European

colonialism on colonized nations. However, this paper shifts the lens to examine the reverse influence—how Britain, as a colonizer, was itself influenced and altered by sustained contact with India. Such an analysis not only enriches our understanding of colonial history but also challenges Eurocentric narratives that depict colonialism as a one-way flow of power and ideas. By documenting these intercultural flows, this paper contributes to a more balanced, inclusive historiography and encourages decolonized academic inquiry.

3. Objectives:

- To explore the influence of Indian languages on English vocabulary and linguistic thought.
- To examine the philosophical and intellectual contributions of Indian knowledge to British academia.
- To identify the influence of Indian culture on British fashion, architecture, literature, and theatre.
- To assess the transfer of Indian environmental and botanical knowledge to Britain.
- To analyze the integration of Indian culinary traditions into British dietary practices.
- To provide recommendations for future interdisciplinary and decolonized academic research.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This research is qualitative, grounded in the interdisciplinary frameworks of postcolonial studies, environmental history, and linguistic anthropology. The methodology includes:

- Textual analysis of historical documents, literary works, colonial records, and travelogues.
- Study of primary sources such as dictionaries (*Hobson-Jobson*), colonial archives, and architectural blueprints.
- Review of secondary sources, including books, academic journals, and peer-reviewed papers.
- Interpretive analysis over statistical modelling, with a focus on thematic interconnections.

5. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS:

The study focuses on the British colonial period in India (17th–20th century), emphasizing themes of linguistic, philosophical, cultural, environmental, and culinary exchange. It excludes postcolonial and contemporary diasporic influences. Given the word constraints and thematic scope, the study provides a selective rather than an exhaustive overview, focusing on emblematic examples to illustrate broader patterns of influence.

6. MAIN RESEARCH CONTENT:

6.1 Linguistic Influence

India contributed significantly to the English lexicon during the colonial period. Words of Indian origin entered English via Anglo-Indian usage and include:

- *Shampoo* (from Hindi *chāmpo*)
- *Bungalow* (from Hindi *banglā*)
- *Pyjamas*, *loot*, *juggernaut*, *thug*, and *guru*

These terms reflect the daily realities of colonial life and were often used without translation. The *Hobson-Jobson* dictionary (Yule & Burnell, 1886) remains a critical resource for tracing these linguistic borrowings. Moreover, British orientalists such as William Jones contributed to the formation of comparative philology through their study of Sanskrit. This led to the classification of the Indo-European language family, establishing deep linguistic ties between East and West.

Example: The modern usage of "guru" to refer to an expert in any field shows how spiritual terminology has become secularized in British usage.

6.2 Intellectual and Philosophical Exchange

The intellectual encounter between Britain and India went far beyond administration and governance. British philosophers, poets, and scientists were deeply influenced by Indian thought systems:

- **Spirituality:** The *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita*, and Buddhist texts inspired European thinkers like Arthur Schopenhauer and Aldous Huxley. T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* concludes with "Shantih Shantih Shantih," directly referencing Indian metaphysics.
- **Mathematics & Astronomy:** India's contributions to algebra, the concept of zero, and astronomical calculations were acknowledged by British scholars and the Royal Society (Joseph 102).

- **Medicine:** British tropical medicine incorporated Ayurvedic practices, particularly in the treatment of fevers and digestive disorders (Arnold 98).

Example*:* The Theosophical Society, co-founded by British and American scholars in 1875, drew heavily from Indian religious thought, promoting spiritual syncretism.

6.3 Cultural and Artistic Appropriation

India's rich aesthetic traditions shaped British tastes in textiles, fashion, and architecture.

- **Textiles:** Indian cottons, muslins, and dyes revolutionized the British textile industry. Chintz and paisley patterns became iconic, the latter originating from Kashmiri shawls.
- **Fashion:** The British elite adopted Indian attire elements like turbans, silk sashes, and embroidered garments.
- **Architecture:** Indo-Saracenic style, characterized by domes, arches, and minarets, influenced buildings like the Brighton Pavilion, reflecting India's impact on British royal architecture.

Example*:* Queen Victoria's close relationship with her Indian attendant Abdul Karim introduced Indian customs into the royal court and fascinated the British public.

6.4 Literary and Theatrical Influence

Colonial India profoundly influenced British literary and theatrical traditions:

- **Literature:** Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, and George Orwell's *Burmese Days* exemplify how India shaped British narrative settings and characters.
- **Theatre:** Eroticized representations of Indian culture became popular in British plays, often combining admiration with Orientalist stereotyping.

Example*:* The character of the "mystical guru" or "exotic princess" became standard tropes in British literary and dramatic productions.

6.5 Environmental and Botanical Exchange

The British Empire actively studied and appropriated India's environmental knowledge:

- **Botanical Gardens:** Plants such as teak, sandalwood, pepper, cardamom, and indigo were collected and cultivated in places like Kew Gardens.
- **Agriculture:** Practices such as crop rotation, water harvesting (*baolis*), and traditional irrigation systems (*qanats*) were documented and occasionally adopted in British colonies.
- **Conservation Ethics:** The Indian reverence for sacred groves and ecological harmony influenced early British conservation policies.

Example*:* Richard Grove and Richard Drayton documented how Indian forest management shaped the British ecological imagination (Drayton 76).

6.6 Culinary Integration

Perhaps no other area shows Indian influence on Britain more vividly than cuisine:

- **Dishes:** Anglo-Indian hybrids like curry, kedgeree, mulligatawny soup, and chutneys became British staples.
- **Tea Culture:** The British obsession with tea traces back to India's Assam and Darjeeling plantations, combined with Bengali chai traditions.

Example*:* Chicken Tikka Masala, now considered a British national dish by some, exemplifies culinary fusion rooted in colonial kitchens (Collingham).

7. Conclusion:

The Indo-British colonial encounter was a crucible of cultural exchange, not merely a tale of domination. From everyday language to architecture, from literature to dietary habits, Indian influence permeated British society in subtle yet lasting ways. Recognizing these contributions allows for a richer understanding of history and counters narratives that portray colonized nations as passive recipients of Western modernity. India was not merely shaped by the Empire—it helped shape it in return.

8. Suggestions:

- Include Indian contributions in British history curricula to ensure balanced perspectives.
- Promote collaborative Indo-British research in cultural and environmental studies.
- Translate and preserve Indian classical texts influential in the West for academic access.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Encourage decolonized historiography in educational institutions.
- Foster intercultural exchange programs that highlight reciprocal historical influences.
- Develop museums and digital archives showcasing Indo-British cultural syncretism.

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47.

Mapping Literary Character Networks: A Graph Theory Approach To Analyzing Narrative Structures

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Abstract : This paper explores the application of network analysis in studying character interactions within literary texts. By representing characters as nodes and their interactions as edges, we employ graph theory techniques to uncover patterns of influence, power dynamics, and narrative structure. Using selected literary works as case studies, this research demonstrates how mathematical tools like degree centrality, betweenness centrality, and clustering coefficients can provide valuable insights into character roles, relationships, and thematic significance. The study highlights the potential of computational methods in enhancing traditional literary analysis.

Key words: Network Analysis, Degree Centrality, Clustering Coefficient, Thematic Significance

1. Introduction

The analysis of narrative structures has long been a cornerstone of literary studies. While traditional methods focus on themes, symbolism, and character development, network analysis offers a quantitative approach to examining character interactions. By modelling these interactions as graphs, we can identify key figures, narrative hubs, and hidden patterns within texts. This interdisciplinary approach combines elements of digital humanities, graph theory, and computational linguistics.

Definition:

1. A weighted graph is denoted as G = (V, E, w), where V is the set of vertices (nodes) and E is the set of edges, for each edge e∈ E can have an associated weight w(e) for an edge connecting nodes u and v.
2. Undirected weighted graph: where edges have no direction, but each edge still carries a weight. In graph theory, an edge weight is a numerical value assigned to an edge in a weighted graph that typically represents any quantitative measure associated with the connection between two nodes (vertices).
3. Degree Centrality is a measure in network analysis that represents the number of direct connections (or edges) a node has to other nodes in the network.

In the context of character networks:

• A character with high degree centrality interacts directly with many other characters.

• It indicates prominence or visibility within the narrative, but not necessarily influence.

Formula: For a node v, the degree centrality C_D(v) is calculated as

$$C_D(v) = deg(v)/(n - 1)$$

Where deg(v) is the degree of node v (i.e., number of connections),

• n is the total number of nodes in the network.

1.4. Betweenness centrality is a measure in network analysis that quantifies the extent to which a node lies on the shortest paths between other pairs of nodes in a network. It reflects the importance of a node as a bridge or intermediary in facilitating interactions or information flow between other nodes.

Mathematically, the betweenness centrality $C_B(v)$ of a node v is calculated as:

$$C_B(v) = \sum \frac{\sigma_{st}(v)}{\sigma_{st}}$$

where: σ_{st} is the total number of shortest paths from node s to node t and

$\sigma_{st}(v)$ is the number of those shortest paths that pass -through node v.

A node with high betweenness centrality controls communication or flow within the

network because many shortest paths pass through it, making it strategically influential.

2. Methodology

2.1. Data Collection

• Select a literary text (e.g., Hamlet, Pride and Prejudice, or War and Peace).

• Identify characters as nodes and their interactions (dialogue exchanges, shared scenes) as edges.

• Data can be extracted manually or via NLP (Natural Language Processing) tools like spaCy, NLTK.

• Nodes: Each character in the play.

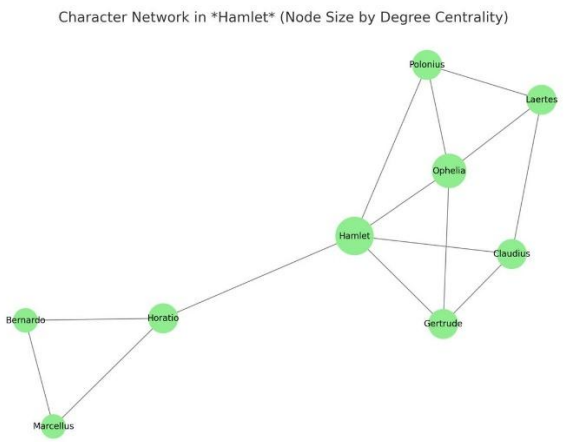
• Edges: Interactions between characters (e.g., dialogue exchanges or shared scenes).

• Edge Weights: Frequency of interactions between characters (to reflect stronger or weaker relationships).

2.2. Graph Construction

• Construct an undirected weighted graph, where nodes represent characters. Edges represent interactions, with weights based on interaction frequency or narrative significance. Let us create visual interaction network graph for Shakespeare's Hemlet using following data table.

Character 1	Character 2	Interaction Count
Hamlet	Claudius	12
Hamlet	Horatio	8
Hamlet	Ophelia	5
Claudius	Gertrude	10
Ophelia	Laertes	6



- Nodes: Hamlet, Claudius, Ophelia, Gertrude, etc.

• Edges: Dialogue exchanges and shared scenes

2.3. Mathematical Metrics for Analysis

• Degree Centrality: Identifies characters with the most direct connections.

• Betweenness Centrality: Reveals characters that act as narrative bridges.

• Closeness Centrality: Identifies characters that can efficiently connect to others.

• Clustering Coefficient: Highlights groups of closely interconnected characters.

This case study applies graph theory to analyze the network of characters in Shakespeare's Hamlet. By modeling the relationships between characters as a network, we aim to reveal insights into narrative structure, key influencers, and social groupings.

2.4. Visualization Tools

Software such as Gephi, Cytoscape, or Python's NetworkX will be used to visualize the network.

```
G = nx.Graph(),# Add nodes (characters)
characters = ["Hamlet", "Claudius", "Horatio",
"Ophelia", "Gertrude", "Laertes"]
G.add_nodes_from(characters)
# Add weighted edges (character interactions)
edges = [    ("Hamlet", "Claudius",
12),    ("Hamlet", "Horatio", 8),    ("Hamlet",
"Ophelia", 5),    ("Claudius", "Gertrude",
10),    ("Ophelia", "Laertes", 6)]
G.add_weighted_edges_from(edges).
```

Step 3: Graph Visualization

The generated graph reveals:

• Nodes (characters) sized based on their importance.

• Edges representing relationships, with thicker lines for stronger connections.

In this sample graph:

• Hamlet is a dominant hub with multiple connections.

• Claudius and Gertrude show a strong relationship with notable narrative importance.

• Ophelia and Laertes have fewer but significant ties.

Step 4: Network Analysis and Insights

Using key metrics from graph theory:

1. Degree Centrality (Number of direct connections):

```
degree_centrality = nx.degree_centrality(G)
print("Degree Centrality:", degree_centrality)
```

Result: Hamlet has the highest degree centrality, reinforcing his narrative dominance.

2. Betweenness Centrality (Key bridge characters):

```
betweenness_centrality =
nx.betweenness_centrality(G)
print("Betweenness Centrality:",
betweenness_centrality)
```

Result: Horatio emerges as a bridge between Hamlet and other groups, despite fewer interactions.

3. Closeness Centrality (Efficiency in reaching other characters):

```
closeness_centrality =
nx.closeness_centrality(G)
print("Closeness Centrality:",
closeness_centrality)
```

Result: Claudius shows strong closeness, reflecting his strategic role in manipulating multiple characters.

4. Community Detection (Finding clusters):

```
from networkx.algorithms import community
communities =
community.greedy_modularity_communities(G)
print("Communities:", [list(group) for group in
communities])
```

Result: The network splits into two main groups: one centered around Hamlet, and another dominated by Claudius and Gertrude.

Step 5: Interpretation

Key insights from the graph include:

• Hamlet's dominance aligns with his complex emotional and narrative role.

• Horatio's high betweenness centrality highlights his role as a confidant and bridge between Hamlet and others.

• The strong bond between Claudius and Gertrude reflects their shared political influence.

• Ophelia's limited connections align with her isolated role and tragic arc.

Step 6: Conclusion

Network analysis provides a unique way to study character relationships in literature. By applying mathematical concepts like degree centrality and betweenness centrality, we gain deeper insights into character influence, narrative structure, and thematic focus. Expanding this method across genres or authors could offer new perspectives in literary studies.

3.Potential Extensions for Future Research

• Applying sentiment analysis alongside network mapping to track emotional dynamics.

• Analyzing dialogue frequency to assess characters' evolving influence.

• Using temporal networks to map changing relationships across acts or scenes.

3.2 Findings

• Hamlet exhibits high degree centrality, reflecting his dominance in interactions.

• Polonius, while less central, shows high betweenness centrality, indicating his role as a messenger and manipulator.

• The clustering coefficient reveals distinct social circles, such as the Danish court and Hamlet's confidants.

4. Applications and Implications

• Literary Analysis: Identifying key players in complex narratives.

• Historical Insights: Mapping influence in historical or mythological texts.

• Educational Tools: Interactive visualizations that enhance classroom learning.

5. Challenges and Limitations

• Character ambiguity in texts may lead to incomplete data.

• Complex narratives with multiple timelines may require advanced NLP techniques.

• Emotional depth and subtext can be difficult to quantify through network models alone.

6. Conclusion

Network analysis provides a powerful framework for exploring literary narratives. By merging mathematical techniques with traditional literary theory, this approach offers fresh insights into character dynamics, power structures, and narrative flow. Future research can expand this method by incorporating multilingual texts, emotional analysis, and dynamic visualizations.

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48.

Postcolonial Gothic: A Study of Jane Urquhart's *Away*

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Abstract

Gothic Studies, from postcolonial and feminist vantage points, has renewed critical interest in Gothic literature. Gothic and postcolonialism, both involve othering as a key idea. Both include tension between the margin and periphery. Gothic has historically presented a voice to the marginalized, which postcolonialism seeks to do as well. It is concerned with the aesthetics of fear and violence. Thus, Gothic is an apt genre to examine postcolonial ideas.

The paper aims to study Jane Urquhart's *Away* as a postcolonial Gothic genre. It will trace the influence of Gothic ideas like abject, the uncanny, grotesque, liminality, etc on postcolonialism. It will do so in the context of the first British colony of Ireland. It deals with Irish potato famine migrants in Canada. It explores postcolonial ideas like memory, homeland, art as a means of resistance, mimicry and hybridity, migration, victim/aggrandizer ambivalence and so on in the context of the novel. It traces the state of aboriginals in Canada as well, exploring settler colonialism. The paper also studies aboriginal spirituality and Celtic myths and music as an alternative for British rationalism.

Keywords – Postcolonial, Gothic, Migration, Imperialism, Resistance.

Gothic and postcolonialism are related terms. Gothic implies a tension between the old and the new, while 'post' of the postcolonialism is haunted by the ghost of the colonialism, even as it implies a break away from it. Gothic can be read as the fear of the past impinging upon the present. As Jerrold Hogle states, Gothic includes "the terror or possible horror that the ruination of older powers will haunt us all…" (Hogle, 33). In other words, Gothic and postcolonialism include an anxiety about past oppression. The Gothic form also readily gives voice to the contemporary anxieties. Similarly, postcolonialism seeks to uncover systems of colonial oppression that continue in the present. Moreover, although Gothic is an ancient term, 'Gothic fiction' is a relatively modern and even postmodern concept. Hogle says that it "has become a long – lasting and major, albeit widely variable, symbolic realm in modern and even postmodern western culture, however archaic the Gothic label may make it seem" (Hogle, 30). As such, Gothic fiction is conducive to understanding contemporary postcolonial concerns. Postcolonialism has a subversive energy, as is famously established through the idea of "Empire writes back". Gothic as a rhetoric mode also deals with marginalized subjects, and their struggle to attain agency. Postcolonialism, drawing from poststructuralism, seeks to topple hierarchies of power and dominant modes of thinking. The Gothic motif of the ghost is often used literally as an actual spirit and symbolically as what haunts the culture, to explore oppression and trauma. Thus, there are critical resonances between Gothic and postcolonial discourses.

British Imperial Gothic often portrayed people from races other than whites, or people of other nationalities as monstrous others (Illot, 20). They had British, often male protagonists, in whose eyes the racially or nationally different were othered. They were presented as threats to the rational, civilized culture that British people

upheld. For example, the eponymous vampire Dracula, or Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*, wherein Satan was shown as black. Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights*, was described as a creature, a goblin, with devilish energies. Similarly, Bertha Rochester, a creole woman, is demonized in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre.* A crucial example of postcolonial Gothic is Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The text rewrites the madwoman in the attic from her point of view. Her life on the plantation estates, discriminated against by the British colonizers is described in detail. This tendency derived its inspiration from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* which first called for sympathy for the 'monster' figure. Another such example is that of *Surfacing*, a rewriting of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness.* The latter treats Africanist tribal culture and forested landscape as triggering a British man's descent into madness and self - destruction. This very wilderness and primitive culture are celebrated in Atwood's *Surfacing*, which views the rationalism and civilization upheld by the colonial project as destructive. In postcolonial Gothic, the position of victims and oppressors are unstable. Sarah Illot notes of the genre, "Postcolonial Gothic of the twentieth century rejected the ideology of imperial Gothic while borrowing from its aesthetic, vocabulary and dominant tropes, with absent fathers, awful inheritances, acts of possession and dispossession and unhomely experiences providing a ready shorthand for the traumas wrought by colonization" (Illot, 21 - 22).

Away by Jane Urquhart reexamines the mid nineteenth century phenomenon of Irish potato famine from a contemporary postcolonial perspective. Urquhart rewrites the British centered narrative from the perspective of Irish victims. She writes of the persecution of Irish Catholics, which is a typical gothic preoccupation, that of the demonization of the other. Such stereotyping and distorted perception of difference has been critiqued by the likes of Edward Said in a postcolonial manner. Postcolonialism believes in unearthing stories of violence through memory and storytelling. Repression, violence and past secrets are often seen as Gothic motifs and themes. Gothic often features morbid scenes of violence, almost fantastic in their extremes. By utilizing the Gothic mode to depict horrors of colonization, postcolonialism enhances the scope of the Gothic genre. Its concern with death, decay and bloodshed overlaps with Gothic. By fictionally recreating history as if it is happening again, Urquhart raises the specter of past colonial trauma, in order to exorcise it as it were.

The novel deals with issues like lost homelands, exile, melancholia, struggles for creating new homes, assimilation, cultural shock, etc. Homi Bhabha has described the postcolonial immigrant's experience as unheimlich. A distinctly Gothic idea, unheimlich or unhomely refers to a feeling of unsettlement. Sigmund Freud has described the feeling as one that entails unease that overshadows a supposed place of familiarity, also using the term uncanny for the same. This aesthetics describes settler colonial experience or immigrant experience well. Gothic has often dealt with a sense of entrapment, whether it is psychological or spiritual. This is precisely what the immigrants face in a new land. The very word 'away', implies a feeling of exile, of rootlessness and distance rather than belonging and proximity. Urquhart suggests 'awayness' as emblematic of refugee condition, where they leave themselves behind with their homeland, no longer able to return to their true self.

Urquhart reveals many a story throughout her novel. The Irish laborers who are to build a bridge in Canada find a mass grave where thousands of immigrants' corpses were thrown. The story of this place, what Frederic Jameson would call 'petit narrativ' is never a part of official history of the British. As a post-colonial gothic, the dehumanization and disgrace of this story is unearthed by survivors. As Sarah Illot says, "Contemporary postcolonial Gothic provides a language for re – engaging with the political realities of the post/neo colonial present, speaking truths that are structurally repressed elsewhere" (Illot, 22).

Away is a multi - generational tale of Irish O'Malley women's lives. As a collection of interconnected herstories, the narrative defies the masculinist model of objective history. The tale begins with Mary/Moira, an Irish pioneer

woman who migrates to Canada with her husband, Brian O'Malley because of the Irish Potato Famine. The next part deals with her daughter Eileen's tale as a Canadian Irish immigrant. Eileen and her brother Liam are settler colonials who encroach on indigenous lands in Canada. Thus, there is a subversion of roles of victim and oppressor in the course of two generations. *Away* shows similarities with its nineteenth century predecessor, *Roughing it in the Bush.* The latter is a memoir by one of the first Canadian settlers, Susanna Moodie. The memoir describes Canadian wilderness as a source of horror, and the struggle for survival in a harsh, uncharted territory.

Eileen advises her granddaughter, "Never allow anything to change your name" (*Away,* 8). While she is referring to her experience of getting carried away by romance, it can also be read in the light of colonialism and how it seeks to erode one's socio - cultural identity. The novel begins in 1840s, in a small village island off the North Coast of Ireland. Ireland is colonized by British. British landlords have encroached Irish lands, exploiting the former owners, exporting their crops to England. This export means that the Irish are left with very few crops, potato being one of their main sources of sustenance. The blight, however, also damages their last source of sustenance. Brian, Mary's husband, says that the ground they were raised on has turned to poison. He adds, "they are dying there like flies. The ditches and hedges and gutters and streets are full of them. There's nothing to be had and shiploads of grain leaving the ports every day for England… The English and the Protestants have stolen the souls of the men so they haven't the strength or the heart to fish" (*Away* 75). The image of places filled with dead bodies evokes a Gothic sense of horror. Soul stealing is a Gothic imagery. It suggests that the British are like life annihilating vampires. Thus, the British Imperial Gothic precept of dehumanizing the colonized is subverted in this narrative. Brian tells stories of British oppression to his son, Liam, years later. The memory stays in his mind, haunting him throughout the years. He talks of "black potatoes, cabins filled with skeletal families, children devoured by rats, the coffin ships, mass graves on Gross Isle, Cromwell, and the long history of the persecution of the Irish race" (*Away,* 197-198). Images of animals consuming children's corpses, or people turning into skeletons utilizes the concept of the abject/grotesque. These refer to a dynamic of fear and disgust, as well as an unsettlement of boundaries. Those of life and death are blurred in this example, as people are so starved they are reduced to skeletons. It is not only the physical dehumanization, but also spiritual, since there is no soul left in them, no vitality. This points to a very Gothic concept of *morts vivants* or living dead figures with no sense of self. The idea of mass graves suggests the concept of numerical sublime, or how the vast number of deaths can cause terror. All these examples depict how Gothic provides an idiom to express extremes of colonial oppression.

Besides economic oppression, the British also force their Protestantism on the Irish. Hedge schools were a crucial part of old Irish culture, which the British close down. The Celtic language, Gaelic, is repressed, people are discouraged from teaching or even speaking it. Brian teaches his students of the unofficial history about eighteenth century penal laws that the British imposed upon their Irish subjects. The Catholics were forbidden from buying lands, leasing them, running for elections, practicing their religion, and so on. Brian remembers and reiterates this history to his students. Throughout the novel, memory and remembrance are depicted as an act of resistance. The Gothic preoccupation with the past and its link to the present is conducive to a postcolonial reappraisal of history. Remembrance is a kind of Freudian talking cure in postcolonial Gothic (Illot, 29).

Song and music help the Irish migrants establish a collective identity and resist colonial rule. Brian sings revolutionary Irish songs to his two children. Eileen, Liam's younger sister sings of "the hanging of brave young men, the curse of Cromwell, cruel landlords, the impossibility of requited love, the robbery of landscapes" (*Away* 199). A wedding in the days of the famine makes the Irish sing collectively after a long time. Music is their cultural identity, their pride. The song they sing is an elegy for

Ireland as it used to be before the British rule. The song describes how the trees have been cut for supplying wood to Britain. A part of the verse goes, "The birds of the forest do bitterly weep, Saying where shall we shelter, where shall we sleep, For the oak and the ash are all cutten down…" (*Away,* 108). British destroyed Irish forests, which points to a link between ecological exploitation and imperialism.

Urquhart exposes the hypocrisies and oppressions of the British colonial rule through two characters, Osbert and Granville Sedgwick. They are British landlords who siphon off of Irish labor and land. But they are ignorant of their own oppressive policies. They harbor fake sympathies for their Irish subjects. An incident centered around Osbert and Mary is allegorical of the British imperial project at large. Osbert goes to the tidal pools, interested as he is in natural history. He spots Mary there. She has come to gather seaweeds for a fertilizer to revive her dying field. What happens as he spots her is telling of the colonial gaze which objectifies the colonized person. He thinks, "were this communication to take place he would desperately want to take notes, but had, alas, neither pencil nor paper with which to make a record of what she would say, if she would speak at all" (*Away* 86). She is thought of as a specimen to be studied, almost like a subhuman creature. Such is the distance between the colonizer and the colonized. He wonders why she is collecting seaweeds, which is a seasonal activity among Irishwomen for centuries. Mary notes, "she knew suddenly that this man had been blind to them, her people" (*Away* 87). When Mary asks her what he had been doing, he thinks "Curiosity was not a state of mind he associated with these people. Imagination, superstition… but certainly not curiosity" (*Away,* 88). This again betrays a colonial prejudice. Osbert kindly offers Mary to give her some sea anemones so she could observe them at her home in leisure. She replies, "Why would I take this world apart so that it could never be again?... If I could go into this world I would go and come away again and leave it all undisturbed…" (*Away,* 91). It is a subtle yet searing criticism of the British imperial project of conquering, exploiting and destroying the Irish at large.

When the family migrate to Canada because of the potato famine, it faces the same colonial prejudice. The O'Malley family is dismissed as 'mad and dangerous', 'dim-witted', reflecting the English Protestant prejudice against them. Gothic texts often feature such tales of ostracization and persecution. The English colonizers reject Brian's job application on the grounds of his being an Irish Catholic as well. Brian recalls how a crowd of Protestants attacked a parade celebrating St. Patrick's Day, an Irish Catholic festival. It leads to a riot, wherein a young Irish Catholic father is stabbed in the back with a pitchfork. This graphic violence lends itself readily to Gothic aesthetics.

Urquhart also introduces a postcolonial theme on a narrative level by interspersing her writing with Celtic myths. These myths and legends celebrate her ancestors' Irish roots. The book mentions a shipwrecked sailor who dies in Mary's arms on the shore. She falls in love at first sight. The sailor is believed to be in fact a supernatural spirit. Before he dies, he whispers 'Moira' to her. Moira is a Celtic name, which according to Audrey Robitaillie, symbolically refers to Mary's cultural identity suppressed under the British rule (Robitaillie, 164). Even after migrating to Canada, a place called Lake Moira haunts Mary with memories of her demon lover as well as her homeland. The symbolic memory of the lover can be used interchangeably with that of her homeland, as a matter of fact. Both haunt her in the manner of Freudian melancholia. Mary internalizes her exile due to British imperialistic policies to the point where she always feels 'away'. The novel's title has many meanings, one of which is the constant feeling of exile that the Irish potato famine migrants faced in Canadian wilderness.

The description of the family's migration across the Atlantic Ocean is distinctly Gothic. The ship they travel in is called a coffin ship, because of the poor survival rate of the Irish migrants. Liam remembers years later "the dark belly of the ship where no air stirred and, as weeks passed, the groans of his neighbors, the unbearable, unspeakable odors, his own father calling for water, and the limp bodies of

children…" (*Away,* 137). People shriek for air and light. The ship is called an abominable beast that devours one third of the flesh that pours onto its hold. Men are dehumanized into flesh, and claustrophobia haunts every migrant. This description reinforces the earlier point about Gothic providing an idiom for oppression.

The book features a native man named Exodus Crow. To him, Mary says that the same trouble stays in the heart of both their peoples. It implies a solidarity between the Irish and the Native Americans, as both are victimized by colonialism. Exodus Crow exemplifies Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry in his attire: "The cut of his coat was exactly like that of an English gentleman, but made of buckskin, and beautifully, though not extensively, covered with beads" (*Away* 172). There are elements of indigenous native culture as well as English culture in his clothes. He wears a waistcoat pocket watch, as well as has feathers in his hair. O'Malleys' interaction with the natives like the Alongquins or Ojibways destabilizes the prejudice against them as wild and uncouth. Liam's father calls them rather mild and fine-looking, hardly anything to be afraid of. Liam ends up marrying an indigenous woman named Molly, who lives on the land he buys. This leads to a transcultural hybridity as posited by Homi Bhabha. The novel depicts a multicultural sensibility opposed to the discourse in *Wacousta*, a Canadian take on imperial Gothic. The images of natives as uncivilized and barbaric have been seen in many a Gothic literature. The native also talks about manitou, the 'spirit that is everywhere and that we, the Nishnawbe, believe in" (*Away* 180). Manitou refers to spirits, the unseen imprints of things that are very much a staple of the Gothic fiction. It is a part of the Ojibway belief system, and is a supernatural force that is energized by the elements of nature. He tells her of the spirits that stay in water or air, and befriend the humans of the lands. The similarity of beliefs between the Irish and the Ojibways suggests a solidarity between the two. His story about a missionary who spreads Christianity among the natives and tries to smother their pagan religion is reminiscent of the Protestants that seek to eradicate Irish Catholic identity. The Moira lake was earlier called the Chuncall Lake. The native name has been replaced by an Irish one. The novel, though suggesting camaraderie between Brian and Exodus Crow, has undercurrents of the oppression that Irish settlers meted out against the Natives. Post-colonialism draws from post-structuralism its radical uncertainty of identity. The signifiers like colonial and colonized, or victim and perpetrator keep shifting. Liam's role as a victim of British imperialism later on subverts to a settler colonial who seeks to claim for himself the land which collectively belongs to the natives.

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49.

Foregrounding the Intersection between Literature and Art in Manju Kapur's *The Gallery*

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Abstract

The aim of the research paper is to study, examine and analyse the latest novel of Manju Kapur, *The Gallery* from an artistic perspective. Literature and visual arts often collaborate with each other to bring out verbal images and visual metaphors enjoyed and studied by literary critics and artists alike for a long time. If literature is articulation in verbal art, then visual arts form an expression in the representation through artistic forms. Both literature and visual arts have found strong representation in canonical works in their respective fields and domain.

Manju Kapur a prominent writer in the Indian Literature in English scene burst into limelight with her novel *Difficult Daughters*. She writes from a quaint background keeping a pulse in the social fabric of India and through the perspective of Indian family especially in urban cities. Her latest novel aptly titled *The Gallery* narrates a heart warming and poignant story of Minal Saini, wife of a successful lawyer in New Delhi trying to get her moorings settled and search for her identity through art and opening a gallery from her garage. The gallery becomes her interior space helping her to navigate through a turbulent life as a wife, mother, art patron and sisterhood with Maitreyi, a Nepali househelp. Kapur composes a brilliant novel through a seamless interaction with literature and art as providing a canvas for the women to re-examine their space, identity and marriage as well as reflecting on the significance of art in today's society as investment, value and property.

Keywords: Manju Kapur, Women, Identity, Art, Gallery.

Introduction:

There has always been an intimate connection between art and literature. In fact literature is considered to be a literary expression among the fine arts such as painting, sculpture, music and dance. All arts are either visual or auditory. Literature on the other hand emote both the visual and auditory through language, words and the symbolic and imagistic meanings of the words. The composition of literature is an exception to the visual and auditory aspect through the content present in the genres of literature. In literary art forms, the plot, story and the narrative form the crux that takes the art forward in search a reality and truth whereas fine art has its own systems and codes to deal with and unravel abstract and concrete meanings to formulate an aesthetic experience. Fine arts have truly lived up to the dictum "Art for Art's Sake" whereas literature has moved away from this as a literary text becomes embedded in the social, political, cultural and historical context of the nation and world.

The nexus between literature and art is ancient and renowned. Writers have often explored fine arts especially painting in their works to collaborate and converse about the artist, artistic movement and the psychology of the artist and their works. Greek philosophy states that all arts are imitative and Aristotle makes a distinction between art and literature in the background of mimesis or imitation through mode, manner and method of imitation between literature and art. One cannot deny the inter-relationship between literature and art that has

been in existence and continue to exist since ancient times.

Literature's engagement with art can be traced to some prominent works such as Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, movements such as Aestheticism, Pre-Raphaelite movement, Imagism, W. H. Auden's 'Musee d Beaux Arts', John Keats' 'Ode to a Grecian Urn' are but a few examples that articulate the strong connection between literature and art. These works highlight and foreground the visual images explored in them bridging the gap between literature and art.

Rationale:

Literature is embedded and rooted in the social, political, cultural and historical constructs of its age, nation and world. Cultural materialism opened new doors and vistas of looking at literature from interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspectives. With the boundaries between literature and other social sciences as well as physical sciences breaking down, the creation, composition and the absorption of literature has also transformed into all pervasive space for collaborative efforts between artists and writers. As a contemporary Indian writer in English, Manju Kapur explores and analyses her character through art. Art runs as a parallel in her novel *The Gallery* (2023) that unites, bends and breathes between the characters of Minal and Ellora Sahni on the one hand and Maitreyi and Tashi on the other. In an interview Manju Kapur talks about her interest in art galleries and the motivation for its incorporation in this novel, "I go to the India Art Fair every year, it's my one little foray into art. . . And I've always been interested in galleries. What struck me about this world was that most of these people were women. A lot of galleries started off in homes, garages and basements and it's one of the reasons I picked the art world as the setting [for the novel]. Time wise and in several other ways, this world is less rigid than a lot of others. The elasticity of this world was also, therefore, a factor. How do you straddle the public and the private, the professional and the personal?"

This research paper aims to explore the connection between art and literature and how art becomes a narrative, entrepreneurial purpose for Minal to introspect and find her space in the world. Through art, Kapur has straddled different themes such as identity, marriage, gender and socio-economic divide and the consumerist culture of the 1990's post globalization and liberalization era of the Indian economy.

Research Methodology

The research paper attempts a close reading of the text as the primary source and access to secondary sources such as reference material in the forms of reviews of the novel and research papers on art and literature.

Research Content

Manju Kapur has established firmly as one of the best Indian writers in English today. She has written six novels and *The Gallery* appears after a gap of almost six years. All of Kapur's novels are situated in Delhi and trace the social and economic aspects of Delhi life through middle and upper middle class society. There is an almost Jane Austen like quality while reading her novels. Her characters are drawn with complexity, complications, introspection and who move with the times. In each of her novels, Kapur portrays and etches characters with depth, pathos, emotion and meticulous preparation. Her novels are extremely engaging and she has received numerous literary awards and prizes such as Commonwealth Writer's Prize for her first book *Difficult Daughters* and many others.

In the novel, *The Gallery*, Kapur examines the role of Minal Sahni and the world around her involving her husband, daughter, and her domestic help's family. Through this microcosmic world, Kapur balances a world of aspirations, differences, identity and standing up for oneself. At the same time, Kapur also brings to the front the value, purpose and attachment to art and its stability to Minal. The novel opens with Minal's character poised at the age of 50 and looking at M F Husain painting and she broods over her life if devoid of art, "Where would she be without art today? Without the courage to say a word, without the will to get her feet out of the door. Afraid, afraid; what would people think, how would she manage? All her female inheritance rushing up to fold her

in its million qualms and reservations." (4) Minal growing up in a joint family savours freedom and love while studying in an elite college. She possessed an inclination towards art and artistic sensibility and develops it through her visits to the exhibitions. She completes her MA in Art History from Panjab University, Chandigarh and subsequently enrols for a MPhil degree from JNU to be sucked into a life of politics, demonstrations and the like stalling her marriage. Minal finally meets her match in Alok Sahni, lawyer with upward mobility and a house in a posh locality of Golf Links Road, New Delhi.

Minal's gaze on art and paintings get an introduction in her marital home, "As Minal sat with her mother-in-law, her eye would fall on the paintings that decorated their walls: Husain, Gaitonde, Gade, Kulkarni, Krishen Khanna, Padamsee, Jamini Roy, Amrita Sher-Gill, artists she had studied, right in their home" (18) as her deceased father-in-law "used his position as a diplomat to sponsor exhibitions abroad and to buy works for embassies. Often artists gave him paintings to show appreciation." (16) Minal's appreciation and keen sensibility towards art was noticed by her mother-in-law in their conversations on art and artists. As a matter of fact, Alok surprises Minal to do something with art after the demise of her mother-in-law. Her interest in art is culminated as Minal names her daughter Ellora famous for their Hindu, Jain and Buddhist art.

During one of her walks with her baby, Minal muses the thought of opening an art gallery and sounds it with her best friend and artist, Katha, "You know our basement? What about an art gallery there? The house is on a pie-shaped lot so it's bigger than you would expect looking at it from the road" (23). She then shares the idea with her husband Alok whose only wish is it to be a successful venture. "He was open to everything she well knew. Only it must be successful. Cultural capital, he explained, was as important in its own way, as any other capital. . . And the clients must be the right kind of clients" (24). In this way the art gallery *La Gallerie* takes shape and is born. The art gallery takes a lot of time and energy of Minal and she hires a house help to look after the growing Ellora, Maitreyi, a Nepali whose husband Krisna already works with them. Maitreyi or Matti as she is known is sincere and forge a relationship with Minal and lives in the outhouse. Matti and Krisna have a daughter Tashi who becomes a playmate and companion along with Ellora. Kapur here discretely talks about the economic divide between the rich and the poor and also the lifestyle differences between the privileged and the underprivileged. She also comments on the changing society of Delhi with its plush homes and the people inhabiting them.

The Gallery is also a trajectory of the art scene in India especially Delhi before and after the liberalization and globalization era. Minal observes that art or painting existed as a matter of fact; it was part of home décor. But post liberalization, art began to be looked at as 'investment' and artists started to feel important. There are a number of prominent artists Kapur discusses in the course of the novel and how it is intricately connected to Minal. The affluent started to notice art as piece de resistance, a point of contact and conversation piece in their gatherings. Artists began to be noticed and having knowledge about art was essential.

The connection between art and commerce is beautifully analysed in the novel. For Minal was caught in the process of owning a galley, Alok on the other hand wanted Minal's passion to be a profitable enterprise. He does take a keen interest in the working of the gallery but leaves Minal to attend to the intricacies. "How could she be not stressed about money when it was Alok's? So far as money was concerned, he felt everybody should be accountable. She was all for accountability, but to explain her expenditure to Alok would open her to both his judgements and strictures" (63). Minal with the prodding of Katha finally takes the plunge of opening *La Gallerie* with thirty canvasses and gradually hires assistants to help her with administrative work. Minal's effort with the gallery meant sourcing new artists, visiting exhibitions in Delhi and elsewhere. In one such trip to Jehangir Art Gallery, she comes across a female artist from Benares Zaida Ali whose work as described in the novel is "And then she saw paper works covered with the most

intricate designs. Among flowers, vines, parrots, peacocks, there were hands with henna, hands holding a garland, holding a baby, working a loom, hands cooking. Though small, they shone like jewels, both intricate and clear. There was also one of an airplane flying towards the twin towers. In there was no colour, only more emphatic strokes of black" (106). Minal visits Benares to meet Zaida, divorced and took up painting to ease her pain of an unsuccessful marital life, "I started drawing, all those saris, all that colour. I feel pen and ink expresses me best. And the twin towers. I did just one as an experiment because we are all involved in the outside world, even me. . ." (124). With this conversation, Minal decides to promote Zaida's work in her gallery and "her faith in herself as a businesswoman grew with every step" (124). Zaida's work reaches Minal and her brothers come for the business transaction with Minal and Zaida's works are sold immediately. Minal ropes in her sisters-in-law Sunita and Vanita who are businesspersons in Chandigarh for her gallery promotion. Minal's gallery grows steadily and she opens La Gallerie/2 in Katha's sprawling flat at Gurgaon.

Kapur makes an interesting point to write about the rise and downfall of the art scene in the novel. In fact, the character of Minal can be traced along with the growth of art scene, "Art may have become big, but selling it was no easier. To spend a lot on what could prove an uncertain investment was a risk most people were not up to. . . a painting gave pleasure and satisfaction every day for decades to come. It reflected the owner's taste for all to admire, and ultimately visual enjoyment outweighed the cost" (130). Minal learns and grows with mistakes and takes every ounce of effort to make the paintings of La Gallerie and La Gallerie /2 a resounding success. She promotes them at various art exhibitions in the capital. She now opens another gallery La Gallerie /3 in Chandigarh, that showed "impressive footfall, . . . Chandigarh liked the decorative, had a fondness for nature on canvas, along with the penchant for the Buddha. . . with this third gallery, Minal could come to the sorry conclusion that she was as much into business as her brothers, Only the commodity was different. Art instead of yarn" (270).

Manju Kapur continues the tryst with art with the next generation of characters in the novel. Tashi seems to have developed a taste for art and is sent to a residency in Chandigarh to hone her artistic skills by Minal and katha. Tashi returns after a steely resolve to become an artist and her works are promoted by Katha in their gallery. Minal holds an exhibition as retrospective of twenty years of her art gallery and two thirds of her exhibits are sold. Both Ellora and Tashi graduate from prestigious institutions and plan their careers. Ellora is admitted to the Burton Institute of Art in England and Tashi wishes to delve deeper into the life of an artist. Meanwhile Minal and Alok divorce due to differences in their marriage when she finds Alok's extramarital affair with Sita, Alok's partner's wife. Minal decides to spend time in Chandigarh investing in the new gallery.

Conclusion:

Manju Kapur in The Gallery brings out a beautiful connection between art and literature. Through art, the characters like Minal discover their identity, Tashi her purpose and Ellora the continuation and passing of art as a heirloom, Zaida for whom art is like a salve for her pain. Kapur also writes about the purposes of art from personal to the political- Zaida and the Assamese artist painting about climate change and its articulation in the novel. The novel traces the development of the characters through the growth and development of art from the 1990's to the 2000's.

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Cycles of Oppression and Postcolonial Resistance through Silence in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*

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Abstract:

Race, gender and ethnicity are the 3 vectors of operation often seen in the colonial context. In the backdrop of the Indo-Caribbean experience, women are often the victims of oppression practiced at house and in the society, forcing some of them into an agonising silence about the atrocities committed on them. As members of a racial minority in an alien land that has a legacy of transporting Indians as convict labourers, the early Indian immigrants to Caribbean had to live under the shame and fear of living as bonded labourers. Subsequently, many of the Indian families in the Caribbean adopted social insularity, forcing women to stay circumscribed within narrow boundaries. The forces of colonialism and the internalised power over symptoms by the male members had created a stubborn nexus of operation which had to be exposed through postcolonial Indo-Caribbean women's writings.

This research paper examines Shani Mootoo's novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* to explain the dialectical interplay between the oppressive cycles on Indo-Caribbean women and the non-normative genders and their anticolonial strategies of resistance. By tracing the life and experiences of Mala who maintains a paradoxical silence, the paper looks into the conflict between operation and autonomy. This paper also explores the liberating alternate spaces that Mala, Tyler and other marginalised figures explore even when they are forced to maintain a shameful silence.

Keywords: operation, colonialism , silence, alternate space, resistance

Trinidadian-Canadian author Shani Mootoo's debut novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) is a text dripping with trauma of sexual violation and postcolonial trauma. With its roots lying in the history of indentured labour, the book narrates the navigation of Chandin Ramachandin through the hierarchical, Colonial system and hints at his superficial acceptance of the Colonial standards not as an end in themselves, but as a means to impress himself and others. This superficial life led by Chandin hollows him from within and makes him hold on to different people as a source of pride. When these characters that he wishes to hold in his possession venture away from him, Chandin takes on a hysterical persona. His anger is his way of expressing himself but this uncouth mode of expression cripples multiple characters from time to time.

By setting the novel in a fictional island town named Lantanacamara and relegating England with a fictional name called as Shivering Northern Wetlands (where the Christian Missionaries are portrayed to hail from), Mootoo attempts to defamiliarize and decolonise from the ingrained history of Colonialization. The Ramachandin parents had travelled across two oceans soon after the birth of Chandin, only with the hope of providing him with a good future. Hailing from a family of indentured Indian labourers, Chandin is chosen by Reverend Thoroughly not just to study at the school set up by the Reverend, but to reside with the Reverend as his son. In a way, Chandin was adopted by the Reverend in return for the family's (and ofcourse Chandin's) conversion to Christianity. From the initial and literal migration to Lantanacamara to the cultural migration into a new religion and a new way of

life, the story progresses to build layers of imposition onto Chandin's mind. It is interesting to note that there is an interplay of religion and Capitalism in Chandin's approach to the conversion. He abides by Christrian thought and Christian way of life not because he believes in the supremacy of the Christian way of life but because he believes in the supremacy of the lifestyle led by all the Wetlanders in Lantanacamara. It is the big dining setups and the Chandiliers etc. that attract him to the Christian world. While Chandin leaves behind the worship of Hindu Gods (unlike his family that secretly is still Hindu at heart), Chandin is unable to fully adopt to the life of a devout Christian or to even just feel at-house in the Thoroughly household. One can say that Chandin experiences a cultural migration without arrival just like his parents experience a migration but do not really avail much from the move (and continue living in the barracks). It is no surprise to the reader that in the innate disdain for the uncultured and uncivilized way of life led by his family coupled with his inability to find a place in the society of Wetlanders makes Chandin hollow from within. While he speaks and dresses up like the Wetlanders his general self-identity is still in a Limbo. His sense of self and sense of self-worth are so inadequate that he starts associating his esteem with people around him or the people he desires to associate with. Everytime he experiences rejection— for instance, Lavinia's engagement to a Wetlander, the eloping of Lavinia and Sarah and years later, the romantic entanglement of Mala with another man—the demon in Chandin gets unleashed and he acts against human intelligence. An example of the same is his random decision to marry someone, raping his own daughters, attempt to murder directed at her daughter's lover Boyie etc. This cultural migration without arrival has left Chandin with a fragmented sense of self. After Lavinia and Sarah elope, Chandin receives the biggest blow to his ego. Despite being in love with Lavinia, he makes the decision to marry Sarah whom he actually looks down upon and years later when Lavinia (who is still the source of his affection) establishes a romantic, homosexual bond and elopes with Sarah, Chandin experiences what one can call a reverse-migration. He drops his refined mannerism and way of life and turns into a tyrant who abuses and rapes his pre-adolescent daughters. With this reverse migration, he becomes a heartless, drunkard man who is extremely possessive of his daughters (just like he was possessive of his wife when she eloped). Years later, when he finds out that Mala has a sexual relationship with Boyie, Chandin's reaction showcases his possessiveness: 'What the ass . . . ?' he mumbled. 'A mman iefing my baby? He brave to even try. I ent go let nobody tief my woman again. No man, no woman, no damn body go tief my woman again. I go kill he. I go kill she too, if it comes to that. I go kill meself too. I sharpenin' culass tonight' (*CBAN* 215).

It is the societal constructs that prevent Mala from escaping the atrocities levied upon her by her father. The general joke about Mala in Lantanacamara is that her father has mistaken her to be his wife. This trivialization of incest by this society and the general notion that it is a family's personal matter restrict Mala's autonomy over her body. When her sister Asha runs away from the house for safety and self-preservation, and writes letters to Mala to join her in another city and country, the postman never delivers those letters because he believes that he does not wish to step foot in a household of moral corruption and sin. This segregation by the society continues to add layers to the societal perception of Mala. Her outer garden (with its lack of aesthetics) becomes a wall between the society and Mala to the extent that nobody even realizes that the corpse of Chandin has laid undisturbed for years in the house itself. This cutoff from a society that thinks of Mala as a lunatic, provides Mala the space to be herself, without supervision. The curious kids of the neighbourhood sure disturb her with stones being flung at her windows etc, but the perception of her being a lunatic provides her with a protection from the society's gaze and shields her from the punishment for murdering her own father.

With years of living all by herself, Mala begins to lose her sense of language and uses language only during her brief interactions with

PohPoh, her childhood self. Mala has disassociated herself from the trauma and abuse-ridden PohPoh to the level where she imagines PohPoh to be young child outside of Mala's body and tries to be her loving and care-giving nurturer. As a result of the years of abuse and trauma, Mala withdraws completely from the societal world and societal language. Silence becomes her coping mechanism for the years to come. She not just maintains silence about her repeated sexual violation throughout her school years, but also uses silence as a shield when her father's corpse is found from the room downstairs. Having relegated herself to the world of plants and insects, Mala imitates the sounds made by the insects and birds. One may say that the desire to communicate could have driven her to speak the tongue of other animals. Aunt Lavinia had imbibed a love and appreciation for insects in the young Mala which later develops into the need to protect and nurture insects. In her school days, Mala and Boyie fancy themselves as "protectors of snails and all things unable to defend themselves from the bullies of the world" (*CBAN* 117). The young PohPoh pours out onto insects and birds all the love and care that she herself never received. Mala's rejection of human vocabulary and her self-relegation to sounds of birds and insects is gradual:

> In the phase just before Mala stopped using words, lexically shaped thoughts would sprawl across her mind, fractured here and there. The cracks would be filled with images. Soon the inverse happened. A sentence would be constructed primarily of images punctuated by only one or two verbalizations: a noun tentatively uttered in recognition, a descriptive word confirming a feeling or observation. (*CBAN 123)*

Silence is used as trope by the author herself when the author maintains silence over the different forms of sexuality that characters in the novel embody. With the central narrator Tyler being referred to as "all kinds of funny" (*CBAN* 73) by the onlookers, his sexual inclination is never given a tag or title by the author. He comes across as funny to the onlookers because he dresses up in an elite fashion due to his education and exposure in the Shivering North Wetlands. He is also a misfit, in the eyes of people at Paradise alms house, due to his unconventional choice of profession as a nurse. He feels like an "outsider" due to his chosen profession. The lack of acceptance of Tyler's profession is evident in the fact that he is handed out menial jobs by the Matron at Paradise alms in spite of the formal training that he has officially received. Since nursing is a profession associated with a particular gender, the nurses at Paradise alms house are reluctant to revisualize the association of the profession with someone who looks like a man but dresses in fashionable outfits. He describes himself as "Not a man and not ever able to be a woman, suspended nameless in the limbo state between existence and non-existence" (*CBAN* 76). The author refrains from giving any judgement on Tyler's sexual orientation and also refrains from highlighting the traumatic responses that non-heteronormative characters usually face in most narratives. Mootoo seems to be using silence strategically in order to convey that homosexuality is natural as heterosexuality and needs no discernment or judgement. By not isolating the issue of homosexuality, Mootoo weaves it into the idea of normalcy but there is, of course, societal gaze that Tyler's personality invites. The gardener Hector admires Tyler's personality because it reminds him of his own brother but also expresses pity for Tyler. The heterosexual characters, thus, either express a disdain or sympathy (without an in-between) towards Tyler. It is only Mala and Otoh who allow Tyler to be who he is. The scene from the novel where Mala offers a female nurse's dress along with stockings to Tyler to try on but gives no particular reaction when he adorns the clothes speaks of her idea of gender fluidity and naturalness. In this extremely powerful scene, Mala just gives him a glance and continues with her usual activities.

The silence maintained by the Lantanacamara society on the transition of Otoh from a man to a woman also speaks volumes about the idea of fluidity of sexuality. Otoh, born as a pretty girl wills to be a young boy. The pronouns used for her change gradually in the novel. Even her parents do not question or even realize the transition of Otoh from a beautiful girl to an attractive young man. Otoh's existence is centered on the fact that he wishes to be a non-cowardly man, unlike his father. It is

only Otoh who becomes a catalyst of change in Mala's story. From romancing Mala in the guise of Boyie's outfit to setting the house with Chandin's corpse on fire in order to prevent Mala's trial, Otoh courageously takes matters in his hand. His romantic relationship with Tyler is also narrated with a general treatment as if it were any other romantic relationship. Thus, one can say that Mootoo consciously uses silence to normalize homosexuality /queerness as well as to describe the evil acts carried out by Chandin Ramachandin in order to project him as a victim-turned-perpetrator.

Mootoo contextualizes various forms of silence that are constructed by patriarchy, colonialism, heteronormativity and oppression. In the first part of the novel, silence hangs heavily on the victims of oppression and trauma such as Mala and Asha. Subsequently however it is the same silence that becomes an agency of resistance in the case of Mala who subvert the very language of oppression with vocalizations and silence. As a narrative of postcolonial resistance, Mootoo mobilizes silence as a cover for personal revenge and resistance against the cycle of oppression that women and homosexuals reel under. These cycles are ruptured by characters such as Mala, Asha, Lavinia, Sarah, Otoh, Tyler who manage to construct their own insularity with the help of silence and redeeming love.

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Reclaiming Identity: Resistance, Cultural Hybridity and Empowerment in Postcolonial Literature

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Abstract:

The present research explores the intricate relationship between Postcolonial Literature and the power of resistance, focusing on how literary works produced in formerly colonised nations challenge and subvert colonial legacies. The central research question guiding this study is: How does Postcolonial Literature employ resistance as a thematic and narrative tool to reclaim cultural identity and challenge colonial domination? This research aims to analyse how postcolonial writers use literature as a medium of resistance, while the objectives include examining the thematic and stylistic strategies employed, understanding the role of language and cultural hybridity, and exploring how these works reimagine history and identity. Postcolonial Literature, broadly defined as works produced after a nation's independence from colonial rule, emerged prominently from the late 19th century to the mid-1960s. This literature not only critiques the enduring systems left by colonisers but also serves as a platform for marginalised voices to resist and redefine their cultural narratives. The power of resistance in postcolonial texts is multifaceted, encompassing physical, intellectual, and cultural dimensions. Writers such as Chinua Achebe, Anita Desai, and V.S. Naipaul utilise language, symbolism, and storytelling to subvert colonial authority and reclaim indigenous identities. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* portrays resistance as both an individual and collective struggle, highlighting the tension between preserving tradition and adapting to colonial-imposed changes. The research employs a qualitative methodology, combining textual analysis and critical theory to examine key postcolonial texts. Themes such as the voice of common people, cultural hybridity, language, identity confusion, and exile are analysed to understand how resistance is articulated. Focusing on these elements, the study reveals how postcolonial literature not only critiques colonial oppression but also reasserts cultural identities and histories.

Keywords: Postcolonial Literature, Cultural Hybridity, Identity Confusion, Exile and Alienation, Resistance.

Introduction:

Postcolonial literature refers to the body of literary works produced in regions that have experienced colonisation, particularly after gaining independence from colonial powers. Emerging prominently from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, this literature reflects the cultural, social, and political upheavals caused by colonialism. It encompasses writings from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and other formerly colonised regions, offering a platform for marginalised voices to articulate their experiences and struggles. Postcolonial literature is characterised by its exploration of themes such as identity, cultural hybridity, language, and resistance. Writers like Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie, and Jamaica Kincaid use their works to critique the enduring legacies of colonialism, including the imposition of foreign languages, cultural erasure, and systemic inequality. By reclaiming Indigenous narratives and histories, postcolonial literature challenges the dominant colonial discourse and reasserts the value of native cultures. It serves as a powerful tool for decolonisation, enabling formerly colonised

societies to redefine their identities and resist the psychological and cultural impacts of colonial domination.

In his PhD thesis, The Crisis of Identity in Postcolonial Literature, Saman Abdulqadir Hussein Dizayi explores the profound impact of colonialism on identity formation in postcolonial societies. Analysing works from former British colonies, Dizayi highlights themes of race, gender, and cultural hybridity, drawing on theorists like Franz Fanon and Edward Said. The thesis underscores the role of literature in addressing identity crises and resisting colonial legacies, offering a comprehensive contribution to postcolonial studies.

Resistance is a cornerstone of postcolonial literature, serving as both a thematic and narrative device to challenge colonial authority and reclaim cultural autonomy. This resistance is not limited to physical rebellion but extends to intellectual, cultural, and linguistic forms of defiance. Writers employ storytelling, symbolism, and subversive language to dismantle colonial narratives and empower marginalised voices. For instance, Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart portrays resistance through the protagonist's struggle to preserve Igbo traditions amidst colonial encroachment. Similarly, authors like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o advocate for writing in native languages as an act of resistance against the cultural imperialism of colonial languages. Resistance in postcolonial literature also addresses internal conflicts within colonised societies, such as class divisions and gender inequalities, highlighting the complexity of decolonisation. By depicting resistance, these works inspire readers to question oppressive systems and envision alternative futures rooted in cultural pride and self-determination.

In his research article, Cultural Narratives in Postcolonial Literature: Exploring the Legacy of Empire, Dr Nasir Abbas Nayyar examines how postcolonial authors address colonial legacies through themes of power, identity, and culture. Analysing key texts, Nayyar highlights the trauma of colonisation and its influence on the literary imagination, offering valuable insights into the cultural narratives of postcolonial societies.

The central research question, How does Postcolonial Literature employ resistance as a thematic and narrative tool to reclaim cultural identity and challenge colonial domination?, seeks to explore the multifaceted ways in which resistance is articulated in postcolonial texts. This question underscores the role of literature as a medium for reclaiming cultural identity and challenging the enduring legacies of colonialism. Analysing themes such as language, cultural hybridity, and identity, the research aims to uncover how writers use resistance to subvert colonial narratives and assert indigenous perspectives. The question also highlights the transformative power of literature in fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment among formerly colonised communities. Through this inquiry, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the ways postcolonial literature serves as a tool for decolonisation and cultural reclamation.

This research aims to analyse how postcolonial literature employs resistance to reclaim cultural identity and challenge colonial domination. Objectives include examining thematic and stylistic strategies, understanding the role of language and cultural hybridity, and exploring how these works reimagine history and identity.

This study is significant as it highlights the transformative power of postcolonial literature in decolonising minds and reclaiming cultural narratives. It contributes to postcolonial studies by offering insights into how literature empowers marginalised voices and fosters cultural pride, inspiring resistance against systemic oppression.

Understanding Postcolonial Literature

Postcolonial literature refers to the body of literary works produced by authors from regions that have experienced colonisation, particularly after gaining independence. It encompasses writings from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and other formerly colonised areas, offering a platform to explore the cultural, social, and political impacts of colonialism. This literature is not confined to a specific genre or style but is united by its focus on themes such as

identity, resistance, and the legacy of colonial oppression. It seeks to challenge and dismantle colonial narratives, reclaiming indigenous histories and voices that were suppressed or erased during colonial rule. By doing so, postcolonial literature serves as a tool for decolonisation, enabling formerly colonised societies to redefine their cultural and national identities.

Postcolonial literature emerged as a significant literary movement during the late 19th century, gaining momentum in the mid-20th century as many nations achieved independence from colonial powers. The period from the late 19th century to the 1960s marked a transformative era, with countries like India, Nigeria, and Jamaica breaking free from colonial rule. This era of decolonisation inspired writers to address the complexities of colonial legacies, including cultural erasure, economic exploitation, and social fragmentation. Authors such as Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and Salman Rushdie began to write narratives that reflected the struggles and aspirations of their societies, using literature as a means to critique colonial systems and celebrate indigenous cultures.

Voice of Common People, Cultural Hybridity, and Identity

Postcolonial literature is characterised by its focus on the voices of common people, often marginalised or silenced during colonial rule. It amplifies their experiences, struggles, and resilience, providing a counter-narrative to colonial histories. Cultural hybridity is another defining feature, reflecting the blending of indigenous and colonial cultures as a result of colonisation. This hybridity is often portrayed through language, where writers mix colonial languages with native dialects to create a unique literary style. Identity is a central theme, as characters grapple with the tension between preserving traditional values and adapting to colonial-imposed changes. These characteristics collectively highlight the transformative power of postcolonial literature in reclaiming cultural autonomy and challenging colonial dominance.

Resistance as a Multifaceted Concept: Physical, Intellectual, and Cultural

Resistance in postcolonial literature is a multifaceted concept that extends beyond physical rebellion to include intellectual and cultural forms of defiance. Physical resistance is often depicted through acts of rebellion or struggle against colonial forces, as seen in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart, where characters confront colonial encroachment. Intellectual resistance involves challenging colonial ideologies and narratives through critical thought and discourse. Writers like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o advocate for the decolonisation of the mind, urging societies to reject colonial mentalities. Hussein Zaboon Mutashar in his research article, "Reclaiming African Identity: Analysing Issues of Postcolonialism in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*", examines Achebe's seminal work as a response to colonial misrepresentations of Africa. Analysing themes of cultural disruption, power dynamics, and identity, Mutashar highlights Achebe's use of language to reclaim African narratives, offering a critical perspective on colonialism's socio-political and cultural impacts.

Cultural resistance, on the other hand, focuses on reclaiming and preserving indigenous traditions, languages, and practices. In his edited volume, Resistance and Literature in a Global Context: Interpreting Meanings and Significance, Prakash Chandra Pradhan explores the multifaceted nature of resistance across cultures, societies, and literary forms. By analysing texts from diverse traditions, the book highlights resistance's cultural relevance in fields like postcolonialism, feminism, and ecocriticism, offering valuable insights for scholars and students of literature worldwide. This form of resistance is evident in works that celebrate native cultures while critiquing the erasure imposed by colonialism. Together, these dimensions of resistance highlight the comprehensive nature of the struggle against colonial domination.

Role of Language and Storytelling in Subverting Colonial Authority

Language and storytelling are powerful tools of resistance in postcolonial literature. Colonial powers often imposed their languages to suppress native cultures, but postcolonial

writers reclaim these languages to subvert colonial authority. For example, authors like Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy use English to critique colonialism and express indigenous perspectives. Storytelling, too, becomes a means of preserving cultural memory and challenging colonial narratives. In her research article, "Language as an Instrument of Power in Colonial and Postcolonial Literature" Sabina Rehman explores the role of English as a tool of power in the Indian subcontinent. Analysing colonial and postcolonial novels, she highlights how mimicry and hybrid identity emerge, revealing the transformative impact of language on both colonised and coloniser cultures. Oral traditions, myths, and folktales are woven into literary works to assert the richness of native cultures. Through language and storytelling, writers dismantle colonial discourses and empower marginalised voices.

Cultural Hybridity and Its Role in Reclaiming Identity

Cultural hybridity, a hallmark of postcolonial literature, reflects the blending of indigenous and colonial cultures. This hybridity is not a sign of weakness but a strategy for reclaiming identity. Writers like Derek Walcott and Jamaica Kincaid depict characters who navigate the complexities of hybrid identities, embracing both their native heritage and colonial influences. Portraying cultural hybridity, postcolonial literature challenges the notion of cultural purity and celebrates the resilience of colonised societies in adapting and thriving despite colonial impositions.

Representation of Marginalized Voices and Common People

Postcolonial literature amplifies the voices of marginalised and common people, often silenced during colonial rule. Authors focus on the experiences of ordinary individuals, highlighting their struggles, resilience, and aspirations. Works like Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun give voice to women, lower classes, and other marginalised groups, offering a counter-narrative to colonial histories. Centring these voices, postcolonial literature fosters a sense of empowerment and solidarity among formerly colonised communities.

Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart: Individual and Collective Resistance

Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart is a seminal work in postcolonial literature, depicting the clash between traditional Igbo society and colonial forces in Nigeria. The protagonist, Okonkwo, embodies individual resistance as he fiercely opposes colonial encroachment and the erosion of Igbo traditions. His struggle reflects the broader collective resistance of his community, which grapples with the destabilising effects of colonialism. Achebe portrays resistance not only as a physical confrontation but also as a cultural and intellectual endeavour to preserve indigenous values. Through Okonkwo's tragic downfall, the novel underscores the complexities of resistance, highlighting both its necessity and its limitations in the face of overwhelming colonial power. Achebe's work remains a powerful exploration of how individual and collective resistance intertwine in the fight to reclaim cultural identity.

Anita Desai's Works: Identity Confusion and Cultural Negotiation

Anita Desai's novels, such as Clear Light of Day and In Custody, delve into the themes of identity confusion and cultural negotiation in postcolonial India. Her characters often struggle with the tension between traditional Indian values and the influences of Western modernity. Desai portrays the psychological and emotional turmoil of individuals caught between two worlds, reflecting the broader societal challenges of post-independence India.

Mehtap Demirtürk, in her research article, "Anita Desai's Clear Light of Day: A Narrative of Postcolonial Writing" explores Desai's portrayal of memory, time, and gender roles in postcolonial India. Through an analysis of Bhabha's theories, Demirtürk highlights the novel's examination of cultural identity, hybridity, and the enduring impacts of colonialism, offering a nuanced perspective on Desai's contribution to postcolonial literature. Through nuanced character studies, she explores how cultural hybridity and negotiation shape

personal and national identities. Desai's works highlight the complexities of postcolonial identity, emphasising the need to reconcile conflicting cultural influences while preserving a sense of self.

V.S. Naipaul's Narratives: Exile, Alienation, and the Search for Belonging

V.S. Naipaul's narratives, including A House for Mr. Biswas and The Mimic Men, explore themes of exile, alienation, and the search for belonging in the postcolonial world. Naipaul's characters often experience displacement, both physical and psychological, as they navigate the aftermath of colonialism. Dr Sneh Gupta, in her research article, "Alienation and Rootlessness in the Novels of V.S. Naipaul", explores the themes of displacement and identity in Naipaul's works. Focusing on the struggles of Indian immigrants, she examines how Naipaul captures the pangs of exile and the search for meaning, enriching diasporic literature and highlighting universal experiences of alienation. Naipaol's works depict the struggles of individuals who feel disconnected from their roots yet are unable to fully integrate into new environments. This sense of alienation reflects the broader dislocation experienced by many in postcolonial societies. Naipaul's exploration of identity and belonging underscores the enduring impact of colonialism on personal and cultural identities, offering a poignant critique of the fragmented postcolonial condition.

Postcolonial literature serves as a powerful critique of colonial oppression by exposing the injustices and inequalities perpetuated by colonial systems. Writers like Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and Arundhati Roy dismantle colonial narratives that glorify imperialism and instead highlight its devastating effects on colonised societies. Through vivid portrayals of exploitation, cultural erasure, and systemic violence, these authors reveal the moral and ethical failures of colonialism. For instance, Achebe's Things Fall Apart challenges the Eurocentric portrayal of African societies as primitive, offering a nuanced perspective on Igbo culture and its destruction under colonial rule. Critiquing colonial oppression, postcolonial literature not only holds colonial powers accountable but also empowers formerly colonised communities to reclaim their agency and voice.

Reassertion of Cultural Identities and Histories

A central theme in postcolonial literature is the reassertion of cultural identities and histories that were suppressed or distorted during colonial rule. Writers use storytelling to revive indigenous traditions, languages, and values, countering the cultural imperialism imposed by colonisers. For example, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o advocates for writing in native languages as a means of reclaiming cultural autonomy. Similarly, Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children reimagines India's history from a postcolonial perspective, blending myth and reality to assert a uniquely Indian narrative. By reasserting cultural identities, postcolonial literature fosters a sense of pride and continuity, enabling formerly colonised societies to heal from the wounds of colonialism and rebuild their cultural heritage.

The Transformative Power of Literature in Postcolonial Contexts

Postcolonial literature possesses a transformative power, serving as a tool for decolonisation and social change. It challenges readers to question dominant narratives and envision alternative futures rooted in justice and equality. Through its emphasis on resistance, resilience, and cultural reclamation, postcolonial literature inspires marginalised communities to assert their identities and demand recognition. Works like Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun not only critique systemic oppression but also celebrate the strength and creativity of colonised peoples. Amplifying marginalised voices and fostering empathy, postcolonial literature bridges divides and contributes to a more inclusive and equitable global discourse. Its transformative power lies in its ability to heal, empower, and inspire change in postcolonial contexts and beyond.

Conclusion:

This research has explored the intricate relationship between postcolonial literature and

the power of resistance, highlighting how literary works challenge colonial oppression and reclaim cultural identities. Through an analysis of key texts and themes, the study reveals that postcolonial literature serves as a vital tool for decolonisation, offering marginalised voices a platform to resist and redefine their narratives. Writers employ language, storytelling, and cultural hybridity to subvert colonial authority and assert indigenous perspectives. The transformative power of this literature lies in its ability to critique systemic injustices, celebrate cultural resilience, and inspire social change. Examining works from authors like Chinua Achebe, Anita Desai, and V.S. Naipaul, the research underscores the enduring relevance of postcolonial literature in addressing the legacies of colonialism and fostering a more inclusive global discourse.

The research demonstrates that postcolonial literature critiques colonial oppression, reasserts cultural identities, and empowers marginalised voices. It employs resistance as a multifaceted tool, blending physical, intellectual, and cultural defiance to challenge colonial dominance and reclaim autonomy. Future research could explore the intersection of postcolonial literature with gender, class, and globalisation, examining how these factors influence resistance and identity reclamation in diverse postcolonial contexts. This study contributes to postcolonial studies by deepening the understanding of resistance as a literary and cultural strategy, highlighting the transformative role of literature in decolonisation and cultural reclamation.

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52.

Fracturing the Frame: Gender Roles and Intersectional Identities in Contemporary Cinema

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Abstract:

Gender studies have evolved alongside people's struggles and experiences. Early feminists fought for equality, challenging unfair systems. Eventually reaction and resistance to unfair definition of roles and practices found its way into texts; written and visual. The field of cinema has evolved to reflect the way people express themselves, making space for every identity and experience. Gender is one of the most fundamental aspects of human identity that shapes personal experiences, social structures, cultural norms and trends. The study of gender theories often involves analyzing key concepts such as gender roles, gender identity, gender expression, and the intersections of gender with other social categories like race, class, and sexuality. This research paper attempts to identify the patriarchal mindset in society, stereotypes, deviant behaviour, resistance and reactions, intersectionality and diversity, power dynamics and audience reception and impact with reference to representation of gender in contemporary cinema like The Test Case, Darlings, Do Patti, and Barbie.

Keywords: patriarchy, gender roles, stereotypes, intersectionality, power dynamics, cinema as resistance, audience reception

Introduction:

Cinema as both a cultural product and a mass medium, plays a significant role in shaping and reflecting societal attitudes towards gender and identity (Mulvey, 1975). The evolution of female characters and gender narratives in film has shifted from traditionally passive portrayals to active, complex agents of change (Kaplan, 1983). This study explores the ways in which *Barbie*, *Darlings*, *Do Patti*, and *The Test Case* challenge gender norms and offer space for intersectional representation (Crenshaw, 1989). Through a comparative analysis of global and Indian cinema, the research seeks to understand how subversion is enacted on screen and received by diverse audiences.

Rationale:

While much has been written on gender representation in film, there is a growing need to analyze how newer cinematic texts resist stereotypes and offer nuanced portrayals of gender and intersecting identities. With the rise of feminist discourse in mainstream media, films like *Barbie* and *Darlings* emerge as culturally subversive films (Gill, 2007). These narratives not only redefine the cinematic female protagonist but also open conversations on power, trauma, agency, and identity. This study is timely and relevant, offering critical insight into how audiences interpret and internalize these shifts in perspectives.

Objectives:

- To examine how the selected films represent gender roles and challenge traditional stereotypes.
- To apply gender theories and intersectionality as analytical frameworks to cinematic narratives.
- To analyze the representation of diverse subversive identities through an intersectional lens.
- To assess audience reception of men and women of different age groups and interpret the perceived impact of these portrayals.
- To compare how global and Indian cinema engage with feminist discourse.

Research Methodology:

Qualitative Analysis: Close textual and visual analysis of the selected films.

Theoretical Frameworks: Feminist Film Theory (Mulvey, 1975), Judith Butler's theory of

performativity (Butler, 1990), Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989).

- Audience Reception: Data collection via structured questionnaires and interviews to gauge viewer perceptions, emotional responses, and interpretations from male as well as female respondents belonging to varied generations in order to calculate the evolution of perspectives on representation of gender.
- Comparative Lens: Contrasting global and Indian cinematic approaches to gender representation in contemporary times.

Scope & Limitations:

Scope:

- The study focuses on select contemporary films/series that center female protagonists and portray perspectives on gender and power politics.
- It combines textual analysis of the select films/series with real audience responses, making it both interpretive and empirical.
- **Limitations**:
- The sample size for audience reception may be limited due to accessibility and time.
- Cultural interpretation may vary widely and findings may not be universal or generalized.
- This study is limited to films in English and Hindi and excludes regional or independent cinema with similar themes.

Research Content and Statistical Analysis:

Gender role disruption, intersectional identity markers, female agency, victimhood vs empowerment, power dynamics.

- Feminist Film Theory examines the form (camera work, narrative structure, character agency) (Mulvey, 1975).
- Butler's Performativity analyzes how characters enact or resist gender norms (Butler, 1990).
- Crenshaw's Intersectionality explores how gender interacts with other social categories (Crenshaw, 1989).

Analysis of Gender, Performance, and Intersectionality in the selected Films:

Cinema, as a cultural mirror and ideological apparatus, has long influenced and been influenced by constructions of gender. In "Barbie" (2023), "Darlings" (2022), "Do Patti" (2024), and "The Test Case" (2017), gender identities are not only depicted but questioned, resisted, and redefined. Applying Feminist Film Theory, Judith Butler's performativity, and Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality, this section investigates how these narratives challenge traditional gender roles and make space for diverse, subversive expressions of identity and power.

Across the four films, feminist film theory helps examine who sees and who is seen, and how cinematic techniques shape power. Collectively, these films offer counter-narratives that challenge male-centric storytelling, positioning women as both narrative drivers and ideological disruptors.

"Barbie" is almost a meta-commentary on performativity. Barbie's evolution—from plastic perfection to existential seeker, embodies Butler's theory. Her constructed femininity becomes burdensome, leading her to choose the uncertainty of the real world over the rigidity of gender performance in Barbie Land (Butler, 1990). In "Barbie", the male gaze is directly satirized and destabilized. Barbie Land is a matriarchal utopia that later grapples with patriarchal infiltration, critiquing how cinema historically centers men's perspectives (Mulvey, 1975). Gloria's monologue about the contradictory expectations of womanhood breaks the fourth wall and reclaims narrative agency for women. Although critiqued for being predominantly white, "Barbie" attempts to introduce diversity through its supporting cast (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality can be applied to critique what the film lacks addressing like race, body size, and other identity markers beyond gender. "Barbie" makes a global attempt at inclusivity, but its intersectional lens is limited. While it includes diverse body types and races in Barbie Land, deeper questions of race, class, or global inequality are not fully explored. However, Gloria (a working mother of color) subtly introduces the intersection of gender with motherhood and labor.

Set in a working-class Muslim community, "Darlings" offers a nuanced portrayal of domestic violence shaped by class, gender, and cultural norms. Badru's marginalization is compounded not just by her gender, but by her socio-economic context. She faces oppression,

gender-based violence, economic dependency, and community silence. Her resistance is not just personal but structural, revealing how multiple identities intersect to shape lived experience. Crenshaw's framework allows us to see that Badru's struggle is not only about gender but also about economic vulnerability and cultural expectation. Badru begins her journey as a woman caught in a cycle of domestic abuse, a trope often seen in cinema, where women are portrayed as helpless or awaiting rescue. However, the film subverts this narrative by allowing Badru not only to survive but to reclaim her agency. Through feminist film theory, particularly Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze, we can argue that "Darlings" deliberately resists the objectification of its female protagonist. The camera never eroticizes Badru or sensationalizes her trauma. Instead, her pain is treated with emotional nuance, and her eventual resistance is depicted as an act of moral complexity, not just revenge. Further, the film avoids moralizing her choices. Rather than a victim-to-victor arc based on external validation, Badru's empowerment is self-directed. She does not rely on a male savior figure; her agency comes from within and is supported by female solidarity (especially her mother and confidantes). This conscious departure from traditional portrayals aligns "Darlings" with a post-feminist narrative where women are not merely reactive but self-defining (Gill, 2007). Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity posits that gender is not a stable identity but rather a set of socially imposed performances repeated over time. Badru initially *performs* the socially sanctioned role of the "good wife" who is forgiving, hopeful, and loyal. Despite repeated abuse, she excuses her husband's violence with lines like *"woh acche hain, gusse mein control nahi rehta"* (he's a good man, he just loses control). However, as the narrative progresses, Badru begins to unlearn this performance. The transformation is not abrupt but layered, showing how internalized gender roles are difficult to shed. Badru's hesitations, moral dilemmas, and emotional breakdowns all serve to humanize the process of deconstructing gender performance, rather than romanticize it.

In "Do Pattti", a noir-style thriller, women occupy spaces typically coded masculine: detective work, criminal underworlds, violence. The camera lingers not on their bodies but on their gaze, intent, and decisions—disrupting genre expectations that usually frame women as femme fatales or victims (Kaplan, 1983). Caste or regional identity plays a role in "Do Pattti" along with gender, implicitly and explicitly. The film features female leads who occupy traditionally masculine roles without "feminizing" them to fit societal norms. Their moral ambiguity and assertion of agency highlight how the performance of gender can break down when placed in unconventional settings. Female solidarity across difference may also be an intersectional theme here. **"**Do Patti" with a hilly region as its setting, subtly engages with class and rural-urban divides. The protagonists challenge caste and gender norms through their access to violence and authority, spaces usually denied to women. The absence of male savior figures further accentuates the horizontal alliances among women in marginalized spaces.

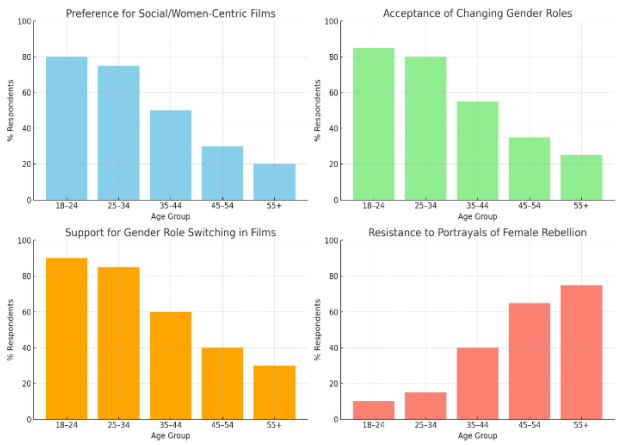
The protagonist in "The Test Case" performs a dual identity: a soldier in a masculine institution and a woman facing gendered scrutiny. Her performance is both literal (combat training) and symbolic (proving worth), revealing the pressure placed on women to "over-perform" in male-dominated arenas (Butler, 1990). The woman protagonist in "The Test Case" is not only navigating gender barriers but is doing so within the nationalist, hierarchical, male-dominated space of the Indian Army. Intersectionality applies in terms of occupational and institutional power dynamics. "The Test Case" critiques the Indian Army's patriarchal structures. Here, intersectionality operates through institutional power, how gender interacts with hierarchies of discipline, authority, and national identity. The female soldier is not only breaking gender barriers but doing so within the rigid confines of militarized masculinity. "The Test Case" subverts masculine war cinema by placing a woman in a combat training program. There is minimal romantic framing; instead, the film's gaze aligns with her internal struggle, creating a

narrative of competence rather than sentimentality.

- Intersectionality across these films reveals that gender never operates in isolation. Instead, it is constantly mediated by other social structures, making resistance both more complex and more urgent (Crenshaw, 1989). These four films reflect a shifting cinematic landscape where gender roles are not only questioned but actively reimagined. Feminist film theory helps uncover how visual storytelling resists objectification. Butler's performativity shows how characters reject gender scripts. Crenshaw's intersectionality reveals how identity is always relational and contextual. Whether it is *Barbie*'s glossy satire, the gritty domestic realism in "Darlings", subversive noir of "Do Patti", or military critique in "The Test Case", these narratives affirm that cinema is no longer a passive mirror of gender norms, but a tool to disrupt, rewrite, and reclaim them.

Analysis of Quantitative Data:

Audience responses were collected via structured questionnaires and interviews, with data analyzed by age group. Younger respondents (18–34) were more open to films with social angles and women-centric narratives, while older groups (45 and above) preferred traditional, family-oriented films and were more resistant to portrayals of women's liberation and role reversal. Attached below are charts showing responses to key questions, percentage of men and women between the age groups of 18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54 and 55 and above, who perceived subversion of gender norms, who felt represented, who viewed the portrayals as realistic.

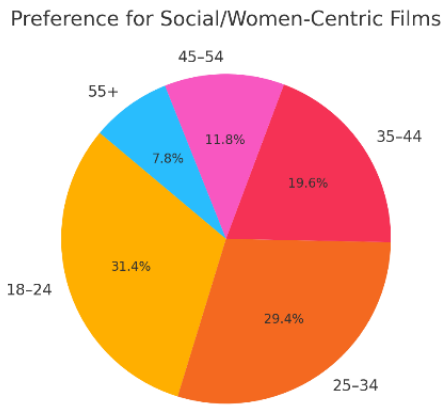


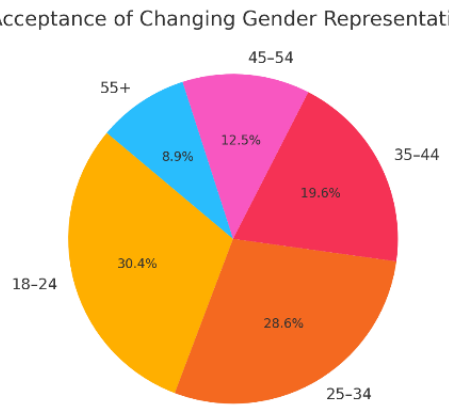
Audience Responses by Age Group

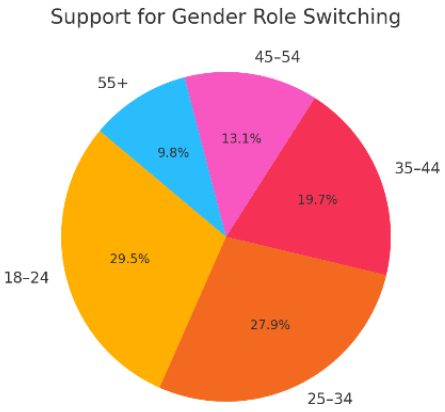
Observations:

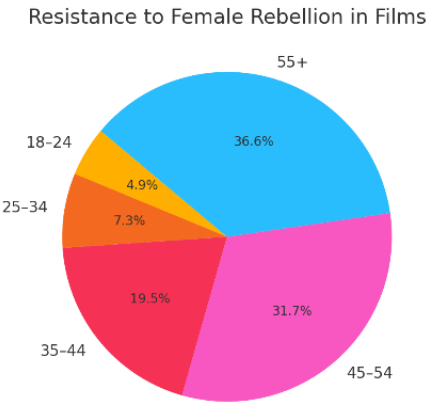
The questionnaire circulated was intended to record responses of people belonging to the age groups of 18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54 and 55 and above. The following observations were made:

1. An understanding of their preferences in terms of films was included in the questionnaire.
It is observed that men and women in the age groups of 18-24 and 25-34 are more open to viewing films with a social angle based on women whereas the age group of 35–44 shows a mixed response to the viewing of women centric films. The age groups of 45–54 and 55 and above prefer movies which are family oriented with a satisfying ending
2. The question on gender representation in films over the past decade was a pivotal question.
It is observed that men and women in the age groups of 18-24 and 25-34 are more open to accepting the changing roles and relationships between men and women whereas the age group of 35–44 shows a mixed response to the showcasing of resistance by women in the given films. The age groups of 45–54 and 55 and above are relatively passive aggressive about the depictions of women's liberation and role reversal strategies adopted by women for instance in Darling's Alia Bhatt attends the redevelopment meeting in place of her husband and he gets furious over the incident.
3. As regards to the difference in the portrayal of male and female characters in films the age groups of 18-24 and 25-34 understand the importance of role switching and therefore accept the differing and evolved family structures and nature of relationships in movies. They are not offended when a woman walks out of a relationship or chooses career ofver family. Movies like Ki and Ka where the roles of a man and woman are switched to the point where the woman is career driven and the man takes care of the household and cooks and cleans is accepted enthusiastically by this age group. The age group of 35–44 shows a mixed response to the viewing of women centric films depending on whether the respondent is a male or female. The age groups of 45–54 and 55 and above are resistant to the changing views on the roles of women in society and reject extreme portrayals of rebellion in films.









Conclusion:

This research reveals a notable shift from one-dimensional portrayals of gender to complex, layered narratives that acknowledge intersectionality and subvert patriarchal frameworks (Crenshaw, 1989; Butler, 1990). Films like "Barbie" critique gender performance through satire, while "Darlings" and "Do Patti" tackle themes of violence, justice, and survival from within the Indian sociocultural milieu. "The Test Case" introduces female visibility in combat roles, thereby challenging militarized masculinity and expanding the scope of feminist narratives in mainstream cinema.

Audience responses show a growing openness especially among younger viewers towards progressive gender representations, although interpretations continue to vary across socio-demographic lines. While younger age groups largely support gender role evolution and non-traditional portrayals, older audiences exhibit a degree of resistance, particularly to depictions of female rebellion and role reversals.

The findings affirm cinema's transformative potential as a feminist tool and underscore the importance of continued representation of diverse gendered experiences. We are in an era of film making that challenges existing norms and advocates inclusivity to foster critical conversations, provoke thought, and inspire societal change.

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53.

Audiobooks and Podcast Fiction: A Study on the Resurgence of Oral Storytelling Traditions

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Abstract

Oral narrating has long been an ingrained form of cultural passing-down, fashioning traditions, legends, and histories in societies everywhere. As electronic media became omnipresent, fiction podcasts and audiobooks entered the scene as contemporary versions of this very ancient practice, resetting the consumption as well as the consumption experience of fiction. This work investigates the upsurge in oral storytelling within digital media and how fiction podcasts and audiobooks affect twenty-first-century literary culture. It examines how they affect readership, access, and narration styles, set against the older forms of oral performance and book writing. It also takes into account the position of voice, performance, and audio design as contributing factors towards more immersive stories. The study further explores the way these genres make storytelling democratic by offering opportunities to various voices and experimental storytelling. By placing this virtual evolution in the larger historical and cultural context of oral traditions, the research places emphasis on how technological progress is not supplanting but revitalizing and transforming the art of storytelling for the 21st century.

Keywords: Oral Storytelling, Podcasts, Audiobooks, Oral Literature, Digital Literature.

Introduction

From ancient epics recited by bards to bedtime stories whispered across generations, oral storytelling has been a fundamental mode of cultural transmission. In a world increasingly shaped by screens and digital text, one might assume that voice-driven storytelling would fade into obscurity. Paradoxically, the opposite is occurring: a digital renaissance in oral narration is underway through audiobooks and podcast fiction.

This research examines how digital literary culture is experiencing a comeback for oral forms, modified to fit digital platforms. The success of audiobooks and fiction podcasts leads the way in demonstrating how performance, voice, and sound design are reconfiguring narrative engagements. These genres not only open literature to broader audiences and make it more inclusive but also revolutionize the ways stories are created and consumed. As Palanisamy and V. contend, the trend is a "listening renaissance," resonating deep cultural habits but also challenging narrative limits within emerging media platforms.

Literature Review

Oral Tradition and Literary Media

The root position of oral storytelling within literature is before written texts. As Ensslin, Round, and Thomas observe in The Routledge Companion to Literary Media, oral conventions have traditionally organized the communication of epic, myth, and folklore, performance and voice being inherent within their form (Ensslin et al. 45). The book dislocated them, favoring visual over auditory attention. But contemporary technological change has caused what Dhiman refers to as a "critical reactivation" of the oral in the post-digital age, specifically with audio storytelling modes (Dhiman 3).

Audiobooks as Literary Experience

Audiobooks are not merely narrated books anymore—they are a multimedia literary

experience. As Dowling and Miller point out in their work on podcasting and audio narration, immersive soundscapes, multiple narrators, and performance-driven delivery refigure the function of narrative voice (Dowling and Miller 170). These improvements fit with Palanisamy and V.'s discussion that audio narratives are not merely supplements but self-contained literary works in their own right that can evoke imaginative, affective, and cognitive responses (Palanisamy and V., sec. 3).

Podcast Fiction and Experimental Narratives

Podcast fiction, in contrast to the traditional audiobook, is frequently created digitally, freed from earlier print iterations. Roop Kanwal names podcast fiction and interactive e-books as rich terrain for experimentation with narrative form: "layered storytelling, non-linear timelines, and performative scripting make these forms uniquely suited for 21st-century listeners" (Kanwal 10). Serialized podcast dramas like Welcome to Night Vale or The Magnus Archives employ sonic strategies to create suspense, world-building, and emotional tension, producing an intimacy unachievable in print.

Analysis

1. Access, Inclusivity, and Democratization

Audio storytelling modes electronically enlarge the number of people able to narrate and access stories. Audiobooks and podcast sites break down gatekeeping systems—economic, geographic, or linguistic—by allowing users direct access to literature without the need for physical facilities. Palanisamy and V. report this change as a "reconfiguration of narrative access," particularly for disabled listeners, the older generation, and users of low-literacy communities (sec. 4). Audio interfaces serve people who might not be able to access written texts because of obstacles like visual impairment, dyslexia, or few formal education years.

In addition, oral modes promote cultural diversity through the facilitation of multilingual and local narratives. For instance, Indian sites such as Kuku FM and Pocket FM offer original podcast fiction in Hindi, Tamil, and Marathi, drawing on indigenous oral forms and folk stories. This localization strengthens Dhiman's contention that "digital audio does not merely replicate Western narrative modes but adapts to the texture of native oral cultures" (7). Such websites not only maximize reach but also maintain cultural specificity.

Fiction podcasting is also a platform where LGBTQ+, Dalit, Indigenous, and other marginalized artists can create their own narrative worlds. Decentralized production allows podcast fiction to circumvent elite literary editorialization. Kanwal has noted that authors are "pushing the boundaries of genre, chronology, and voice" to describe non-normative worlds and identities (14). These innovations provide new rhetorical tactics—like circular narration, non-linear storytelling, or collective voice narration—that are notably effective in speaking multiplicity.

2. Voice and Performance of Literature

The voice of man in electronic literature is not merely the vehicle of text but a dynamic narrative tool. Audio book narrators employ vocal range, modulation of tone, speed, and accent to create engaging performances. In most instances, a professionally read audiobook provides depth of meaning, particularly for texts that are dense with cultural or affective backgrounds. A prime candidate is Bahni Turpin's narration of Angie Thomas's The Hate U Give, as an audiobook. Her narration enhances emotional inflection, heightening the experience of systemic injustice and adolescent resiliency on the part of the listener.

The performative aspect of narration is not isolated to professional audiobooks. Ensemble casts or solitary narrators who play multiple characters are common in fiction podcasts, creating acoustic layering that makes up for visual cues lost. Dowling and Miller term this effect "sonic mise-en-scène," whereby sound establishes the atmosphere, spatial relations, and emotional tone of a story (173). The term recognizes that voice, in addition to music and sound effects, constitutes a dynamic narrative grammar.

Podcasts such as Welcome to Night Vale depend on the deliberate employment of

deadpan tone and strange narrative syntax to produce surrealism. Others, such as The Magnus Archives, employ narrators whose voice subtly changes across episodes, following character development through voice change alone. These are enactments of narrative intentionality born out of oral tradition but repurposed for serialized digital dissemination.

3. Immersion, Interactivity, and Cognitive Engagement

Perhaps the most significant strength of digital oral narrative is its capacity for immersion. Listeners are surrounded by a sensory environment containing not only voice but also ambient noise, environmental detail, and music. Palanisamy and V. call this the building of "auditory architecture," as a listener's internal imagery is constructed by carefully edited soundscapes (sec. 5). Audiobooks such as Lincoln in the Bardo or Neil Gaiman's audio performances of The Sandman employ spatial sound and polyphonic dialogue to place the listener within a literary world that is multidimensional.

This immersion has profound cognitive effects. Listening engages distinct areas of the brain compared to reading, typically engaging the limbic system—associated with emotion and memory—more strongly. Dhiman reports research showing audio stories increase narrative transportation, that is, the listener is emotionally and cognitively engaged in the story world (4–5). Such intense engagement can also lead to increased empathy, memory recall, and emotional purging.

Additionally, fiction podcasts frequently expand interactivity beyond listening. Most have active online communities—forums, comment threads, or Discord servers—where listeners speculate, debate, and even collaborate on storylines. Serialized podcasts like Limetown or Alice Isn't Dead publish episodes episodically, replicating TV binge culture but also encouraging participatory hypothesis. As Dowling and Miller observe, this interaction produces "a digitally networked literary experience that is simultaneously communal and individual" (174).

4. Literary Stylistics and Production Practices

This growth of audiobooks and podcasts is also having an impact on how books of contemporary fiction are written. Writers are becoming more aware of the sound of their writing when spoken aloud. As Dhiman notes, there is an "oralization of prose style," where the rhythm of sentences, ease of reading, and fluidity of dialogue are given priority over visual density (7). This movement is a return, in part, to the literary feature of pre-literate oral societies—repetition, alliteration, call-and-response structure, and rhythm as a memory aid.

Authors such as David Sedaris and Neil Gaiman often write with performance in mind. Some even edit their manuscripts by reading them aloud. Kanwal adds that scriptwriting for narrative podcasts tends to be very similar to playwriting, where vocal emphasis cues, silences, and mood are encoded into the textual plan (16). Such performative writing practices transform literary making from individual writing to multisensory design.

Discussion

Oral Renaissance or Digital Reinvention?

The return of oral tradition in the form of audiobooks and podcasts is not merely a nostalgic phenomenon; it's an evolutionary process. Although these mediums take their inspiration from ancient practices—bards, griots, kathavachaks—their marriage with digital technology marks a new era of storytelling. Palanisamy and V. call this change a "renaissance," but it could be better understood as a reinvention: a techno-cultural mashup that combines the performative with the algorithmic, the intimate with the global.

In contrast to the traditional oral narrative, which was fleeting and shared, digital audio narrative is archivable, distributable, and repeatable. This breaks the role of memory, ritual, and even temporality in narrative. Kanwal insists that the persistence and modularity of podcasts present a new type of "literary time," wherein listeners create their own plot schedules instead of following linear consumption (12). Therefore, the act of listening becomes individuated while preserving communal resonances.

The Remapping of Literary Authority

Digital audio formats disrupt the hierarchical power conventionally held by the printed word. To a large extent, they level out literary standing. Although print publication continues to shape literary canons, audio sites facilitate non-traditional canon construction via virality, crowd reception, and access. Books that could easily be marginalized or genre fiction—sci-fi, horror, urban fantasy—flourish in podcast format. As Dhiman puts it, "audio storytelling reclaims narrative agency for creators who were peripheral in the publishing world" (8).

This transition also reshapes who gets to be heard—literally. Author-read audiobooks deliver authenticity; professionally voice-acted audiobooks deliver interpretive depth. Podcasts rely on untrained but genuine voices to create relatability. Each model redescribes what constitutes "literary voice," both metaphorically and audibly. This vocal diversity is the mark of democratic media.

Empathy, Emotion, and Para-social Connection

Empathy is at the heart of the magic of oral narrative. The sound of the human voice conveys emotion, intention, and subtlety in ways that written text can only begin to approximate. Dhiman implies that audio narrative creates "parasocial intimacy," a one-way relationship where the listener becomes strongly emotionally invested in the teller (6). This psychological closeness increases emotional identification with characters and can result in transformative reader (or listener) experiences.

Research in neuro-literacy proposes that auditory processing is more empathic when stories are delivered vocally instead of being silently read. Voice produces tone, mood, and cultural nuance, enabling stories to affect various levels of cognition. An example would be the listening experience of a Holocaust victim's account, or one of a refugee's experiences in podcast form, which tends to have a more gut-level response than the reading of a transcription.

Interdisciplinarity and Future Directions

The applications of audio narration extend beyond literature, hitting education, psychology, media studies, linguistics, and digital humanities. Audiobooks are being applied in the pedagogical practices of classrooms to enable inclusive learning. Podcasts are also being incorporated into public history initiatives, language revival programs, and even therapy. Ensslin et al. contend that future literary output will be "radically multimodal," engaging auditory, visual, haptic, and even AI interfaces (302–303).

Ahead, we can anticipate audio storytelling developing through hybrid forms: spatial audio, interactive podcast drama, VR-stories, and AI-created narrators. Nevertheless, the core will not alter—the human need to narrate orally, to listen, to envision through sound. And so, digital oral literature has the potential to not just endure but even spearhead the next literary experience evolution.

Immersion, Interactivity, and Cognitive Engagement

Its most striking strength is the immersive quality of digital oral narrative. Audiences are surrounded by a field of senses that not only comprises voice but also ambient noise, environmental hints, and music. Palanisamy and V. term this creating "auditory architecture," in which a listener's imagination is crafted from carefully composed soundscapes (sec. 5). Audiobooks such as Lincoln in the Bardo or Neil Gaiman's The Sandman audio productions utilize spatial sound and polyphonic dialogue to transport the listener into a literary world that seems multidimensional.

This exposure has important cognitive effects. Listening engages various areas of the brain than reading, tending to engage the limbic system—associated with emotion and memory—more robustly. Dhiman references studies that demonstrate audio storytelling increases narrative transportation, or how the listener is emotionally and cognitively engaged with the world of the story (4–5). This heightened engagement could also lead to greater empathy, recall, and emotional purging.

In addition, fiction podcasts tend to expand interactivity past the act of listening. Numerous ones have continuing online communities—forums, comments, or Discord channels—where listeners theorize, debate, and even help to co-create narratives. Podcasts like

Limetown or Alice Isn't Dead drop episodes episodically, emulating television binge culture but also encouraging participatory guesswork. As Dowling and Miller acknowledge, such interaction produces "a digitally networked literary experience that is simultaneously communal and individual" (174).

Stylistics of Literature and Production Practices

The emergence of podcasts and audiobooks is also beginning to shape how contemporary fiction is being written. Writers are paying greater attention to the way their writing sounds when read aloud. As Dhiman notes, there is an increasing "oralization of prose style," wherein sentence rhythm, legibility, and dialogue ease are given more importance over visual density (7). This trend is a partial reversion to the literary features of pre-literate oral cultures—repetition, alliteration, call-and-response forms, and rhythm as memory aids.

Authors such as David Sedaris and Neil Gaiman often write with performance in mind. Some of them even edit their drafts by reading out loud. Kanwal observes that scriptwriting for fiction podcasts may look similar to playwriting, where instructions for vocal stress, pauses, and mood are incorporated into the textual plan (16). Such performative writing practices transform literary production from single-author creation to multisensory design.

Conclusion

The comeback of oral narrative through audiobooks and podcast fiction is not just a change in medium but a deepened transformation of the way stories are heard, obtained, and disseminated in the 21st century. As the digital platforms keep changing, they reflect the time-tested human interest in hearing, recalling, and transmitting stories, infusing fresh life into practices previously considered relegated by print and visual media. Far from rendering oral traditions obsolete, audiobooks and podcasts have revitalized the spoken word, allowing storytelling to transcend barriers of geography, literacy, and physical ability.

This research has shown that voice, performance, and sound design are not ornamental but essential elements of contemporary narrative art, shaping immersive experiences that rival or even surpass traditional reading in engagement and affective power. By means of research by Palanisamy et al. (2025), Dhiman (2023), and Dowling & Miller (2019), it is clear that the sound aspect of fiction has the potential to enhance emotional resonance, create more diverse storytelling environments, and foster a renewed focus in a distracted age.

In addition, by opening the doors to various voices, particularly those long marginalized in mainstream publishing, podcast fiction and audiobooks level the playing field of literary production and reading. The minimal production hurdle and worldwide accessibility of platforms like Audible, Spotify, and independent podcast feeds create room for grass-roots storytellers, innovative genres, and hybrid forms, transforming the literary canon and broadening its scope.

Finally, this research confirms that podcast fiction and audiobooks are not marginal fads but at the very heart of today's literary scene. They represent a return to our origins as storytellers, now brokered by sophisticated technologies but driven by the same human need to tell and listen to stories. As we progress deeper into the digital age, these modes have tremendous promise—not merely to safeguard oral traditions but to reenvision storytelling in ways more inclusive, emotional, and culturally relevant. The renaissance of listening is neither a nostalgic return nor solely a static revival but an ongoing reinvention that allows the oral tradition to flourish well into the future.

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54.

The Impact of the Presence of Virtual Baristas on the Job Satisfaction and Job Engagement of Human Baristas

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ABSTRACT
The integration of virtual baristas into the coffee industry presents both opportunities and challenges for human baristas, influencing their job satisfaction and engagement. This study explores the effects of virtual baristas on the well-being of human baristas, aiming to understand how AI-driven automation shapes their work experience. Using a quantitative approach with the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) and the Gallup Q12+ scales, data was collected from human baristas across various cafés in Mumbai and Thane. Results indicate a negligible correlation between virtual barista presence and both job satisfaction ($r = 0.120$) and job engagement ($r = 0.08$), suggesting that other workplace factors may have a more significant influence. The findings highlight the need for further exploration of technological integration in service industries while emphasizing strategies to optimize human-AI collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

The coffee industry is constantly evolving, and with that comes the need for innovation in how we keep our employees engaged and satisfied. Virtual baristas, automated systems designed to handle tasks like ordering and payments, are making café operations more efficient and convenient, allowing human baristas to focus on crafting beverages and connecting with customers. While virtual baristas bring flexibility and autonomy, they can also change the dynamics of human baristas' roles, so it's important for businesses to manage this transition carefully to maintain morale. Even though they help reduce operational costs, their impact on job satisfaction can be complex. To keep employees engaged, businesses should offer regular feedback, opportunities for growth, and create a positive work environment, all while addressing challenges like communication gaps and training needs to get the most out of both the human and virtual elements of café operations.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the coffee industry is revolutionizing how we brew and serve coffee. Technologies like Simonelli Group's Virtual Intelligent Scale and Mintel's FlavourScape AI software are enhancing both efficiency and creativity in cafes. Rather than replacing human workers, AI complements baristas by streamlining operations, enabling them to focus on crafting beverages and building customer relationships. As AI evolves, it promises to reshape the coffee industry, improving both productivity and satisfaction (Morrell, 2023).

In the restaurant and cafe industry, a study by Barthwal et al. (2013) reveals that while job satisfaction is generally above average, employees express dissatisfaction with their pay. Satisfaction is higher among younger employees and those with lower education, while males report greater satisfaction than females. This highlights the complexity of job satisfaction and the need for organizations to address various factors to improve employee well-being.

Research on AI's impact on labor markets and worker well-being reveals mixed results. Brekelmans and Petropoulos (2020) found that exposure to AI led to a decline in job satisfaction, especially among medium-skilled workers, who are more vulnerable to displacement. However, there were no

significant effects on mental health. These findings underscore the need for further research into AI's impact on worker well-being, particularly as it relates to job security and economic outlook.

This study aims to explore how virtual baristas, as a form of AI, impact job satisfaction and engagement among human baristas. While existing research has examined AI's broader impact on job satisfaction, there is limited focus on virtual baristas specifically. This research fills this gap by using established tools like the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) and the Gallup Q-12 survey, adapted to the context of human-barista interactions, to assess satisfaction and engagement in cafes with virtual baristas.

Spector's (1985) development of the JSS provides a framework for understanding job satisfaction, particularly in human service professions. The rise of AI in low-wage labor, such as AI-powered baristas, offers benefits like consistency and data-driven improvements (Moryson, 2023). Research by Hughes et al. (2019) emphasizes the importance of employee engagement and fairness when integrating AI into workplaces, particularly for middle- and low-skilled workers. Loureiro et al. (2023) highlight AI's potential to both stress and motivate employees, reflecting the complex dynamics of AI's impact on employee well-being.

The CIPD's report on workplace technology highlights the importance of employee consultation when implementing new technologies, especially post-COVID. It stresses the need for organizations to consider the effects of technology on productivity, work-life balance, and employee well-being (CIPD, n.d.).

In conclusion, the reviewed literature underscores the transformative impact of AI on the workforce. From AI's role in enhancing productivity in low-wage jobs to its effects on employee engagement and well-being, these studies highlight the need for organizations to carefully manage technological transitions, ensuring that employee perspectives are considered and well-being is prioritized.

AIM

This study aims to explore how virtual baristas influence the job satisfaction and engagement of human baristas in cafes. It looks at how baristas feel about working alongside virtual baristas, how these interactions affect their job involvement, and the key factors shaping their experience in this evolving work environment.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

A quantitative survey-based design was used to examine the impact of virtual baristas on human baristas' job satisfaction and engagement. A qualitative question provided deeper insights into virtual baristas' roles and interactions (table 3). Google Forms facilitated efficient data collection from baristas across Mumbai and Thane.

HYPOTHESES

Alternate Hypothesis 1 (H1): The use of virtual baristas in cafes has a significant impact on the job satisfaction of human baristas.

Alternate Hypothesis 2 (H1): The use of virtual baristas in cafes has a significant impact on the job engagement of human baristas.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF VARIABLES

Independent Variable –

Virtual Baristas (Digital Interaction): The use of digital interfaces, such as virtual baristas or AI-driven systems, for customer interactions in cafes.

Dependent Variables –

Job Satisfaction: The overall contentment and positive feelings reported by human baristas about their job roles.

Job Engagement: The extent to which human baristas feel emotionally connected and engaged in their work.

SAMPLING

This study employs snowball sampling to investigate the impact of virtual baristas on human baristas' job satisfaction and engagement. Participants were fluent in English, aged 18-50, residents of India, currently employed in cafés with virtual barista technology, had at least six months of experience, and provided informed consent.

THE TOOLS OF RESEARCH

Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS)

Developed by Paul E. Spector (1994), the JSS measures job satisfaction across nine facets,

including pay, supervision, and work nature. It uses a 36-item Likert scale, with scores ranging from 36 to 216. Higher scores indicate greater job satisfaction, with strong reliability (α = 0.91).

Gallup Q12+ Questionnaire

The Gallup Q12+, an extended version of the original Q12, assesses employee engagement through 16 key questions on recognition, communication, and teamwork. Scores range from 12 to 80, with higher scores reflecting greater engagement. It has strong reliability (α = 0.91) and is widely used for workplace assessments.

DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistics, including mean, median, standard deviation, were used to interpret data from baristas in Mumbai and Thane. Bar graphs depicted demographics, while scatterplots illustrated relationships between virtual baristas, job satisfaction, and engagement. Correlation analysis, using Pearson's coefficient, measured the strength of associations, and regression analysis assessed the predictive impact of virtual barista usage on job satisfaction and engagement.

RESULTS

Let's have a look at the statistics obtained.

Table 1 – Age and Gender Dynamics

Age Range	Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage
18–25	Female	18	18%
18–25	Male	23	23%
26–35	Female	22	22%
26–35	Male	10	10%
36–45	Female	5	5%
36–45	Male	6	6%
46–50	Female	7	7%
46–50	Male	3	3%
Total		**94**	**100%**

This table gives a quick snapshot of the baristas who took part in the study from Mumbai and Thane. Most of the respondents were young, between 18 to 25 years old, with a slightly higher number of women than men overall. Many baristas had work experience ranging from six months to six years, showing that the sample mostly included early-career professionals. The data helps us understand the age, gender, and experience mix of the workforce studied.

Figure 1 – Percentage of Responses of Different Age Groups

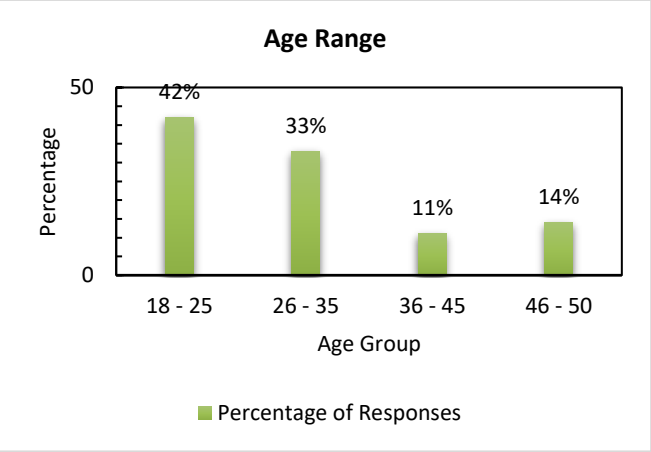


Figure 2 – Work Experience of Participants in Years

Figure 3 - Gender Dynamics of the Participants

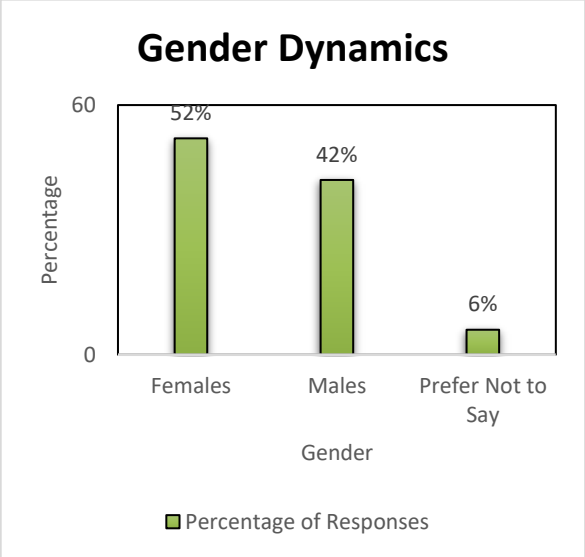


Table 2 – Descriptive Statistics for all the Data

Measure	%	JSS	JE
Mean	0.537	134.5	59.48
Standard Deviation	0.126	16.30	6.83
Confidence Level (95%)	0.025	3.23	1.36
Correlation	–	0.120	0.085

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics and correlation results. The correlation between virtual baristas and job satisfaction (0.120) and job engagement (0.08) suggests minimal influence. These findings indicate that other factors play a more significant role in shaping employee satisfaction and engagement in café settings, warranting further research.

Table 3 – Tasks Performed by Virtual Baristas in cafés

Sr. No.	Tasks	Percentage
1.	Making and serving coffee drinks following set recipes.	75%
2.	Greeting customers and helping them choose drinks.	72%
3.	Using coffee machines and grinders to brew coffee.	63%
4.	Keeping the café clean and tidy.	39%
5.	Handling payments and keeping track of coffee supplies.	66%
6.	Decorating drinks with latte art.	65%
7.	Checking equipment to brew coffee just right.	43%
8.	Being friendly and helpful to customers.	58%
9.	Working with co-workers to serve customers well.	39%
10.	Learning more about coffee and customer service in training sessions.	37%

Table 3 provides insights into the distribution of tasks performed by virtual baristas in cafes. Coffee preparation accounts for 75% of their workload, followed by customer engagement (72%) and operating coffee machines (63%). Lower percentages in cleaning and equipment inspection suggest areas for improvement in automation and efficiency. While virtual baristas excel in key tasks, optimizing ancillary duties could enhance their overall effectiveness.

Interpretation of the qualitative question –

In addition to their primary tasks, virtual baristas perform additional duties as noted by human baristas. These include personalized customer service (20 responses), inventory management (5 responses), and marketing efforts like promoting deals on social media (7 responses). These insights highlight their broader role in enhancing café operations and customer experience.

JSS –

Table 4: Summary Statistics for Job Satisfaction Facets

Sr. No.	Subscale	Total	Mean	SD	Variance
1.	**Pay**	1493	14.93	147.098	21637.888
2.	**Promotion**	1563	15.63	154.000	23715.848
3.	**Supervision**	1517	15.17	149.467	22340.458
4.	**Fringe Benefits**	1485	14.85	146.305	21405.164
5.	**Contingent Rewards**	1402	14.02	138.144	19083.643
6.	**Operating Procedures**	1370	13.7	134.981	18219.753
7.	**Co-workers**	1548	15.48	152.520	23262.229
8.	**Nature of Work**	1610	16.1	158.619	25160.026
9.	**Communication**	1462	14.62	144.057	20752.348

Tables 4 provide insights into job satisfaction among 100 baristas and the prevalence of virtual barista usage in cafes. "Nature of work" scored highest, emphasizing the importance of engaging tasks and a positive work environment. "Promotion" and "co-workers" also ranked high, highlighting career growth and supportive colleagues as key satisfaction factors. The lowest score was in "operating procedures," suggesting that while smooth workflows matter, they are less influential than job fulfilment and workplace relationships. Additionally, Table 4 reveals the growing integration of virtual baristas, adding another dimension to workplace dynamics.

Table 5.1 – Regression Statistics

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.120202795
R Square	0.014448712
Adjusted R Square	0.004392066
Standard Error	16.26345108
Observations	100

Table 5.2 – ANOVA Statistics

	Df	*SS*	*MS*	*f*	*Significance f*
Regression	1	380.0155743	380.0155743	1.43673271	0.233559285
Residual	98	25920.98443	264.4998411		
Total	99	26301			

Table 5.3

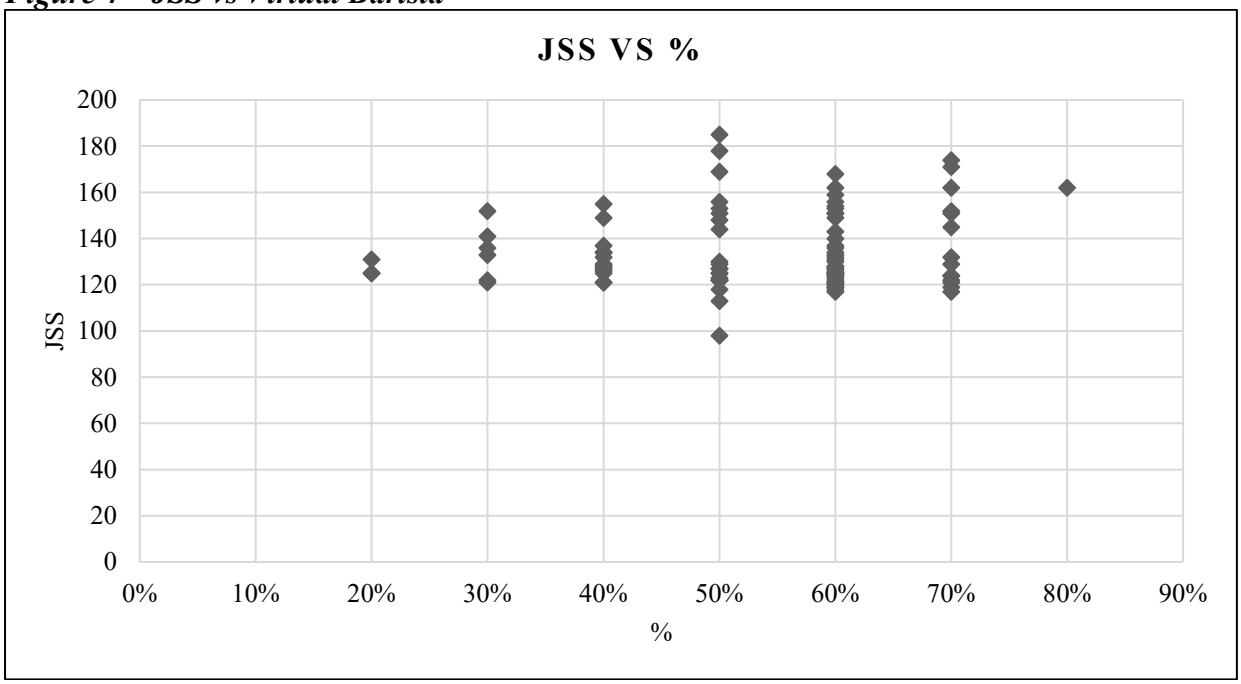
	Coefficients	*Standard Error*	*t Stat*	*P-value*	*Lower 95%*	*Upper 95%*	*Lower 95.0%*	*Upper 95.0%*
Inter-cept	126.153	7.150	17.642	3.51363E-32	111.963	140.343	111.963	140.343
%	15.542	12.967	1.199	0.233	-10.189	41.274	-10.189	41.275

Table 5.4 – F value

F-Test	
Calculated F	1.436732713
Critical F	3.938111078

Tables 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4 present the regression statistics derived from the analysis of the job satisfaction survey data. These tables and data provide insights into the relationships between virtual barista usage and job satisfaction levels among the surveyed participants. When we look at the regression equation obtained (*Y = 126.15364566779 + 15.542559277859X*), we can see that even if the value of X (virtual barista usage) is kept 0, the value obtained will still be close to the mean (Mean = 134.5, table 2). This suggests that even without the inclusion of the virtual barista variable, the job satisfaction of the baristas will remain almost same.

Figure 4 – JSS vs Virtual Barista



Gallop Q12+ Survey

Table 6: Summary of Virtual Barista Usage and Job Engagement (N = 100)

Engagement Level	No. of Participants	Common % of Virtual Barista Usage
High	92	Mostly 40%–70%
Moderate	8	Ranged between 20%–60%

Out of 100 baristas surveyed, 92 reported high levels of job engagement, while only 8 reported moderate engagement. Most participants worked in environments where virtual barista usage ranged from 40% to 70%. These findings suggest strong employee involvement despite the integration of virtual systems, though the moderate engagement group signals the need for further investigation into individual or workplace factors that may affect motivation and satisfaction.

Table 7.1 – Regression Statistics

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.084692623

R Square	0.00717284
Adjusted R Square	-0.002958049
Standard Error	6.845068164
Observations	100

Table 7.2 – ANOVA Statistics

	df	*SS*	*MS*	*F*	*Significance f*
Regression	1	33.17409955	33.17409955	0.708016843	0.402151518
Residual	98	4591.7859	46.85495817		
Total	99	4624.96			

Table 7.3

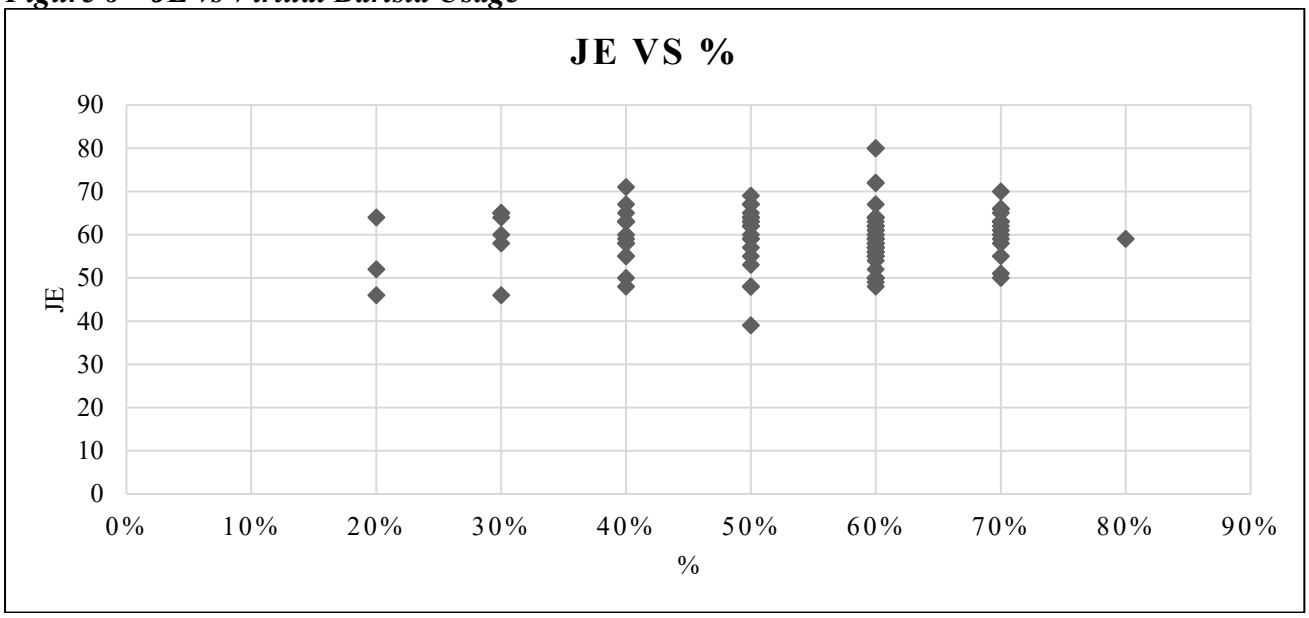
	Coefficients	*Standard Error*	*t Stat*	*P-value*	*Lower 95%*	*Upper 95%*	*Lower 95.0%*	*Upper 95.0%*
Inter-cept	57.014	3.009	18.944	1.57152E-34	51.041	62.986	51.041	62.986
%	4.592	5.457	0.841	0.402	-6.238	15.422	-6.238	15.422

Table 7.4 – F value

F-Test	
Calculated F	0.708016843
Critical F	3.938111078

Tables 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4 present the regression statistics derived from the analysis of the job engagement data. These tables and data provide insights into the relationships between virtual barista usage and job engagement levels among the surveyed participants. When we look at the regression equation obtained (*Y = 57.0139851249126 + 4.59220647129871X*), we can see that even if the value of X (virtual barista usage) is kept 0, the value obtained will still be very close to the mean (59.48, table 2). This suggests that even without the inclusion of the virtual barista variable, the job engagement of the baristas will remain almost same.

Figure 6 – JE vs Virtual Barista Usage



DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the data collected show that there is no correlation between the integration of virtual baristas in cafes and the job satisfaction and job engagement of the human baristas.

The results indicating that the integration of virtual baristas in cafe settings does not have a significant effect on the job satisfaction and job engagement levels of human baristas may be attributed to several factors. Firstly, it is possible that the implementation of virtual barista technology did not adequately address the specific needs and preferences of the human baristas. Inadequate training, support, or integration of virtual systems into existing workflows may have hindered their ability to positively impact job satisfaction and engagement levels.

However, research by Hughes et al. (2019) provides a more positive angle. Their study shows that AI technologies, like virtual baristas, can actually enhance job satisfaction and engagement when they are used to complement human workers. By automating repetitive tasks, virtual baristas allow human baristas to focus on more creative and customer-centric aspects of their jobs, which can lead to increased job satisfaction. This collaboration between AI and human workers fosters a more engaging and rewarding work environment, where employees can perform their roles with greater fulfilment.

Recently, the telecommunications company SK Telecom launched an AI-powered coffee barista in South Korea. The AI barista is capable of making up to 20 different caffeinated beverages and can also manage café operations. Rozum Robotics, an R&D and manufacturing company based in Minsk, is also actively developing AI baristas. Viewed optimistically, the development and implementation of AI baristas could be a stroke of good luck for many café owners.

One other reason for no correlation between the variables can be that the human baristas are very confident about the importance of human touch. Human interaction has always been important in the coffee shop experience, and you can't really replicate that quite well with a piece of metal. AI and Automation isn't really that good with being creative beyond preset recipes and designs, so introducing these robotic baristas into small coffee shops with often-changing menus might not be as effective (Yeetus, 2023).

Moreover, the responses obtained from the open-ended question in the survey reveal that virtual baristas undertake additional tasks beyond those initially identified. Integrating these additional tasks into the survey can significantly enrich the data collected and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the roles and responsibilities of virtual baristas in café settings. By incorporating these insights into the survey framework, researchers can strengthen the validity of their findings and strengthen support for the hypothesis formulated at the outset of the study.

SUGGESTIONS

To improve future research, expanding the sample to include diverse cafes and baristas from various backgrounds would enhance representativeness. Combining qualitative methods like interviews with quantitative surveys can provide deeper insights into baristas' experiences. A longitudinal study controlling for confounding variables and broadening the research to include cafes from different regions would increase external validity. Additionally, follow-up interviews and intervention studies could optimize virtual barista integration, improving job satisfaction and engagement.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while the study finds no significant impact of virtual baristas on job satisfaction and job engagement among human baristas, it is important to recognize the positive role virtual baristas play in enhancing café operations. Although their direct influence on workplace well-being may be limited, virtual baristas contribute to efficiency, consistency, and customer service, creating a supportive environment for baristas. These technologies can free up baristas to focus more on creativity and customer interaction, leading to greater job fulfillment. Future research exploring additional factors will help uncover how virtual baristas

can further contribute to employee satisfaction and engagement in the café setting.

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55.

Construction Of Femininity In A Desert Travelogue: A Reading Of Robyn Davidson's *Tracks*

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Abstract

Femininity and gender play a significant part in travel memoirs. These aspects of a travellers identity often shape experiences of places, people and cultures. In recent years, with the advancement in the modes of travel and financial independence, women's travelogues have gained popularity and readership across the world. However, desert travels are considered to be tough and challenging, and mostly perceived as masculine enterprises. Women, particularly as solo travellers, are seldom expected in desert travels though they are commonly found in desert fiction. However, Robin Davidson with her works such as *Desert Places* and *Tracks* has challenged this traditional paradigm of masculine desert travelogues.

This paper analyses Robin Davidson's travel narrative *Tracks* to show how a female traveller negotiates a perilous journey across seventeen thousand miles of the tough Australian desert. It examines a woman's experience of Australian desert and her encounters with indigenous people and desert landscape which results in constructing an identity that gets transformed in the process of moving across a vast arid landscape.

Key words: Woman's Travelogue, Desert Travelogue, Gender, Identity, Adventure .

A literary work that documents an individual's experience of travel, his/her personal observation of local culture and historical commentary, is a 'travelogue'. It is a first-person narrative, with descriptive detailing, personal reflection, adventure, discovery, and interactions with locals. Travel writing for long has been considered a male-dominated literary, dynamic and evolving genre; observing, experiencing, reflecting and exploring unknown territories, landscapes, culture with adventure and a sense of conquest. From past to the present the explorers have blended their personal experience with cultural, historical and political insights in their travel narratives. From Marco Polo's 13th century travelogue, *The Travels* to Captain James Cook's 18th century *Voyages of Discovery* and Charles Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle* to Paul Theroux's *The Great Railway Bazaar,* modern classic travel writing produced travel narratives through their storytelling, scientific observations, theory of evolution, self-discovery, practices, perceptions and introspective immersive narratives. Travel memoir is an interplay of fact and fiction with literary techniques such as symbolism, metaphor and anecdotes used abundantly. The subgenres of travel writing are adventure narratives, quest, memoir, autobiographical travelogue, eco-tourism, documentary, cultural and ethnographic documents along with feminist and gendered travel narratives.

Women travellers came in forefront with the passage of time though they were constrained for long by societal expectations and gender norms. They had to justify their role in the male-dominated world as missionaries, as dependents of male travellers who often accompanied their husbands on trips or as assistants to scientific study and exploration of men.

A feminist travelogue is a subgenre of travel writing. It has challenged the male dominated, traditional narratives, exploring women-centric perspectives, experiences and challenges. The feminist travelogues emphasize more on self-discovery and negotiation of gendered spaces rather than on adventure and conquest. They highlight how a woman's travel is often conditioned by social norms, safety concerns and cultural restrictions. However, theorists have examined how feminist travelogues act as a resistance. Sara Mills in her *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (1991) highlights that women's travelogues often emphasize social interactions and relationships over conquest or discovery. She argues that women travel writers are not writing from the same position as male do because they are perceived as transgressing gender norms: "As we have seen with the reading of women's travel writing, the dominant reading tends to be an autobiographical one, which foregrounds those elements in the text which concern themselves with personal relations, self-revelation and other feminine characteristics" (Mills 51).

Sidonie Smith in her *Moving Lives: Twentieth-Century Women's Travel Writings* (2001) examines how women travellers write about their journeys as an act of self-reconstruction and how they have mastered new modes of mobility in a world where historically they were restricted:

> Through their travel writing, women affirmed for the public their intellectual curiosity and depth, their physical prowess, their daring enterprise. Further, in turning travel experiences into travel narratives, women positioned themselves as credible, authoritative, and competent "professionals". In critical ways, they used their narratives to reimagine themselves away from the spectacles of femininity constraining them at home. (Smith 19-20)

The key features of Women's travelogue are that they introduce unique themes and challenges experienced, that are gender-specific. Women's travelogues basically reshape the traditional ideas of gendered spaces and mobility, exploring the emotional landscape of fear, empowerment, vulnerability, safety concerns and belonging. These travelogues highlight interpersonal connections particularly with local women who are often considered as passive or exotic figures. For many women travellers travel writing is an act of resistance against societal norms. Basically, women's travelogues serve as metaphors for self-exploration and empowerment. They challenged the colonial and patriarchal gaze of male travel writers and presented a more nuanced, empathetic view of different cultures.

Travelogues by women, from historical figures like Mary Kingsley and Isabella Bird to contemporary travellers like Robyn Davidson, negotiated all the challenges and started emphasizing women's personal transformations, socio-political dimensions of travel, space and encounters with new cultures, pleasures, colonialism, often highlighting sustainability and climate change between 17th and 19th centuries. Their works not only highlight the challenges women face while travelling but also celebrate their agency and determination in navigating unfamiliar terrains.

Feminist travel writing defies male dominated adventure narrative, highlighting vulnerability and resilience. It frequently discusses the physical and emotional experiences of travel including safety, clothing and bodily discomfort. The texts engage in reciprocal relationships, acknowledging power dynamics in interactions. They focus on emotional landscapes and embodied experiences. Women's travelogues frequently grapple with the questions of autonomy, cultural identity and politics of female mobility and question the gendered construction of space as men always had the right to travel, claim space and narrate stories.

A few women's desert travel narratives like Isabelle Eberhardt's *Desert Soul* (1904) being a Swiss-Algerian explorer disguised as a man in Arab society, challenging gender norms while immersing herself in Sufi culture. Freya Stark a British Italian traveller, explored Middle Eastern deserts, including journeys through

Persia and Yemen, a Muslim majority region contributed autobiographical travel writing extensively on her experiences in her work *The Valleys of the Assassins* (1934) and *A Winter in Arabia* (1940). Meanwhile, Gertrude Bell a British archaeologist and political officer travelled across Arabian desert, contributing Middle Eastern diplomacy in her work *The Desert and the Sown: The Syrian Adventures of the Female Lawrence of Arabia* (1907). On the other hand, Rosita Forbes a British travel writer explored the Libyan desert defying gender norms of her time in her non-fictional work *The Secret of the Kufara* (1921).

Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* (1980) is a significant feminist travel narrative. It recounts her solo journey across 1,700 miles of the Australian desert with only four camels and a dog for company. It is a personal memoir, a quest for meaning and self-discovery. She starts exploring the desert centrally and makes it to the west coast where the readers come across instances of interaction between her and desert at the age of twenty-five. Davidson delves deep into her psyche, offering readers a close look at her motivations and the transformative impact of her journey in Alice Springs. Her narrative challenges the gender norms, traditional notions of femininity and space by choosing solitude and self-reliance and rejecting conventional feminine roles of wife, mother, domestic caregiver and a desire to escape the monotony of daily life. Her journey is not merely about physical endurance but also psychological and emotional resilience, stating her capabilities as a woman in both urban and remote settings. Unlike male explorers who seek to map and conquer, Davidson's journey is about understanding herself and her place in the world. Crossing the desert is a personal rebellion to free herself against societal expectations, a metaphorical journey to understand her own identity, when left to herself at large:

> I arrived in the Alice at five a.m. with a dog, six dollars and a small suitcase full of inappropriate clothes. 'Bring a cardigan for the evenings,' the brochure said. A freezing wind whipped grit down the platform as I stood shivering, holding warm dog flesh, and wondering what foolishness had brought me to this eerie, empty train station in the centre of nowhere. I turned against the wind, and saw the line of mountains at the edge of town. (Davidson 3)

Desert travelogue often symbolizes isolation and endurance. It depicts an existential confrontation, in which desert is traditionally depicted as a place for men where survival is a challenge and an act of conquest. From a woman's perspective, the desert is considered a place of exploration, vulnerability, introspection, transformation and resistance against all social odds, thus it is not a battleground for her. It symbolizes a demystified landscape: "My first impression as we strolled down the deserted street was of the architectural ugliness of the place, a discomforting contrast to the magnificence of the country which surrounded it. Dust covered everything from the large, dominant corner pub to the tacky, unimaginative shop fronts that lined the main street. Hordes of dead insects clustered in the arching street lights, …" (Davidson 5). Davidson experiences more than a self-transformation while travelling and crossing the desert—not only a search for freedom and responsibility towards cultural differences but representing geographical crossings too. The narrative underlines not only a change within herself but her contribution to colonial history.

Davidson had never thought of writing a book when she started her journey. She committed to *National Geographic* for writing an article about her experience in the desert as they offered to fund her trip. She wrote *Tracks* after two years after the article was published. *Tracks* was well received by the readers worldwide for which she received *Thomas Cook Travel Book Award*. In 2013 the book was adapted into film by John Curran about which Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan commented: "*Tracks* contains the classic ingredients for a woman's survival narrative: the courageous solitary traveler, defying the restrictions placed on her sex; the fearless confrontation of total strangers and 'hostile' surroundings; the gradual adaptation and

communion with the environment" (Holland and Huggan 121).

Davidson critiques the racist treatment of indigenous Australians, unlike many male travel writers who exoticize or ignore indigenous perspectives. She visits and documents an interaction with aboriginal communities, who are considered as aimless wanderers, backward, lazy, dangerous, dirty and primitive which deepens her understanding of indigenous knowledge and also highlights the post-colonial concerns in travel writing. Her views on aboriginals and the dropouts have also positioned her narrative as a counterpart to mainstream perceptions:

> There are fourteen thousand people living there of whom one thousand are Aboriginal. The whites consist mainly of government workers, miscellaneous misfits and adventurers, retired cattle or sheep station owners, itinerant station workers, truck drivers and small business operators whose function in life is to rip off the tourists, who come by the bus-load from America, Japan, and urban Australia, expecting high adventure in this last romantic outpost, and to see the extraordinary desert which surrounds it. (Davidson 7-8)

Davidson in *Tracks* has accessed Aboriginal history, their legacies, racist views by white Australian and natives' bonding's to Australian land. Her journey across Australian desert though challenging for a solo traveller is unique in its perspective as in spite being caught up in a dominating landscape she goes along with it, establishing almost a spiritual communion with nature:

> The ranch itself was fantastic and uncanny perched out there in the middle of the oldest rocks in the world. And it was perhaps the cold desolate lovelessness of the place that threw into sharp focus the magical and life-affirming qualities of the country around it. To enter the country is to be choked with dust, suffocated by waves of thrumming heat, and driven to distraction by the ubiquitous Australian fly: it is to be amazed by space and humbled by the most ancient, bony, awesome landscape on the face of the earth. (Davidson 22)

Davidson describes the physical toll of the journey in *Tracks*, including hunger, exhaustion and menstruation—which are often ignored in male travel writing. She also overcomes the barriers of extreme heat, dehydration, navigation difficulties, difficulties in surviving in an unforgiving environment and the dictum that women are unfit to venture in an extreme climate or in a men's country. In a territory where "men are men and women are afterthought" (Davidson 4-5). Being from the north-east region, she is new to the Australian outback, another challenge, thus calling herself as "an urbanite in the bush" (Davidson 7). Slowly she gains knowledge of Australian bush country as a solo traveller though while working in the pub, one of the clients threatens her: "You ought to be more careful, girl, you know you've been nominated by some of these blokes as the next town rape case" (Davidson 19). Challenges are unending in this masculine environment but she is prepared to face further hardships.

Robyn Davidson's primary companionship with camels and her mastering them symbolize an alternative, non-human form of companionship and trust, making a departure from traditional male-centric travelogues where animals are considered as objects or as non-sentient beings. Davidson's empathy with the animals is a significant feature. She reveals her love for and respect for Australian camels in unambiguous terms: "I loved them all with an anthropomorphizing devotion. No matter how much I discovered about them, there was always more to learn. They continued to surprise and fascinate me …" (Davidson 22). She trains and transforms wild camels such as Dookie, Bub, Zeleika and Goliath into loyal travel companions. They depend on her for survival, even though she depends on them from transport to emotional support. As she tapped in the desert, she adapted to the Australian outback. She knows that this arid locale is deeply tied to masculine tropes of rugged individualism.

Davidson challenges this male-dominated space, asserting her independence in an environment where she charts her own path and creates a map for herself.

Davidson learns the art of being patient as she meets potters, leather craftsmen who are archetypal hippies, though hospitable, friendly, with a different language. She learns the art of packing and stitching from them, the intricacies which the male explorers generally tend to avoid and considered too primitive and low-profile work.

The non-judgemental support that Davidson receives throughout her journey in the form of Diggity, her dog as a companion, is exceptional. The emotional and unconditional support that she receives from Diggity shows the depth of her attachment which often a tough male fails to. Her journey is not only a test of human endurance but a story of interspecies companionship. In the wilderness, survival is not only about strength but trust, companionship and shared resilience with her animals who become her family in the desert: "I found for the first time in my life that I really did enjoy the company of animals better than people" (Davidson 30).

Davidson subsequently embraces the desert as a friend, philosopher and guide, facing scepticism, unwanted male attention and proving her potential at every step under patriarchal structures. She encounters many men in Alice Springs who either see her as an amusement or as an object of desire disrespecting her autonomy. While accepting sponsorship from *National Geographic* magazine which comes with a compromise, allowing Rick Smolan, the magazine photographer to document parts of her trek, she feels she has lost her freedom. This situation reflects a tension between personal experiences and media sensationalism as she is being exoticized as a "female adventurer" and her journey is repeatedly sensationalized by journalists. She thinks that her relationship with the photographer is ambiguous. She acknowledges his help and support, simultaneously feels burdened by his presence, specifically the way he presents her to the world. She is wary of losing control over her own narrative: "I did not perceive at that time that I was allowing myself to get more involved with writing about the trip than the trip itself. It did not dawn on me that already I was beginning to see it as a story for other people, …". (Davidson 136). While Smolan only captures portraits of the people without actually engaging with them, Davidson involves and engages with Aboriginal people in the desert. She differentiates herself from Rick's objective project as she is more immersed with the aboriginal realities.

Unlike many white men Davidson encounters, an aboriginal elder Eddie respects her wisdom and guides her with valuable survival skills and insights through sacred lands to which they are spiritually connected. She gradually learns from him how to approach the Aboriginal territory. She realizes how colonial attitudes have marginalized indigenous knowledge. Mr. Eddie accompanies her for many days to explore Aboriginal ground: "He was teaching me something about flow, about choosing the right moment for everything, about enjoying the present. I let him take over" (Davidson 173). Eddie's guidance makes her grounded to the environment and more connected to the Australian outback, which is the land of his ancestors. She learns and gets inspiration from the elderly Pitjantjara, Eddie, the value of the desert. For a week they wander through the land and she notices: "He was a dingo-dreaming man, and his links with the special places we passed gave him a kind of energy, a joy, a belonging …and the feeling began rubbing off on to me … The land was not wild but tame, bountiful, benign, giving, as long as you knew how to see it, how to be part of it" (Davidson 174).

Despite her claims, Davidson remains an outsider to both the region and Aboriginal culture. While much of her narrative expresses' sympathy for the marginalization of Aboriginal people in Australia, she does so from a position of an external observer. Some critics acknowledge her awareness of the complexities surrounding her journey through central Australia. For instance, Magali Sperling Beck argues that: "Indeed, one of her main preoccupations in the book is to re-access

Aboriginal history and its legacies, and she does that not only by resisting imperial white Australian racist views of Aborigines, but also by recovering Aboriginal knowledge and their ties to the Australian land" (Beck 94).

However, a more balanced analysis uncovers the complexities in *Tracks'* portrayal of race, colonial history, and the idealization of solitude. Davidson's solo journey is considered as a feminist act in this patriarchal world, though the critics argue that it does not offer a radical feminist critique. She links her struggle to sexism. Her relationship with Aboriginal culture, their marginalization and sympathy towards them raise questions about cultural appropriation apart from exploring the history of colonial settlement. Davidson tries to understand Aboriginal people in her travel document's framework. The Aboriginal people she encounters are often depicted in ways that emphasize their mysticism and connection to the land, reinforcing a primitivist lens rather than portraying them as contemporary individuals with complex identities. At the same time, she is critical of the colonial destruction of the Australian landscape. She documents the environmental devastation caused by white settlers and expresses a deep admiration for the land.

Romanticization of solitude is one of the themes in *Tracks.* Davidson's journey is a quest for personal freedom and escape from societal constraints. It could be argued that *Tracks* presents an isolation as an existential choice rather than engaging with its historical and political dimensions as male explorers often do.

Davidson's writing is poetic, introspective and deeply personal, capturing the raw beauty of the desert while also confronting the physical and emotional hardships of her journey. Unlike traditional male adventure narratives that frame the traveller as a dominant force, Davidson admits to moments of failure, self-doubt and emotional breakdowns. Beck argues that, despite Davidson's acknowledgment of her privileged position, the narrative at times reinforces a romanticized—and even voyeuristic—view of indigenous culture.

Tracks is more than just a travel memoir, it is a thought-provoking test, challenging conventional travel narratives and gender norms. It is a revolutionary feminist travelogue that has dismantled traditional masculine desert narratives with introspective style, critique of colonialism, and engagement with Aboriginal culture and history which add depth to her memoir. Davidson offers readers a lens through which they examine their own lives, a representation of place, the societal norms that shape them, deeper scrutiny of its cultural and historical implications, a testament to personal endurance and resilience. Thus, *Tracks* is a timeless and inspiring work that continues to reverberate with audiences worldwide, a woman-centered exploration of self and society. It has been praised for its candidness and depth, carves space for the women in the adventure genre but redefines women as a solo traveller. *Tracks* is a journey toward self-sovereignty.

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Digital Technology and the Visual Narrative of the Theriocentric Dystopia in *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*

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Abstract: Digital technology has positively impacted visual narratives such as films, television series,and cartoons. These technological advancements, including digital cinematography, virtualproduction, enhanced editing tools, virtual reality, augmented reality, and VFX, have provided a more immersive experience for film spectators. With the help of these computer-based technologies, the power of storytelling through visual media has been enhanced with high-definition images and sounds. Furthermore, such digital interventions have significantly reduced the use of trained animals and birds in films, making film production more animal-friendly and ethically justifiable.

This paper analyzes the movie *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011) to show how Rupert Wyatt, the director, employs digital technologies in creating an animal-centred dystopia that interrogates human intervention in animal genetics. With extensive use of VFX and digital technologies, this film focalizes the female chimpanzee Bright Eyes. This paper shows how the primates in focus, such as Caesar and Bright Eyes, communicate and make the point that they are better than their human counterparts. Much of the impact of this movie is based on the creation of digital apes, which offsets the traditional focus on real animals. The film's nearly 1,500 meticulous visual effects shots are a core element of Rupert Wyatt's theriocentric thinking and menagerie.

Keywords: Digital technology, Theriocentrism, dystopia, speciesism.

Filmmaking has transformed dramatically since its early days, thanks to ground-breaking technological advancements that have revolutionized the way stories are told and presented on screen. From the black-and-white silent movie era to the modern CGI-packed films, each breakthrough has opened new doors for storytelling. In the early days, filmmakers used basic tools like hand-cranked cameras, and mechanical props to create visual effects, but with time, new technologies like folly sounds, blue/green screens, scale doubles, miniature sets, CGI, VFX, etc. added a new depth and perspective to storytelling on screen. These advances haven't just changed how we experience films – they have also transformed how animals are portrayed on screen. In the early days of cinema, filmmakers frequently used real animals in films, which required intensive training and often raised ethical concerns. For example, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), and *The Call of the Wild* (1935), used real dogs to portray canine characters Toto and Buck respectively, whereas *Born Free* (1966), depicts real lions to tell the true story of Elsa, a lioness raised in captivity and later released into the wild. However, using real animals in films posed several challenges. Filmmakers worked

closely with animal trainers but faced challenges in portraying the animals as intended because of their unpredictable behaviour. Moreover, featuring wild animals on screen was risky for both the animals and the film crew. Additionally, animal rights' activists questioned the ethical treatment of animals used in filming. However, with the rise of CGI, VFX, and modern cinematographic techniques filmmakers can now create lifelike animal characters. Further, with fewer real animals being used in films, the chances of their mistreatment on set are also reduced.

Using advanced cinematography, filmmakers combined CGI and VFX to create lifelike virtual animals. For examples *Jurassic Park* (1993), mixes animatronics and CGI to bring dinosaurs to life in a way never seen before, *Jaws* (1975) used a mechanical shark nicknamed "Bruce" to create suspenseful underwater scenes, revolutionizing creature effects in film, *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) featured an animatronic E.T. puppet, making the alien character feel more expressive and lifelike, *The NeverEnding Story* (1984) brought the flying dragon, Falkor, to life using a large animatronic model with detailed facial expressions, and *Gremlins* (1984) used puppets to create the mischievous creatures, blending horror and comedy. This mix of mechanical and digital effects set a new standard for bringing fantastical creatures and animals onto the screen.

The real shift came with the rise of photo-realistic CGI, eliminating the need for live animals in many cases. Through cutting-edge CGI, *Life of Pi* (2012) created a tiger so convincingly that it blurred the line between digital and real, leaving audiences in awe. Disney's use of CGI in *The Jungle Book* (2016) and *The Lion King* (2019) set new standards, making digital animals appear more lifelike than ever before.

This change made animal-centric films more visually stunning and realistic. In the past, real animals in films could only do what they were trained for, and their time on set was limited to ensure their safety. But with digital technology, animals can now take on roles of protagonists, act in complex scenes, and express all the emotions a human being is capable of. This makes these CGI animals more relatable. Advanced cinematography has played a great role in creating theriocentric films allowing filmmakers to give animals their own voice, personality, subjectivity, intelligence, and even the ability to challenge human cruelty.

In the new age films the CGI animals actively resist animal cruelty in different fields such as animal testing, factory farming, transportation, animal trafficking, agriculture, etc. Instead of being silent victims, they can now be portrayed as intelligent and emotional beings who understand their suffering and fight back. For example, *Okja* (2017) is s story of a genetically modified pig who is raised with love but finally taken for slaughter. The film exposes animal cruelty in factory farming & the meat industry. *The One and Only Ivan* (2020) shows a gorilla who is forced to perform in a circus. This movie exposes the suffering of captive animals used for human entertainment, especially in circuses. *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* (2018), a sci-fi action film, has Blue the Velociraptor as a central character. This movie explores themes of animal trafficking, genetic manipulation, and the ethical consequences of human interference with nature. In *Dumbo* (2019) the titular character is CGI elephant who is required to perform in unnatural conditions. These films expose animal cruelty and make animals take a stand for their rights and resist animal cruelty, and rebel against it. These portrayals also make the audience think about the unethical treatment of animals in different industries. These technologies not only make storytelling more impactful but also encourage audiences to see animals as individuals with thoughts, emotions, intelligence, and feelings, rather than just objects for human use in an anthropocentric world. In doing so, CGI is transforming both the film industry and discussions on animal rights. Such a non-anthropocentric depiction of animals also fosters a sense of responsibility in the audience toward animal welfare. So, CGI is not just enhances films by making it visually more impressive, but it also shapes how people look at the rights of non-human beings.

On similar lines, a great example of a theriocentric film is *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011) by Rupert Wyatt, a science fiction film that explores the consequences of genetic experimentation on animals. The story follows Will Rodman, a scientist developing a drug to cure Alzheimer. He tests the drug on chimpanzees, leading to enhanced intelligence in a female chimp named Bright Eyes. She instinctively becomes aggressive to protect her new-born son, Caesar, but the scientists mistake it for a side effect of the drug and fatally shoot her. Will takes orphaned Caesar home to save him from being ethnised. However, he soon realizes that Caesar has inherited his mother's enhanced intelligence, a consequence of the drug experiments conducted on her during pregnancy. Will raises Caesar at home, but as he grows he starts questioning his place in the human world. After a violent encounter with a neighbour, Caesar is taken to a primate shelter, where he is subjected to unnecessary cruelty and abuse. Being a highly intelligent ape who can understand language, science, and medicine, he unites the other apes, steals the drug from Will's house and strategically makes other apes inhale the medicine creating an army of highly intelligent apes to rebel against animal experimentation and animal cruelty. After the fight between humans and apes on the Golden Gate Bridge, the apes, freeing themselves from human dominance escape to the forest. Meanwhile, a virus linked to the drug starts spreading among humans, foretelling the downfall of humanity and the rise of the apes. The film raises ethical questions about animal testing, speciesism, and the ethical and ecological consequences of scientific intervention in nature.

Rupert Wyatt used cutting-edge film techniques to bring the apes in *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* to life, giving them complex personalities, subjectivity, and human-like emotions. Talking about the film Rupert Wyatt mentions in an interview that *Rise of Planet of Apes* is "a live-action film that has its main character as a thoughtful, self-aware, feeling animals" ("Rise of the Planet of the Apes - CGI making of (2011) (HD)" 0:13 – 0:18). Additionally, he clarifies that they chose not to use prosthetics or actors in ape costumes, since the film critiques the exploitation of apes, making it ironic to use real ones. Instead, they aimed to explore the possibilities of performance capture technology. It is an enhanced version of motion capture, that records an actor's entire performance – body movements, gestures, facial expressions, and voice – to create realistic digital characters for film, games, and virtual reality. With this advanced technology, they could create photorealistic apes and capture complex emotional performances: "Our story deals with real Apes. We knew that we had to put to one side the idea of using prosthetics and human actors in animal suits. We couldn't do that" ("Rise of the Planet of the Apes - CGI making of (2011) (HD)" 0:37 – 0:44). Wyatt also maintains that the production and visual effects team at Weta Digital focused more on performance capture to authentically present the character of Caesar, who is a thoughtful, self-aware being: "So we have the choice of exploring what we could do with performance capture to actually try and create photorealistic Apes" ("Rise of the Planet of the Apes - CGI making of (2011) (HD)" 0:59 – 01:05).

However, a reference model is required to create a virtual/digital character. Joe Letteri, Senior VFX supervisor at Weta Digital, emphasizes the importance of bringing in Andy Serkis and Terry Notary to create life-like images of Caesar and other apes in the movie: "It really became about the performance and that's where we really draw on working with performers like Andy Serkis and Terry Notary" ("Rise of the Planet of the Apes - CGI making of (2011) (HD)" 01:06 - 01:13).

The team at Weta Digital relied heavily on the performance of Terry Notary and Andy Serkis to portray the emotional depth of Caesar. Terry Notary, in particular, brought extensive experience as a movement expert, which was essential for accurately capturing how apes move and interact. Terry is a gymnast, and he trained other performers to act like apes. He has taught them the techniques to achieve the correct posture and movement patterns that reflect an ape's anatomy and dynamics. Terry also emphasizes the importance of getting into

the mindset and physical presence of an ape: "It is getting into the mode of an ape, getting into the presence and feel of how they exist" ("Rise of the Planet of the Apes - CGI making of (2011) (HD)" 2:04 – 2:13). Meanwhile, Andy brought out the subtle emotions of Caesar which were crucial in making the character of Caesar authentic and relatable. Moreover, the team closely studied the apes at the Wellington zoo, collected the data of the nuances of their behaviour, facial expressions, and movements to create virtual apes. Christopher White, VFX Supervisor at Weta Digital, describes the complexities they had to understand before designing digital apes. "To go into some of the anatomical details we also referred real apes as well just to look at how the muscles move, bone structure, facial expressions…" ("Rise of the Planet of the Apes - CGI making of (2011) (HD)" 2:55 – 3:04).

It was important to create an accurate anatomical structure for Caesar, including the skeleton, muscles, and skin to create a virtual ape that looks real. The VFX team developed an intricate virtual model for Caesar with different layers of his anatomy, which includes modelling the skull, neck muscles, and other skeletal muscles. This underlying structure, while not directly visible, affects the character's movement and expressions. Simon Clutterbuck, Digital Creatures Supervisor, Weta Digital, says: "You never directly see that in the finished result but you will see the effect of all these different things" ("Rise of the Planet of the Apes - CGI making of (2011) (HD)" 3:46 – 3:51)

The Department of Textures also played a vital role in adding fine details like wrinkles and pores to the skin of virtual apes, making them appear real. Modern tools and techniques enabled the texture department to scan real chimps and apes using silicon-based technology. These detailed scans were then used to precisely map textures onto the digital models, ensuring realistic skin, fur, and other surface details. Additionally, zoom-in technology made it possible to add fine details to any part of the virtual character. The combination of well-developed models and high-quality texturing was crucial for achieving the final look of Caesar.

Further, Weta Digital used 'Barbershop,' its hair simulation software, to precisely control the hair structure and create realistic fur for the apes. The Barbershop software comes with unique tools to comb hair and change the structure of the fur. Nicholus Gaul, Lead Groomer at Weta Digital, explains how new tools are used to create special effects: "With Barbershop what we have in screen is actually like physical environment. I can go in and actually tweak a single hair" ("Rise of the Planet of the Apes - CGI making of (2011) (HD)" 5:36 – 5:43).

Photorealism, the rendering of images intricately and realistically, is noticeable in the movie. The most challenging part for the effects team was to capture Caesar's emotions, especially expressed through his eyes. The team visited a local eye doctor to learn scientific details about how eyes move, the reasons behind blinking, how eye muscles pull, how water/tear drops sit at the bottom of eyelids, and what keeps it from rolling out, etc. This meticulous research enabled them to authentically capture the subtle, unspoken emotions in Caesar's eyes, making them remarkably lifelike and expressive.

The challenging part of the movie for the VFX team was to create toddler Caesar. The team had to consider the weight and movement differences between an adult male actor (Andy) and a toddler chimp when creating animations. Joe Letteri maintains: "The most challenging scenes are the scenes where Caesar is a toddler because it's where we had the most size discrepancy between Andy and Caesar … when you are doing animation it's all about the weight. So you are never trying to go lighter. You are always trying to make you have appropriate weight. But in this case, we have to take the movements and just say, okay, Andy is doing this but he's an adult male so when he does what that means for a toddler chimp" ("Rise of the Planet of the Apes - CGI making of (2011) (HD)" 7:31 – 7:59)

Another significant technical challenge the animation team encountered was depicting the wide range of emotions Caesar experiences upon realizing that Will won't be taking him home and that he will be left at the shelter. To convey Caesar's panic and desperation, the team

drew from Andy's facial expressions, capturing the shifting muscle structure as he pressed his face against the glass. Simon Clutterbuck, Digital Creatures Supervisor, Weta Digital, explains behind-the-scenes technology: "We had modelled the pane of glass in 3d and we have the animator's performance. Then we just kind of squashed his face against the glass and its kind of did the right thing … the skin kind of deformed and sort of dragged along this glass surface" ("Rise of the Planet of the Apes - CGI making of (2011) (HD)" 8:53 – 9:04).

Andy Serkis expressed his surprise at how effectively CGI and VFX translated the emotions and movements he performed into the digital character of Caesar, bringing them to life on screen: "First time that I saw the fully rendered Caesar up on screen, I was completely blown away … there was my performance, all the emotions, all the eye movements, the gestures are all cloaked in this digital chimpanzee" ("Rise of the Planet of the Apes - CGI making of (2011) (HD)" 9:13 – 9.28).

Through innovative cinematography, CGI, and VFX, Rupert Wyatt brings to life a striking theriocentric narrative in *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*. This film exposes the harsh realities of animal testing in the medical field, and condemns the cruelty involved in such practices. Weta Digital, known for its expertise in visual effects and animation, has convincingly and realistically portrayed the skin diseases caused by the drug experiments on the apes. The movie challenges the reliability of animal testing by showing that drugs that work positively on animals may not have the same effect on humans.

Further, by portraying Caesar as sentient being capable of reading, speaking, and understanding human language, the film defies the belief in human superiority based on linguistic skills. The film also underscores the tension in human-wildlife interactions by showing Will's neighbour's children screaming in fear and scaring away Caesar, who only wanted to play. Further, the film critiques the domestication of animals and the human assumption that animals are best protected in human homes by making Caesar chose the jungle over a human home, as reflected in his words to Will: "Caesar is home" (*Rise of Planet of Apes* 1:35 - 1:36). Akira Mizura Lippit (2000) points out in her book *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* that, around the turn of the nineteenth century, "the cinema came to determine a vast mausoleum for animal being" (Lippit 187), indicating that cinema functions as a space where animals are both preserved and framed within human storytelling. Similarly, Rupert Wyatt uses CGI and VFX to bring to life a world of apes, weaving a powerful theriocentric tale within human civilization.

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57.

Laughter As a Form of Epistemic Resistance in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*

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Abstract

Humour can work as a strong tool for resistance and challenging dominant narratives. Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* does precisely that by employing irony, satire, absurdity, and self-referential humour to expose the contradictions in the cultural memory of events of the catastrophic Holocaust. It represents trauma but uses humour as a disruptive technique to upend conventional epistemological frameworks. This paper argues that *Maus* attempts to engage readers through the use of humour in a re-assessment of how memory and trauma are constructed rather than oversimplifying historical facts. Laughter becomes a form of epistemic resistance in the graphic novel that covertly questions existing narratives and exposes the lacunae in the rendition of history.

Keywords: Humour, Graphic Narrative, Epistemic Resistance, Holocaust, Cultural Memory

Introduction

Humour is rarely looked upon as a form of resistance in literary texts. It usually serves the purpose of a literary device for critiquing or highlighting social disorders. However, in other fields of study like philosophy, politics, and psychology, it is widely recognized for its significant role in challenging the discourse. Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel *Maus* offers an unconventional combination of humour and trauma that challenges the prevalent narratives about the tragic and horrifying events of the Holocaust. Humour serves as a tool for epistemic resistance that enables a critique of the existing historical narratives, and cultural memories of the event, as well as the limitations of their representations in literary texts. Spiegelman uses satire, irony, parody, and absurdity to question the historical truth and offer a new and very personal perspective on the experiences of the Holocaust.

Published as a serialized graphic novel between 1980 and 1991, *Maus* was compiled in two parts. These books cannot be classified under any one genre. Rather, they offer a combination of biography, autobiography, memoir, fact, and fiction. The first book titled *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History* starts with Spiegelman's conversations with his father Vladek in New York. It is revealed that Vladek is a Polish Jew and a Holocaust survivor. The conversations are about the time before the Second World War and Vladek's courtship with Anja. There are mentions of the rising anti-semitism and Nazi occupation in Poland. This volume ends with Spiegelman's parents being sent off to the concentration camps in Auschwitz. The second volume titled *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began* gives bone-chilling details of the brutalities inflicted in the camps. Vladek manages to survive because of chance and resourcefulness. The narrative shifts to the present where Art Spiegelman struggles to deal with the emotional baggage of the past and recollects the trauma of his mother's suicide. He also suffers from the guilt of representing the memories. By the end of the second volume, he realizes that this representation of trauma, memory, and the identity of the survivors is a very complex task.

However, despite the immense pressure of telling the survivor's story from his perspective, Spiegelman finds expression through the medium of animal allegory to share deeply personal memories. His efforts to record the legacy of the Holocaust across generations are creatively expressed through the allegorical as well as visual mediums. This paper argues

that Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* employs humour and laughter as a means for the readers to re-assess the memories and trauma of the past rather than oversimplifying historical facts.

Rationale:

The study of humour as a means of epistemic resistance is crucial for highlighting how the comic art form, which is mostly considered popular art and dismissed as a 'low art', can effectively challenge existing discourses and rigid epistemological structures. (Doherty) Holocaust narratives that have been available for quite some time have either been factually heavy, authentic, and solemn or deeply personal. Humour is rarely used as a means of expression or engagement with history, trauma, and memory. Furthermore, the fact that humour can complicate the understanding of a historical event and make readers question the efficacy of existing narratives is largely unexplored. These are the reasons due to which the current study focuses specifically on analysing humour as a tool of resistance and explores irony, satire, and absurdity in Art Spiegelman's *Maus* to contribute to the academic discourse about the Holocaust. It also aims to highlight graphic narratives as valuable markers of cultural memory, thereby making them pertinent subjects for academic research.

Objectives

1. To analyse the use of humour in Art Spiegelman's *Maus* as a tool of epistemic resistance
2. To evaluate the challenges offered by the text to the dominant narratives about the Holocaust
3. To explore the impact of humour on the representation of cultural memory and trauma associated with the events of the Holocaust

Research Methodology:

This research study uses a qualitative approach to analyse the visual and textual elements in Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus.* An interdisciplinary analysis is attempted that draws on humour theory and trauma studies to understand the representation of the Holocaust in literature. Along with the primary text *Maus,* the study includes references to secondary criticism like scholarly articles on *Maus,* graphic narratives dealing with historical events, and literary representations of the Holocaust. Foundational theories of Humour studies are also cited to form the basis of this research. Additionally, audience reception is explored with the application of reader response theory where applicable. The objective of using this methodology is to emphasize the role of humour in graphic narratives as a tool for epistemic resistance and expose the gaps in the prevalent narratives on the Holocaust.

Scope & Limitations:

The primary limitation of this study is that it focuses on a single text, namely Art Spiegelman's *Maus.* This limits the scope of comparison with other graphic novels dealing with the events of the Holocaust or other texts with the same subject. Further, the study mainly provides an analysis of the visual and textual elements of *Maus* to understand the challenges offered by it to the prevalent discourse about the Holocaust. The broader historical context is explained but not critically evaluated in detail because that may take attention away from the subject of this study. An in-depth analysis of the historical context may provide further supporting evidence that can help expose the gaps in the dominant narrative. Lastly, the study's focus on the epistemic role of humour in *Maus* excludes the psychological interpretation of the impact of humour on trauma survivors. Despite these limitations, the study provides a thorough analysis of a graphic novel that is seminal in making comics a subject for academic study and offers a different account of a catastrophic historical event.

Findings and Discussion:

Stephen E. Tabachnick raises the following question in *The Quest for Jewish Belief and Identity in the Graphic Novel:*

> The Holocaust (or in Hebrew, the Shoah, which means "catastrophe") is fraught with unresolvable questions about how this tragedy can or should be remembered in artistic works. Given its enormity, with six million Jews and many, many other people killed in the Nazi concentration camps, can any form of art ever recapture this experience?

Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* tries to provide an answer through the comic art form. It is a self-narrative that has two powerful autobiographical strands- the author's relationship as an artist and a son with his mother and his complex interactions with his father. (Miller)

The author primarily uses humour in different ways to represent events of the Holocaust in *Maus*. The most important visual strategy employed is that of animal allegory which also contributes significantly to the ironic undertones of the graphic novel. The portrayal of the Jews as mice, Nazis as cats, Poles as pigs, and Americans as dogs is not just an absurd take on real events and personalities but a ridiculous representation that evokes laughter because of its unexpected nature. Racial hierarchies become very evident through the use of anthropomorphism. When Spiegelman was asked in an interview about the reason behind employing this technique, he argued that "to use these ciphers, the cats and mice, is actually a way to allow you past the cipher at the people who are experiencing it. So it's really a much more direct way of dealing with the material." (Kohli) He further explains that "the mouse heads are masks, virtually blank, like Little Orphan Annie's eyeballs—a white screen the reader can project on." (Nielsen) These explanations make it clear that anthropomorphism coupled with the comic book format are deliberate choices of the author not in bad taste but to show that the Holocaust was in bad taste, as argued by Spiegelman.

Incongruity generates humour and also shows the glaring gaps between appearance and reality. Victor Raskin's Script-based Semantic Theory of Humour states that humour is created when there are two parallel scripts in a narrative that don't seem to fit and the readers manage to make them fit by discovering a startling resolution to the incongruity. (Risden) There are several examples of this in *Maus.* In Volume I of the novel, Vladek paints his mouse snout to pass off as a Polish pig. The dark humour of this moment also becomes a critique of identity politics imposed by oppressive regimes. Another instance is Vladek's frugality and how he reuses a piece of wire instead of throwing it away and argues with Mala over wooden hangers. The absurdity of survival routines developed under duress unsettles the expectations of the readers who anticipate a solemn narrative. The situational irony which makes the scene humorous also poignantly highlights the neuroses which is a result of intense trauma. This portrayal debunks the one-dimensional and sanitized representations of survivors. Relational irony is another element in the narrative that comes forth when Vladek narrates in first person and speaks about his petty squabbles and romantic jealousy while the world is falling apart around him. This humanistic portrayal and emotional complexity introduced by Spiegelman make the events even more tragic and the loss more real, resisting reductionist portrayals. Readers are never allowed to become complacent and are shaken by the changing narrative techniques of the author. Midway through the first volume, Spiegelman uses self-referentiality while citing extracts of his underground comic anthology "Prisoner on the Hell Planet" which has human characters and is also autobiographical because it revolves around his mother's suicide. The contrast that these human figures offer to the anthropomorphic ones makes the reader question the latter's identity and compels them to regard these characters as a different species. (Kohli)

Volume II of the novel shifts the focus from the father to the son. Art Spiegelman depicts himself in a mouse mask and reveals his psychological burden through a self-reflective narrative. His struggle with anxiety and guilt and discussions with the psychiatrist about his commercial success as well as inherited trauma illustrate the transgenerational impact of the Holocaust. (Salihi) Marianne Hirsch's work on postmemory is very apt for understanding the response of the second generation to the trauma of the first generation. She argues that postmemory is a powerful form of memory that is not simply a recollection of the past but its representation, projection, and creation, which is often expressed through and based on silence and the invisible. It is a form of remembrance that is shared by an ethnic group and takes the forms of "identification, adoption, and projection." (Hirsch) She further explains the

idea of postmemory with reference to *Maus* (her inspiration) by stating that it is "an intersubjective transgenerational space of remembrance, linked specifically to cultural or collective trauma." When this concept is applied to *Maus,* particularly to Volume II, Spiegelman's ironic and self-deprecating account lays bare the impossibility of truly representing the past. His conflicting feelings about the legacy that he gets from his father and the fame that he has earned make his difficulties palpable.

Spiegelman called Artie in the novel, has a troubled relationship with his father. Vladek's prejudice against the African-American man is both disturbing and ironically humorous because of Vladek's status as a victim of discrimination. Being a victim does not prevent Vladek from being biased or flawed. This problematizes the representation of victims or survivors because it resists the idea of moral absolutism. In a conversation with the psychiatrist, Spiegelman jokes about going to Auschwitz to understand his father better. This is a satirical take on how second-generation survivors are under pressure to authentically inherit trauma and suffering. In the second part, the author goes back to the use of visual irony that is grotesque at the same time by showing himself sitting at a desk and surrounded by a mountain of dead bodies. He reminisces about the critical acclaim the first part of *Maus* received but his thoughts come out like a stream of consciousness that shifts between his fame and distress. The text boxes in the panel highlight his mental state. He is transported to Auschwitz mentally which is evident by the pile of dead bodies occupying half of the page and is constantly called back to the present moment by several offers of work. The sheer volume of trauma seems unsurmountable but the graphical representation of it in the style of the comics somehow lightens the impact.

These are just a few instances of Spiegelman's brilliant attempt to capture the vulnerability, deep-set anxiety, fear, panic, terror, and emotional burden of the Holocaust through the personal account of experiences in *Maus* which also reflect the trauma of an entire generation of an ethnic group. His humanistic portrayal of animal figures parodying real ones is an act of epistemic resistance that forces the readers to actively engage with the narrative rather than passively consuming it. Historical events are reframed and the Jewish identity is presented multi-dimensionally to provoke a deeper understanding of the superficially understood trauma of the Holocaust. Art Spiegelman challenges the Holocaust discourse by employing satire, irony, absurdity, and parody to evoke laughter in the gravest moments and allow marginalized voices to question the dominant narrative.

Conclusion

Spiegelman does not use humour in *Maus* for comic relief. It is a potent tool for epistemic resistance that challenges the modes of understanding historical trauma. The skilful and strategic use of irony, satire, and absurdity by Spiegelman contributes to an unsettling account of the Holocaust that refuses to sanitize its representation. The use of humour helps in confronting the absurdity of genocidal logic and questions the limitations of the representations of traumatic events. *Maus* is not only a personal account of suffering but gives insights into collective suffering and inherited memory. The evocation of laughter is not due to physical or farcical comedy but due to the absurdity and unconventionality of representation. The gap between expectation and reality is what evokes laughter.

The author's use of animal allegory as a visual metaphor to parody actual events is central to its resistance to conventions. The dehumanization in characterizing the Jews as mice, Germans as cats, Poles as pigs, and Americans as dogs is a parody of the racial categorization and elimination that was integral to the Holocaust. The reductive racial ideologies presented through such visual codes ironically mirror reality as well as critique it. The humour is dark, disturbing, and devastating which intrinsically makes the reader question the validity of previous representations. Moreover, it evokes an emotional response from the readers who feel a sense of discomfort with the disturbing truth and empathy upon reflection.

There is a metafictional self-awareness that Spiegelman brings to *Maus* combined with

the shifts in narrative tone. He does not aim for accuracy. Rather, he chooses to show flaws and vulnerability in a deeply human portrayal of the characters. The monolithic portrayals of victims and survivors are also upended in the complex interplay between memory, trauma, and identity. This research paper illustrates how the thoughtful use of humour can function as a crucial tool for resistance and defiance. The graphic narrative style makes for a compelling and engaging read that allows readers to critically engage with and understand how narratives can be inherited and perpetuated by systems of power. Finally, Spiegelman's account of the Holocaust does not trivialize trauma or provide a larger-than-life picture of the historical event. Instead, it serves as an act of remembrance through laughter that deepens the reader's understanding of grief and the need to retrieve and restore cultural memory to include all accounts rather than just the dominant discourse.

Suggestions

1. Taking into consideration the limitations of this research paper, future research can explore other narratives, specifically graphic novels, that focus on the Holocaust or related events and understand differing perspectives about it.
2. A comparative study of *Maus* with other works that offer a satirical take on traumatic events of the past can provide further insights into the use of humour as a tool for epistemic resistance.
3. Reader response or audience reception can be taken up for a study to understand the actual impact of humour as a means of establishing a counter-narrative on different reader demographics.
4. Humour as an epistemological tool can be explored by focusing on comics to understand how it helps in bringing attention to the subaltern and marginalized sections that have been largely ignored or are absent from mainstream cultural representations and works.

Recommendations

1. To encourage the study of graphic narratives, comics, and comic strips as literary works of merit and important representatives of culture.
2. To explore the ethical implications of the use of humour in representations of historical atrocities.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of humour as a tool for epistemic resistance in academic discourse.
4. To promote an interdisciplinary approach by combining trauma studies and humour theories in analysing graphic narratives.

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58.

Eco-Spirituality In Sri Aurobindo's "The Miracle Of Birth", "Ocean Oneness" And "Creation"

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Abstract: Eco-spirituality is a practice that links natural objects with religion and faith. It tries to generate a deeper understanding between human beings and the environment. Beginning with the combination of ecological science with spiritual tradition, eco-spirituality has moved into different dimensions such as dwelling, caring, respecting, experiencing, and relating. Furthermore, it brings together environmental activism and religious tradition. Closely linked with eco-spirituality is the concept of deep ecology, which was propagated by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess. This concept highlights the intrinsic worth of everything in nature regardless of its use for human beings. A spirituality-based ecological tradition is not alien to Indian sensibility as well.

This paper analyses Sri Aurobindo's poems, "The Miracle of Birth", "Ocean Oneness" and "Creation" to show how the mystic poet spiritualizes nature and ecology. It examines the eco-spiritual influence on Sri Aurobindo, apart from the idea of communion with nature that his poems configure. In particular, this paper shows how Aurobindo considers the earth and the universe as spiritual entities. Also within the purview of this paper is a study of Aurobindo's notion of creative power which is rooted in holistic and bio-centric eco-spirituality.

Keywords: Eco-spirituality, Bio-Centrism, Spiritual Ecology, Ecosophy

Introduction

Objectives:

This research paper has the following aims:

1) To study the aspect of eco-spiritualism in Sri Aurobindo's poems, "The Miracle of Birth", "Ocean Oneness," and "Creation."

2) To analyse the divinity of nature in the selected poems.

3) To observe and understand Sri Aurobindo's way of spiritualizing nature and its manifestations in the process of configuring a bio-centric and eco-centric world view.

Hypothesis:

The research will focus on the divine and spiritual elements of nature reflected in the poems "The Miracle of Birth", "Ocean Oneness," and "Creation" by Sri Aurobindo.

It will also examine the aspect of yogic spiritualism, which can be aligned with eco-spiritualism

Research Methodology:

The researcher will read the texts closely by using the lens of eco-spiritual theory. The researcher will use an analytical method drawn from ecocriticism and Culture Studies to focus on the aspects of eco-spiritualism in the selected poems of Sri Aurobindo.

Meaning and Concepts Related to Eco-Spirituality:

Eco-spirituality is the form faith and spirituality that celebrates the interconnectedness between human beings and the environment. It helps the study of environmentalism and spiritualism together. Eco-spirituality is understanding the shared links between human beings and various elements of nature. Modernisation and urbanisation have created an ecological crisis, urging the need for developing and environmentally based religion. Eco-spirituality

results from people wanting to free themselves from consumeristic and materialistic society. It is an umbrella term for concepts such as deep ecology and ecosophy. The term deep ecology means deep spiritualism, and ecosophy means ecological philosophy. These terms are the basis of eco-spirituality. Deep ecology is a spiritual philosophy that preaches a new worldview to save the planet from present ecological degradation and degeneration in the era Anthropocene. Deep ecology challenges the shallow anthropocentric environmentalism. Fritjof Capra (1939) is an Austrian-born American author, physicist, systems theorist, and deep ecologist. In his book, *The Web of Life*, he explains the concepts of deep ecology as:

> The new paradigm may be called a holistic worldview, seeing the world as an integrated whole rather than a dissociated collection of parts. It may also be called an ecological view, if the term "ecological" is used in a much broader and deeper sense than usual. Deep ecological awareness recognizes the fundamental interdependence of all phenomena and the fact that, as individuals and societies, we are all embedded in (and ultimately dependent on) the cyclical processes of nature. (Capra 6)

Capra's view reflects the central theme of deep ecology, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings and the need for a holistic approach to environmental issues. Capra states that understanding and respecting these relationships are integral in fostering ecological sustainability and well-being.

The Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess highlights the concept of deep ecology in his book *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle,* which is translated and edited in English by David Rothenberg. Naess describes the concept of deep ecology as:

> …deep ecology is a far more radical position than that taken by most supporters of alternative technology involving as it does the rejection of economic growth and of the assumptions underlying western science, the subordination of human society to natural processes, and the doctrine that humans share a profound identity with non-human nature. (Naess 17).

Naess has divided deep ecological consciousness into five principles, they are: tending, dwelling, reverence, connectedness, and sentience. These principles will help human beings to live a sustainable life and will support and conserve the environment for the next generation, he says.

Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, in their book *Ecology and Religion,* have defined eco-spirituality as a way of understanding and experiencing the sacred in the natural world. According to them ecospirituality integrates spiritual and ecological awareness, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life and the responsibility to care for the Earth.

The book *Eco Spirituality: An Introduction* by Rachel Wheeler opens with a quote: "Whatever I know as a woman about spirituality I have learned from my body encountering Earth. Soul and soil are not separate. Neither are mind and spirit, nor water and tears" (Wheeler Npg). These lines display deep ecological aspects where man and nature are considered equal. Eco-spirituality also refers to the interconnection between intuition and bodily awareness about a relational view of human beings and the planet. According to Wheeler, the stories of creation connect human beings with nature and help them to understand their identity: "Cosmologies or creation stories are important in different traditions because they not only provide a framework for understanding how humans and everything else have come to exist in the first place but also activate a human's behavior as that person responds to their understanding of their identity in the world" (Wheeler 23).

Wheeler has further emphasized the interconnectedness between God and nature. Eco-spirituality has become more relevant due to a need for a reconceptualization of the human relationship with the environment, she argues. Terms such as environmental crisis, ecological crisis, climate change, and global warming refer to contemporary global issues that needs to be addressed. Generally, the ecological crisis is referred to as the destruction of the ecosystem in the Anthropocene. This encompasses a highly controversial debate in the scientific, political, and religious spheres. Religious belief with a

modern scientific approach can change the perspective of looking towards the environment, Wheeler maintains.

Paganism and Eco-spirituality:

Paganism is a nature-based religion that exists in various beliefs and practices. It has no official doctrine or sacred text. Due to its lack of anthropocentric structure, many Pagans believe that it should be used as a tool to fight the current ecological crisis. Eco-spirituality advocates the need for an ecology-based religion that focuses on the nurturing and healing of the Earth. As paganism is already based on nature worship, many believe it would be a useful starting point for eco-spirituality. Neo-pagan revivals have seen the emergence of pagan communities that are more earth-focused. Pagans may build their rituals around advocacy for a sustainable lifestyle and emphasize complete interconnectedness with the earth. Many pagans believe in strong bonding among all living beings, which allows them to foster moments of self-reflection before acting. These pagan ideals coincide with eco-spirituality because pagans understand the environment to be part of the divine realm and part of their inner-self. Therefore, in their view, harming the environment directly affects their well-being. Pagans have already recognized the importance of incorporating environmental ideologies with their own religious beliefs.

Indian Mythology and Eco-spirituality:

> "A pond is equal to ten wells;
> Ten ponds are equal to one lake;
> Ten lakes are equal to one son;
> And ten sons are equal to one tree." (Matsya Purana 17: 154)

This verse from Matsya Purana implicates the importance of elements of nature as specified in Indian mythology. In Hinduism, Prithvi Sapta refers to the "Seven Earths" or the seven layers of the earthly realm. According to Hindu cosmology, the universe is divided into multiple planes of existence, and the earthly plane itself is said to be composed of seven regions or divisions. Human beings, monkeys, reptiles, and various other living organisms are the inhabitants of these seven regions of earth. This belief interrogates the human dominance over other living organisms. In Hinduism, all the elements of nature are sacred and need to be worshiped. River Ganga is considered a motherly figure whose holy water is a symbol of chastity and dignity. The Banyan tree epitomizes peace and protection. Various animals are considered sacred, and their existence is celebrated through various festivals. The base of Hinduism is the notion of karma and karma means that the pain caused to other living things will come back to one through the process of reincarnation. All these beliefs prefigure Eco-spirituality.

Eco-spirituality and Sri Aurobindo:

Rishi Aurobindo (1872-1950) was a great lover of nature, an eminent Indian personality, a visionary of a new enlightened world, a humanist, a mystic, and a spiritual yogi. He is known for his integral vision of life and spirituality and the evolution of human consciousness. M.K. Naik, in his book *History of Indian English Literature,* epitomizes his life as "a glorious chronicle of progress from patriot to poet, yogi, and seer" (Naik 47). He has his works on the Veda, the Bhagavad Gita, and yoga. He has composed many poems, especially sonnets. "The Life Divine", a philosophical work, and "Savitri", an epic in blank verse, are the greatest contributions of Rishi Aurobindo. His writings delve into deep ecological insight and spiritual renaissance, which can address the greatest environmental crisis. In the research article, "Deep Eco Darshan in Aurobindo: Spiritual Renaissance for Evolutionary Crisis, Sanjit Sarkar describes the seer-poet's works as:

> His rhythmic numbers with mantric power, spiritual flow, divine glow, intrinsic value, transcendental vibrations, and integrated Yogic discipline can awaken, illuminate, divinize and thus metamorphose the mundane consciousness of human mind and soul to the divine consciousness of inherent harmony with ecology as a web of divine relationships. (Sarkar 679)

The deep ecological vision in Sri Aurobindo's poems can powerfully combat the environmental problems of the modern era.

Eco-spiritual Analysis of the Poem, "Creation":

In the poem "Creation," the poet addresses God, proclaiming Him as the creator of the amusing eternity and miraculous universe.

Sri Aurobindo praises and appreciates God's creativity, which has shaped and designed nature and human beings. This poem portrays a spiritual connection between man and nature. According to the poet, God the creator, Supreme Power, has created both man and nature using his skills and craftsmanship:

> O sculptor of the living shapes of earth,
> O dramatist of death and life and birth,
> World-artist revelling in forms and hues,
> Hast Thou shaped the marvel of the Whirling spheres,
> A scientist passing Nature through his tubes,
> And played with numbers, measures, theorems, cubes,
> O mathematician Mind that never errs,…
> (Aurobindo 155).

Here, the poet addresses God as sculptor, dramatist, scientist, and mathematician. The poet says that using all His skills, God has developed the living shape of Earth, weaving intricately the stories of life, birth, and death. God, using his artistic skills, has added many forms and colours to the Earth, making it beautiful yet mysterious. These lines depict the eco-spiritual aspect connecting human beings and nature as the creation of God. God is the supreme head of the universe. God has created every small thing intelligently, making every element of nature divine, deserving of love, care, and respect. The poet concludes the poem:

> Or forged some deep Necessity, not Thy whim,
> Fate and Inconscience and the net of Time?
> (Aurobindo 155).

The poem concludes with a philosophical question about the nature of destiny and human choice. The lines suggest that the events that take place in one's life are not the result of personal desire or casual choice but are shifted by cosmic or inevitable forces and not merely by an individual will. The spiritual vision of Sri Aurobindo is visible through these lines. According to Sri Aurobindo, faith, the inconscience, and the vast net of time are interconnected and responsible for shaping events in human life. These lines put forth the idea of God governing man and nature. The poet maintains that man is a part of nature and not apart from it. Every element of nature is vital and connected with mankind. The poet thus challenges the superiority of man over nature and considers both equal.

Analysis of the Poem "The Miracle of Birth":

The poem "The Miracle of Birth" opens by describing the journey of the soul:

> I saw my soul a traveller through Time;
> From life to life the cosmic ways it trod,
> Obscure in the depths and on the heights sublime,
> Evolving from the worm into the god.
> (Aurobindo 157).

The speaker perceives the soul as a traveller moving through the vast expanse of time, experiencing life after life, following the cosmic journey of existence. The soul's journey is both hidden in the depths and exalted in the heights. It evolves through many forms, from the lowest, like the worm, to the highest, like a god, signifying the gradual evolution of consciousness.

The poet describes the earth as inanimate that is unable to move. It is unconscious and lifeless. The travelling soul enters, and the earth wakes up from its gleaming sleep. The poet symbolizes 'thought' as an idea that is born and will make the inanimate earth move. He has described the process of birth and the magic of life, which makes Earth a miraculous planet. He also states that a thinking creature is born who is always aspiring for love and hope. Nature, which is sleep-walking, is made conscious with the touch of life and birth. The poet says that life is powerful and the process of birth is miraculous. This process of birth continues and is making the earth a better place to live. According to the poet, every element of nature becomes divine with the touch of life.

The journey of the soul from unconscious to conscious is similar for all the living things on this earth. This suggests that every organism is an essential part of the earth. God has created everyone democratically without any discrimination, the poet implies:

> Life stirred and Thought outlined a gleaming shape
> Till on the stark inanimate earth could move,
> Born to somnambulist Nature in her sleep,
> A thinking creature who can hope and love.
> Still by slow steps the miracle goes on,

The Immortal's gradual birth mid mire and stone. (Aurobindo 157)

This poem provides a deep spiritual and ecological insight. The eco-spiritual perspective is reflected in the description of the sacredness of birth, the cycle of life, and the spirit of the soul, which interconnect all the living beings on this earth. The poem also celebrates the divine power that prevails between nature and life on earth.

Analysis of the Poem "Ocean Oneness":

The poem "Ocean Oneness" conveys the mystical vision of oneness with the universe. It deals with the theme of the unification of all the elements of nature. It suggests that the smallest element of nature is part of the bigger universe. The poem begins with a description of the vast and majestic ocean, which is voiceless and soundless. The boundless ocean is described as the wilderness 'ineffable', which depicts the greatness and depth of the Ocean.

The birds in the poem are the symbols of freedom and liberty who are flying and wandering in nature. The ocean and the universe are compared and considered similar by the poet as both are soundless, voiceless, and limitless. The repetition of the word 'azure' shows that the poet is gazing at the depth of the sea, which is immeasurable and blue. The poet wants to become one with nature and become part of its vastness. He wishes to reach the depths of the ocean, pursuing reality. The poem, thus, evokes the divinity of the ocean and the poet's urge to be part of it:

Someone broods there nameless and bodiless,
Conscious and lonely, deathless and infinite,
And, sole in a still eternal rapture,
Gathers all things to his heart for ever. (Aurobindo 557)

These lines describe a being or force that exists beyond the physical world, transcending the limits of identity, form, and time. In the phrase 'Nameless and bodiless', the entity doesn't have a name or physical form, suggesting it is not bound by the material world. This could be interpreted as a spiritual or divine presence. The entity is aware of its existence but experiences solitude, possibly because it is separate from the physical world and others. This could represent an isolated or individual consciousness.

Shri Aurobindo praises the alchemy of nature, which has the potential to transform one's life. He believes in the divine power of nature and has propagated the idea of the divinity of nature through his poems. His poem "The Miracle of Birth" speaks about birth, which is not just a biological process but a spiritual miracle that can bring revolutionary change. Aurobindo's poems reflect a cosmic vision and spiritual power that transcends science and religion. In the poem "Ocean Oneness," he describes the vastness of the ocean, which is elusive and mystical. The mysteries in the depths of the ocean and universe, created by the divine power, are still unresolved. No scientific discovery or invention will ever be able to resolve the mysteries of the universe and ocean, he seems to imply. According to Sri Aurobindo, the only way to achieve moksha and peace is to be one with the divine power. Human beings will have to accept the supremacy of the divine power and will have to respect his creation. Every organism is designed and shaped by God with the same spirit or soul, he suggests. Aurobindo establishes a strong bond with nature through his poems which are the extension of his yogic practice. He believes that this bond can be made stronger with the help of yogic meditation and writing poetry. A deep interconnection between human beings and nature is the central theme of all his poems and the entire ecosystem works on this interdependence, his poems suggest. This interconnection is necessary for the conservation and protection of the earth, in his eco-spiritual vision. He believed that deep philosophical vision and spiritual thoughts can unitedly work for the progress of humanity. He saw nature as an integral part of the divine power. He also advocated a harmonious relationship between human beings and the environment. Drawing inspiration from the Vedantic thoughts and integrated yoga, he emphasized the interconnectedness of all the living and non-living elements of nature. Though Eco-spirituality is a nascent development in humanities, Sri Aurobindo, in the late 19th century, had propagated his ideas of nature-

based spirituality, which can help to resist the environmental crisis. His philosophy aimed to bridge the gap between science, religion, and the environment, advocating for a holistic approach where scientific advancements align with spiritual values and environmental sustainability. This vision promotes a harmony between human progress, nature, and spiritual evolution, moving beyond rigid traditional beliefs.

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59.

Indigenous Culture And Transformation: A Literary Perspective On Radical Animism And Environmentalism

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Abstract

Animism is a philosophy and practice that is based on the traditional belief that everything has a spiritual essence and things are interconnected. Animists believe that plants, animals, elements, materials on earth and human beings have souls. Radical Animism is a theory that considers the agency of non-living things and non-human entities. It asserts the point that environment is not a passive background but rather a living body which is connected to human beings. Jemma Deer, a radical animist urges the readers to see life beyond human beings—a perspective which she believes is relevant in an age of climate crisis. Her brand of Radical Animism considers human beings as a part of the larger field of life rather than superior to the environment.

This paper analysis the literary engagements with Radical Animism to show that novels and poems have mobilised the idea of the agency of things. Further, this paper examines the American novel *Bless Me, Ultima* by the Hispanic writer Rudolfo Anaya to prove the point that the novel has a landscape and certain cultural motifs that touch upon the agenda of Radical Animism. Furthermore, this paper explains the transformative powers of the indigenous cultural tradition including shamanism and herb healing as depicted in Anaya's narrative. The idea of a new religion based on the respect for the souls, in the moon, the sea, fish and the landscape, is the key takeaway in Anaya's novel.

Keywords: Animism, Radical Animism, Shamanism, Indigenous Culture, Environmentalism

Animism is a way of looking at the world that dates back to humanity's earliest days— a belief system in which not only humans but all elements of nature (animals, plants, rocks, river and even artifacts) are seen as alive or imbued with spirit. Animism blurs the boundaries between the living and non-living, inviting people to see the world as a dynamic, interconnected web of relationships. Animistic beliefs are considered the earliest form of religious thought. They are evident in ancient cave paintings, burial practices, and rituals among hunter-gatherer societies. These practices expressed a deep respect for nature and an intimate sense of kinship with the environment. In many indigenous cultures—Native American and Aboriginal Australian traditions to various African and Asian societies—animism remains a living practice. These traditions often involve rituals, shamanism, and a relational view of the environment where every rock or river might be seen as having its own personality or spirit.

In 1871, English anthropologist Edward B. Tylor coined the term 'animism' to describe what he considers the earliest and most basic form of religion. Later scholars began to question the idea that animism was merely a 'primitive' error. After understanding the positive environmental and social impacts of Animism, in the late 20th century and early 21st century, many anthropologists and theorists proposed 'New Aanimism,' which views animistic thought as a relational epistemology. In this view, humans are part of a community of beings—both human and non-human—and human understanding of the world arises from these relationships rather than from detached,

objective analysis. This modern revival of animistic ideas also appears in discussions on environmental ethics, where the living quality of nature is emphasized. For instance, artists and thinkers inspired by the New Animism argue for a more ethical and reciprocal relationship with the environment—a perspective that challenges the modern divide between subject and object. Hence, Animism is much more than an antiquated or 'primitive' belief—it is a dynamic framework for understanding the world that continues to evolve. Its influence is visible not only in the rituals and artwork of indigenous cultures but also in the experimental and philosophical approaches of contemporary artists.

Radical Animism, which is an offshoot of New Animism, is the idea that everything in the world—animals, plants, rivers, rocks, and even objects has a kind of agency or influence rather than being just passive or lifeless. Unlike traditional animism, which often sees spirits in nature, Radical Animism is more about recognizing that all things play an active role in shaping the world, even if they don't have consciousness like humans do. For example, a river is not just a body of water—it carves landscapes, nourishes ecosystems, and even influences human societies. A forest, similarly, doesn't just exist for human use. It communicates through root systems, supports wildlife, and reacts to environmental changes. The idea of root brain which is developed in Phytocriticism, identifies the agential roles of plants and trees and implies that plants are sentient and have identities therefore.

By recognizing that everything has agency, i.e, everything influences and responds to its surroundings, Radical Animism promotes a more respectful and ethical relationship with nature. It challenges exploitative attitudes and encourages a perspective where humans are not 'owners' of the environment but part of an ongoing, dynamic network of relationships.

Jemma Deer's theoretical text *Radical Animism: Reading for the End of the World (2020)* explores how animism can help human beings rethink literature, philosophy, and their relationship with the environment, especially in the context of climate change and the modern world. Jemma Deer explores the interconnectedness of humans and the non-human world, emphasizing the agency and vitality of all entities. Here are some excerpts that highlight themes of animism and environmentalism:

> The reckoning of climate change calls for us to fundamentally rethink our notions of human centrality, superiority and power. Drawing on a wide range of modern writers and thinkers—from Freud and Darwin to Latour and Derrida, from Shakespeare and Carroll to Woolf and Kafka—Radical Animism develops a new theory of life for a planet in crisis. (Deer 47)

In this original and timely work, Jemma Deer reframes human thinking of the Anthropocene with ideas from anthropology, astronomy, deconstruction, evolutionary biology, psychoanalysis, quantum physics and veganism. Through readings that are both inventive and compelling, this book shows how 'literary animism'—the active and transformative life of literature—can open human thinking to the immense power of the non-human world.

Jemma Deer's *Radical Animism: Reading for the End of the World* talks about how climate change forces human beings to change the way they see themselves in the world. For a long time, humans have thought they are the most important and powerful beings, but Deer argues that they need to recognize that nature and non-human life also have power and meaning. She uses ideas from different fields—literature, science, philosophy, and anthropology to explain that humans are not separate from nature but deeply connected to it. Her idea of 'literary animism' suggests that stories and books can change the way human beings think and help them see that everything in the world, including animals, plants, and even objects, have their own lives and influence: "It may not be possible, finally, to 'imagine an extinction'. To imagine, that is to say, the gaining of a loss, the presence of an absence, the past deprived of its future. And yet, with each day that passes, as thousands of forms of life

disappear forever, the attempt becomes increasingly necessary" (Deer 55).

Jemma Deer is of the opinion that it is really hard to truly imagine what extinction means. Extinction is when something disappears forever, but trying to picture something that no longer exists is almost impossible. It is like trying to see an empty space where something used to be. However, because so many animals and plants are disappearing every day due to climate change and human activity, human beings need to try to understand extinction. Even if it is difficult, thinking about it is important so human beings can realize the urgency of protecting life on Earth: "Here I was a different animal. Have you ever watched a deer walking out from cover? They step, stop, and stay, motionless, nose to the air, looking and smelling… That morning, I felt like the deer… experiencing forms of attention and deportment beyond my conscious control" (Deer 57). Here, Deer is saying that, for a moment, she felt like a deer. She moved carefully, stopped, and noticed everything around her, just like a deer does when it steps out into the open. She wasn't thinking about it—it just happened naturally, as if her body was acting like an animal's, sensing the world in a new way.

In Western culture, people often see nature as something to use for their own needs, like cutting down trees to build houses or changing rivers to create farmland. But in Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*, nature is seen as something sacred, meaning it should be respected and protected.Ultima teaches Antonio that everything in nature has a spirit and a special meaning. The following are the pieces of animist eco-centric wisdom:

- The **golden carp** is not just a fish; it is a powerful symbol of a different spiritual belief.
- The **owl** is more than a bird; it is Ultima's protector and a sign of her wisdom.
- The **plants** that Ultima uses for healing show that nature provides medicine and care when treated with respect.

Anaya's book teaches that humans and nature are connected, and real wisdom comes from understanding and working with nature instead of trying to control or destroy it. The book shares an indigenous and mestizo (mixed Spanish and Indigenous) way of thinking, where humans and nature are connected. It teaches that wisdom comes from respecting the earth, understanding its balance, and working with it instead of against it.

In *Bless Me, Ultima*, nature is not just land, rivers, or animals—it is alive and has its own spirit. The story shows that people should respect and live in harmony with nature instead of trying to control or use it for their own benefit. The following sentence illustrates this point:"The river was quiet. The murmuring of its waters lull me into dreams, and I saw again the golden carp" (Anaya 15). This reflects animistic thought, as the river is portrayed as having its own voice and presence, and the golden carp symbolizes a divine, living force in nature. Further, one finds the statements: "I looked at the black mud of the river. It was a part of my past, and it would be a part of my future" (Anaya 30). This suggests a deep, reciprocal relationship between the protagonist and the natural world, a key concept in Radical Animism.

The narrative explicates further the meaning of animism: "Ultima was the only one who shared the secrets of the earth with me. She taught me that the owl was her spirit, and that the soul of a man could be tied to the earth" (Anaya 34). Ultima's connection to her owl as a spiritual guardian and her belief that souls are intertwined with nature reflect an animistic worldview. Elements are also shown to be agential: "The wind gathered and whistled through the pinon trees, and it carried the owl's warning. It was the cry of Ultima" (Anaya 57). Here, the wind and the owl are given a sense of agency and meaning, reinforcing the idea that nature communicates and holds power. Later one finds a reference to indigenous wisdom steeped in animism and care for the environment: "Everything the old people did was steeped in tradition, in respect for the beauty of the earth" (Anaya 66). This highlights the indigenous and animistic perspective in the novel, where nature is revered and seen as alive.

To conclude, in the novel *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya, Radical Animism insists that nature is alive and full of meaning. Ultima teaches Antonio that everything around him animals, plants, rivers, and even the wind has its own spirit. Readers learn that humans are not above nature but a part of it. The story shows that true wisdom comes from respecting and understanding the natural world instead of trying to control it.

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60.

Indian Urban Fiction: Cityscape And Urban Issues In Payal Kapadia's *Maidless In Mumbai*

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Abstract

Urban fiction is the sub-genre of novel that focuses on the socioeconomic realities and cultures of characters living in urban settings. This brand of fiction often highlights the hardships and challenges involved in surviving in a tough city. Such a novel also focuses on characters moving in and out of urban spaces such as the people who commute between suburbs and metropolis. Frequently urban fiction features contemporary urban settings with realistic depiction of characters and their problems. Indian urban fiction explores the experiences of people in Indian cities and writers such as Aravind Adiga, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chetan Bhagat, Jeet Thayil and Trisha Bohra are associated with Indian urban fiction. Urban fiction can be examined using the lens of Urban Studies- An interdisciplinary field that strives to explain the dynamics of cities such as urbanization, economic activities, experiences of marginalized populations and the resource crunch in a city.

This paper analyses Payal Kapadia's novel *Maidless in Mumbai* using the lens of Urban Studies to show how maids and helping hands are integral in the lives of working women in Mumbai. It looks into the complex social relations between maids and their employers as revealed in the novel. It also explains the typical urban humour that Kapadia mobilizes in negotiating the urban realities and the challenges. This paper scrutinizes the depiction of urban Indian woman who has to juggle various tasks and develops a dependence on a domestic help. The urban economy, that sustains maids and working women in Mumbai, is also in focus in this paper.

Keywords: Urban fiction,Urban Studies,urban chores,urban economy.

Urban Studies is an interdisciplinary engagement that closely examines cities and urban locations, scrutinizing their history, sociology, geography, economics, urban structures and urban culture in an attempt to understand the realities and complexities of urban life. It draws from various disciplines such as environmental studies, architecture, urban design, political science, demography and urban planning. Studies conducted in this domain often investigate social life and behavioral patterns of people who dwell in urban built environments. It also comments on urban politics which is about the governance within cities. Furthermore, it examines urban resource management and urban social divide focusing on urban living spaces and the realities of slums and urban poverty. Yet another dimension is urban geography which looks into aspects such as locations, transport, map, geography, cultural geography, economic geography and the core and Periphery of cities. A city's physical environment is examined to find out the various spatial relations that exist in urban and metropolitan locations.

Urban fiction studies is a literary analysis which focuses on what is often termed as street literature or street fiction. This form of study, which is also known as Literary Urban Studies, explores narratives and novels set in urban landscapes. Furthermore, it explains the sociocultural realities of an urban setting and their impacts on characters and Plot.

One of the major themes of urban fiction is that of violence which is triggered by urban crimes and social unrest. However, it could be

argued that urban experiences may vary according to demographic features such as religion, gender, ethnicity, age and so on. Gender plays a significant role in defining the urban experiences of characters. For instance, a working woman might look into aspects such as cooking, domestic chores and other household related problems as compared to male characters who might be more engaged in the professional spaces in a city.

Indian literary world has ample amount of urban fiction written by male, female and LGBTQ writers. These writers try to define Indian urban fiction by focusing on urban settings. Cities such as Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, New Delhi and other urban locations are particularly depicted in Indian English writing. Among the varied urban fiction in India, novels about Mumbai have attracted many readers. Works such as *Maximum City* by Suketu Mehta, *Love and longing in Bombay* by Vikram Chandra, *Family Matters* by Rohinton Mistry, *Milk Teeth* by Amrita Mahale, *Serious Men* by Manu Joseph and *Socialite Evenings* by Shobha De are some significant narratives set in Mumbai.

One can also find a legacy of Indian women writers occupying the literary urban spaces. Particularly in the New Millennium, many women writers have made the literary urbanscape very rich. These writers include Anita Nair, Anuja Chauhan, Arundhati Roy, Shobha De, Nikita Singh, Payal Kapadia and so on. All these writers foreground the images of urban women through their narratives, making their female protagonists to experience the cosmopolitan culture and the issues and dilemmas of modern womanhood.

Social and cultural theories about Indian women who occupy urban spaces are also significant in the context of this study. Shambunath discusses the problems and challenges faced by urban working women in India. He maintains that one of the major issues that the urban women face is the stress due to lack of balance between employment and family care.

He explains the significance of his study in the context of the new paradigms created by working women. He does not fail to highlight the problems which women have to address in playing a dual role:

Women today are breaking that boundary and are playing the dual role of balancing domestic life as well as professional life, giving a boost to their societal status in the process. The major problems for working women arise out of the dual responsibilities of the working women - domestic work as well as office work. Though more and more women are coming out in search of paid employment and their families also need their income, the attitude towards women and their role in the family has not undergone much change. (Shambunath 625)

One of the issues that working women face in Indian cities is that of domestic workers who are also known as maids. Due to low wages, precarity, poor working conditions and lack of legal protection, domestic workers create an unexpected tension in the economic and social realities of Indian cities. Nonetheless, women working in organizations with decent enough pay package find it often difficult to take domestic help workers. There are studies on the issues faced by household owners in managing domestic workers in Indian cities. Archana Kherde and Milind Peshave in a research paper argue that issues such as frequent absenteeism of maids can frustrate the household owners. They have come out with certain finding that could be considered significant in maid-household owner relationship:

12. “Uninformed absenteeism, irregular Timing and Expectation of Payment during Leaves” are most challenging factors faced by household owners.

- “Constant Demand for Money, Constant Close Supervision, and Threat of stealing/Theft and Lack of interest in work” are the least challenging factors faced by household owners.
- The major difference in challenges faced by male and female household owners is on “Irregular Timing and Constant Demand for Money” while “Constant Close Supervision and Threat of Stealing/Theft” is having least difference of opinion. (Kherde and Peshave 33)

Based on the above discussion, one can maintain that Indian urban working women have

their lives entangled with domestic workers. In the light of this awareness, it is possible to read Payal kapadia's *Maidless in Mumbai* to analyze the novelist perspective from working women in Mumbai and the practical household problems that they face. It is also possible to illustrate from Kapadia's narrative in support of the complex relationship between female domestic workers and female household owners.

Maidless in Mumbai, a novel by Payal Kapadia, explores the urban reality of finding and retaining maid/ domestic help in urban India, particularly in a city like Mumbai wherein the maid understands her priorities, does all the chores without complaint and takes sufficient responsibility to maintain the house. The novel, narrated in the form of a memoir, penned down with light humour and seems relatable to every Indian home. Furthermore, it is a tongue-in-cheek look at the typical madam-maid relationship, at a time when the urban dwellers have absolute dependence on domestic workers. But finding a reliable, loyal and forever in one's service kind of house help is akin to a pipe dream in today's scenario. When the protagonist finds herself 'maidless,' it becomes symbolic of how urban life, despite being up to the minute and breakneck, still adheres to conventional framework of domestic support. After many abortive attempts in hiring a perfect maid, the protagonist, Anu Narain states: "The thing is that every maid comes with an expiry date stamped on her forehead. We will never know the dread of losing a maid again because we will be one step ahead of inevitable heartbreak and never need one" (Kapadia 110).

Anu Narain, a zealous journalist by profession, grapples with the difficulties of balancing her professional goals with the demands of newly embraced motherhood, postpartum depression aggravated by the perpetual intervention of her Mother in Law (She mentions her as MIL throughout the novel), unending advice by proxy mothers (both Anu's mother and MIL), futile suggestions offered by her school friends/colleagues and the most significantly maidomania, a peculiar anxiety and reliance on domestic help that many urban Indian women experience.

The story has been told from a new mom's point of view throughout the novel, uncovering new perspectives of knowing things around, introspecting and keeping up the spirit of finding "that ideal maid" until the realization that "Being Maidless is such a blessing in disguise, I say" (Kapadia 117), leading to self-discovery and endless satisfaction and delight after each accomplishment in every role she plays with the each passing day. She states with a touch of irony about her status of a working mother in the urban setting: "I've turned maidless adversity into an opportunity for self-discovery. I know so much more about myself now. Such as, I am a cleaning cyclone. I can swab, wash dishes, and make beds faster than anyone else" (Kapadia 117).

Kapadia has portrayed a wide array of female characters in the novel, showcasing their diverse personalities, strengths, and vulnerabilities. These urban female characters often defy traditional gender roles and contribute significantly to the narrative, whether as protagonist, supporting characters, or villains. These include professionals, ex-professionals, stay-at-home moms, grandmothers, fellow residents (Aria, a giant Amoeba, The Stick, etc.) and house help /nannies with their unique terms and conditions (Maid Nirmala): sycophancy, pretence, derision, disbelief, selfishness, egotistic streak and fake show off, etc. The whole plot of the novel is interwoven in a diary form with Anu jotting down different episodes (with time mentioned) that occur throughout the day. Anu documents Nirmala's demands:

> Three sets of nighties, two towels, two pillow cases, one blanket, shampoo, a separate conditioner, please!' (She did say please.)
> 'Shower gel, soap dries up my skin,' she says (which makes sense). What else?
> 'A mobile phone plan. Fish, twice a week. Two hours of afternoon nap-time. And a Bengali newspaper subscription, because in Calcutta, everyone reads the paper. (Kapadia 49)

Female characters' hypocrisy is effectively exposed in this novel by Kapadia. For instance,

while Anu is rendered as the working woman, the maid, despite being one herself, becomes the subject of mockery just because she belongs to the underprivileged class. Another example is Anu's colleague Piya Prakash (Anu calls her Poor Piya) who steals Anu's big story and claims it hers. Another deceptive face is that of Anu's school march-past friend Mansi, who announces her pregnancy towards the end of the novel albeit she was shown advocating being child-free and maid-free. These women fit well in the urban society. Anu recollects Mansi's words: "I have bigger news than Anu's," says Mansi, looking uncomfortable. 'I'm having a baby!' (Kapadia 161).

The setting of the novel is mainly Anu's apartment, situated in Mumbai urban-scape, yet many places like hospital, Sceptic's office, playground, restaurants, spas, neighbor's'' place, etc. are mentioned to convince readers that it is every urban Indian's story and concern these days. Kapadia has vividly depicted public, private and social spaces of Mumbai in *Maidless in Mumbai.* She gives graphic account of urban domestic spaces such as living room, bedroom, kitchen, washroom, her wardrobe, etc. Depiction of household chores like laundry, cooking, washing, drying and ironing the nappies, baby feeding, etc. also compel readers to connect to the narrative, especially if they are new urban moms or moms-to-be. She also gives detailed account of the public spaces such as heroine's meet ups with her school friends in restaurants, visits to Paediatrician, obstetrician and Psychiatrist, neighbours'/ friends' places, garden, playground etc. These spatial units too represent the urban life. Anu's private space is her to-do lists, office space and diary in which she keeps a record of her childbirth experiences followed by maidomania and eventually self-discovery of being a super mom capable of accomplishing anything and everything even without any domestic support.

In Kapadia's *Maidless in Mumbai,* urban culture plays a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of its female characters, particularly through urban themes of gender, class, modernity, and complete dependence on house help. The novel humorously but insightfully analyses how household chores are still largely considered a woman's domain, regardless of her professional status and the urban progressive location. Here, too, Sameer, Anu's husband, is portrayed as an uninvolved father who does not initially extend much support to his wife in dealing with baby/ household chores. He is always presented as someone who is as busy as a beaver at office and hardly spends time with the family as a new father. The novel explores the hardships of balancing a career and familial/ motherhood responsibilities, highlighting the emotional and physical toll it takes on urban working women. Anu observes: "I behave like I've done this having-a-baby and-returning-to-work business a gazillion times before. Issuing last-minute commands to Deepu in brisk shorthand. Running through every item on Tara's daily schedule. And reminding Deepu that a copy is up on the fridge, just as a backup. Also up in my room'' (Kapadia 68).

Urban spaces can be both empowering and isolating. Female friendships and support networks (like minded group in the novel) become crucial for emotional survival in a city that is both opportunity-laden and alienating. When women meet their friends at parks, playground, restaurants, cafes, get together and spas, etc. they are often found talking about their maids, families, and social constraints, providing an ironical yet candid look at how urban women cope with their inner conflicts. While the protagonist and her peers navigate a liberal, fast-paced city life, they are still often judged by traditional standards—how well they manage their households, raise their children, or maintain a certain image in society. The novel contrasts traditional roles with modern aspirations. For instance, both the proxy moms are shown dispensing free and unending advice to the new mom which she finds harsh and undesirable at times. Anu documents the urban working woman's difficulty in having mother or mother in law at home and retaining a maid: "Mom and MIL have joined the Proxy Moms Club. Proxy Moms have many common activities to bring them together. Such as occupying homes with babies in them. Sipping tea. Dispensing advice more freely than food rations from the Red Cross. Bulling Birth

Moms. Oh, and driving away potential maids" (Kapadia 35).

Kapadia's novel also subtly shows how class overlaps with gender. Not all women are heaven-sent to grab Mumbai's urban opportunities, and some are more vulnerable to exploitation, highlighting inequality even within the same city. For instance, Nannies or governesses are English educated and hence demand high salary over maids or house help who are hardly educated. Anu observes this divide in urban space:"Maria and I have a rendezvous at the nearest ATM. 'I am a nanny, not a maid', says Maria, crossing her arms. "I can read and write in English, follow recipes, and type" (Kapadia 39). Kapadia in *Maidless in Mumbai* offers amusing yet distressing picture of how the urban environment shapes the lives and relationships of its female characters, particularly in the context of domestic toil, family undercurrents, and career goals. It explores the complex realities of working women and their search for balance in a fast-paced city like Mumbai. Anu Narain, is caught in a vortex of urban relations involving house help, family dynamics, and the pressures of being a working mother in a busy city. The central theme revolves around the search for a reliable maid and the impact of this search on Anu's life and associations. Anu's relationships with her husband, mother-in-law and mother are strained, particularly as she navigates the demands of motherhood and her career. The presence of the mothers adds another layer to the household woe, with the potential for conflict and different perspectives on child-rearing and household management. She states: "I call Sonia to complain about the poor old ladies who will drive all my maids away if I don't stop them. 'Slip the maid something extra on the side,' she says. 'How do you think Janaki survives my mother-in-law?' (Kapadia 27).

Anu's professional life as a reporter is a significant aspect of her urban experience, adding to the pressure of balancing work and family. She juggles between the challenges of being a working mother in a fast-paced city and the workplace tasks/challenges. The novel also touches upon the societal expectations placed on women in Mumbai, particularly regarding motherhood, gender roles and household responsibilities. The narrative wraps up on an empowering note, celebrating both the imperfections and victories of a maidless, multitasking life.

Conclusion:

The novel explores the existential tragedies of being maidless in India (particularly in Mumbai), highlighting the societal pressures and norms that contribute to the dependence on domestic help. Despite the struggles and absurdities, there is a sense of triumph in reclaiming control and finding strength in independence. Anu's struggle for a perfect maid, her resilience and shift in perspectives about a perfect maid, illustrating that while the ideal of a perfect maid may be unattainable, the strength derived from adaptability, shared responsibility, and self-compassion enables urban working women to navigate the unpredictable landscape of modern parenthood with greater confidence and grace. Although, the novel's end doesn't provide a quick fix to the problem of finding and retaining 'that one perfect maid', but instead, subtly encourages urban working women/ new mothers to embrace self-sufficiency and take on more responsibilities for their homes and lives rather than solely relying on domestic/external help.

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61.

Rap of Resistance: Exploring Resistance in Hanumankind's and *Gully Boy's* Rap Songs

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Abstract

When Sooraj Cherukat, aka Hanumankind, and his team released the single "Big Dawgs" on July 10, 2024, it became a sensation worldwide, resonating with everyone across the globe, especially among the youth. The song sparked worldwide conversations about him and the video. Set inside the "Maut ka Kuan" (Wheel of Death), which is a circus that travels many regions across different villages in India, "Big Dawgs" revolves around the stunt artists performing inside this wheel. The high beats of hip hop resonate with the stunts along with lyrics which reflect the oppression brown people face throughout the world in the post-colonial era and the misrepresentation of India in popular culture. Humankind and his team came with another hit, "Run It Up" in 2025, showcasing Martial arts forms of India, which have lost fame over time. The songs reflect the growing interest of youth in resisting dominant culture through rap. Coming to Zoya Akhtar's film *Gully Boy* (2019), which is set in the slums of Dharavi, Mumbai, the film explores the life of the underdog street rapper Murad Ahmed. With a passion for rap and hip hop, he expresses the inequalities he faces at his job, belonging to a minority community. *Gully Boy* is inspired by the lives of rappers DIVINE and Naezy. The film explores the struggles of rappers in India and resistance against the class and government systems. The song "Apna Time Ayega" became a national anthem as it resists the hegemonic structure of the society, gives hope to the marginalized sections of the society, and inspires hard work. This paper will analyze the lyrics in Hanumankind's singles and the songs from *Gully Boy,* which show a resistance towards the dominant culture and reflect the power of popular culture to give agency to the masses.

Keywords: Rap Songs, Resistance, Popular Culture, Dominant Culture, Cultural Representation.

Introduction

A rapper is like a jester in Shakespeare's plays who always tells the truth to the aristocrats and gives social commentary. Hip hop and rap evolved from the lived experiences of the African American youth in Southern America and its revolutionary street culture. It was ''incubated in the black community's house parties, public parks, housing projects, and local jams'' (Powell and Rose 245-59). Rap songs are notoriously known to incorporate themes of alcohol use, drug use, misogyny, masculinity, references to sex and violence, but there are positive themes as well, such as social commentary and cultural representation. A study by Weitzer and Kubrin found that Misogyny was present in 22% of the 403 songs (N = 90 songs, by 31 rappers). The research indicated that misogyny is much less prominent in rap music than some critics believe, but it is still relevant in a few themes (11). The study by Weitzer and Kubrin also indicates that the producers and composers in the industry, to make a profit, deliberately pressured others to use profane language and discouraged those who wanted to resist the system. As a result of such practices, a direct proportional relationship has developed between rap music's explicitness in promoting male hegemonic power through the usage of misogynistic lyrics and the sale of its records. It is also to be noted that Rap is monolithic; it has various themes and genres (6-

26). Those who usually dislike rap songs focus more on the words that trigger them, rather than focusing on the story that it tries to convey (Jorgenson). Those from high culture find the description of realities in the ghettos to be uncomfortable. Rap conveys stories like poetry, spontaneous expression of powerful feelings (Wordsworth 180), but not the emotions recollected in tranquility, but instead in resistance.

Hailing from Houston and travelling across many other countries, Sooraj Cherukat, aka Hanumankind, left his corporate job and pursued music full time to get inspired by the places he stayed at, which left a lasting impact on him. His experience as a brown person in America and the racism along with it are reflected in his works. In a *YouTube* video titled "Hanumankind - the Making of 'Big Dawgs' | Vevo Footnotes.", he talks about the inspiration for the lyrics of "Big Dawgs."

> "The lyrics were inspired by the things we were going through at the time. There's always insights into my culture and people in my writing as well, so a blend of people in my writing as well, so a blend of both." ("Hanumankind" 2:26-29)

As he called Houston his 'second home' in the interview, he was highly inspired by the street rappers of Houston and Memphis. ("Hanumankind" 1:46-1:50). His songs are incomplete without the accompaniment of the videos of the songs, which were directed by Bijoy Shetty. They showcase the primitive and popular art forms of India, which he represents to the world. He released "Big Dawgs" in 2024 and "Run It Up" along with the producer Kalmi in 2025, which received a lot of appreciation throughout the world and started a lot of discussions. No one could imagine that hip hop could be brought inside the "Maut ka Kuaan" (Wheel of Death) of a small village in Kerala. His videos and songs are genre-defining and will continue to inspire everyone even after a long time.

Gully Boy draws inspiration from the lives of real-life Indian hip-hop artists Divine and Naezy, who are widely known as "*gully*" (street) rappers. Their music has long reflected the harsh realities, daily struggles, and deep-rooted social discrimination faced by the residents of Dharavi, Asia's largest slum. It is the voice of these people who demand justice and not pity. Their raps about class, caste, and poverty resonated with many around the nation, especially among younger generations. The film brought their work to the mainstream, and with a big Bollywood star like Ranveer Singh as the main lead, it earned the genre a wider audience. (Arora) Struggling to live up to his father's expectations, Murad gets inspired when he sees MC Sher doing a live hip hop performance at his college and he finds out that music is the best tool to battle societal, caste and class structure in the society, a verbal battle and a message to the dominant class without the use of physical battle and bloodshed. Drawing inspiration from American street rappers, *Gully Boy* (2019) brings hip-hop to the lanes ("gullies") of Dharavi, empowering the underdogs of these streets with its powerful social commentary. The fast-paced lyrics bring out the spontaneous swagger replies to society by the rappers. With influences from American hip-hop and the streets, the film has been a platform for rappers from Dharavi to showcase their less-represented talents. The rap songs are adapted to Indian vernacular languages like Hindi and Urdu for the authentic expression of the people. Although the genre has been predominantly male-dominated, female artists like Raja Kumari are steadily making their mark and gaining popularity. (Arora) "In India, hip-hop culture is becoming increasingly popular, with 18- to 34-year-olds driving consumption for rap across the country," said Amarjit Batra, the managing director of Spotify India. (Aroa). *Gully Boy* also tries to encourage "Asli hip hop" (true hip hop) culture, as hip hop songs are usually about songs expressing how much money a person has, and it is also seen through the attire they adorn in the video, with explicit gold jewelry and bundles of cash with them. *Gully Boy* and Hanumankind challenge this stereotype by promoting a true underdog and letting those who were deliberately silenced or, preferably, unheard (Roy), be heard again. In an interview published by *Homegrown* with the directors of "Big Dawgs", Bijoy Shetty said that he refused Hanumankind's idea of looking like a

typical flashy rap artist to connect more with the masses. His response was in these words:

> "He was like, I want to wear a jacket; I want to wear something flashy, and I told him, no money on - let's not try to idealize you. You are a part of the boys; you're a part of everybody over here. We don't want to sort of like make you into this guy. We want you to be the torchbearer of the homegrown scene." (Khan)

Being authentic to their roots and culture is the main goal in the rap song instead of adapting to the western popular culture to resist it just as a study by Bonnie Mitchell and Joe Feagin contends that non-European groups—including African Americans, American Indians, and Mexican Americans—rely on their cultural traditions to resist oppression (65-86). The argument presented by Frantz Fanon also supports the idea that the natives have to promote cultural nationalism to go back to their roots and oppose dominant ideologies and, in turn, influence the dominant culture (Nayar 157). Their roots, cultures, identities, languages, way of living, and art forms become a form of oppositional culture to the dominant culture. (Stuckey 1987; Scott 1990).

Scope of the study:

Rap songs, though known for being misogynistic, promoting substance use, alcoholism, and violence, can spark a revolution in society, as they mean much more than that. It can bring about changes reflecting the harsh realities of the marginalized in the postcolonial countries. This study will highlight how rap songs can bring about a revolution and bring out the voices of people who need to express their living conditions. It will also analyze how rap is a social commentary of society and has to be viewed from this perspective instead of in terms of vulgarity and promoting violence. The lyrics reflect how hip hop brings out the best in the artist and is a hope for many street rappers throughout the world. Hip hop and rap songs are getting recognition worldwide, with Kendrick Lamar, the American rapper, winning the Pulitzer Prize for music in 2018, bringing the genre to the mainstream culture, where classical and jazz music dominated (Weese).

Limitations of the study

The study is restricted only to a limited number of rap songs by Hanumankind and from the film *Gully Boy,* which limits the generalization of the study. Many upcoming and small artists compose rap songs that defy the dominant culture and compose songs in various genres through rap.

The singers and composers of the rap songs chosen for the study are primarily restricted to male artists; there are also several female rappers and composers, including India's Raja Kumari and Eva B, who is recognized as Pakistan's first female rapper (Arora).

The research may not account for how different audiences interpret or respond to these acts of resistance in the rap songs, which can limit understanding of the real-world impact of the messages. The role of the music industry, commercial pressures, and censorship in shaping what resistance can be expressed may restrict a thorough analysis of resistance in the lyrics.Rap songs are not just about the lyrics; it's also about the tone, production, visuals, the people, and the actions, which also convey deeper meaning. Limiting the analysis to lyrics might miss other forms of resistance present in delivery, visuals, or musical style.

Objectives of the study

To analyze the lyrics and find the elements of resistance against the hegemonic and social structures of the society.

To understand the sociopolitical context, background, and inspiration of the lyrics of the rap songs chosen for study.

To analyze the postcolonial discourse within the rap songs as a means to promote cultural nationalism.

Research Methodology

The data in this research is collected from secondary sources and is qualitative research which include review of literature from research papers from reputed journals, interviews, news reports, theories on popular culture, youth culture and an analysis of the lyrics from the songs "Big Dawgs", "Run it up" by the artist Hanumankind, and "Shah Rule vs Murad" rap battle and "Azadi" (Freedom) from the film *Gully Boy* written by Reema Kagti and Zoya Akhtar.

Discussion

Hanumankind, though has Indian roots but has a postcolonial identity. He produces the

lyrics in English but has his native elements in it, as the lyrics come naturally to him in English, as he mentioned in an interview. According to a compilation of contemporary literary and cultural theories by Pramod K. Nayar some seek a more hybrid nature for language identity– Derek Walcott (1986[1962]) and Salman Rushdie (1991) have argued that English gets *nativized,* it does not solely belong to the Englishmen, it is now a part of expression of the people who were colonized which does not reduce the force of the expression (168). Hanumankind also had the responsibility of representing India globally, so English and hip hop helped him reach the audience globally.

Songs and Rap battles from *Gully Boy* and Hanumankind express a form of resistance against racial and class discrimination. Some of them are as follows:

Anger against Racial Discrimination and Dominant Culture

Straight terror, product of your errors
Pushin' culture, baby, got that product you can't measure (product you can't measure) ("Hanumankind" 0:30-0:33)

When life isn't free for a person, dawg
You act like an animal cornered
Savages speak in a language y'all
You don't understand, you a foreigner ("Hanumankind" 2:19-24)

These words express how the native brown people are seen as the 'Other' and dehumanized as a "product of your errors", 'your' and 'you' here most likely signifying the white people the colonial master's constant representation of the native as a non-human, animalized 'thing' which annihilates the identity of the native. (Frantz Fanon,1963). The native is also someone who can't be comprehended by the white people, so their culture is a product which can't be measured by the dominant culture.

Uh, the skin color like the bourbon
A worldwide sign that we face close curtains (close curtains) ("Hanumankind" 1:51-53)

In school, I used to fight the bullies, now I'm fightin' with the law
Guess some things don't leave you fully (yessir) ("Hanumankind" 2:12-15)

I want the money, the cash, the moola, the bag, the currency, stacking it up (yeah)
We want the freedom to live and the freedom to have the things we been lackin', my bruh
So what are we lackin'? (Huh?) ("Hanumankind" 1:52-56)

These lines capture the experience of Brown people throughout the world who face discrimination because of their colour and the writer's experience as mentioned before. The lines also represent mistrust in the system that even laws are biased, and the ones who are marginalized need to fight bullies in school, as well as the discrimination they face because of the unbalanced law and order. The lines also indicate a turn towards capitalism, of wanting money. According to Aime Cesaire, the main motive of colonialism was profit, and it destroyed community-centred, anti-capitalist native cultures with the colonial capitalist one. (Nayar 159). But the lyrics also mention "I put money down on all of us on my people now, on what I love," which shows a sense of coming back to the community-centred roots. The inspiration for dogs is also from the rap song 'Dogs Out' by DMX, released in 2003, which shows revolting street rappers in America.

Against the Class System

In a Rap battle scene in *Gully Boy,* the protagonist Murad is challenged to battle with a stereotypical flashy rap artist named Shah Rule. Shah Rule mocks Murad, who from Dharavi comes from a humble background in tattered clothes. The main points of discrimination and Murad's replies are as follows:

Shah Rule: Rap Game tere bas ka na tu dhone aa jaa meri gaadi
(Rap is not your thing, you come to wash my car)
Lele paise jaa aish kar le bhikaari
(Take this money and have fun, beggar.)
Nau se 5 hai tera kam tu to galliyon me kutta hai
(Your job is 9 to 5, you are a street dog)
Wah kya design hai iske kapdo par paseena
(What design his clothes have, full of sweat)
Sadaak chaap aukat teri mushkil kar du jeena
(I will make your life difficult)
Tere soch me kachra, ghar bhi kachra, kachre pe tu banta hai
(your thoughts, house, and you are trash)
Ma ko sadi dila tu ye ek rupaiy ki bheek le
(Go buy your mom a saree, take this 1 rupee)

Murad: Bahata hu me khoon paseena ab bahau tere aansu kya
(I sweat out of hard work, now I'll make you cry)
Vohi kapde me baar baar peheu par har bar laagu me dhaasu
(I wear the same clothes many times, but I look dashing every time)
Kapde silaye maine apne khud ke dam pe nahi liye maine apne baap se
(I stitched these clothes on my own, not from my father's money)
Teri akal itni kam hai jitni meri Maa ke pass sadiyaan
(Your wisdom is less than the number of sarees my mom has)
Toodunga me har taarazu tu kya mujhe tolega
(I'll break the balance, who are you to measure me?)
Tere kaale noteon ki to raid lag gayi ab ye sikka mera bolega.
(Your black money got raided, now my one rupee will speak) ("Excel" 0:43-3:45)

This battle highlights the huge income gaps in India, where there are millionaires and slums side by side, especially in Dharavi. In a study by the researcher Melissa Nisbett, who visited Mumbai and found huge disparities in the living conditions of the people. She saw the 'Antilla' world's most expensive residential property, the residence of Mukesh Ambani, who is one of the richest people in the world, and the slums of Dharavi, where people live on barely 1.25 dollars a day in cramped places. She did a survey of the slum tour reviews and found out that the slum tours were empowering the western tourists who looked at the hard work, resourcefulness, and neighbourliness of those living in the slums instead of highlighting their living conditions, the poverty, and unsanitary conditions (37). Just like that, in this battle, Murad resists the class structure without pitying his situation. The same point is reiterated in "Big Dawgs" in the following lines:

They ask me, "How you be like this? (What?)
How do you live like this? (What? What? What?)"
Why you worried 'bout it, ho? Get up off my d**k (get up off my d**k) ("Hanumankind" 1:23-28)

Distrust in the System

The song "Aazadi" in *Gully Boy,* written and sung by DIVINE and Dub Sharma, expresses distrust in the government system and the necessity to speak up against the wrongdoings of the government. Some of the lines, for example, are:

Bahuth Baithe Chup Chaap
(We sat quiet for too long)
Kya ghante ka insaaf
(There is no justice)
Desh kaise hoga saaf
(How will the country change?)
Inki neeyat me hai daagh
(There's maliciousness in their intentions)
Sirf karte rahenge baat
(They just keep talking)
Vote milne par ye khaas
(They are nice only when they get votes.)
Phir gayab poore saal
(After that, they disappear)
Baaki poora desh doobe
(When the country sinks)
Inki naiyaan par hai
(They stay afloat)
Dharam ke naam pe kaam vahi
(They do all the work in the name of religion.)
Dharam banaya insaan nahi
(They made a religion, not humans)
Paison ke liye tha sabhi
(It was all for Money)
Dimaag lada kar jaan abhi
(Use your common sense now)
Dhyaan se laga tu kaan abhi
(Listen carefully now)
Istemaal kar tu zabaan kabhi
(Raise your voice) ("Zee Music" 0:38-2:02)

This song is a message for all the underdog street rappers in India especially to raise their voice against the injustice inflicted upon them and to raise their voice through rap to resist against the power structure in the society, especially in Dharavi, which is resourceful and an economic hub but where living conditions are the worst.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Thus, to conclude, this study attempts to change the perception of rap music. It has to be seen as an important part of the popular culture of the society, apart from its vulgarity and violence, which reflect the conditions in which people live. It's the experience of the slums and the ghettos, and an important part of their resistance. The songs reflect the need for change in society and to honor people without pitying them.

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62.

Representation of Colour Burst and Life Affirming Friendship—A Comparative Analysis of Vikas Khanna's *The Last Color* and its Film Adaptation

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Abstract: Adaptation Studies is an interdisciplinary engagement with literary and cultural adaptations across media. It explains the processes and difficulties of rendering a text into film apart from exploring the social, cultural, aesthetic and communicative implications of adaptations. Furthermore, Adaptation Studies bring literary insights into audio visual text and audio visual analytical tools into literary studies. In the wake of the popularity of novels being adapted into films, an adaptation studies perspective can add intermedia and transmedia perspectives on cultural texts.

This paper analyses, in an inter semiotic mode, Vikas Khanna's novel *The Last Color* and its film adaptation to show the text to screen transformation of two important themes – colour burst and life affirming friendship. It focuses on the textual and the visual coding of colours that characterize Holi. It also examines the verbal and visual representations of life, affirmation through female solidarity as practiced by Noor and Chotti. The theme of life affirmation is rendered as the enabling impulse in the lives of widows in the backdrop of the orthodox settings of Varanasi. The paper deploys the methods of close reading and Film Studies to bring out the nuances of color burst and life affirmation.

Keywords: Adaptation Studies, Life affirmation, Color burst, Transformation.

Introduction:

Adaptation Studies is an interdisciplinary field that explores the transformation of literary texts into visual narratives, examining the shifts in meaning, aesthetics, and cultural context during the process. "While adaptation is often understood as the reimagining of a story across different media, it is, in essence, an act of translation—one that involves not only linguistic conversion but also the negotiation of visual, cultural, and narrative codes" (Hutcheon 7). In its broadest sense, adaptation is an inter-semiotic practice, wherein a written text is reinterpreted through the audiovisual language of cinema. This shift is not merely a replication but an act of creative transposition, involving decisions about characterization, setting, and symbolism that can either reinforce or subvert the original narrative.

The study of adaptations is particularly relevant in the context of Indian literature and cinema, where storytelling traditions are deeply entrenched in cultural and visual semiotics. In the past few decades, Indian cinema has witnessed an increasing number of literary adaptations that seek to bring regional and marginalized narratives to a wider audience. Vikas Khanna's *The Last Color* (2018) is one such text that, through its film adaptation (2019), transforms the written story into a cinematic experience while retaining its core themes of colour, social justice, and female solidarity.

Adaptation of Social, Cultural, and Aesthetic Elements from Text to Film:

Adaptation, as a process of translating stories across different media, involves a complex negotiation between social, cultural, and aesthetic elements. Film adaptations often

reframe or reinterpret literary texts to fit new visual, auditory, and narrative conventions. While some argue that adaptations must remain faithful to their source material, others emphasize the transformative power of adaptation, suggesting that each medium carries its own artistic and cultural imperatives.

Robert Stam, a key scholar in Adaptation Studies, argues that "adaptation is less about reproduction and more about re-creation, an intertextual engagement that makes meaning within the cultural and ideological conditions of its time" (Stam 3). This means that adapting a literary text into film is not a mere duplication but an act of cultural re-signification, where social and historical contexts, audience's expectations, and cinematic techniques shape the final product.

Social elements in adaptations include the representation of marginalized groups, shifts in gender roles, or political and economic factors. For instance, Indian adaptations frequently reinterpret themes of class, caste, and gender through a contemporary lens, engaging with evolving social narratives. In Bollywood and regional cinema, adaptation has often been a medium for challenging or reinforcing dominant social ideologies. Priya Joshi notes, "Indian cinema often transforms literary texts to better align with contemporary political concerns, sometimes modifying narratives to reflect nationalist, feminist, or social justice themes" (Joshi 118).

Cultural elements in adaptation include language, setting, and traditional practices, which may be altered to increase accessibility for audiences. For example, films often relocate narratives to different temporal or geographical settings, updating cultural references to make them more relatable to modern viewers. Hutcheon states, "adaptation is a cultural practice that is always situated in a historical moment and in dialogue with contemporary issues" (Hutcheon 31). This reinforces that adaptations are not static retellings but dynamic cultural engagements.

Aesthetic elements, such as performance, cinematography, acoustic design, and visual composition, play a crucial role in how adaptations reinterpret literary themes. While literature relies on internal monologues and narration to explore a character's thoughts, films must externalize these emotions through symbolism, colour palettes, and visual metaphors. As Andrew Higson explains, "Cinema translates the written word into an embodied visual experience, using mise-en-scène, camera angles, and editing to articulate subtext that literature conveys through language" (Higson 92).

Life Affirmation in Friendship and Women's Writing in India:

The theme of life-affirming friendship is a recurrent motif in women's literature, particularly in Indian writing, where female bonds serve as sites of emotional refuge and defiance against patriarchal norms. Women's writing in India has frequently challenged traditional narratives of female isolation and dependence on male figures, instead emphasizing solidarity, companionship, and shared resilience.

Gauri Deshpande, a prominent Indian writer, explores female friendships as spaces of resistance against societal expectations. In her works, friendships between women become sources of empowerment, allowing characters to articulate desires and ambitions that conventional familial structures suppress. As Anjali Nerlekar notes, "Deshpande's narratives reconstruct female intimacy as an alternative to patriarchal institutions, offering a model of interdependence and mutual strength" (Nerlekar 156).

Similarly, Anita Nair's novels often depict friendships as life-affirming forces that help women reclaim agency in their personal lives. In *Ladies Coupé,* the protagonist Akhila, after years of societal conditioning, finds solace and strength in the stories of other women, ultimately leading her to make independent choices. This aligns with Chandra Talpade Mohanty's argument that "female solidarity, when framed outside hierarchical structures, becomes an act of survival and liberation" (Mohanty 142).

Indian chick-lit, a genre spearheaded by authors like Anuja Chauhan, presents a modern take on female friendships. Unlike traditional narratives that focus on romantic fulfillment,

chick-lit novels prioritize friendships as central to personal growth and self-discovery. As Meenakshi Malhotra opines, "The Indian chick-lit heroine often finds her greatest support in her female friendships rather than romantic relationships, which marks a significant departure from conventional storytelling" (Malhotra 87).

The life-affirming power of friendship, as depicted in Indian literature, serves a dual purpose: it challenges existing gender hierarchies while also providing an emotional and psychological framework for women's self-actualization. Whether through intellectual companionship, emotional solidarity, or shared struggles, these relationships offer pathways to autonomy and fulfillment in ways that traditional institutions often fail to provide.

Colours, Art and Communication:

Colour has long been a powerful cultural and symbolic marker, used to convey emotion, identity, and transformation. Across literature, art, and cinema, colours carry layered meanings that are often historically, culturally, and contextually shaped. Whether representing joy and celebration or repression and exclusion, colours serve as a visual language that communicates beyond words.

In many traditions, colours define the transitions of life—from birth and marriage to mourning and renunciation. White, for instance, has historically symbolized both purity and erasure. In South Asian cultures, it is the colour worn by widows, signifying their withdrawal from worldly pleasures. This coding of white aligns with Roland Barthes' concept of mythologies, where he argues that "colors do not exist in isolation but within systems of meaning that encode power structures and societal expectations" (Barthes 102).

In *Chromophobia,* David Batchelor argues that Western culture has historically associated colour with excess, irrationality, and the feminine, while privileging white and monochrome as symbols of purity and order. He states, "Color has been systematically marginalized, reviled, diminished, and degraded in Western culture, linked to the primitive, the oriental, the infantile, the feminine, the vulgar, and the pathological" (Batchelor 22).

Conversely, in Asian cultures, vibrant colours—red, yellow, blue, pink, green—are associated with festivals, fertility, and life energy. The festival of Holi, often referred to as the "festival of colors," is deeply symbolic, marking the arrival of spring and the triumph of joy over sorrow. The act of throwing colours transcends mere festivity; it functions as a visual and tactile transformation, signifying a temporary blurring of social distinctions. As Sudhir Kakar observes, "Holi is a momentary rupture in rigid social order, allowing for expressions of freedom, transgression, and renewal" (Kakar 58). Beyond Holi, colours are woven into everyday Indian life, from the bright sindoor (vermillion) marking marital status to saffron robes symbolizing renunciation. Each hue holds associations that shift depending on its wearer and context.

The cinematic use of colours similarly evokes mood, meaning, and transformation. In films, colour palettes are carefully chosen to guide audience's perception. As André Bazin suggests, "In cinema, colour is never accidental; it is an active participant in storytelling, shaping the viewer's emotional response" (Bazin 113). The absence or presence of colour in a film's mise-en-scène can denote isolation, oppression, celebration, or rebirth.

Film theorist, Sergei Eisenstein explored how colour, like montage, could serve as a psychological and narrative device. He notes, "Color in film is not merely decoration; it is an active force that transforms perception, evokes emotion, and constructs meaning within the frame" (Eisenstein 134). Thus, colour is more than an artistic element—it is a narrative force that reflects and transforms human experience. Whether in literature or film, the burst of colour signifies a break from monotony, an assertion of life, and a moment of transcendence.

Comparative Analysis of the Novel and its Film Adaptation:

The adaptation of *The Last Color* from novel to film presents a rich intertextual dialogue, exploring the text-to-screen transformation of two central themes: life-affirming friendship and the symbolism of colour burst. Both texts engage with social exclusion, resilience, and the power of

reclaiming joy, yet their modes of representation differ. While the novel's introspective prose delves into emotional depth, the film externalizes these struggles through evocative visuals, cinematic techniques, and sensory imagery.

Life-Affirming Friendship: Noor and Chhoti's Bond across Media:

One of the most significant aspects of *The Last Color* is the bond between Noor, the widow, and Chhoti, the street performer, which serves as a lifeline against societal exclusion. In both texts, this relationship subverts traditional narratives of female isolation, offering an alternative model of solidarity and emotional survival. However, the two different media shape their portrayal differently—the novel privileges Noor's interior monologues, while the film emphasizes the physicality and gestures of care that define their bond.

In the novel, Noor's friendship with Chhoti unfolds in lyrical, introspective passages. Noor, resigned to a life of whiteness and renunciation, slowly begins to find colour—both metaphorically and literally—through Chhoti. She muses, "She came with her laughter, her street tricks, and her eyes filled with mischief. She brought color to my world, and I feared how much I needed it" (Khanna 112). The novel uses Noor's hesitant acceptance of companionship as a marker of her gradual return to life, illustrating how friendship acts as an antidote to social erasure. This friendship bond remains and is reaffirmed when Chotti visits the ashram in Varanasi years after Noor's death and finds:

> She pulled the long-hidden bundle put, pulled off the plastic wrap with trembling fingers, opened it to the first page, and traced the first line with her finger. It said, "Meri Choti, Mera Chand," in Hindi. The simple line almost exploded the floodgates she had erected around her heart. The word "meri" is a small one, but it's a word with the potential to change the course of the universe. (Khanna 23)

The film translates the theme of female bonding into a visual language, replacing Noor's internal soliloquies with lingering close-ups, hand-held shots, and lighting contrasts. Neena Gupta's portrayal of Noor relies on expressions rather than words, conveying her silent longing for connection. In one striking moment, Noor hesitantly touches the vibrant fabric of Chhoti's dress, a simple yet powerful act of engaging with colour and life. Vikas Khanna's directorial choices emphasize gesture over dialogue, reinforcing how friendship is often felt rather than spoken.

Further, the film expands on this bond through collective solidarity. Unlike the novel, which focuses primarily on Noor and Chhoti, the film extends its gaze to other widows in Varanasi, depicting them as a muted, monochrome mass before their transformation. This chromatic shift takes the narrative from an individual friendship to a broader communal awakening, a choice that aligns with cinematic tendencies to amplify social themes for visual impact.

The bond between Noor and Chhoti is the heart of both the novel and the film, but its portrayal shifts in adaptation. In the novel, their friendship is built through quiet moments, shared silences, and unspoken understanding: "She never asked why I wore white. She never asked why I did not dance. She only asked if I was hungry" (Khanna 112). These lines record Chhoti's instinctive kindness, emphasizing that care and solidarity do not need grand declarations—sometimes, they exist in the simplest of gestures. In the film, their relationship is externalized through physical interactions and visual storytelling. One added scene that is absent in the novel shows Noor braiding Chhoti's hair, a deeply maternal act, symbolizing intimacy and protection. This small moment visually reinforces their bond, showing that Noor, despite her oppression, still has love to give.

The theme of gender solidarity is further amplified in the film's climax, where other widows hesitantly join Noor in the Holi celebration. This communal reclaiming of colour is a cinematic expansion of the novel's message, aligning with feminist theories on collective resistance. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty asserts, "Women's solidarity is not just the rejection of oppression but the active construction of new, self-defined identities" (Mohanty 41). The film literalizes this idea by making Noor's transformation a collective experience, rather than an individual one.

Revolutionary Color Burst: A Visual and Narrative Inversion of Cultural Chromatic Codes:

The Last Color, both, the novel and the film employ colour as a complex symbol, though they do so in distinct ways. The novel uses colour metaphorically, often tying it to memory, loss, and desire: In the novel, Noor's voice dominates the storytelling, making her pain, isolation, and transformation deeply personal. Her reflections on widowhood are laden with melancholy and longing, reinforcing the rigid societal norms that seek to erase her presence: "I had learned to exist in silence. White had become my second skin, my armor, my punishment" (Khanna 36). This passage establishes Noor's internalized oppression, depicting whiteness not as a symbol of purity but as a suffocating absence of identity. The film, however, relies on visual storytelling to communicate these emotions. Noor is often shown in dimly lit spaces, framed within doorways or behind temple pillars, emphasizing her confinement within tradition and loss.

One notable addition in the film is the use of saffron (kesari) as a transitional colour, appearing subtly before Noor fully embraces Holi. Saffron, often associated with renunciation and asceticism, suggests Noor's transition from imposed widowhood to self-chosen liberation. This is a nuance the novel implies but never explicitly visualizes, making it an example of how cinema can add layers of meaning through purely visual means.

In the novel, Noor's relationship with colour is one of tension and longing. Having been denied colours for years, she watches others celebrate Holi but never participates. She reflects, "To touch the gulal was to sin, to allow it on my skin was to forget who I was supposed to be" (Khanna 189). These lines capture the rigid social conditioning that links colour to identity, a theme that finds cinematic articulation through the film's visual storytelling.

In the novel, Noor's first contact with colour is a slow, almost meditative experience, described in sensory-rich prose: "A flicker of yellow landed on my hand, startling me. Then another. A wave of color moved toward me, enveloping me, painting me back into existence" (Khanna 183). The imagery of colour as a force that 'paints her back into existence' highlights its transformative power, suggesting that Noor's re-entry into the world is not a choice, but an inevitability—something she had been yearning for all along.

The colour burst scene is one of the most striking differences in adaptation. In contrast to the novel, the film amplifies this moment through visual and kinetic energy. In the climactic Holi sequence, Noor stands still as Chhoti hurls pink gulal at her, the scene unfolds in slow motion, as Noor, initially stiff with hesitation, is suddenly drenched in colour. The colours cling to her skin, dissolving years of enforced whiteness, symbolizing a return to life, agency, and joy. The camera lingers on the powder swirling in the air, the vivid pigments clinging to her white sari, until she finally laughs—her first uninhibited expression of joy. Unlike the novel, which describes Noor's emotional reaction in words, the film conveys her transformation entirely through her body's response—her eyes widening, her lips parting in an unspoken acknowledgment of freedom. The film's use of orchestral music swelling in the background intensifies the emotional catharsis, making the moment feel like a release, a long-awaited rupture of silence and oppression.

Another key difference is Chhoti's role in the colour burst scene. In the novel, Noor walks into the celebration hesitantly, while in the film, Chhoti boldly smears Noor's face with colour first, an act of childlike defiance and affection. This addition strengthens the idea that Noor's liberation is not just personal, but communal, facilitated by love and solidarity.

While Holi serves as the most dramatic representation of colours, both the novel and film feature other significant instances where colours carry symbolic meaning. In the novel, Noor's white attire is repeatedly contrasted with the colourful world around her, emphasizing her erasure from life's vibrancy. She observes the bazaars of Varanasi, filled with bright fabrics, turmeric, and sindoor, but remains an outsider to this world: "The market was alive in saffron and marigold, in reds that burned like embers. I was the ghost among them, my white sari

swallowing me whole" (Khanna 78). In the film, this contrast is visualized through lighting and set design. Noor is often filmed against muted, colourless backdrops, while scenes of daily life in Varanasi burst with reds, blues, and yellows. This visual disparity makes her alienation more pronounced, without needing exposition.

The red bangles in the novel, is an instance of colour nostalgia, Noor reminisces about her wedding day, describing how her hands were once adorned with red bangles, a symbol of marriage and vitality: "My wrists jingled with red glass, a song of love and belonging. Now, they were silent, bare, erased" (Khanna 56). The loss of red signifies Noor's forced detachment from womanhood, an absence that the colour burst later reverses. "I had forgotten the feeling of red against my skin. I had forgotten what it meant to wear color without shame" (Khanna 129). Here, red is more than a pigment—it is a lost identity, a buried emotion, a forbidden indulgence. The film, however, visualizes this loss and its restoration through cinematography. Noor's wardrobe transition—from stark whites and grays to the explosion of red and yellow during Holi—is an evolution that is seen rather than described.

Similarly, the blue walls of Noor's house in the film incorporate blue as a recurring visual motif, particularly in Noor's living quarters. This shade of blue, reminiscent of Varanasi's ghats, represents both confinement and spirituality, reinforcing the idea that Noor exists between devotion and exile.

Additional instances of colour symbolism occur through Chhoti's dresses, Noor's nail paint, food, and accessories. Chhoti is often dressed in bright reds and greens, marking her resistance to the city's muted palette. In one scene, Noor watches as Chhoti waves her yellow dupatta in the air, yellow, a colour of warmth and optimism, symbolizing a freedom Noor has long been denied. Noor's silent observation—"The girl danced in gold, weightless in the afternoon sun" (Khanna 94)—suggests that Chhoti embodies everything Noor has forgotten: movement, joy, and belonging. Similarly, in a poignant moment in the novel, Noor watches Chhoti painting her nails a deep maroon, a colour Noor associates with youth and femininity. She wonders, "Would my hands ever hold that color again?" (Khanna 147). The film visually mirrors this, showing Noor hesitantly dipping her fingers into a small bowl of color before withdrawing, symbolizing her internal conflict with self-expression.

Food also plays a role in the chromatic narrative. The vivid yellows of turmeric in street-side stalls, the fiery reds of pickled chilies, and the glowing orange of sweets in the market form a stark contrast to the bland, colorless meals served to widows. This chromatic disparity reinforces social deprivation.

Julia Kristeva argues, "Color, particularly when forbidden or withheld, operates as an unconscious language of desire, marking the boundaries between repression and liberation" (Kristeva 141). The Holi scene in *The Last Color* exemplifies this interplay, where colour becomes not just a visual element, but a declaration of existence. Such examples show that colour is not just a moment of liberation during Holi—it is an ongoing narrative force, marking loss, restriction, and eventual reclaiming of identity.

Conclusion: From Page to Screen: Chromo-Thematic Continuities and Divergences:

While both the novel and the film maintain the integrity of their core themes, their approaches differ in significant ways. The novel relies on Noor's introspection, allowing readers to access her internal conflicts and evolving emotions. The film, however, externalizes these conflicts through cinematography, performance, and chromatic contrast. Ultimately, *The Last Color*—both in print and on screen—offers a deeply moving meditation on resilience, identity, and the transformative power of colour. While the novel invites readers into Noor's mind, the film immerses the viewers in her world, ensuring that her journey from absence to presence, from erasure to the vibrancy of life affirmation, is one that resonates across mediums.

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Weaving Voices of the Marginalized: Subaltern Narratives in Sudha Murty's *Three Thousand Stitches*

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Abstract:

Sudha Murty, a renowned Indian author and social worker, has made significant contributions to Indian English literature by portraying the lives of marginalized individuals with empathy and realism. Her work *Three Thousand Stitches* presents authentic narratives of struggle, survival, and empowerment, primarily focusing on oppressed women and other disadvantaged groups. Through accessible language and grounded storytelling, Murty sheds light on the realities of caste discrimination, gender inequality, and socio-economic marginalization. This paper analyses how *Three Thousand Stitches* offers space for subaltern voices, examining the literary strategies employed by the author to challenge dominant social narratives and bring forward stories of empowerment and resilience.

Keywords: Subaltern, Marginalized Voices, Indian English Literature, Social Justice, Devadasis, Empowerment, Sudha Murty

Introduction: Indian English literature has increasingly provided a platform for underrepresented voices, especially those from the margins of society. Literature not only reflects society but also acts as a powerful tool for change. In this context, Sudha Murty's *Three Thousand Stitches* becomes a significant contribution by addressing the voices of the subaltern through real-life narratives. The term 'subaltern' refers to communities that exist outside the hegemonic power structure and are historically subjected to oppression, silence, and misrepresentation.

Murty, through her lived experiences and work with the Infosys Foundation, has interacted closely with such marginalized communities. Her narratives are not merely fictional constructs but derive authenticity from reality. The present paper explores how her collection *Three Thousand Stitches* serves as a testimony to subaltern lives, especially women entangled in societal taboos and stigmas. By analyzing select stories from the collection, the paper aims to illustrate how Murty's storytelling technique enables the reader to engage with silenced voices and understand the transformative potential of compassion, education, and inclusion.

Subaltern Theory and the Indian Social Framework:

The conceptual framework of subaltern studies originated from Antonio Gramsci, who used the term to describe groups excluded from established systems of power. Later, postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak critically questioned whether the subaltern can truly speak if their voices are constantly filtered through elite or dominant structures. In the Indian context, the term typically includes Dalits, tribal populations, women subjected to patriarchal norms, and economically weaker sections, all of whom face systemic oppression.

Indian society, being inherently hierarchical, imposes various limitations on individuals based on caste, gender, and economic status. Subaltern literature seeks to deconstruct this hierarchy by narrating stories from the perspective of the oppressed. Murty's work embodies this spirit by narrating real-life experiences that reflect resilience and the aspiration for a dignified life, even under oppressive circumstances. Her approach is not radical in tone but transformational in impact, as she adopts empathy and practicality rather than protest alone.

Overview of *Three Thousand Stitches*:

Three Thousand Stitches is a collection of autobiographical short stories that encapsulate Murty's experiences as a social worker, teacher, and philanthropist. The title story deals with her monumental effort to rehabilitate three thousand women previously bound to the Devadasi tradition—a centuries-old practice of temple prostitution that cloaked systemic sexual exploitation in the guise of religious duty. Each story in the collection offers a glimpse into the lives of individuals who are often overlooked in mainstream society—domestic workers, students from underprivileged backgrounds, small-time artisans, and women caught in social stigma.

The stories are not didactic but profoundly human, marked by Murty's lucid narrative style. She uses anecdotal storytelling to render complex social issues accessible. Her unpretentious language serves as a vehicle to reach a broader audience, especially those outside the academic elite, thereby reinforcing her commitment to democratizing knowledge and experience.

Representation of Subaltern Narratives:

- **Empowerment of Devadasis**

The titular story "Three Thousand Stitches" stands as the centerpiece of Murty's subaltern narrative. It highlights her long, arduous journey of attempting to bring dignity to the lives of Devadasis. Initially met with hostility and mistrust, her consistent efforts eventually bore fruit. What distinguishes this narrative is the portrayal of these women not as passive victims but as individuals possessing strength and courage once given the opportunity.

Murty does not position herself as a savior but rather as an enabler. Her story celebrates the agency of these women who, with support, education, and vocational training, manage to reclaim their identities and lead respectable lives. The transformation from marginalization to empowerment is at the heart of this narrative, making it a quintessential subaltern story.

- **Dignity in the Everyday**

Several stories in the collection focus on ordinary people whose lives are marked by hardship, yet they carry a sense of dignity that transcends their circumstances. For instance, narratives about housekeeping staff, vegetable vendors, and rural students highlight that strength and resilience are not the monopoly of the elite. These stories blur the binary of powerful versus powerless, allowing the reader to appreciate the quiet dignity embedded in everyday life.

By offering a platform to such characters, Murty deconstructs the literary canon that often privileges the urban and elite. Her focus on the marginalized does not exoticize poverty but instead humanizes it, drawing the reader into a world where empathy replaces apathy.

- **Challenging Social Stereotypes**

One of Murty's significant literary achievements is her subtle dismantling of societal prejudices. Her stories expose how caste and gender biases operate insidiously within supposedly progressive spaces. She recounts instances where well-educated individuals exhibit regressive attitudes, thereby critiquing the superficiality of social change.

Murty's storytelling encourages introspection. Her characters often experience personal growth after confronting their biases. In doing so, she engages the reader not as a passive observer but as a participant in the process of societal transformation. The power of suggestion, rather than confrontation, allows her narratives to resonate across diverse reader groups.

Literary Techniques and Style

- **Personal Involvement and Anecdotal Narrative**

Murty often inserts herself into the narrative, lending authenticity and a sense of intimacy to her stories. This personal involvement also allows the reader to trust her voice, making the

narratives more impactful. The use of anecdotal storytelling helps simplify complex social issues without diluting their gravity.

- **Simplicity of Language**

Murty's language is characterized by clarity and simplicity. Unlike academic or elite literary works that may alienate the common reader, her accessible style ensures inclusivity. The lack of ornamental language does not compromise depth; rather, it enhances relatability.

- **Realistic Settings and Characters**

The geographical and social settings in Murty's stories reflect the diversity of Indian life. Whether it is a small village, a slum, or a middle-class household, the settings are grounded in reality. Her characters are drawn from real life, making their struggles and triumphs believable.

- **Contribution to Indian English Literature**

Sudha Murty's contribution to Indian English literature lies in her ability to represent voices that have long been excluded. In a literary world often dominated by themes of urban alienation and diaspora, her focus on grassroots issues stands out. She democratizes literature by writing about and for those outside the elite literary sphere.

Her works serve both literary and sociological functions. While they entertain and inform, they also advocate change. The stories encourage readers to engage with their social realities and question long-held prejudices. Murty proves that literature can be a powerful instrument for empowerment and awareness without being didactic.

Moreover, her role as a writer-activist bridges the gap between word and deed. Her writing is backed by decades of social work, making her narratives not just artistic expressions but also reflections of real-world impact.

Conclusion:

Sudha Murty's *Three Thousand Stitches* is a compelling blend of narrative and social commentary. By giving voice to the subaltern, particularly marginalized women, Murty contributes to a more inclusive literary and social discourse. Her stories do not merely depict suffering but also celebrate resilience, dignity, and the possibility of transformation.

Her work exemplifies how literature can transcend its traditional boundaries and act as a force for change. In presenting stories of the oppressed with empathy and realism, Murty not only enriches Indian English literature but also reaffirms the potential of storytelling to shape a more just and compassionate society.

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