

WOMEN ACROSS LITERATURES: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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Dinesh Kumar

Doaba House
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Women Across Literatures: A Global Perspective

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Acknowledgements

Women Across Literatures: A Global Perspective primarily speaks of my own experiences as a teacher of English literature, language and linguistics. As an academic endeavour, the present anthology stands as a beacon guiding readers through the labyrinthine corridors of English literature in the 21st century. This book is not merely a collection of articles, but also serves as a testament to the enduring power of literature to inspire, challenge and illuminate.

Expressing gratitude is a fortunate opportunity, yet it poses a considerable challenge. There is a risk of overlooking individuals who have been a source of inspiration and have significantly contributed to the completion of one's work.

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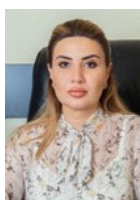
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Foreword



It gives me immense pleasure to write a foreword of the book, *Women Across Literatures: A Global Perspective* edited by Dinesh Kumar, Associate Professor and Head, P.G. Department of English at Dyal Singh College, Karnal, India.

Dinesh Kumar is the sole author of four books: *George Orwell's Social Vision: A Critical Study* (2019); *Voices in Literature* (2020), *Feministic Ethos in Pre-Independence and Post-Independence Indian Literature* (2021, Lambert Publication, Germany), *Reflection of Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar's Ideology in English Literature: A Critical Evaluation* (2023). Besides, he has also edited sixteen books on English Literature, linguistics and Translated Studies.

He has more than 52 research papers to his credit in various National and International Journals both in India and abroad. His thrust areas of research comprise feminism, Dalit literature, comparative literature, Commonwealth literature and post-modernism.

He has attended 47 National and 30 International conferences in India as well as in abroad and attended more than 25 Faculty Development Programs in India and outside. Besides, he has also contributed 30 (thirty) book chapters on different topics- feminism, eco-feminism, translation studies, Dalit literature, linguistics and postcolonialism in different books published with ISBN number.

Dinesh Kumar has also delivered more than 27 extension lectures on literature of different genres: poetry, plays, fiction. He has also chaired 25 Technical Sessions in various conferences. Since 2015 He is also rendering his services as an active member of the editorial boards (editor and reviewer) of different National and International journals.

The struggle for gender equality and the quest for women's voices to be heard have been enduring themes in human history. Across centuries

and continents, literature has served as a powerful mirror to society's evolving attitudes toward women — at times reinforcing stereotypes, at other times boldly challenging them. Feminism in World Literature enters this vibrant discourse with a rich and nuanced exploration of how feminist thought has been expressed, reinterpreted, and resisted in diverse literary traditions.

The present book resonates deeply with the spirit of our times. In an era when voices of equality, justice, and inclusivity are being heard across the world, this book makes a meaningful contribution by presenting women's experiences through the lens of literature from diverse cultures and traditions.

The significance of this volume lies in its global vision. It moves beyond regional boundaries to highlight how women—whether in the East or the West, in classical texts or contemporary writings—have been represented, silenced, celebrated, and reimagined. The book not only examines women as subjects within literature but also acknowledges their vital role as creators of knowledge, storytellers, and agents of transformation.

What sets this book apart is its comparative and interdisciplinary approach. By bringing together varied literary voices, it provides readers with a rich tapestry of themes—identity, resistance, empowerment, creativity, and intercultural dialogue. It invites us to see connections between women's struggles and triumphs across the globe while also respecting the uniqueness of each cultural context.

At a time when the world is striving for gender equity and greater intercultural understanding, this work is both timely and necessary. It will serve as a valuable resource not only for students and scholars of literature and gender studies but also for any reader who wishes to engage with women's voices in a more inclusive and holistic manner.

I commend the author/editor for undertaking such an ambitious and meaningful project and trust that this book will inspire readers to re-examine literature as a space where women's voices echo across borders.

It is both an honor and a privilege to introduce *Women Across Literatures: A Global Perspective*, a book that addresses one of the most compelling and necessary conversations of our time—the presence, absence, and re-emergence of women's voices in world literature. Literature, throughout history, has been both a mirror and a mold of

society, reflecting its values, silences, prejudices, and aspirations. Yet, for centuries, the narratives of women—whether as characters, authors, or intellectuals—remained marginalized or overshadowed by dominant patriarchal traditions. This volume emerges as a powerful corrective to such omissions by bringing women to the center of literary analysis and cultural discourse.

The strength of this book lies in its expansive vision. Unlike studies confined to national or regional boundaries, *Women Across Literatures* deliberately adopts a global outlook. It journeys across continents and cultures, from classical epics to modern narratives, and from canonical works to marginalized voices, to illuminate the myriad ways in which women's lives, struggles, and contributions are inscribed in literature. This wide-ranging approach not only highlights the universality of women's experiences—of love, loss, resilience, and resistance—but also celebrates their cultural specificities, shaped by history, geography, and tradition.

What is especially commendable is the way this work resists reducing women to singular representations. It does not merely focus on women as passive figures or victims within literature; rather, it foregrounds their roles as creators, thinkers, and transformative agents. It examines how women have negotiated identity, articulated dissent, and carved creative spaces within restrictive structures. In doing so, the book affirms that women are not merely subjects of stories but also the authors of history, language, and imagination.

Equally significant is the book's interdisciplinary and comparative method. By drawing connections across literatures—Eastern and Western, ancient and contemporary—it enables readers to perceive both continuities and ruptures in the ways women are represented. This comparative perspective fosters an intercultural dialogue that is essential in today's globalized world. It helps us recognize that while women's struggles for equality and recognition often resonate across borders, their experiences remain deeply rooted in cultural contexts that must be acknowledged and respected.

In the present moment, when debates on gender, equity, and representation are at the forefront of intellectual and social life, this book proves to be both timely and relevant. It enriches academic discussions in literary studies, gender studies, and cultural studies, while also speaking to the wider public concerned with justice, inclusion, and human dignity. It reminds us that literature is not merely a repository of aesthetic beauty

but also a living archive of human experience and a powerful instrument of social change.

I would like to commend the author/editor for conceiving and executing such a thoughtful, ambitious project. It is no easy task to weave together voices from across the globe and present them in a manner that is both coherent and critically engaging. Yet this volume succeeds in offering a narrative that is scholarly in its rigor, inclusive in its scope, and inspiring in its vision.

Women Across Literatures: A Global Perspective is more than a book—it is an invitation: an invitation to rethink the literary canon, to hear voices that have too often been silenced, and to embrace a vision of literature that is more inclusive, diverse, and humane. I am confident that this work will find a lasting place not only in academic libraries and classrooms but also in the hearts and minds of all readers who value literature as a means of understanding ourselves and others.

Timely and relevant, this book will appeal to scholars, students, and general readers interested in women's studies, world literature, cultural studies, and gender discourse. It emphasizes the importance of reading women's voices across literatures to foster empathy, equality, and a global vision of humanity.

I wholeheartedly commend this book to its readers and trust that it will spark dialogue, reflection, and transformation in the years to come.

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In Search of ‘Real Feminism’ in India: Beyond Lip-service and Tokenism

Dr. Surajit Senapati • Sarthak Samantha • Riya Panja

While Indian feminism as an academic discourse and a social movement has made significant strides since its inception, feminist interventions have failed to find traction across communities in India, as it suffers from insurmountable internal contradictions and contestations. It is still seen as an exclusive bastion of English-educated and city-bred women belonging to the privileged social backdrops, driving its legitimacy from its overtly west-centric prism, which hardly reflects the changing contours of feminist activism in India. It is increasingly becoming polarized and tokenistic, failing to attract women across class, caste and religion. It is often seen to be transcending the boundaries of public decorum and the moral universe, and, at the same time, it tends to be manipulated by the media and the forces of neoliberalism, which in turn diminishes its emancipatory potential. The paper critically examines the inherent contradictions and ambivalences of Indian feminism and its inability to be accepted by women cutting across communities, and brings forth a future roadmap to ensure its wider acceptability and relevance, which is aimed at fostering an inclusive and intersectional model of Indian feminist praxis grounded in grassroots realities.

Locating the Internal Contradictions of Indian Feminism

Indian feminists stand at a crossroad now, with a number of distinct feminist branches cropping up over the times, showing the increasing divides between feminist scholars and activists in India about the future framework of its emancipatory agenda that aims at ensuring gender parity and an inclusive society based on solidarity across sexes. While Indian feminism and its rise has a distinct western influence, it continues to adopt localized

or distinctive sociocultural issues to stay relevant. While attempts have been made to bridge the gaps between feminist scholars who draw on unique experiences or perspectives of the phenomena due to their different socio-cultural upbringings. Yet Indian feminism in general remains a weaker force compared to the global context, thus showing its limited influence in framing national-level policies and discourses. An important factor behind such persistent dormancy is its concentrated leadership generally drawn from the privileged segment of Indian society, an accusation that runs rampant in intellectual circles. Besides, the movement has lost its esteem to a great extent, as visible in its losing power in forming a national consensus about tenacious issues such as women's reservation in both houses of the Indian parliament.

At the same time, Indian feminism has displayed certain artificialities in recent times in its advocacy of equal rights for women and an inclusive society that recognizes the biological difference between sexes not as a sign of female empowerment but as a unique opportunity to engage in building a nation based on progressive ideological viewpoints as enshrined by the progressive constitution of India. Here one needs to understand the progressive role of Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts on realizing the untapped potential of Indian women in every spectrum of India's knowledge systems. He focused on the need to understand the deeply entrenched social system of structural inequalities linked to caste identities and the role of orthodox Hindu religious texts, which validate such types of gender disparities and an unequal social order that legitimizes the oppression of women and their persistent subjugation under the patriarchal structures of Hindu society.

Over time, feminism in India has become more powerful, challenging the systematic oppression and otherization of women in socio-cultural milieus. It has become a visible force to reckon with and, due to the combined efforts of feminist groups, India has seen some remarkable women-centric bills getting passed in the Indian parliament and state legislatures, recognizing the need for a feminist approach to address the burgeoning issues of female infanticide, polygamy, dowry related deaths, forcible sexual exploitation women in flesh trade, pay disparities and acute shortage of women in India's business establishment. Such issues have been solved to a great extent, offering a better and noticeable legal framework and an accommodative work ecosystem for women. Such steps removed the deeply ingrained social stigmas and weakened the authoritative role of patriarchy as a coercive force. It led to the establishment of a social environment in which women began to come out of their endorsed domestic slavery and assert their autonomy and creativity in public spaces.

At the same time, feminism expanded its vocabulary of assertion and protest and intensified its voice to a great extent. This has allowed widespread awareness about the need for general equality and an inclusive society where both women and men act as a unified force to ensure the rise of nations from ignorance and weakness to strength, from exclusive social order to an inclusive model of society or nationhood where every opinion of women is counted and plays a crucial role to the nation-building efforts.

While the international framework has been gradually acknowledged as a more effective way to address women's issues and to form a holistic approach to the larger question of gender-based oppression and discrimination. It created visible fissures within feminist leadership about the primacy of caste-based identities as a platform to understand women's predicament in Indian society. While the intersexual viewpoint acknowledges the role of caste, class and gender as co-impacting factors to measure women's extent of freedom or vulnerability. It has become a contentious issue among feminist scholars. The central bone of contention in India's feminist movement is its centralized leadership, basically drawn from the upper caste, privilege, urban and English-educated backgrounds and their inability to focus beyond the tokenised or bureaucratized methods of addressing women's issues. Their viewpoints are very limited and stand clearly at a distance from the grassroots issues of feminism. While necessary education and expansion in leadership roles have been made to repair the age-old mistakes, mainstream Indian feminism still seems to be stuck around the neoliberal bourgeois ideologies of modernity and individual empowerment. It hasn't dug the mud of socio-cultural prejudices and belief systems to bring out what a true feminism is about.

Another point of criticism challenged by the Indian feminist leadership is their West-centric thinking, forgetting the fact that what achieves success in western hemispheres and in developed nations will fall utterly short in the Indian context, as the level of social-economic dynamic or democratic penetration stands drastically vary in both contexts. This needs a recalibration of feminist properties and an action-oriented approach that takes into account the distinctive ground realities of Indian history. Besides, mainstream feminism in India has become an indirect offshoot of the political class, which use it as an extension of their political and ideological outreach programmes. This resulted in more harm than good to feminist causes in India. All the women's commissions have been miserable at performing their constitutionally-mandated duties with impartiality. Their actions and statements become merely a symbolic movement rather than actual transformative involvement in the glaring issues of Indian feminism.

But in the last two decades, Indian feminist activism has trapped itself into mere tokenism and lip-services, failing to address the deeply-entrenched anti-women prejudices and social stigmas that give rise to the violence and oppression of Indian women. It also failed to incorporate or acknowledge the changing dynamics of Indian women's lives and their lived realities. The rise of neoliberal socio-economic order has created a unique chain of oppression and suffering from women living in rural areas, wage earners, unmarried women and divorced women and their priorities and problems have hardly been seriously decided in public spaces. The leadership of Indian feminism has become so passive and intent on exhibiting mere tokenised approaches that they never go beyond the routinized schedule of engagement to ensure the radical issues of such ill-fated women who have failed to live up to the expectations of neoliberal order, thus perpetuating their chronic suffering and socio-spatial segregation all over the country. The caste and class-blind nature of mainstream Indian feminism is criticized by sociologists such as Guru, who expressed the need to study the "social location" of women as it produces the perception of reality which varies from one community to another. Writing in defence of Dalit women's need for having a "different voice", Guru justifies the need for "talking differently" so that the women's issues are homogenised which "prevents the ghettoization of Dalit hood" (Guru 153).

The rise of state-sponsored late capitalism and the growing influence of right-wing politics has seriously undermined the radical potential of Indian feminism. Feminist slogans and campaigns are now visible only within the studios of the media where nonsensical decibels have replaced the real issues of feminism, making it more a 'pliant' or 'comfortable' feminism which distances itself from its radical politics of addressing the intersecting and co-impacting factors of Indian women. Shahani and Ghosh (2020) rightly pointed out, "The combined hegemony of the right-wing orthodoxy and global consumer capitalism have edged out the radical element of feminism, creating instead a comfortable space for a more populist feminism".

The space of women's rights organizations has seen a tremendous spike in recent times and the mushrooming of numerous women-centric organizations has resulted in the large NGOisation of Indian feminism, led by urban-educated women who spearheaded gender awareness and protest against sexual harassment on social media. While they seem to be hyperactive on social media, they are now increasingly seen as dissociated from the grassroots politics of women's empowerment. This created a noticeable shift in women's movement in India. The rise neo-liberalism since 1990s has drastically altered the dynamics and functional attributes of women rights activists. Today

women's groups draw huge funding from both internal and external sources to execute their female-centric actions. They have become more or less market-oriented and inspires a bureaucratized modes of engagement with women's issues which hardly finds traction with the real issues of grass-roots feminism. Such corporatisation and bureaucratization of women's organization indicates a sinister pattern which hardly aids the emancipatory politics of feminism rather becoming reductant in the face of real issues of women.

The #MeToo movement of 2017 as a social media campaign against the rampant sexual harassment of women by the senior members of intellectual community marks a watershed movement in Indian feminism, raising the ugly picture of systematic bullying and molestation of women in the sites of power. Such incidents go hidden from the public scrutiny as the victims of such mental and sexual oppression couldn't come out in the public out of public humiliation against such cases of sexual abuse out of fear. The listing of around 60 male comedians as the culprits behind such anonymous claims created a public furore in the nation and this underlines the extent of such oppressive cycle of sexual oppression in the premier educational institutes of the country. It raised many questions about the safety and security of top-level would-be future female intellectual leaders of the country. While this offered a unique opportunity to an in-depth study of the said subject that may involve the judiciary, policy-makers, women rights activists and the political leadership, yet it has failed to forge a wider consensus on the said topic. Immediately after the incident took place, a group of 12 eminent female activists released a public statement that discredited such acts as uncalled for. They expressed a deep sense of apprehension that such unwarranted acts could "delegitimise the long struggle against sexual harassment, and make our tasks as feminists more difficult" (Menon 2017)

In recent times, feminism in India has assumed a strong anti-man stance and a naked display of nudity as a means of female autonomy and agency over the body. The feminist activists have intensified their anti-man stance to a violent level and equate patriarchy and male dominance as the only obstacle to female emancipation and subjugation. Here are the oral observations of Additional District Judge Kamini Lau in 2011 need critical scrutiny as she called for chemical or organic castration of males as a deterrent to the rising of rape cases against women. Such statements must not be seen as an example of an isolated act, rather in conjunction with the larger public opinion of female activists who call for the same sort of treatment against men as an effective tool to combat violence against women. But such inflammatory speeches don't serve the collective interests of women, rather

cement male violence against women. It is time to build solidarity, bridge gaps between sexes, and one must not comment in such an irresponsible way because it could widen the male-female gaps and enhance the trust deficit.

The corporatization of the female body in the fashion, advertising and film industries triggers a renewed debate about the failure of Indian feminism to combat such issues in a creative and nuanced ways, as it increases the vulnerability of women to sexual exploitation and domestic violence as well as the psychological inferiority of women. This makes them more prone to violence and bodily dissatisfaction, which hardly ensures female autonomy and agency. Such corporatization of the female body in sexual terms increases consumerist appetites and the profits of the corporate industry. It may look sound and good if looked at from the narrow parameters of individual freedom, as it allows women greater visibility and economic empowerment, but it must not be ignored that it also leads to further commodification of the female body, which has profound repercussions on women belonging to marginalized social backgrounds.

Yet the feminists have become so assertive their display of female agency and bold assertion of female body smacked of sexual connotation, thus unconsciously reducing the entire movement of women's rights as a mere public stunt or attention-grabbing attempts. Such displays of nudity aimed at displaying female autonomy and agency sometimes transcends the reasonable limits of freedom and play a malevolent role in the public order. Similarly female activists take recourse to unapologetic public kissing with their partner to express their agency and freedom over body in the contexts of a highly polarized Indian society that is stuck between the extremities of modernity and invigorated orthodoxy as boldened by the changing political scenarios of the country. While there is no doubt about that fact that women have the freedom to do whatever they wish with their body or sexuality yet such arguments are subject to public scrutiny depending upon the socio-cultural ecosystem of the country. Gupta (2016) calls such acts as "media-driven feminism."

The pad against sexism campaign launched at Jamia Milia University in March 2015, which then travelled to other university campuses such as Jadavpur University in Kolkata. It is another incident of radical feminist expression against gender violence and sexual assault in which students stuck sanitary pads on the walls of university campuses and wrote on them the message against naming and shaming the victim. It is important to note that while such a creative and unusual mode of protest against sexual violence is

directed against creating awareness of the structural issues of violence against women within the campuses, some accuse such movements of spoiling the spirit of public decency. Such feminist protests hardly care about the specific cultural context of the nation and its utter disregard for the spirit of civic prudence in the display of collective anger often goes beyond socially permitted actions without making any compromise to public decency.

Another point of serious concern in Indian feminism is the increasing silence of feminist leadership in matters related to the rising cases of sexual violence against women from marginalized social backgrounds. Their selective response to the case of feminism underlines their acts of omission and commission. While they seem to be very assertive about cases of rape against women belonging to rich backgrounds, they maintain a criminal silence when atrocities are committed against women belonging to vulnerable social contexts. The entrenched biases linked to caste and class identities of women create a sense of ambivalence in the acts of feminist leadership. While tribal women are stuck in the crossfire of Maoist/Naxal and state confrontations, which sometimes ends up in the raping and killings of tribal women. They maintain a strategic distance from such incidents, which underlines their complicity in perpetuating such acts of crime that perpetuate the cycle of state-sponsored violence. Women's issues are not identical in nature, and they vary along the lines of caste and class and any homogenization of feminist thought or perspective will be very detrimental to the very purpose of women's long histories of long struggle. Yet the mainstream feminist leadership has deliberately ignored the specificities of violence against marginalized women.

Women activists are increasingly being seen as promoters of fake feminism or pseudo-feminism or militant feminism, which does more harm to female freedom than good. Their increasing attacks on males have created a serious backlash across the globe. Indians don't stand isolated. The rise of militant feminism and consistent attacks on the male community for playing the role of spoiler against feminism. The promotion of mobocracy or deliberate anti-man politics has serious repercussions across the globe. This not only reinforces gender stereotypes and prioritized goals of feminist activists but also triggers misandry. It needs to be stated that such a movement is aimed at gender equality and restoring justice, not at provoking the male community. It must not be driven by vested interests or narrowly defined theories of revenge to punish males for their centuries-old subjugation of women.

Across the world, a sizable segment of feminist activists have clearly deviated from their clear-cut objectives, that is, to establish a gender-equal society. They use all forms of institutionalized power to humiliate and denigrate men for their misery, reducing them into second-class citizens. The prevalence of biased or one-sided narratives grows in the media and social networking sites, which hardly aim at establishing equality and justice for women rather they are directed against public humiliation of males.

In India, the rampant misuse of women's legal provisions has taken a nasty turn as a disproportionate number of well-educated women are seen misusing the provisions of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. Educated and urban-born women misuse legal routes to harass and humiliate husbands. Such things must be curbed as they undermine the principle of fairness and equity and cause a travesty of justice in the name of feminism. It is not feminism in its real sense. Rather, it uses pro-legal laws to harass husbands. This is a disturbing trend and must be reversed at any cost. While those women need such laws terribly for their survival, they fail to access them and, instead, the educated women are misusing with a malafide intention which raises serious questions about the true intentions of feminist activists.

On a similar note, educated women of today's India are seeking exorbitant alimonies from their husbands as a tool to compensate their failed marriage. Such a case papered before the bench headed by THE Chief Justice of India, Hon'ble BR Gavai in which an MBA graduate placed a 12-crore alimony claim from her ex-husband because according to her, their marriage was unsustainable and he called her 'schizophrenic'. Recently, a Supreme Court bench comprising Justices B V Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma have expressed a deep displeasure with the rampant misuse of Section 498A (cruelty) of IPC and Sections 3 and 4 of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 in which the kins of husbands especially elderly men and women are mentally and physically harassed under the provisions of the said acts. The court not only rebuked the woman but also reversed the Allahabad High Court Order, thus acquitting the accused man and his kins from all charges which turned out to be false and malafide.

Conclusion:

While feminism has achieved some notable achievements in the last several decades in India, it remains concentrated at the hands of a privileged few. While time has come to acknowledge the framework of intersectionality as a salient yardstick to address the overlapping and interconnecting issues of a feminist predicament, feminist activists are required to forge a broader

solidarity with other autonomous women's organizations working around the clock at the grassroots level. At the same time, Indian feminists need to reorient themselves to address the paradigmatic shifts in the lives of Indian women, especially from marginalized backgrounds. While using innovative tools to spread feminine awareness is not a bad thing, they should not compromise their moral grounds by attaching too much significance to public gimmicking and immoral acts. Time has come to pluralize feminist articulations and act as a unified force beyond tokenism and lip-service. That's the only way to achieve a "real feminism" for all of us.

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Feministic Concerns in Nigerian Literature

Dr. D. Shyilla Juliet

The nineteenth century African literature is filled with patriarchy, hegemony, cultural and traditional stigma against women, religious beliefs, and so on. Women neither had an identity nor knew the importance of having one. Forerunners of African literature were predominantly male writers making it difficult for them to empathise with their female counterparts. Nigerian literature being a subcategory of the African landscape has slowly welcomed female writers bringing out the nuances of thriving in a male dominated society. In their current scenario it is rather fascinating to analyse the fact that their literature motivates women to seek for identity and relish their feminine status. Through words of affirmations, actions, and examples women writers have influenced and sown seeds of empowerment in young readers around the world to stand up for themselves. This journey was challenging and women are still voicing out their struggles for a better tomorrow.

The different waves of feminism helped women understand the need to break the cocoon they were forced to stay. The first wave feminism (mid 19th century to 1920s) was briefly concerned about education and employment rights i.e. equal pay. Educated women instigated the desire to study to remove the veil of ignorance making it essential for them to comprehend their self-worth. Influential figures include Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, Lucretia Mott and so on. The second wave feminism (1960s to 1980s) highlighted their motive by raising awareness against patriarchy and spoke in terms of 'liberation' in all forms including the label attached to bodily differences. It was here the famous phrase "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (Beauvoir 295) by

Simone de Beauvoir in *Second Sex* ignited the spirit of feminism and need for an evolved system. Key figures were Betty Friedan, Angela Davis, Bell Hooks, etc. The third wave feminists (early 1990s to 2010s) were well educated and recognised their limitations. Rebecca Walker, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins and Audre Lorde are influential figures of this age. In *50 Key Concepts in Gender Studies* Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan explain:

...being part of feminism's third wave means realising one's own politics through the mass media and popular culture – this is diametrically opposed to the ambitions of second wave feminism to keep its 'authenticity' by generally shunning the blandishments of the media for fear of being absorbed by patriarchal power structures. (171)

Western feminism was ruling the feminist world – was acknowledged in this stage. Women belonging to the third world countries were frustrated as their problems were not dealt or voiced by western feminists. While black women were struggling to survive violent familial conditions and severe identity crisis, western feminists preached about capitalism and plight of white middle class women. There began a rift making women of colour taking things into their own hands. Moreover, they wanted the world to witness their narrative through them. Though there was a split, women in general challenged societal norms and the welfare of women across the globe.

Resilience was quite strong among black women and they knew the importance of sisterhood. They formed groups and clubs to keep them united and fight for their cause. To name a few are The General Federation of Women's Club, National Colored Labor Union and African Feminist forum. Influential Afro-American women influenced African women to stand up for their identity. Black writers took it on them to tell the true narrative through their works. Men for years failed to portray women as an individual because she was not treated like one. Dissatisfaction rose as females were used supporting characters used for reproducing male children and working like a maid (exact representation of female role in black society). Nigerian society is no different and follows the typical African way of treating women. It is crucial to view the different generation of Nigerian writers to get an idea about the transition that helped focus on subjugation of women and oppression through tradition.

The Nigerian writers can be broadly classified into four generations. Prominent writers from each generation have been listed out. Chinua Achebe, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka and Flora Nwapa belong to the first generation. Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo and Grace Ogot belong to the second

generation. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Teju Cole and Akwaeke Emezi fall under the third generation. The contemporary and fourth generation consists of Ayòbámi Adébayò and Abubakar Adam Ibrahim. It is essential to comprehend that from the second generation of writers, women writers began painting the real Nigerian society from their side putting an end to the Nigerian women presented to the world by male writers.

Early writers like Chinua Achebe did speak about their real time society contributing to the history of male hegemony and masculinity in Nigeria through his famous work, *Things Fall Apart* (1958). He exposes the traits expected of men where they are expected to protect their clan, farm, wrestle and dominate or overrule their wives. Women on the other hand must procreate for the benefit of their clan or society. She had no identity of her own and never demands for one rather would yield to the needs of people around her and keep producing children until her womanliness wears out. To bear male children was quite their ambition as it was a sign of victory. Her role was to stay invisible. This is one important trait of all the others that went unnoticed.

From the second generation, women writers put an end to all the early writing that painted the perfect caricature of men which was chauvinistic in nature advocating patriarchy. Feminist consciousness sprouted during this age helping women appreciate their contributions to the society and home. They spearheaded their role by contributing through their writings and expressing strong perseverance. Various empowered women characters were included in their writings to guide common black women to strive for their identity and confidence to survive as an empowered individual rather than a sustained slave. Dr. Digvijay Singh in *Feminist Perspectives in Contemporary African Literature* asserts:

The emergence of feminist writers... marked a shift from a traditionally male-dominated narrative to one that includes the perspectives and experiences of women...Through their literary works, they encourage women to resist passivity and silence, advocating for the recognition of their rights, voices, and opportunities for advancement. (73)

Nigerian writers' spirit of feminism did not sprout until the late twentieth century as writers did not want to be acknowledged as feminists. It was too strong a label for them to carry. Though women writers were emancipated and forward thinkers they could not alienate themselves from their role as 'mothers'. This attachment made them fear being attached to 'feminism'. Black women were the sole bearers and providers of children which were indeed deeply rooted in their minds. They were conditioned for centuries

making it tenacious to give up their traditional role for a western label. When the western connotation of feminism rejected 'motherhood', black women found it disheartening and did not want to be associated with it. The reason for refusing is also quite strong. She (black women) was undervalued until she became a mother and she climbed a step forward with that status. Despite not having rights over her own children, black women enjoyed this new identity that came with being a mother. Ganita M Olatokun in *Nigerian Feminism: A Typology of African Feminism* clarifies, "She vehemently opposes the doctrine of white radical feminism which she considers to be anti-mother, anti-child, anti-nature and anti-culture. She considers the tasks of being a mother to include the nurturing of a child, protecting the home as well as the environment" (218).

Moreover, culture and tradition was a huge part of their lives which are non-negotiable. To reject them for liberation was beyond imagination. Holding culture yet savouring freedom was accepted. These made Nigerian women deny feminism and therefore not be labeled as 'feminists'. Buchi Emecheta openly showed resistance in calling herself a 'feminist' as it was too western in motive. Flora Nwapa too laid the foundation but did not name it so. Until Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her famous essay *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014) expressed her desire to be called a feminist the word was a misfit in the eyes of Nigerian women. The essay took Nigeria by storm helping young women and particularly men understand the need for a positive surrounding that will nurture women to attain her potential.

' Nigerian literature has no short of feminist overtones and it is essential to trace them from its point of genesis. The *Joys of Motherhood* (1979) by Buchi Emecheta talks about a woman named Nnu Ego who has nine children but dies alone in her village. Emecheta paints the picture of a strong woman in the form of Nnu Ego who raises her children on her own without the help of a 'man'. Though it ends tragically it shows the inbuilt strength a woman is bestowed with. Nnu Ego faces humiliation from being infertile making her have as many children as possible. The pleasure from physical intimacy was out of context for her. The difference with western feminists lies here. Jeffrey Hunter echoes Emecheta's notions in her essay *Feminism with a Small "f"* (1988) through his understanding stating, "Sex is part of life. It is not THE life. Listen to the Western feminists' claim about enjoying sex, they make me laugh. African feminism...believe that we are here for many, many things, not just to cultivate ourselves, and make ourselves pretty for men" (Hunter). There may not be strong overtones of feminism yet it advocates liberation against patriarchy and the gender inequality. Ava Chuppe in *Obscured to Outspoken: Buchi Emecheta, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie,*

and Akwaeke Emezi as Case Studies in Nigerian Feminism explains:

...if they [reader] expect a feminist novel with a narrative cognizant of gender inequities throughout, they may feel exasperation at the absence of this form of critique. Due to Nnu Ego's lack of agency, a feminist revolution in her world feels far from imminent. Reading the novel through a feminist lens frustrates the reader and underscores the dire need for Nigerian women's liberation but, simultaneously, the difficulty of achieving it. (21)

Second - Class Citizen by Buchi Emecheta (1974) portrays the protagonist Adah more resourceful in terms of finance management explicitly exposing her ability to handle money which was considered the job of a man. *Wives at War* (1980) by Flora Nwapa is similar to Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) for the first time in the history of Nigerian literature presents the events of war from the perspective of women explaining their unsung role during the war in protecting their family and raising children. It helps us understand the undeniable ability of women which cannot be overlooked. If men fought guns and barrels women fought hunger and disease. A vivid description of it is painted by Adichie in her work. As her women characters are highly educated they take up the job of educating young children in the neighbourhood. Olanna teaches children while her twin sister, Kainene runs a shelter for the diseased. "We will teach mathematics, English, and civics every day...we have to make sure that when the war is over, they will all fit back easily into regular school. We will teach them to speak perfect English and perfect Igbo, like His Excellency. We will teach them pride in our great nation" (291).

The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives (2010) by Lola Shoneyin focuses on the lives of four women married to the same man. Though the narrative is amusing, it portrays the individual struggle of these women and how they build resilience in a polygamous relationship. Lola through her character, Iya Segi says, "A real woman must always do the things she wants to do, and in her own time too. You must never allow yourself to be rushed into doing things you're not ready for" (Shoneyin, 102). Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) is a collection of short stories that deals with several concerns relating to women liberation and the beauty standards imposed on young women obstructing their growth in all spheres of life. The last short story in this collection is *The Headstrong Historian* that talks about a woman named Grace (embraces her traditional Igbo name, Afamefuna) who throws away her education, life and partner to return to her village to start living the life her ancestors lived. Grace is the embodiment of her strong grandmother and all that stands in protecting tradition. Her grandmother, Nwamgba was

her major source of motivation. Adichie has created this atmosphere based on the stories she heard from her grandmother. In her work, *We Should All Be Feminists* one can absorb the inspiration for making a character like Nwamgba when she states:

My great-grandmother, from stories I've heard, was a feminist. She ran away from the house of the man she did not want to marry and marries the man of her choice. She refused, protested, spoke up whenever she felt she was being deprived of land and access because she was female. She did not know that word *feminist*. But it doesn't mean she wasn't one. (WSF)

Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail* (2006) revolves around the life of an orphaned girl who is dehumanised by the atrocities of people around her. Abigail is abused and is forced into prostitution. Despite facing severe traumas, Abigail rises from dust to reclaim her life and skilfully write her own story. The above works are set us examples for women going through the same plights in life. Narratives like this will install self-reliance and help women strive to be empowered. Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) a coming-of-age novel traces the life of Kambili and her mother, Beatrice. Kambili lives in fear her entire life while her mother under domestic violence almost every day in the hands of her dominant husband. Beatrice tolerates her husband to provide a better life for her children. Everything takes a turn when her sister-in-law, Auntie Ifoema an educated woman re-enters into their lives. She was frustrated with her brother's treatment of his family and advised Beatrice to leave her brother as he was an abuser and subjugated both Beatrice and Kambili. In the novel she tries hard to make Beatrice understand the reality of life when she says, "When a house is on fire, you run out before the roof collapses on your head" (124).

An important poetry collection that deals with empowerment and would inspire readers to defy hegemony and oppression is Dami Ajayi's *A Woman's Body Is a Country* (2017). Several aspects of womanhood and the resilience a woman holds within is celebrated in the poems. Apart from the above discussed works, *Daughters Who Walk This Path* (2012) by Yejide Kilanko, *Butterfly Fish* (2015) by Irenosen Okojie, *Stay With Me* (2017) by Ayobami Adebayo, *Freshwater* (2018) by Akwaeke Emezi and *Blackass* (2015) by A. Igoni Barrett are few examples of Nigerian works that showcase women characters that challenges traditional norms and societal clichés to transform into an empowered versions of themselves. It also highlights the transition women writers of Nigeria have gone through in the past decades with reference to feminism. The once rejected word has now been modified into a variety of terms with they could refer themselves without the guilt.

Words like ‘Naijafeminism’ (acronym for Nigerian feminism), Womanism, Stiwanism (acronym for Social Transformation Including Women in Africa) and Motherism are appreciated and highly accepted by Nigerian women. They find a sense of belonging, set of valuable principles pertaining to their culture and tradition and a bearer of rich heritage with these words. From rejecting feminism to embracing it in different forms they have come a long way. Male writers have failed to represent the real contributions and sacrifices of black women making their presence insignificant in the eyes of the outside world. This awakened women driving them to take things into their own hands and brought to attention the selfless contributions and importance they hold for the survival of the society and their tradition.

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A Comparative Analysis of Afro-American and Algerian Feminism: Intersectionality, Resistance, and Cultural Identity

Dr. Amina Bouaziz • Abdelaziz Menci

The paper compares and contrasts Afro-American and Algerian feminism, two different but equally important feminist movements influenced by racial oppression, colonialism, and cultural resistance. The study looks at the differences between these movements' historical development, ideological frameworks, and relationship to religion, and modes of activism, drawing on academic works in gender studies, postcolonial theory, and cultural criticism. Algerian feminism, which engages with Islamic discourse and state-centered legal reform, is a product of French colonial rule and the fight for national independence, whereas Afro-American feminism is rooted in the legacy of slavery and systemic racism in the United States and centers the idea of intersectionality to address overlapping systems of race, gender, and class. The study contends that both movements challenge universalist narratives of gender equality by serving as examples of context-specific feminist resistance. The study emphasizes how crucial cultural identity, religious reinterpretation, and decolonial thought are in forming feminist praxis through a comparative lens. In the end, it urges a transnational feminist solidarity that honors diversity while banding together to combat common oppressive systems.

As a worldwide movement for gender equality, feminism is anything but homogenous. Although its fundamental goal, gender equality, remains constant, historical, cultural, and political contexts have a significant influence on its manifestations, philosophies, and tactics. The fight for legal personhood

under patriarchal family codes may take the form of a demand for reproductive rights in one area and be reinterpreted religiously in another. These differences are necessary adjustments to local realities rather than departures from a universal feminist ideal. The idea of a homogenous “global woman” hides the material circumstances and power dynamics that influence women’s lives in different ways depending on their race, class, country, and religion, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty warns (Mohanty 62). We must look at how feminism is practiced, conceptualized, and opposed in various sociopolitical contexts in order to fully comprehend its complexity.

This diversity is embodied by two strong but different feminist traditions: Algerian feminism in North Africa and Afro-American feminism in the United States. Despite being geographically and historically distinct, both movements have produced distinctive forms of resistance that oppose patriarchy as well as the interlocking systems of race, religion, and state power. They have also arisen from intense experiences of colonial violence, systemic marginalization, and national struggle. Afro-American feminism emerged from the legacy of racial capitalism, segregation, and slavery, where Black women experienced economic disenfranchisement, sexual exploitation, and erasure in both the civil rights and mainstream feminist movements. On the other hand, Algerian feminism emerged in the aftermath of French colonialism (1830–1962) and the anti-colonial struggle for independence. The 1984 Family Code and other post-independence state policies weakened women’s involvement in the country’s liberation.

Although their paths diverge, both movements face a fundamental conflict: the need for gender equality in national and cultural contexts that frequently associate feminism with moral decay or Western imperialism. Both Black liberation movements and feminist movements that often focused on the experiences of white women have required Afro-American feminists to make their position known. Similarly, once promoting women’s rights, Algerian feminists deal with charges of betraying Islamic and national values, that are frequently framed as “too Western” or “not Muslim enough” (Sadiqi 88). These issues highlight the necessity of recognizing the decolonial, intersectional, and culturally embedded character of feminist praxis and moving beyond Eurocentric models of feminism.

The paper compares and contrasts Algerian and Afro-American feminism, contending that although both are based on fights against structural marginalization, their conceptual frameworks, activism styles, and approaches to identity are very different. The theory of intersectionality, a framework that demonstrates how race, gender, class, and sexuality function as

interlocking systems of oppression, was developed by Afro-American feminism, which is rooted in the Black radical tradition (Crenshaw 1243). To achieve gender justice through legal reform and reinterpretation of religious texts within an Arab-Muslim cultural framework, Algerian feminism, in contrast, frequently engages with Islamic feminism and postcolonial nationalism.

Four main aspects are examined in this study through a comparative lens: (1) historical development and colonial legacies; (2) ideological foundations, specifically the role of Islamic feminism and intersectionality; (3) religious and cultural contexts; and (4) forms of activism and cultural expression. By examining these facets, the paper shows that feminism is a contextually grounded practice of resistance, self-definition, and community empowerment rather than a universal model imposed from the West. In the end, this analogy urges a transnational feminist solidarity that respects diversity while banding together against common oppressive systems, such as racism, patriarchy, colonialism, and state violence.

Historical Foundations and Colonial Legacies

Though the types of oppression vary, colonial and racial violence are fundamental to the roots of both Algerian and Afro-American feminism. The ruthless legacy of slavery, segregation, and institutional racism in the US gave rise to Afro-American feminism. Black women in slavery faced forced labor, sexual exploitation, and the denial of their right to motherhood and bodily autonomy. In *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, Deborah Gray White observes that Black women were stereotyped as “mammies” or “jezebels,” roles that legitimized their exploitation and stifled their voices (White 45). In contrast to white, middle-class feminists, Black women experienced gendered violence, economic disenfranchisement, and racial segregation after emancipation, all of which influenced their feminist consciousness.

Racial justice activism’s gendered constraints were further revealed by the mid-20th century Black Power and civil rights movements. Both movements marginalized Black women, who were expected to support racial liberation while their own sexism concerns went unnoticed. Autonomous Black feminist groups like the Combahee River Collective, whose 1977 declaration became a cornerstone of Afro-American feminism, were born out of this exclusion. According to the Collective, “if Black women were free, then everyone else would have to be free” (Combahee River Collective). The fundamental tenet of the movement, that liberation must be intersectional, addressing race, gender, class, and sexuality all at once, is emphasized by this radical assertion.

French colonialism (1830–1962) and the fight for independence, on the other hand, shaped Algerian feminism. Women were essential in the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962) as nurses, intelligence officers, and fighters. While individuals such as Zohra Drif and Djamilia Bouhired came to represent national resistance, their roles were later downplayed in official narratives that prioritized male bravery (Amrane-Minne 52). Following independence, Algeria's new state fostered a nationalist ideology that frequently restricted women to the roles of traditional guardians and mothers.

Feminist activism gained momentum in 1984 after the Algerian Family Code was passed, which limited women's rights in marriage, divorce, and inheritance. To contest the Code and promote legal reform, women's organizations like Rassemblement Action Jeunesse (RAJ) and the Ligue Algérienne pour la Défense des Droits de la Femme (LADDH) were founded (Sadiqi 92). In contrast to Afro-American feminists, who battled for inclusion in feminist and civil rights movements, Algerian feminists faced a postcolonial state that upheld patriarchal norms and used women's rights for nationalist ends.

Intersectionality and Identity Politics

Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal scholar, introduced the idea of intersectionality in 1989, and it is one of the most important contributions of Afro-American feminism to global feminist theory. In contrast to mainstream feminism and anti-racism movements, Crenshaw maintained that Black women face discrimination not just as Black people or as women, but at the intersection of both identities (Crenshaw 1243). This framework has become essential to comprehending the simultaneous and interdependent functioning of power systems.

Thus, identity is central to Afro-American feminism as a site of resistance. Authors such as Toni Morrison, Bell Hooks, and Audre Lorde have highlighted the significance of cultural memory, voice, and self-representation. Lorde criticizes the shortcomings of white feminism and advocates for a feminism based on the lived experiences of Black women when she states that “the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house” (Lorde 112). Similar to this, Morrison's books, especially *Beloved*, focus on the suffering, resiliency, and agency of Black women while examining the psychological and generational trauma of slavery (Morrison 5).

Although it was less overtly theoretical in its early phases, Algerian feminism also deals with identity, yet from a different perspective. Here, nationalism, language, and religion rather than race shape identity. Many Algerian feminists work in a complex cultural environment where Arab-

Islamic nationalism was fostered by post-independence regimes and indigenous identities were upended by French colonialism. Algerian women, according to Fatima Sadiqi, “are caught between tradition and modernity, between Islam and secularism, between national identity and gender equality” (Sadiqi 88).

Algerian feminists frequently encounter pressure to choose between feminism and cultural authenticity, whereas Afro-American feminists use intersectionality to combat racism within feminist spaces. They are criticized for spreading “Western” ideals that jeopardize religious and national identity. Islamic feminism, a framework that reinterprets religious texts to support gender justice, is embraced by many Algerian feminists in response. Feminism can be both authentically Algerian and based in Islamic ethics, according to scholars like Nadia YalaKisukidi and activists like Louisa AïtHamadouche (YalaKisukidi 134). This strategy stands in stark contrast to many Afro-American feminists’ secular or Christian-critical positions.

Religion and Feminist Discourse

In each movement, religion has a crucial but opposing role. One of the most important institutions in African American life has been Christianity, especially the Black church. It has been a place of spiritual empowerment, community, and resistance. However, its patriarchal structures have also been criticized by Black feminists. A spiritual and cultural identity that celebrates Black women’s strength and inventiveness while opposing religious sexism is one of the reasons behind Alice Walker’s development of the womanist concept (Walker 6). Womanism emphasizes group care, healing, and storytelling while embracing the sacredness of Black womanhood.

By contrast, Algerian feminism functions in a largely Muslim society where national identity and the law are closely linked to religion. Several Algerian feminists use *ijtihad*, or the independent interpretation of Islamic texts, to support women’s rights rather than condemn Islam. Kouider Lamdoune and Nadia Labidi, for instance, stress that the Quran encourages women’s employment, education, and involvement in public life (Sadiqi 95). In order to recover women’s voices and histories, Assia Djébar uses Islamic and Berber cultural symbols in her books and films, such as *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua* (Djébar 112).

This distinction reveals a significant difference: Algerian feminists aim to reform and reclaim religious discourse from within, whereas Afro-American feminists frequently place themselves in conflict with prevailing religious institutions. Though they represent different cultural and theological

contexts, both strategies are forms of resistance.

Forms of Activism and Cultural Expression

The two movements' different sociopolitical contexts are also reflected in their modes of activism. Historically, digital advocacy, literary expression, and grassroots organizing have been central to Afro-American feminism. Black feminists utilize social media, art, and storytelling to raise awareness of issues like LGBTQ+ rights, police violence, and reproductive injustice, as demonstrated by the Combahee River Collective and more recent movements like #SayHerName and #BlackLivesMatter (Crenshaw et al. 1). Self-representation has been facilitated by cultural production, including music, film, and literature. In her visual album *Lemonade*, Beyoncé, among others, celebrates Black womanhood and resiliency by fusing Afrocentric imagery, Warsan Shire poetry, and references to Yoruba spirituality (Beyoncé).

In contrast, Algerian feminism has prioritized institutional advocacy and legal reform. Women's rights groups have advocated for protection from domestic abuse, increased educational opportunities, and modifications to the Family Code. Women took the lead in calling for gender equality and democratic reforms during public protests like the *Hirak* movement (2019–2021) (El-Khazen 78). In contrast to the more well-known and media-savvy Afro-American feminist movement, feminist activism in Algeria is frequently suppressed, censored, and subject to social backlash, which limits its visibility.

In addition, Algerian feminists often express resistance through literature and film. For example, AssiaDjebar's work examines how language can be used as a tool for liberation and how women are silenced in postcolonial Algeria. Her book *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment* gives voice to women who have traditionally been portrayed as exotic and submissive by reimagining Delacroix's well-known painting (Djebar 45). Similarly, in a patriarchal society, MaïssaBey's writings address memory, trauma, and the potential for feminist renewal.

Toward Solidarity and Global Feminism

The dedication to decolonizing feminism—that is, opposing the dominance of Western, white, middle-class feminist narratives that have long dominated international discourse on gender justice—unites Afro-American and Algerian feminism, despite their different historical and cultural paths. White women's experiences in the Global North are frequently universalized by these dominant frameworks, which establish them as the standard while portraying women of color—especially those from Africa, the diaspora, and postcolonial societies—as “other”—either as culturally

backward subjects or as victims in need of rescue. Feminists in Algeria and Afro-America both oppose such simplistic representations, arguing that racism, colonialism, religious exclusion, and economic disparity are all intertwined with gender oppression. Third World women are active change agents rather than passive victims, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty persuasively argues in *Feminism Without Borders* (51). This insight serves as the moral cornerstone of a truly global feminism, one that is based on respect for one another, solidarity, and a common struggle rather than paternalism or cultural superiority.

In the past few decades, there has been a growing call for transnational feminist solidarity, especially as feminist movements have come to understand the limitations of solitary, nationalistic activism. The African diaspora and the African continent are increasingly connecting through activist and intellectual discourse, despite the fact that Afro-American and Algerian feminists have not traditionally worked together in official coalitions. One framework for bringing Black women together across borders is Pan-African feminism, which has resurfaced. Women from North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States engage in collective strategizing around issues such as reproductive justice, state violence, and digital activism in spaces established by organizations like the African Feminist Forum and the Black Feminist Future initiative (African Feminist Forum). These platforms highlight Black women's shared vulnerabilities and interconnected histories, challenging the fabricated distinction between "African" and "diasporic" Black women.

The opposition to state violence is one possible area of convergence. Campaigns like Say Her Name, which draws attention to cases like those of Breonna Taylor and Atatiana Jefferson, have made the long-standing documentation and protest of police brutality against Black women visible (Crenshaw et al.). Similarly, Algerian women have been subjected to repression through state surveillance, censorship, and the criminalization of protest in addition to patriarchal laws. Women led peaceful protests calling for democratic reform during the HIRAK movement (2019–2021), but many of them were subjected to intimidation, arrest, and smear campaigns meant to undermine their activism (El-Khazen 82). Since the state serves as a location of racialized and gendered control in both situations, feminist resistance to anti-state violence is common.

Islamophobia and anti-Black racism intersect at another crucial intersection. In both domestic and international settings, Algerian women

experience systemic discrimination as Muslim women, even though they are not usually the targets of anti-Black racism like Sub-Saharan Africans or Afro-descendants. For instance, in France, laws that prohibit religious symbols in public places, like the 2010 burqa ban and the 2004 headscarf ban, disproportionately affect Muslim women in Algeria and North Africa. These laws are intended to promote racial and religious exclusion but are frequently justified under the pretext of secularism (*laïcité*) (Bilge 80). Afro-American Muslim women who experience racism and religious discrimination in the United States, such as those in the Nation of Islam or convert communities, find great resonance in these state-sanctioned forms of Islamophobia. Their common experience of being policed because of their gender identity and faith creates opportunities for coalition building based on understanding rather than presumed differences.

Social media and digital activism have also developed into effective platforms for international feminist discourse. Feminists from Algeria and Afro-America can translate texts, share stories, and highlight each other's struggles on social media sites like YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. For example, Algerian women used social media to show solidarity during the 2020 Black Lives Matter uprisings, comparing the repression of youth and activists in Algeria to police brutality in the United States. On the other hand, Afro-American feminists have started to discuss Arab and North African feminist movements more critically, eschewing Orientalist preconceptions that portray Muslim women as oppressed everywhere. With hashtags like *#MuslimWomensLivesMatter*, *#FeminismWithoutBorders*, and *#BlackAndNorthAfrican*, women are able to confront Islamophobia in Black and Western feminist circles as well as racism in Arab communities.

Crucially, eliminating differences is not necessary to foster solidarity. Although Algerian and Afro-American women may oppose patriarchal systems, their lived realities—which are influenced by language, religion, colonial history, and geopolitical location—must be recognized by a true global feminism. “Solidarity does not assume that our struggles are the same; it means that we struggle together,” as scholar Sara Ahmed reminds us (Ahmed 179). This entails putting listening, humility, and reciprocity at the forefront of feminist partnerships. Additionally, it entails eschewing “savior feminism,” which holds that one group can free another, and promoting collaborations founded on horizontal knowledge sharing.

Conclusion

Two potent reactions to structural oppression, Afro-American and

Algerian feminism are influenced by different histories of colonialism, race, religion, and nationalism. Based on the history of slavery and racial segregation, Afro-American feminism emphasizes intersectionality, identity, and cultural resistance. It uses activism, music, and literature to combat sexism and racism. Emerging from French colonialism and the establishment of the post-independence state, Algerian feminism navigates conflicts between tradition and modernity by emphasizing national identity, Islamic reinterpretation, and legal reform.

Despite the differences between their settings, both movements show that feminism needs to be culturally grounded, self-determined, and context-specific. They affirm the variety of women's challenges and strengths, challenging the idea of a single feminist narrative. We learn more about how feminism functions as a dynamic, changing practice of resistance and hope rather than as a universal doctrine by contrasting these two traditions. Such comparative research is crucial to fostering inclusive, equitable, and genuinely global feminist solidarity in a world growing more interconnected by the day.

Despite coming from very different historical and cultural backgrounds, Algerian and Afro-American feminisms are dedicated to opposing oppression and redefining women's agency. The need for context-specific feminism that recognizes the unique power intersections that influence women's lives in various societies is illustrated by both movements.

Afro-American feminism is based on the history of slavery, racial injustice, and intersectional identity politics, whereas Algerian feminism is influenced by postcolonial nationalism, Islamic discourse, and state-centered legal struggles. Notwithstanding these variations, both movements:

The Hirak protests in Algeria and the Black Lives Matter movement in the US are two recent examples of how these feminist traditions are still relevant and evolving. Gaining an understanding of these distinctions enhances feminist discourse worldwide and emphasizes the need for context-sensitive approaches to gender justice.

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Eco-Feminist Interpretation of Nature and Identity in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*

Dr. Sheelu Sengar

Literary critics have given significant attention to the concept of eco-feminism, exploring the relationship between women and nature as represented in literature. This paper explores the symbolic and material affinities between women and the natural world and seeks to highlight the condition of both entities, underscoring how they are simultaneously marginalised and exploited under the dominance of patriarchy and human authority. She focuses on the concept of landscape and its various contexts, including urban and rural, to emotional and revolutionary. It looks at how nature and culture are intertwined.

Anita Desai is a renowned feminist author who delves into the intricate complexities of human interactions with nature. Desai uses symbolic interpretations of nature to expose the inner realities and psychic echoes of her woman characters. Her incorporation of various elements of nature, such as trees, birds, animals, and colours, allows for a connection between the general image of nature and the mental state of her characters. This research paper examines the ecological concerns highlighted in Anita Desai's debut novel, *Cry, the Peacock*. It is typically a feminine novel that represents the incompatible marriage of the protagonist, Maya. As Maya grapples with her own sense of impending doom, she also witnesses the destruction of the natural environment around her, highlighting the ecological concerns of the novel.

Through Maya's struggles, Desai emphasises the importance of preserving the natural environment for both physical and psychological well-being. She tries to explore the ecofeminist desire for self-integration through

these narratives, which take place in middle-class Hindu communities in India. This paper sheds light on the concept of eco-feminism, which addresses the degradation of nature and women, and highlights the exploitation faced by both women and nature in a male-dominated society.

The discourse of ecological concerns in Indian English fiction is deeply rooted in cultural and environmental realities. Novelists such as Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Kamala Markandaya, Arundhati Roy, and Anita Desai celebrated the intimate bond between humans and their surroundings, often portraying rivers, forests, and animals as integral to the narrative fabric. These texts not only foregrounded the spirit of place but also represented cultural practices such as the worship of rivers and trees. In contemporary contexts, ecological thought in literature has been interwoven with the issues of gender identity and social resistance, thereby aligning with eco-feminist theory, which views the exploitation of women and nature as interconnected outcomes of patriarchal domination.

Eco-feminism is concerned with environmental and feminine influences on literature. It is a branch of feminism that examines the connections between women and nature. This term was brought into existence by French feminist Françoise D'Eaubonne in 1974. The late 20th century identified eco-feminism as a powerful movement that speaks not only for women and the environment but also for all marginalized groups, including the queer community. Eco-feminism is defined in the Oxford Learners Dictionary as a "philosophical and political theory and movement that combines ecological concerns with feminist ones, regarding both as resulting from male domination of society." (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*)

Indian mythology powerfully emphasized a more intimate bond between women and nature as 'Mother Nature' (Prithvi Mata). This personification is not accidental but deeply rooted in the symbolic parallels between women and the natural world. Both are regarded as life-givers, sustainers, and nurturers, embodying the principles of fertility, growth, and renewal. Eco-feminist literature portrays that nature and women are commoditized and exploited, and they seem to be the victims of development. Both are treated as objects to be used, consumed, and discarded. It is considered that women share a more intimate relationship with nature because of their biological nature, and hence, they are more sensitive to the degradation of nature. Eco-feminism adds both a commitment to the environment and an awareness of the associations made between women and nature. Specifically, this philosophy emphasizes the ways both nature and women are treated by patriarchal (or male-centred) society. As Vandana Shiva, world-renowned

environmental thinker and activist, defines the links between ecological crises and the oppression of women: -

Ecological destruction and the marginalisation of women, we know now, have been the inevitable results of most development programmes and projects based on such paradigms; they violate the integrity of one and destroy the productivity of the other. Women, as victims of the violence of patriarchal forms of development, have risen against it to protect nature and preserve their survival and sustenance. Indian women have been in the forefront of ecological struggles to conserve forests, land and water. They have challenged the Western concept of nature as an object of exploitation and have protected her as Prakriti, the living force that supports life. They have challenged the Western concept of economic production of profits and capital accumulation with their own concept of economics as production of sustenance and needs satisfaction." (*Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*-15)

This paper investigates Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*, a novel that offers a profound exploration of the female psyche while embedding ecological imagery to represent psychological landscapes. By examining Maya's existential anxieties and her relationship with nature, the analysis demonstrates how Desai employs eco-feminist symbolism to critique patriarchal indifference and highlight the affinity between women and the environment. Nature plays a vital role in Desai's novels. The daughter of a wealthy father, Maya, is married to an imaginatively starved and emotionally barren middle-aged person, Gautama. Though he is an educated husband, he never cares for his wife with true love and dedication. Maya and Gautama make many attempts at serious conversation, but an unknown barrier prevents effective communication. It is clearly visible in the scene when, despite standing very close to Gautama in the moonlight, she finds herself lonely and depressed, "...Nothing was hidden, all was revealed, and it was not what I hunted for. He was not on my side at all, but across a river, across a mountain, and would always remain so." (131)

Desai's maiden novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, exhibits the inner psyche of the female protagonist, Maya. She has tried to explain the cause and tightening grip of alienation on Maya, a motherless child, but her father poured all his love on her. She has been brought up like a princess, as she herself says, "As a child, I enjoyed princess-like, a sumptuous fare of the fantasies of Arabian Nights, the glories and bravado of Indian mythology, long and astounding tales of the princes and regal queens..." (41)

The eco-feminist narrative depicts the images that contribute to a meaningful link between the various aspects of animate and inanimate relationships. Anita Desai has represented it through different symbolic images in the novel. D.S. Maini, a noted critic, rightly says, through simile, metaphor, and symbol, "The two spouses are evoked for us as opposed archetypes." (4) Desai uses the symbolic image of day that is the emblem of the naked and ultimate reality of life. Maya has a fear of death, which is the reality of life, and that is why she does not like the day. On the contrary, she prefers the night, which is cool and pleasant for her. The image of a plant, 'Queen of the Night,' is a beautiful plant, but it attracts snakes. It shows the inevitable relationship between life and death.

Maya is passionately hungry. As a childless mother, she is very attached to her pet dog, Toto. Toto is not merely an animal companion but a symbolic substitute for Maya's unfulfilled motherhood and a confidant in her solitude. She pours her love, care, and grief into this relationship, finding in Toto a listener, a companion, and even a childlike presence. She says, "Childless women do develop fanatic attachments to their pets, they say. It is no less a relationship than that of a woman and her child, no less worthy of reverence and agonized remembrance." (10)

The death of Toto plunges Maya into profound grief; she longs for a dignified burial for Toto, but Gautama, as a realistic man, regards this incident as insignificant and arranges for the municipal authorities to dispose of the carcass. He, instead of consoling her, advised her to have a cup of tea and said that he would bring another dog for her. Gautama's insensitivity towards Toto illustrates how patriarchy rejects both female feelings and ecological sensitivity. She feels that her last attachment in life has been seized away. Maya is humane and charitable by nature, and so she is agonized to see a trainload of monkeys being taken to a laboratory in Bombay. They are packed in cages without sufficient space to move, and the cruelty disturbed Maya. It indicates her isolated life and domestic imprisonment. She identifies herself with the peacock. The peacock's dance becomes for Maya both a mirror of her suffering and a symbol of release, as she identifies with the bird's tragic yet liberating cry, "Are they not blood-chilling their shrieks of pain? pia, pia, they cry, Lover, lover. Mio, Mio, I die, I die" (82)

Desai's novels frequently explore the themes of female sensibility and the struggles of women confined by a male-dominated societal structure. In the novel, she powerfully describes Maya's mental anguish through a peacock's mourning for its mate. Gautama, who values his work and tries to find logic in everything, has no idea about the beauty and magic of nature.

Maya is romantic by nature and needs special attention from her husband, which he fails to give. She finds joy in nature and its elements through close observation of trees and plants. Her extraordinary perception of silk cotton plants is evident in the novel. She remembers the days spent at her father's house. The garden at her father's house holds a special place in her memories, and she remembers, "Our table is set next to a mandarin orange tree. In every corner of the garden, there is a small fairy tree, with its glossy leaves, and an overload of tiny, bright miniature lanterns on carnival nights." (44)

The novel uses natural elements to depict Maya's feelings. Each animal or bird has an image attached to it. The dog is known for its loyalty, the peacock for its beauty and shyness, the snake for its venom, and the crow for its guile. These associative images are effectively interwoven with events in Maya's life. Maya's pet dog Toto, is the most prominent image and is used. Toto's death, a very moving event in Maya's life, causes her paranoia and mental instability:

The body was rotting in the sun all day. It could not be moved to the veranda because, in the April sun, the decay of the dead flesh was too strong and would soon have penetrated the rooms. The crows sat in a circle around the carcass, and the crows will eat anything - guts, eyes, anything. Undisguised by the finer details on the leafless, bare neem trees, hitherto carefully hidden, nests, deserted by birds.... (22)

If we dive deep into the psychological insight and social surroundings of Anita Desai's characters, we find that they are struggling against the odds, and most of them suffer only because they are not happily married. They are perpetually afflicted with the sense of loneliness, isolation, and pessimism and ultimately fall prey to the morbidity of temperament. Desai's female protagonist, Maya, is also a real and credible study of the psychological conflict and the inner psyche-probing of a woman's mind. The communication gap between Maya and her husband creates a wide chasm between them. They suffer from their temperamental differences, which make their relationship inconsistent. In *Cry, the Peacock*, many situations, and occurrences create a deleterious and detrimental impact and an adverse psychological pressure on the mind of Maya, which gradually pushes her into the dark abyss of depression. Her husband's unfortunate and untimely death by falling from the parapet also adversely impacted her, causing her to repent as a convict and the cause of his death. Being the woman of a sentimental and emotional temperament and delicate conscience, the innocent Maya lost her equilibrium and ultimately died for no fault of her own. The lines extracted below show Maya's matrimonial trap:

Maya grew impatient. You have not exactly sold your soul to the devil, have you? You have left your pretty backwoods and taken up in the big city. You have only given up a bloody, frustrating job as a village schoolmaster and become a prosperous, successful young box-wallah on his way to becoming director of a reputable business concern. He took a cigarette stub out of his mouth and flung it with violence at the incessantly wakeful budgerigars. My dear chap, you are too innocent; you just do not know what you are talking about, what really goes on there. (103)

Cry, the Peacock stands as a mournful echo of both the silenced feminine soul and the wounded earth. Maya's tragedy is not hers alone; it is a cry of every silenced feminine soul. When love is replaced by logic and nature by control, both the soul and the soil suffer. Ecofeminism highlights the parallel exploitation of women and nature, where both are objectified and consumed—women by men and nature by humans—under the false pretence of advancement and satisfaction. This unchecked consumption not only depletes the environment but also brings about the self-destruction of humankind. They consume nature and natural elements that invite the ruin of humans ultimately, as Gautama failed to impart the visible love and care to Maya that ruined the lives of both Maya and Gautama.

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Labour, Class, and Gender: A Socialist Feminist Reading of Mahasweta Devi's Women Characters

Shruti Rupam

Mahasweta Devi remains one of India's most fearless, committed, and politically engaged writers. Her fiction is not simply about storytelling—it is about documenting the lives of the oppressed, giving voice to the silenced, and exposing the deep injustices that structure Indian society. At the very heart of her writings are women, especially those who exist on the margins: tribal women, bonded labourers, sex workers, peasants, and widows. By bringing them to the centre of her narratives, Devi highlights how the interlocking systems of labour, class, caste, and gender shape women's lives. She shows us that women's oppression cannot be explained through patriarchy alone but must be understood in terms of economic exploitation, feudal structures, and state violence.

Through a socialist feminist lens, Mahasweta Devi challenges the idea that women are merely passive victims of oppression. Instead, her protagonists are bold, complex figures who demonstrate resilience, resistance, and radical defiance. They may be poor, exploited, or even brutalised, but they are not silent. Their very existence questions the foundations of a society that seeks to erase or contain them. In Devi's fiction, women's bodies often become sites of both oppression and protest—bearing the marks of exploitation while also symbolising rebellion and survival.

Take, for instance, her iconic short story *Draupadi*. Here, Dopdi Mejhen, a tribal woman, is raped in police custody for her involvement in a peasant rebellion. Yet, rather than being broken, Dopdi refuses to cover her naked body when presented to her oppressors. Her gesture of standing unclothed before the authorities transforms her violated body into a weapon of

resistance. Instead of shame, there is defiance; instead of silence, there is unspoken protest. Similarly, in *Breast-Giver*, the character of Jashoda, who earns her living as a professional wet nurse, becomes a metaphor for the exploitation of female labour. Her body is celebrated when it serves the needs of others, but once it is exhausted and diseased, she is discarded. Devi uses Jashoda's life to critique how capitalism and patriarchy exploit women's productive and reproductive capacities without offering them dignity or security. In *Rudali*, the protagonist Sanichari, a poor lower-caste widow, earns her livelihood by weeping at the funerals of the rich. Here again, Devi draws attention to how women's labour—even their grief—can be commodified. But Sanichari's act of survival also demonstrates courage, resourcefulness, and the ability to carve out agency even within oppressive systems.

These women are not “idealised” heroines in the conventional sense. They are scarred, angry, and deeply human. Yet their struggles embody what can be called a socialist feminist vision—a perspective that recognises how gender inequality is inseparable from class struggle, caste hierarchies, and the exploitative structures of labour. For Devi, women's liberation is not about individual freedom alone but about collective resistance, dignity, and justice for entire communities.

By focusing on these marginalised figures, Mahasweta Devi pushes beyond the boundaries of conventional feminist discourse in India. Many earlier feminist texts concentrated on the urban, middle-class woman and her negotiation with patriarchy in the domestic or professional sphere. Devi, however, redefines the feminist project by turning our gaze toward women who are doubly or triply marginalised—by gender, caste, class, and ethnicity. Her fiction insists that their stories are not peripheral but central to any honest understanding of Indian society and to any genuine vision of women's emancipation.

This chapter will therefore examine how Mahasweta Devi creates bold and politically charged female protagonists who embody survival, protest, and alternative forms of power. By analysing works such as *Draupadi*, *Breast-Giver*, and *Rudali*, the discussion will show how Devi connects the personal with the political, the individual with the collective, and the body with broader structures of exploitation. The chapter also situates Devi within the larger trajectory of Indian women's writing, demonstrating how her approach is both unique and transformative. Unlike writers who restrict their focus to questions of gender identity, Devi insists on a more holistic framework where class struggle, collective resistance, and the dignity of labour are at the heart of women's liberation.

In doing so, Mahasweta Devi contributes not only to Indian feminist literature but also to world literature. Her protagonists stand as universal symbols of rebellion, survival, and transformation. They remind us that literature can be a form of activism, that fiction can be a weapon, and that the struggles of the marginalised must remain at the centre of our critical and political imagination.

Socialist Feminism and Indian Literature

Feminist literary criticism in India has always had to negotiate between questions of gender, class, caste, and community. Unlike Western feminist discourse, which initially focused primarily on gender inequality in isolation, Indian feminism emerged in a deeply stratified society where the oppression of women cannot be separated from questions of poverty, caste hierarchy, and landlessness. Within this context, socialist feminism offers one of the most effective frameworks for studying Indian women's writing, as it foregrounds the connections between patriarchy and capitalism. Socialist feminists argue that women are not only oppressed by cultural structures of gender but also by economic systems that exploit their labour, both domestic and public.

In Indian literature, many women writers have engaged with this reality. From Kamala Das's confessional poetry on the private lives of women to Anita Desai's middle-class explorations of alienation, the spectrum of women's writing is diverse. However, very few writers have engaged with the struggles of working-class and tribal women as powerfully and consistently as Mahasweta Devi. Her work does not simply depict "women's oppression" in abstract terms but situates it within the material realities of labour, hunger, landlessness, and sexual exploitation.

Socialist feminism, when applied to literature, enables us to ask questions such as: "How are women's bodies treated as tools of both reproduction and production? How does class inequality intensify gender oppression? How do women resist when they are doubly marginalised—as workers and as women?" These questions become crucial when studying Devi's protagonists, who are rarely middle-class urban women but instead tribal rebels, exploited mothers, sex workers, or widows fighting systemic violence.

Mahasweta Devi's writing marks a radical departure from the literary mainstream. While much of post-independence Indian English fiction turned towards questions of national identity, modernity, or urban middle-class concerns, Devi deliberately placed her focus on the lives of subaltern women—those excluded from both history and literature. Her protagonists

not only endure oppression but often embody acts of resistance, transforming their suffering into collective defiance. In this way, they stand as figures of socialist feminist politics, confronting both patriarchal structures and exploitative economic systems.

An important aspect of Indian socialist feminist thought is that it cannot be separated from caste and tribal identity. Unlike in Western Marxist feminism, where the class–gender binary dominates, in India, labour, caste, and gender overlap in complex ways. Women who belong to tribal or Dalit communities face exploitation not only as women and workers but also as members of stigmatised social groups. Mahasweta Devi’s work remains one of the most important contributions to this layered understanding of women’s struggles.

This chapter, therefore, explores how labour, class, and gender intersect in Devi’s stories, and how her protagonists can be read as socialist feminist icons. Her stories offer a critique not only of patriarchy but also of capitalism, feudalism, and state violence. In doing so, they make visible the voices of women who have been historically silenced.

Politics, Activism, and Literature

To understand the radical presence of women in Mahasweta Devi’s fiction, it is important to situate her within the political and literary landscape of post-independence India. Unlike many contemporary writers who were celebrated in urban literary circles, Devi spent much of her life engaged in grassroots activism, living close to the communities about whom she wrote. Her identity as a writer cannot be separated from her role as a social worker, journalist, and activist for tribal and marginalised groups.

Born in 1926 into a family of artists and intellectuals, Mahasweta Devi grew up in an environment that encouraged political awareness and creativity. She studied English literature and later took up teaching, but her literary career soon expanded into a larger mission—writing as resistance. Her activism began in the 1960s and 70s when she became increasingly aware of the struggles of tribal communities in Bengal, Bihar, and Jharkhand. These were groups displaced by dams, deprived of forest rights, and exploited as cheap labour by landlords, moneylenders, and contractors. Devi’s work aimed not only to represent their suffering but also to create a political consciousness around their exploitation.

One of the striking aspects of her activism was her field engagement. Unlike many writers who imagined the subaltern from a distance, Devi worked with tribal communities, listened to their oral traditions, and documented

their stories. This gave her fiction an authenticity and urgency that distinguished her from the mainstream Indian literary canon. She did not write “about” tribal women as passive subjects but presented them as active historical agents. Her characters—whether Dopdi Mejhen in *Draupadi*, Douloti in *Douloti the Bountiful*, or Jashoda in *Breast Giver*—carry the weight of lived oppression but also embody resistance, sometimes in subtle forms and at other times through confrontation.

Politically, Mahasweta Devi was deeply influenced by leftist ideology. While she was not a Marxist in the strict sense, her work reflects a consistent critique of capitalism, feudalism, and state power. She saw how class exploitation was intertwined with gendered violence, especially for women of the lower castes and tribes. For Devi, labour was not only economic but bodily—women’s bodies were used as tools for both production and sexual exploitation. This insight placed her firmly within the socialist feminist tradition, which refuses to separate gender from class struggle.

At the same time, Devi’s writing was not limited to a doctrinaire political stance. She combined a documentary style of realism with myth, folklore, and history, creating a unique narrative form. Her prose often blurs the line between fiction and reportage, making the reader confront the raw brutality of exploitation. For instance, in *Draupadi*, the rape of Draupadi by state officials is narrated in a way that forces the reader to feel both horror and admiration for her final act of defiance, where she refuses to cover her naked body. This stylistic blend made her work accessible to readers but also politically provocative.

Devi’s position as both writer and activist also raises questions about the role of literature in society. She believed that literature should not remain a private, aesthetic indulgence but should intervene in real social struggles. For her, the pen and the fieldwork were inseparable. This belief shaped her protagonists, who are rarely depicted as individuals seeking personal liberation but as symbols of collective struggle.

Mahasweta Devi’s context as a politically active writer deeply shaped her literary vision. Her lifelong dedication to marginalised communities, her leftist political leanings, and her innovative blending of literary forms positioned her as one of the boldest socialist feminist voices in Indian literature. She did not merely create characters but built bridges between literature and activism, ensuring that the stories of women on the margins became impossible to ignore.

Labour and the Female Body in Devi's Writing

One of the most striking aspects of Mahasweta Devi's socialist feminist vision is her portrayal of women's labour, not just as economic activity but as a total occupation of the female body. Her writings insist that the exploitation of women in a capitalist–feudal society is never limited to wages or productivity alone—it extends to their reproductive roles, sexuality, and even their capacity for survival. In Devi's fiction, the woman's body itself becomes a site of labour, exploited, consumed, and discarded by the structures of patriarchy, caste, and class.

A powerful example of this is her short story *Breast Giver*. Here, the protagonist Jashoda, a poor Brahmin woman, is forced to sustain her family by becoming a professional wet nurse. What begins as a desperate economic arrangement turns into a cycle where Jashoda's breasts become her livelihood—nurturing over fifty children across different households. On one level, this reflects a uniquely maternal form of labour, a commodification of the nurturing body itself. Yet, Devi goes beyond sentimentality to expose the brutal irony: Jashoda, after years of feeding others, develops breast cancer and is abandoned by the very families she sustained. Her body, once celebrated and essential, is now a disposable commodity. Through Jashoda, Devi highlights how the female body is not valued for itself but only for its use, a socialist feminist critique of how labour and gender intersect.

Another example is *Douloti the Bountiful*, where the tribal girl Douloti is forced into bonded sex work to repay her father's debt. Her body becomes a site of permanent enslavement, a living metaphor for the colonisation of tribal labour by landlords and moneylenders. Douloti's story tragically reveals how women's bodies in marginalised communities are doubly oppressed: first as workers in the fields, and second as sexual objects for landlords, contractors, and even state officials. When Douloti finally dies of disease and exhaustion, her body lies sprawled across the landlord's land, a haunting symbol that the earth itself is written over with the suffering of tribal women. This merging of the female body and the soil reflects Devi's profound critique of the political economy of land and labour.

In *Draupadi*, the theme of bodily labour takes a political turn. Dopdi Mejhen, a tribal woman accused of being a Naxalite, is captured, tortured, and gang-raped by soldiers. Her body is marked not only as a woman's but as the body of a rebel labourer, someone who threatens state authority. Devi presents Dopdi's refusal to clothe her naked body after the assault as an act of defiance: she refuses to let shame be imposed on her. Here, the woman's body becomes both the battlefield of exploitation and the site of resistance.

Unlike Jashoda or Douloti, Dopdi survives, but her survival is defined by a radical assertion of agency through her own violated body.

Through these characters, Devi insists that labour is embodied labour—women’s physical and reproductive capacities are inextricably tied to systems of exploitation. The wet nurse, the bonded sex worker, the tribal rebel—all show how the body itself is an economic resource. But at the same time, Devi does not portray these women as mere victims. Their stories carry moments of defiance, resilience, and rebellion, however tragic the endings may be. This duality—between oppression and agency—captures the essence of Devi’s socialist feminism.

Ultimately, Devi reveals how capitalist and feudal economies extract value not only from land and men’s work but also, crucially, from women’s unpaid, invisible, or violently coerced labour. Her stories make us confront uncomfortable truths: that the economy runs not just on fields and factories but also on breasts, wombs, and bodies.

Conclusion

Mahasweta Devi’s literary and activist oeuvre stands as a profound testimony to the intersections of gender, class, caste, and tribal identity in postcolonial India. Through her stories, she dismantles dominant patriarchal and nationalist narratives that either erase or romanticise women from marginalised communities. Instead, she places them at the centre, insisting that their struggles, voices, and resistances form the very backbone of any authentic discourse on feminism and justice.

At the heart of her work is a socialist feminist vision, one that refuses to view gender oppression in isolation. Devi shows how patriarchy colludes with feudalism, capitalism, caste hierarchies, and state violence to create a web of exploitation that entraps women—especially tribal and Dalit women. In doing so, she extends the scope of Indian feminism beyond urban middle-class boundaries, situating it within the broader struggles of labouring and subaltern communities. Her feminism is never detached from material realities; it is grounded in hunger, displacement, bonded labour, sexual violence, and the dispossession of land.

Characters like Dopdi Mejhén in *Draupadi* or Douloti in *Douloti the Bountiful* are not mere literary figures but become powerful political metaphors. They embody both the brutalisation of marginalised women and their defiance against systemic oppression. Dopdi’s refusal to clothe her raped body and Douloti’s corpse symbolically covering the land are acts of resistance that expose the cracks in patriarchal and state authority. Such

moments demonstrate Devi's insistence that women's bodies, often reduced to sites of exploitation, can also become instruments of rebellion and truth.

Yet, Devi's narratives also resist one-dimensional portrayals. Her women are not idealised martyrs or passive sufferers; they are complex individuals—sometimes defeated, sometimes resilient, sometimes complicit, but always real. This refusal to romanticise subaltern women is itself a radical gesture. By writing them with such depth, Devi insists that they be recognised as full human beings, not symbols to be appropriated for nationalist, patriarchal, or even elitist feminist causes.

Devi's contribution lies not only in her storytelling but also in the political reimagining of feminism that her works demand. A purely liberal feminism focused on individual rights and empowerment cannot encompass the lived realities of women who face structural violence from landlords, contractors, moneylenders, and the state. Devi's socialist feminism, in contrast, highlights collective struggle, community resistance, and the interconnectedness of social justice movements. Her works compel readers and scholars to acknowledge that the emancipation of women cannot be separated from questions of land, labour, and class.

Moreover, Devi's blending of activism and literature demonstrates the transformative power of art. For her, literature was never a detached intellectual pursuit; it was a tool for consciousness-raising and mobilisation. Her writings, informed by her direct engagement with tribal communities, speak both to the oppressed and to those complicit in systems of oppression. This dual address ensures that her texts are not only representations of reality but interventions aimed at reshaping it.

In conclusion, Mahasweta Devi's socialist feminist vision is revolutionary because it unsettles complacent notions of feminism and challenges readers to look beyond their own social locations. Her writings reveal that true liberation must be intersectional, collective, and materialist, rooted in the lives of those who are most marginalised. By giving voice to tribal women and other subaltern figures, she not only rewrote Indian literature but also redefined the horizons of feminist politics. Her legacy endures as both a literary landmark and a call to action—a reminder that the fight for women's freedom is inseparable from the fight for justice, equality, and human dignity.

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Gender Roles and Subversion in Shakespearean Comedy

Dr. Som Parkash Verma

William Shakespeare's comedies present a fascinating arena for the exploration of gender identity, performative roles, and the subversion of societal norms. This paper examines how Shakespearean comedy constructs and deconstructs gender roles, offering a space for ideological experimentation. With a focus on key plays like *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, the study investigates how these texts use disguise, cross-dressing, and comic inversion to challenge patriarchal expectations and traditional binaries. Drawing upon feminist criticism, performance theory, and historical context, the paper reconsiders how gender subversion in these comedies reflects both Elizabethan anxieties and proto-modern emancipatory possibilities.

Gender has long served as a powerful axis in literary interpretation, particularly in Elizabethan drama where performative identity was both a theatrical device and a societal discourse. Shakespeare's comedies, written at a time when all roles were played by male actors, offer a unique lens through which gender can be read not as a biological constant but a performed construct. The comedic genre, with its inherent license for inversion and disguise, becomes an effective site for this exploration. By placing characters in situations that compel them to transgress normative gender roles—often through disguise or mistaken identity—Shakespeare not only entertains but also interrogates the rigidity of gender constructs. This paper seeks to illuminate the techniques Shakespeare employs in his comedies to subvert gender norms and to explore the broader implications of these devices within the cultural milieu of Renaissance England.

Cultural Coordinates

To fully understand Shakespeare's gender politics, one must consider the cultural and theatrical context of Renaissance England. The Elizabethan stage was entirely male-dominated; women were not allowed to perform, and thus female characters were played by young boys. This already embedded a level of gender performance into the very fabric of the theatre. Furthermore, the period was steeped in patriarchal ideology that positioned women as subordinate and passive. Yet, within this repressive context, Shakespearean comedy allowed for the temporary liberation of female agency and the playful interrogation of gender roles.

For example, in *As You Like It*, Rosalind disguises herself as Ganymede and navigates the Forest of Arden with far greater freedom than she could as a woman in courtly society. The forest becomes a space of liminality—a metaphorical and literal wilderness—where normative social structures are suspended. Rosalind's wit, control over her romantic fate, and manipulation of gender expectations exemplify the kind of subversion that the comedic genre permits.

Figurative Language and Gender Play

Shakespeare's use of figurative language further deepens his engagement with gender. In *Twelfth Night*, the language of love is frequently parodied, with Viola/Cesario articulating desire in a way that is both sincere and ironic. The elaborate metaphors and conceits associated with courtly love are destabilized by the layered identities and concealed truths of the characters. When Viola speaks of her 'father's daughter' who 'loved a man,' the audience is confronted with the complexity of desire that defies simple categorization.

Figurative language in these comedies often reflects the instability of gender and identity. Puns, double entendres, and wordplay frequently rely on the ambiguous gender of the speaker or the listener. Shakespeare thus not only writes about gender fluidity—he performs it through language. The result is a dramaturgy where meaning is never fixed, and identity is always in flux.

Symbolic Dimensions of Cross-Dressing and Disguise

Cross-dressing is perhaps the most explicit symbol of gender subversion in Shakespearean comedy. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia dresses as a male lawyer to rescue Antonio, thereby taking on not only male attire but male authority and legal knowledge. This act symbolically overturns the gender hierarchy, positioning a woman in the traditionally masculine role of

savior and judge. Importantly, Portia's disguise enables her to speak in a legal public forum—a space denied to her as a woman.

Similarly, in *Twelfth Night*, Viola's assumption of the male identity Cesario creates a love triangle that both mocks and explores the irrationality of heterosexual desire. Orsino loves Olivia, who loves Cesario (Viola), who in turn loves Orsino. This triangulation of desire destabilizes normative gender roles and raises questions about the fixity of sexual identity.

Feministic Readings and Interpretive Possibilities

Feminist criticism has long found fertile ground in Shakespearean comedy. Critics like Lisa Jardine and Juliet Dusinberre have emphasized the ways in which female characters manipulate language and disguise to assert agency. Jardine, in particular, notes that while these temporary transgressions often resolve into traditional marriages, they nevertheless allow women to experience and exercise autonomy.

The comedies, then, operate within a double framework: they subvert and reinforce. On the one hand, characters like Rosalind and Viola demonstrate that gender roles can be assumed and discarded like costumes; on the other, the plays typically conclude with the restoration of social order through heterosexual unions. This ambivalence has led some critics to label the gender subversion as ultimately conservative. However, the very act of imagining alternative roles, identities, and power dynamics—even if only temporarily—renders these plays radical in their potential.

Performance, Reception and Theatrically

Performance theory also enhances our understanding of gender in Shakespeare. The all-male stage meant that a boy actor played a woman who then disguised herself as a man. In *As You Like It*, the actor playing Rosalind would be a boy pretending to be a woman pretending to be a man. This triple layering of identity not only creates a complex dramatic irony but also foregrounds the artificiality of gender itself.

Modern performances continue to explore and emphasize this aspect. Productions that employ gender-blind or gender-reversed casting often highlight the constructed nature of identity, drawing attention to Shakespeare's own subversion. Audiences are made more aware of the performative aspects of gender, allowing the plays to comment not just on Elizabethan society but on contemporary concerns about identity, inclusion, and fluidity.

Marriage as Resolution and the Reassertion of Order

While Shakespeare's comedies allow for significant gender fluidity and subversion, they often conclude with conventional endings—most frequently, marriage. These resolutions have been interpreted by many scholars as the reassertion of patriarchal order. Yet, the very process by which these conclusions are reached complicates this interpretation. The journey to marriage often includes female initiative, choice, and manipulation.

For instance, in *As You Like It*, Rosalind orchestrates not only her own marriage but those of other characters. Her intelligence and initiative redefine the romantic narrative from a passive female pursuit to an active enterprise. Marriage, then, while a return to social norms, is not devoid of female agency or negotiation.

Conclusion

Shakespearean comedy remains a vital site for interrogating the fluidity and constructedness of gender roles. Through disguise, cross-dressing, and linguistic play, Shakespeare destabilizes traditional binaries and opens up a space for alternative performances of identity. While the plays often resolve in conventional unions, the temporary subversions they enact are rich in political and philosophical significance.

These comedies do more than merely reflect their time; they imagine new possibilities. They question the nature of identity, the limits of societal expectation, and the boundaries of gender. In doing so, Shakespeare offers not only laughter but also a lens through which to examine the enduring human questions of who we are, who we might become, and how roles—whether on stage or in life—can be rewritten.

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Post Feminism' in Robert Browning's *My Last Duchess*

Dr. N. Sumathi

Robert Browning's *My Last Duchess* focuses on the power dynamics of male gaze, objectification of female identity, aristocratic pride and authoritarian control. It interrogates the gender politics at work, silencing the female sexuality, commodification of women's body and erasure of the Duchess' voice. Duke symbolises the patriarchal possession and how the absence of Duchess' signifies the intergeneration feminism as the voice of women in history, art and cultural memory had always been silenced."To be silenced is not simply to be deprived of speech but to be deprived of subjectivity." (Gilbert & Gubar 45). By silencing his wife (literally through death, symbolically through narration), the duke deprives her of subjectivity. The contemporary feminist concerns lie in the voice, agency and representation of a woman in this work. The contemporary debates of agency, visual pleasure and ideological containment from Mulvey's theory of the male gaze and Rosalind Gill's concept of postfeminist sensibility are dealt in the research paper.

Postfeminism is the term used by the critic, Toril Moi in his notable work, *Sexual/Textual Politics* in 1985. The term is popularly applied to the works that were published after 1980s as the reaction to the second wave feminism. Post feminism looked at the feminism as a political stance, feminine as a cultural construct and female as biological entity with neo conservative approach. Angela McRobbie and Rosalind Gill, the scholars see the movement not as a rejection of feminism but a double entanglement where feminist gains are acknowledged yet undermined through irony, commodification and individualism. In the essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) by Laura Mulvey who introduced the concept of male gaze

in terms of films where women are positioned as passive objects of visual pleasure, framed by and for male desire. Mulvey concept can be applied to literary works as well. Postfeminist analysis of the poem reveals how the male gaze operated not only through visual control but also through narrative framing and ideological containment. The silence is far from passivity but becomes an interpretive resistance. The postfeminist theory is applied to contemporary debates on gender, representation and power.

Male Gaze and Objectification

The poem's prime focus is on the male gaze which is presented to the readers. Duke's authoritarian control is literal and symbolic. Male gaze is that the Duke is gazing the painting, and tells the envoy as:

"That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive."

The Duchess exists only as a painting, as a visual object controlled by Duke. She is not held in his heart as a platonic love. He calls the attention of the listener to gaze at his Duchess to make her a commodity to look at for the silent listener as well as the readers. The gaze establishes the male ownership through mediated mode. He curates the representation of this gaze as an act of infidelity of the Duchess. Literally, the duke pulls back the curtain to reveal her portrait, controlling who can look and without her consent. He also controls the interpretation of her character as infidelity seducing others with her smiles and kindness and it is interpreted as signs of disloyalty."Browning's women are often heard only in the silences of the male monologue." (Reynolds 142). The Duchess's silence is precisely what feminist critics identify as symptomatic of patriarchal representation. The monologue is symbolic of the absence of Duchess' voice and any of her allies. The narrative of the duke is filtered through male gaze. In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female." (Mulvey 11). The Duke embodies the active gaze, while the Duchess is rendered passive, frozen in a portrait.

Commodification lies in holding a lot of portraits by the duke. The Duchess' portrait is a part of his collection just like the bronze sculpture of Neptune taming a seahorse. It parallels how women are seen as possessions as art, objects of display that portrays the value of women as objects of display and not to be loved. The commodification has become visual possession by holding the art piece of the duchess. "The dramatic monologue forces us to sympathize with a speaker in spite of ourselves, until the revelation of his inhumanity shocks us into judgment." (Langbaum

85). Readers are drawn into the Duke's gaze before realizing its cruelty — showing how the male gaze manipulates both subject and audience.

The portrait becomes a substitute for the living woman allowing the Duke to restrict access and it also reflects on how he has exercised his control over the woman. The authoritarian control is revealed through his boast that:

“.....none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I.”

This act of veiling and unveiling mirrors the voyeuristic structure of the male gaze, where the woman is rendered visible only through male permission. Transgression of her smiles, her joy in life are framed as threats to the Duke's authority. The Duchess expresses her emotional openness through her smiles and joy but it is pathologized by him and her subjectivity is erased through Duke's gaze as a series of seductive and aesthetic impressions and shown as a mere visual artifact. “He is the Subject, he is the Absolute - she is the Other.” (Beauvoir 6). It is a kind of existential entrapment through suppressing the role of the woman and her authentic self but performs his entitlement with infidelity. The Duchess is not allowed subjectivity; she is “the Other,” defined entirely by the Duke's narrative and possession.

Silencing of the Woman's Voice

The dramatic monologue dramatizes the duke's perspective and absence of Duchess's own voice. She never speaks within the poem that makes the duke to reduce her actions, gestures and personality to the evidence of disobedience and infidelity. The silencing is not just accidental but central to the execution of power of patriarchy in the monologue reflecting the mechanism of power politics based on gender. Browning has made an attempt to exercise the gender politics focussing on polygamy practised by duke mentioning her as last duchess. The vitality and generosity of women commonly exhibited through smiles and graceful gestures of women which are stereotyped as feminine qualities by men. The same men blame her for her feminine qualities and call her to be infidelities.

“That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive” (ll. 1-2)

The Duchess is positioned as an object, frozen in art, deprived of speech and agency. Her smiles, which should signify generosity and vitality, are reinterpreted as flaws by the Duke:

“She smiled, no doubt, whene’er I passed her; but who passed
without

Much the same smile?” (ll. 43–45).

In his narration, her individuality is erased and her warmth becomes grounds for condemnation.

Elaine Showalter observes that “the female voice has often been mediated, suppressed, or silenced in the patriarchal text” (*A Literature of Their Own*, 31). The Duchess is doubly silenced: first through death—when the Duke “gave commands” that ended her life and then through the dramatic narrative technically silenced her and he controls how her memory is presented. Adrienne Rich reminds us that “the silences are as important as what is said; they tell the story of the power that has silenced them” (*When We Dead Awaken*, 19). A woman’s silence can be easily dominated by men many times and the Duchess’s silence, therefore, is not mere absence but evidence of domination.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar noted that “to be silenced is not simply to be deprived of speech but to be deprived of subjectivity” (*The Madwoman in the Attic*, 45). The authoritative voice of the Duke has overwritten the Duchess’s subjectivity and leaving her as a portrait, possession and objectification and a male tale to be narrated to everyone to show her infidelity. As Isobel Armstrong argues, “Browning’s monologues dramatize not only what is spoken but what is silenced, the margins of utterance” (*Victorian Poetry*, 213). The margins drawn for the women stereotypes is present as a portrait in the poem but absent as an autonomous presence. The Duchess exists only in these “margins,” absent from the center of her own story. The Duchess’s absence of voice exemplifies patriarchal suppression within male-authored narratives.

New Feminism

Silence becomes the agency of power for women in new feminist lens. The silencing is recognized and celebrated as an act of women’s power through the feminist criticism that considers silence as an act of reclamation. The duchess’ voice challenge the structures of women stereotyping by gently smiling at people to show her generosity and individuality as strengths rather than fault. “The silences are as important as what is said; they tell the story of the power that has silenced them.” (Rich 19). The Duchess’s silence itself tells the story of the duke’s control and the violence of patriarchal power. Though Silencing is considered as patriarchal strategy to gain control over the legacy of this woman’s life and art, she is calm and peaceful exhibiting

her smile pleasantly when she is alive and stands as a valuable art portrait with aesthetic value.

“The female voice has often been mediated, suppressed, or silenced in the patriarchal text.” (Showalter 31). The Duchess never speaks for herself in the poem; her life and actions are narrated entirely by the Duke.

The poem opens with his claim:

“That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive.” (ll. 1–2)

The phrase suggests she is not only dead but reduced to an image, deprived of speech and agency. The poem exemplifies how the authority of patriarchy is intergenerational that dictates not only women’s loves but also their afterlives in memory and representation.

The subtle resistance and emotional autonomy of the duchess is expressed through her smiles, her joy in life, her appreciation of others. The emotional agency stands as an emotional autonomy gaining control over situations and people in spite of the duke’s character assassination. The duke’s complaint that she was “too soon made glad” and valued “anyone’s gift” reveals his discomfort with her democratic spirit and refusal to be exclusively defined by him.

Under narrative framing in the poem, the unreliable masculinity is expressed his style of monologue. The monologue is often seen as a performance to impress a marriage emissary. The readers feel that his narration is unreliable and it reflects his character as jealous and possessive. Postfeminist readings interrogate this stereotyped narrative framing rendered in the dramatic monologue but calls the readers to understand the historical truth behind the silenced narrative construction directed towards the duchess and her silence erase the duke’s agenda in readers’ minds.”Browning’s monologues dramatize not only what is spoken but what is silenced, the margins of utterance.” (Armstrong 213)

Irony and Postfeminism

The monologue is represented as a dramatic irony as he presents himself as refined and reasonable but his speech reveals his cruelty, jealousy and authoritarianism as he plans to kill the duchess, holds her art and smile through his possessiveness and authority that he holds over the art and her life itself.

“I choose
Never to stoop”

The pride duke expresses an ironic self-indictment and is perceived as a refusal to engage with emotional complexity. His mind is more complex with his possessiveness to be held responsible for her life, death and art as well.

Postfeminist sensibility is portrayed through contradiction and ambivalence. Rosalind Gill stated that “Postfeminist sensibility is a cultural mode that simultaneously celebrates and disciplines female agency. The duchess is admired for her beauty but punished for her autonomy. Her “too soon made glad” nature is entitled as a moral failure yet postfeminists celebrate it as an emotional openness as a resistance to aristocratic control.

Surface civility vs. subtextual violence is evidential through the duke’s language that is elegant and his tone is measure through his civility in chilling admission that:

“I gave commands
Then all smiles stopped together”

The aesthetic refinement and implied murder are juxtapositioned and shows the postfeminist irony that the very structure that admire the beauty of women in art, marriage and nobility and women are expected to be pleasant and smiling exhibiting the feminine beauty which is admired in marriages suddenly becomes the reason for jealousy in duke that he gave commands to stop her smiles forever.

The narrative, the portrait, the social transaction, the life and death of the duchess are controlled by the duke’s narrative. His speech reveals his performance for the emissary crafted to secure another bride for him. Postfeminist critique questions that “whose story is being told and whose voice is missing?”. The duchess’ silence becomes the site of interpretive resistance.

The illusion of empowerment and commodification of the duchess as a woman and as an art can be viewed in terms of post feminism through how empowerment is often repackaged as aesthetic appeal. Women are considered to be trophies or a commodity to be own and not subjects as the duke expresses his pride through “nine-hundred-years-old name” and his art collection reflects the worldview of art and women as commodities by aristocrat men.

Conclusion

Robert Browning’s *My Last Duchess* offers a perceptive and unsettling portrait of patriarchal control, one that reverberates powerfully with

postfeminist critique. Through the Duke's monologue, the poem stages a complex interaction of visual possession, narrative framing, and aestheticized silencing—mechanisms that postfeminist theory identifies as central to the commodification of femininity. The Duchess, though denied a voice, emerges as a figure whose emotional autonomy and refusal to conform subtly challenge the rigid hierarchies imposed upon her.

Postfeminist sensibility, with its emphasis on contradiction, irony, and ambivalence, allows for a reappraisal of the Duchess not as a passive victim, but as a symbol of resistance within a system that aestheticizes and disciplines female agency. The Duke's polished rhetoric and performative civility mask a deeper violence, revealing how patriarchal authority often operates under the guise of refinement and taste. *My Last Duchess* becomes more than a dramatic monologue - it is a cultural artifact that anticipates contemporary debates around gender, power, and representation. Its enduring relevance lies in its ability to provoke critical reflection on how women are seen, spoken for, and silenced and how those silences might speak volumes when read through a postfeminist lens.

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Eco-feminist Readings of Coastal Ecologies in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*

Pooja D

This research article undertakes a comparative ecofeminist reading of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, focusing on their representation of coastal and watery ecologies as gendered spaces. Both novels dramatize how patriarchal and colonial power intersect with environmental exploitation, linking the domination of women to the degradation of nature. Drawing on ecofeminist theorists such as Vandana Shiva, Val Plumwood, and Stacy Alaimo, the study examines how each text portrays the feminine body and coastal landscape as sites of trauma, memory, and resistance. Through close textual analysis, it shows how Ghosh and Atwood decentre anthropocentrism by foregrounding non-human agency; the Irrawaddy dolphin in *The Hungry Tide* and the animal life and wilderness in *Surfacing*. The article argues that these novels transform coastal ecologies from passive backdrops into active agents in the narrative, inviting readers to imagine a more ethical and interconnected environmental future.

Eco-feminism emerged in the late 20th century as a critique of how patriarchal and colonial systems simultaneously oppress women and exploit nature. Scholars such as Vandana Shiva, Val Plumwood, and Greta Gaard have highlighted the structural links between environmental destruction and gendered marginalization. Coastal and watery ecologies, liminal spaces where land, water, and life blur, are especially rich sites for eco-feminist analysis because they symbolize both fertility and precarity. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004), set in the Sundarbans of eastern India, and Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972), set in rural Quebec's lakes and forests, depict

communities negotiating displacement, memory, and environmental fragility. While Ghosh focuses on a deltaic region shaped by tides, cyclones, and endangered species, Atwood traces a woman's psychological return to a wild, watery landscape tied to colonial and patriarchal histories. Reading these novels together reveals how coastal ecologies function as gendered, contested spaces where the survival of both human and non-human life is at stake.

Research Methodology:

This research adopts a qualitative textual analysis informed by ecofeminist theory and postcolonial ecocriticism. Through close reading, it identifies how language, imagery, and narrative form in *The Hungry Tide* and *Surfacing* articulate the interconnections among women, water, and non-human life. The analysis draws on Ecofeminism (Vandana Shiva, Val Plumwood, Stacy Alaimo's "trans-corporeality"), Postcolonial ecocriticism (Huggan & Tiffin; Mukherjee), and Environmental justice frameworks (Guha & Martínez Alier). Secondary sources include peer-reviewed essays on both novels, ecofeminist theory, and studies on coastal ecologies. This interpretive approach allows the two texts to be placed in dialogue, highlighting common patterns and divergences in how they portray gendered coastal environments.

Review of Literature:

Existing scholarship on *The Hungry Tide* has focused on ecocriticism, climate change, and displacement in the Sundarbans (Dhar 2020; Brindha & Priyadharshini 2019). Critics highlight Ghosh's depiction of slow violence (Nixon) and environmental justice but seldom frame the novel within ecofeminism. Likewise, *Surfacing* is widely read as a feminist and nationalist text exploring identity and colonialism in Canada (Howells 1996; Wilson 2018), yet its watery setting and animal imagery are often treated symbolically rather than ecologically. Few studies compare these two novels, even though both centre on female perspectives, aquatic landscapes, and the ethics of human–nonhuman coexistence. This article fills that gap by bringing an ecofeminist lens to their coastal ecologies.

Research Gap:

While *The Hungry Tide* has been examined for eco-stress and environmental justice and *Surfacing* for feminist and nationalist themes, there is limited comparative research on how both novels construct coastal ecologies as gendered sites of power and vulnerability. This paper addresses that gap by analysing the texts side by side to show how ecofeminism reframes their landscapes as active agents rather than passive settings.

Objectives:

- n To analyse how women's identities and coastal ecologies intersect in *The Hungry Tide* and *Surfacing*.
- n To examine how both texts critique patriarchal and colonial domination over land and women.
- n To explore how non-human species and watery spaces embody agency and shared vulnerability.

Research Questions:

1. How do *The Hungry Tide* and *Surfacing* depict coastal ecologies as feminine and contested spaces?
2. In what ways do the novels critique the overlapping exploitation of women and nature?
3. How do non-human agents (Irrawaddy dolphin; animals and wilderness) complicate anthropocentric narratives?

Women, Water, and Marginality:

In *The Hungry Tide*, the Sundarbans, “a place where the boundaries between land and water are always shifting”, becomes more than a setting; it is a living, breathing force that shapes the fates of those who inhabit it. For women like Kusum and Piya, the tides are not just natural phenomena but metaphors for their own unstable lives. Kusum's story, culminating in her death during the Marichjhapi massacre, reveals how state-led conservation initiatives, cloaked in the language of environmental protection, can violently strip marginalised women of their homes, livelihoods, and sense of belongingness. The sea and the mangroves echo her displacement: always advancing, always retreating, yet never offering permanence. In *Surfacing*, Atwood's unnamed narrator undertakes a journey into a lakeside wilderness in Quebec to search for her missing father, but the landscape also draws her inward, forcing her to confront memories she has long repressed. Her repeated immersion in water, diving beneath the lake's surface, floating, or submerging herself, becomes both literal and symbolic. It signals a descent into the depths of her own psyche, where experiences of sexual exploitation, colonial dispossession, and personal betrayal have been buried like silt. In both texts, water functions as a liminal, feminine space where patriarchal control loosens and submerged traumas rise to visibility. The rivers, tides, and lakes are not inert backdrops but agents of transformation, pulling the female protagonists toward moments of reckoning and, ultimately, toward the possibility of renewal. This interplay between women and water aligns with eco-feminist

thought, which understands the body and the natural world as profoundly interconnected. Through their encounters with these shifting, fluid landscapes, both Kusum and Atwood's narrator remind us that the struggle for ecological survival is also a struggle for memory, identity, and justice.

Non-human Agency and Shared Vulnerability:

In *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh gives a powerful voice to the Irrawaddy dolphin, presenting it not just as a creature of the Sundarbans but as a kind of sentinel whose shrinking habitat mirrors the precarious lives of the local fishers. Through the careful, patient observations of Piya and Fokir, the novel illustrates how scientific knowledge and traditional, indigenous understanding can come together, showing a shared concern for both human and non-human survival. The dolphins, like the fishers, are vulnerable to forces beyond their control: rising waters, ecological change, and political neglect revealing an intertwined fate between species. Similarly, in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, encounters with animals serve as a moral and spiritual mirror for the narrator. Her refusal to kill a fish, her vivid visions of animals, and ultimately her transformation challenge the conventional human-animal hierarchy, suggesting a world in which humans are not the only actors with agency or moral significance. Both novels, in their own ways, ask readers to rethink human supremacy and to recognize that ethical responsibility extends beyond humanity. By centering animals and landscapes as active participants in the story, these texts resonate with Huggan and Tiffin's vision of postcolonial eco-criticism, emphasizing that environmental justice must account for the lives and voices of all beings, not just humans.

Patriarchy, Colonialism, and Environmental Control:

In the Sundarbans, conservation policies often framed as measures to protect fragile ecosystems, end up displacing entire communities, particularly refugees, under the pretense of saving nature. Similarly, in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, the Canadian wilderness is threatened by logging and tourism, reflecting a mindset that views the land as something to be controlled and exploited. In both cases, colonial and patriarchal structures converge, treating women and the natural world alike as resources to be managed rather than beings with intrinsic value. Eco-feminist thinkers such as Vandana Shiva highlight this "logic of domination," showing how the subjugation of women and the degradation of the environment are deeply intertwined. Amitav Ghosh and Atwood dramatize this connection by paralleling female suffering with ecological loss, illustrating the human and environmental costs of systems built on control. Yet their narratives are not without hope: they

imagine ways of living that are grounded in care, reciprocity, and respect, suggesting that ethical relationships with both women and nature are possible when domination is replaced by mutual responsibility.

Toward an Eco-feminist Ethics of Care:

In *The Hungry Tide*, the bond between Piya and Fokir goes beyond mere companionship, it becomes a model of care rooted in attentiveness, respect, and mutual reliance. Similarly, in *Surfacing*, the narrator's ultimate rejection of violence marks a profound shift toward recognizing the interconnectedness of all life. Together, these moments suggest what we might call an ecofeminist ethics of care, one that privileges relationships, empathy, and interdependence over control and domination. In both novels, coastal and wilderness landscapes are more than scenic backdrops; they are living, breathing entities that call for ethical attention and responsibility. By placing women's experiences and the lives of nonhuman beings at the center, the narratives challenge us to rethink environmental justice not as a human-centered project, but as one that honors the intricate web of life in which we are all entangled. These stories remind us that true care requires listening, humility, and a willingness to live in harmony with the natural world.

Conclusion:

In *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh and Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, coastal and watery landscapes are not just settings, they become living, breathing spaces where the struggles of humans and nonhumans intersect. These novels show how such environments are deeply gendered, highlighting the vulnerabilities of women who live in fragile ecologies, and how memory, history, and trauma are tied to the land and water around them. Through the experiences of their female protagonists, alongside the presence of non-human agents like rivers, tides, and wildlife, the authors explore how environmental degradation is often linked to patriarchal and colonial systems of control. Yet, these stories also offer hope: they imagine ways of living that respect both human and nonhuman life, suggesting that survival and flourishing require care, empathy, and ethical responsibility. When read through an eco-feminist lens, the novels reveal that struggles for environmental justice and gender justice are inseparable, urging readers to recognize the interconnectedness of all life and the need for a more compassionate relationship with the natural world.

Scope for Further Study:

Future research could extend this comparative ecofeminist approach to other water-centred texts such as Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* or Linda

Hogan's *Solar Storms* to explore how women writers across cultures use coastal and riverine spaces to critique power and imagine resilience. Empirical studies could also examine how contemporary women activists in coastal regions negotiate environmental and gendered vulnerabilities, linking literature to lived struggles.

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Exploring Feminist Views in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*

Dr. Archana Sharma

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's 2008 novel, *The Palace of Illusions*, is a critically acclaimed bestseller that offers a profound and innovative retelling of the Hindu epic Mahabharata. The novel's central, and most significant, departure from the classical text lies in its narrative perspective: it presents the epic saga through the eyes of Draupadi, also known as Panchaali, the wife of the five Pandava brothers. By shifting the viewpoint from the traditional male-centric account to that of its most prominent female figure, Divakaruni undertakes a fundamental project of feminist literary re-visioning. The novel's purpose, as a work of "feminist literary projects that reclaim mythological women's agency", is to transform Draupadi from a symbolic, objectified figure into a complex, multi-dimensional protagonist with her own voice, desires, and subjective reality.

The strategic choice to employ a first-person, or "autodiegetic," narration is not merely a stylistic flourish but a profound political and literary act. In the original epic, Draupadi's inner world is largely inaccessible; her emotions, actions, and motivations are filtered through the perspectives of male characters, rendering her a "narrated rather than narrating, symbol rather than subject". She is often reduced to a catalyst for the great war, with her personal pain serving to assert male honor rather than exploring her own humanity. Divakaruni's novel directly rectifies this historical silencing. By beginning the narrative with Draupadi's assertion, "Not the story of the sons of Pandu, though they are part of it—just as I am part of theirs," the novel immediately signals a reclamation of agency and autonomy. This

narrative choice effectively answers the postcolonial feminist question, “Can the subaltern speak?” with a resounding and powerful affirmation, positioning the novel as a “literary and political act” that gives voice to those who have long been excluded from cultural memory.

II. The Reclaimed Voice: Narrative and Subjectivity

The novel’s most significant feminist contribution is its deliberate humanization of Draupadi. By granting her an introspective, first-person narrative, Divakaruni portrays her as a psychologically complex figure filled with emotions, vulnerabilities, and passions that were largely absent from the original epic. The historical Draupadi is often depicted as a stoic and steadfast archetype, but Divakaruni’s version is more relatable to a modern audience, navigating her life with a nuanced “inward gaze” and a constant search for “meanings beneath the surface of things”. This interiority transforms her from a passive victim of fate into a “proactive agent” who consciously struggles with the roles and limitations imposed upon her by a patriarchal world. The novel delves into her internal conflicts, which are presented as a reflection of the struggles faced by women whose identities are often “overshadowed by societal expectations”.

A key instance of this re-envisioning is the novel’s exploration of Draupadi’s unfulfilled love for Karna, a subplot that is virtually absent from the classical epic. This conflicted desire for a man who is not one of her five husbands serves multiple feminist purposes. It subverts the

Mahabharata’s traditional “androcentric moral framework” by foregrounding Draupadi’s individual desires and suppressed longings. Her admiration for Karna during the

Swayamvara, a private longing that remains even after her marriage to Arjuna, adds a profound layer of psychological complexity. This romantic sub-plot, which reveals her “quest for personal fulfilment and love” and challenges traditional notions of marital fidelity, is a powerful assertion of her personal identity beyond her role as wife and queen. Furthermore, her inability to choose Karna due to her rejection of his low-caste status in the midst of the public assembly serves as a direct critique of the rigid societal and caste norms that constrain women’s choices. Her later self-blame for what happened to him demonstrates the lasting emotional impact of a choice she felt she was denied.

This focus on Draupadi’s emotional landscape directly addresses a criticism that the novel portrays her as an anachronistic “modern day feminist” concerned only with romance and an extravagant palace. Far from

being superficial, the novel's depiction of these desires is a profound psychological exploration of her quest for autonomy. Draupadi's aspiration for a home that mirrors her "deepest being" and her continuous search to be "loved and longed for" are not trivialities. They are direct consequences of a lifetime of rejection, beginning with her father's initial disdain for having a daughter instead of a son. Her desires are not simply romantic or materialistic; they are a fundamental struggle for self-realization and a stable identity in a world that consistently sought to define her by male-centric roles and expectations.

III. Deconstructing Patriarchy: The Thematic Core of the Novel

The novel meticulously deconstructs the various patriarchal structures that govern Draupadi's life, from her birth to her public humiliation. From the very beginning, she is marked by her father's disappointment, who views his daughter as "unwanted baggage" because she cannot fulfill his desire for vengeance. This familial rejection establishes a foundation of alienation and a continuous struggle to define herself. Her education is limited to activities deemed "appropriate for girls," such as music and dance, and she longs for the knowledge of governance and statecraft reserved for men. Her physical space is confined within her father's palace, which she perceives as a metaphorical prison with its "unimaginative" walls and "tight grip" on her ideals. This psychological and physical imprisonment is presented as a deliberate patriarchal tool to prevent women from "transcending boundaries".

The Swayamvara, traditionally a princess's opportunity to choose her husband, is exposed as a hollow spectacle orchestrated by King Drupad to secure a political alliance with Arjuna. Despite the ceremony's pretense of choice, Draupadi feels "reduced to an object, a reward in a game orchestrated by others" and laments that it is her father, not she, who decides her destiny. Her subsequent marriage to the five Pandavas is not a divine boon, as in the traditional epic, but a "negotiated survival strategy" for her husbands, forcing her to accept a life of polyandry that society views as shameful. The novel highlights the deep-seated hypocrisy of this arrangement, as her husbands could freely take multiple wives, but she was confined to her role, with any deviation being "harshly punished".

The climax of this patriarchal injustice occurs during the infamous dice game. The moment Yudhishthira gambles Draupadi away, treating her as "property... no less so than a cow or a slave," is a profound and horrifying display of male dominance. The novel depicts her public disrobing not as a divine event used to catalyze a war, but as a deeply personal and traumatic experience that exposes the "entrenched patriarchy of the era". The chilling

silence of the court elders, who “chose silence over justice” despite being pillars of moral authority, is a powerful critique of patriarchal complicity. Draupadi’s body becomes a site for the “marking [of] male hegemony,” and the novel gives voice to her anger and defiance, allowing her to assert, “I am no one’s possession!” and question the moral codes that allowed such an injustice to occur.

IV. The Psychology of the Re-Visioned Woman

Divakaruni’s portrayal of Draupadi’s character can be understood through the lens of feminist psychology, particularly Karen Horney’s theory that women’s psychological conflicts are a result of being “dominated in a men’s world”. From her birth, Draupadi is psychologically “Othered” by society, which creates a deep-seated desire to establish her own identity and agency. She is a “proactive agent” who consistently struggles for autonomy, questioning her father’s decisions, challenging the traditions of her marriage, and refusing to silently accept injustice. Her continuous defiance and assertion of her rights are central to the novel’s feminist critique, transforming her from a passive figure into a symbol of resilience and empowerment.

The novel also provides a nuanced exploration of female relationships, portraying both the conflicts and the solidarity that exist between women in a patriarchal society. Divakaruni delves into Draupadi’s “complicated relationship with Kunti,” the Pandavas’ mother, which is marked by rivalry and competition. This portrayal acknowledges the ways in which patriarchal norms can pit women against each other. Simultaneously, the novel highlights the “importance of female solidarity” through Draupadi’s “deep bonds with her female companions,” such as her handmaidens and Krishna’s sister, Subhadra. These relationships are depicted as a crucial “source of strength and support” that helps Draupadi navigate her male-dominated world, emphasizing “the power of sisterhood” and the ways in which women can “uplift and empower one another”.

V. The Metaphorical Landscape: The Palace of Illusions

The novel’s title, *The Palace of Illusions*, is a central and powerful metaphor that unifies its core themes. The titular palace, Indraprastha, is a magnificent creation, but Draupadi recognizes it as a beautiful yet deceptive facade. It represents the “deceptive ideals women are asked to live by”—the myths of obedience, beauty, and sacrifice that promise a grand and fulfilling life while masking a profound lack of true power. Draupadi’s reflection that the palace, like her life, is “a place built of illusions” captures the novel’s central conflict. The physical splendor of the palace exists in

stark contrast to the psychological confines of her reality.

The symbolic collapse of the palace at the end of the narrative mirrors the disintegration of Draupadi's dreams and the shattering of the facade of her life. The palace is destroyed by forces beyond her control, just as her personal ambitions for her marriage, motherhood, and political influence are undone by the male-centric world around her. The metaphor serves to link the grand political narratives of the epic to the intimate, personal struggles of its female protagonist, demonstrating how her individual life is inextricably intertwined with the "fragile" patriarchal structures that govern her world.

VI. Comparative Analysis and Critical Reception

The *Palace of Illusions* is a significant work within the growing tradition of contemporary feminist retellings of mythology. Divakaruni's work is part of a broader literary movement that seeks to give voice to the previously "marginalized" heroines of ancient epics, a project shared by authors of both Indian and Western mythology. While each author takes a unique approach, the common goal is to create space for women's voices to be heard and to portray archetypal figures as "multifaceted humans" with distinct agency.

A comparative analysis with Divakaruni's other work, *The Forest of Enchantments*, highlights the distinct expressions of feminist agency. In *The Forest of Enchantments*, the protagonist Sita's agency is described as "more internal, marked by moral strength, resilience, and quiet defiance". Conversely, Draupadi's agency in

The Palace of Illusions is characterized as "outward... by rebellion, ambition, and assertiveness". While both women ultimately reclaim their narratives and defy patriarchal norms, their methods are fundamentally different, demonstrating the layered ways in which female autonomy can be expressed.

A critical view of the novel argues that Divakaruni's portrayal of Draupadi fails to do justice to her historical character, reducing her to a figure preoccupied with romance and material possessions and suggesting that she lacks the profound complexity of the original epic heroine. This perspective posits that the novel twists a historical "fact" into a modern "story" that is not compelling and overlooks the profound spiritual significance of the original. However, this critique may misunderstand Divakaruni's literary project. The novel is not an attempt at a historical record but a "deconstruction to reconstruct" the female character. Its purpose is to reimagine mythology "with modern relevance" and to dismantle

“stereotypical ideology” by providing a voice that was historically denied. Divakaruni’s Draupadi, with all her human flaws and desires, is presented as a relatable figure whose emotional journey validates the struggles and triumphs of women navigating a male-dominated world.

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Gender Discrimination in Arunadhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

Dr. Deepa Rani

The image of women in various anthropological, historical and cultural studies has been presented as non-actors. Their activities are invariably confined to private space and they are really shown as playing role in social and historical development. Such age-old conceptual notions about womanhood are embedded in the binary opposition between male and female attributes: initiative and passivity; reason and emotion; materiality and spirituality. The nature of womanhood is constantly defined in the terms of male desire and female imagination.

Hence, women have always been the object of male subjectivity. She has been defined in terms of the relation to the males need in society. Her social role and position in society is also assigned by patriarchy. She is often portrayed in terms of popularity available stereotypes of the suffering mother, the restive wife or the shrewish mistress, in all the cases and easily dispensable appendage to the male counterpart. She is not allowed to speak or act in an autonomous fashion but is spoken to and acted upon.

The portrayal of women in the Indo-English fiction is in conformity with the traditional image. Traditionally, the Indian women accepted the framework of the family with a blind faith and rarely showed a rebellious trend. Likewise, women in the early Indo English fiction is seen as docile, self-sacrificing, patients, loving and capable of suffering, but the impact of feminism has changed the thought process of later writers, especially women writers like Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee and Arundhati Roy.

They have portrayed women from a different point of view. The marginalisation in security and segregation experienced why women have

been effectively highlighted by these writers they have also depicted the numerous face facets of women's experience emphasising in particular the trial and tribulation is of being a woman in a rigid patriarchal culture.

The God of Small Things is a telling account of the women's struggle for getting a respectable place in the society which is deliberately denied to them by the traditional norms of patriarchy. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a remarkable indictment of patriarchy and the injustice as well as oppression faced by women in the andocentric society. The novel faithfully and succinctly delineates the realistic portrayal of sufferings and hardships faced by women coupled with their anxieties, cares, predicaments, their prosecution, undeserved humiliation and humble submission in a chauvinistic world.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a powerful exploration of the silent voice of subaltern. It throws light on some important things of life. It has universal appeal because it voices the hidden and suppressed emotions of subaltern. It is a panorama of Indian social life. It shows the endless struggle of women and untouchables for carving their identity in this cruel, conservative and elite dominating society.

Search for identity is the key elements associated with the females who are constantly victimised by the patriarchal set-up in the society, a society that is hostile and aversive to them. Consequently, their lives are full of ifs and buts, ups and downs which can vividly be seen through the portrayal of female characters like Ammu, Mammachi, Rahel, and Margaret Kochamma.

The present work expresses the saga of three generations. Among the most recurrent issues dealt by Arundhati Roy is the issue of family and social mechanism evolved over the centuries in traditional Indian society to suppress women and her independence as a human being. Of all the three generations portrayed by the novelist in the book, the woeful tale of Ammu, mother of Rahel and Estha who suffers silently, yet simmers inside in her a deep discount.

It is an established and interesting fact that in the present book, there are women than men. Most of the men are shadows, while women are sharply delineated and occupy the centre stage. Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Ammu, Sophie Mol, Rahel keep in motion the story. We perceive in the book, women from three generations who take up the cudgels to establish and maintain their spiritual, sexual and economic liberty. Against the restricted background of Ayemenem, the novelist through her confidence, ironic vision and comic spirit sketches a variety of characterization of female characters. Her portrayal of women characters is chiefly according to the Indian

environment and atmosphere. They have been painted with their good and bad characteristic traits. The varied options available to the modern Indian women, from traditional motherhood to manless lifestyle-all are given local habitation and colour by Roy in her novel.

Mammachi, the wife of Pappachi, an entomologist, belonging to the first generation and is responsible for making a path on which women of next-generation tread so fearlessly. She is a typical housewife and a victim of her frustrated husband who is seventeen years older than her. . She has been a silent sufferer from the beginning of her marriage life. Though she is not frustrated in love like Baby but she is an unhappy character. She is like a doll in the hands of Pappachi. Her husband has a very poor opinion about her. In the beginning Roy presents a pathetic picture of Mammachi's life. Roy observes "Mammachi was almost blind and wore dark glasses when she went out of the house. Her tears tickled down from behind them, trembled down from behind them and tremble along her jaw like raindrops on the edge of a roof."

She suffers like caged bird in the hands of her entomologist husband whose professional failure makes him ill humoured and sulky. He is polite and generous to outsiders, but a tormentor to his wife and children. He derives satisfaction from beating and humiliating his wife and children. His jealousy and egoism lead him to suppress his talent for music. A few words of praise from the music teacher are enough for him to abruptly end her lessons. Because he could not excel in his career, she had no right to shine. Breaking the bow of the violin and throwing it into the river reveal his desire to put off the flames of the independent thinking and her aspiration to attain some place of her own in society.

Mammachi's married life is devoid of love, understanding and co-operation. She accepts everything as her fate and remains a passive sufferer till the matter is intervened by her son, Chacko, who finds Pappachi's treatment of her as something too much for him to tolerate. It tells his father in no uncertain terms that it must not be repeated again. The result is that even the thin bond of relationship between Mammachi and her husband is snapped off: "He left it there in the moonlight, a heap of varnished wicker and splintered wood. He never touched Mammachi again. But, he never spoke to her either as long as he lived."

Mammachi is women who remains under control of her husband and then her son and she takes it has a norm of life. Her experiences in the male-dominated world and her suffering is in the enclosures called marriage with a sadistic husband pervert her mind. Though she has carved a niche for

herself, yet, her progress in terms of her attitude and mentality is not enough for her independent identity. Still it cannot be denied that her boldness and economic independence give her a sense of achievement and provide a foot mark to the women of future generation to follow. She becomes the connecting agent between the conservative dependent housewives and fully independent Women.

In this way, we find Mammachi has been depicted as a woeful character who leads a life of frustrations and dissatisfied marriage. The age gap between her and her husband is responsible to a great extent of her deplorable situation. Her husband is seventeen years older than her. He is a respectable man in society and a notable entomologist. He is a very jealous husband. Mammachi takes lesson in violin when her teacher praises her he becomes sad and abruptly discontinues her lessons. Every night he beats Mammachi with a brass flower vase. One day Pappachi beat Mammachi with brass vase, Chacko had come to Ayemenem for summer vacation and he saw Pappachi beating Mammachi and he strode Pappachi to room and twisted his hand back. This episode created hatred in mind of Pappachi and he never touched or sought any help from Mammachi.

Ammu, the women character who represents the second generation is obviously marginalized. She is the upholder of the novel, who faces marginalization in the hands of both men and women. Though she is born in a rich family, she is denied love and care from her parents. She is a divorcee with two children. They live a life of sufferance in her parent's house where she is degraded by other relatives.

Ammu, the daughter of Mammachi, belongs to the second generation. She too suffers from gender bias in the patriarchal society represented by her father, who does not allow her to pursue her studies. She is forced to drop school when her father retires from his job at Delhi and shifts to Ayemnem. As he refuses to be bear "unnecessary expense" of her education, she idles around in the home town and waits for her marriage. The delay turns her desperate and she starts finding escape routes from the prison like situation of her house. Ultimately, she succeeds in her plans and marries the first man who proposes "...Ammu did not pretend to be in love with him. She just weighted the odds and accepted. She thought that anything, anyone at all would be better than returning to Ayemenem."

Though history repeats itself when Ammu, too, suffers beatings from her husband, yet she fares better than her mother. Insecure and bitter childhood has taught her the survival tactics and she fights back fiercely like a true rebel. She retaliates violently when her husband forces her to sleep

with her boss to save his job. The actual tale of sufferings and misery for Ammu begins when she comes in contact with Velutha. Though there was huge caste difference between Ammu and Velutha yet they indulged in sex act because of their passion and they did not pay any heed towards the code of conduct of their respective castes. Such illicit affair was not permitted and was considered a societal crime to be punished severely.

Arundhati Roy castigates this kind of gender discrimination as gross injustice and tyranny. She condemns this shameful tendency of parents who sustain the conventional outlook of debarring their daughters from having higher education and shockingly, this narrow and orthodox tendency still persists even in the twenty first century.

Arundhati Roy gives exposure to the caste difference, gender discrimination, colour and racial distinctions through social institutions and she strongly professes how they influence human relations and individual behaviour of people. The old traditions gave rise to rebellious thoughts and Roy has raised a voice of protest through her characters and the way injustice is done to these socially downtrodden people because of their gender is emphatically portrayed. The treatment given to women for their basic necessities and passions through the character of Ammu is condemnable as the new waves of change, with the independence of India and equal rights to women in the constitution, are gaining strength. In such a closed atmosphere, Ammu began to feel like a captive in the big Ayemenem House whereas she wants to fly high in the sky like a free bird and thus she got a chance to visit Calcutta to attend a marriage function where she met her future husband who was on the post of Assistant Manager in a tea estate in Assam.

Roy has used the theme of marginalization in her novel as a medium to exhibit the low-spirited lives of women in the orthodox Indian society. She has also brought out the sufferings, pains, prejudice, physical and sexual violence of women in the devoted world. Roy has also not failed to criticize the social institutions such as family, marriage and religion which act as the authoritative factor for marginalization in her novel.

New generation of women is represented by Rahel who lives throughout the life of a rebel. Described as 'an excited mosquito on the leash' Rahel is the daughter of Ammu and twin sister of the Estha. The disturbing and destructive elements of her childhood experience wreck her life completely. Still, she manages to salvage something from nothing. After her mother's disgrace and banishment her behaviour deteriorates further. She is expelled for having 'un-girl like' temperament, but she manages to get admission in the college of architecture, Delhi, daily though fails to get a degree. She tries

to settle down after her marriage with Larry, but contentment eludes her. Ultimately, she returns to man Ayemenem in search of fulfillment and finds it in her twin brother. Like her mother, she returns to Ayemenem after venturing in the outer world but unlike her mother, she comes not to seek shelter but to provide shelter to her abnormally weak and feeble brother.

Creative writers in the modern era must incorporate women's issues and struggle against those institutions social relations and ideas that divide women and keep them powerless and self-effacing to men. They must pave way to wrench control of the institutions that now oppress them.

Thus, Arundhati Roy has graphically and realistically portrayed this evil of gender discrimination in her novel *The God of Small Things*. The next hapless target of gender discrimination is Ammu's daughter Rahel who like her mother also develops a sense of isolation and aloofness in a male centred social set-up and she is always treated by her own family members as an outsider. She is devoid of any love, affection and care of the Ayemenem House and for this very reason Rahel feels like a fish out of water. After the death of Ammu, she faces the most troublesome period of life whether she is in school or at home. The treatment of the family made her sadistic and even abnormal in her attitude.

Thus, by the end of the novel, The circle seems to be complete. Mammachi who starts the journey of her life on the periphery of the social structures, takes a few steps towards the centre by achieving economic independence for entry into the business world-the men's world forbidden for women-is the clear indication of the power she enjoys. Ammu proceeds further and challenges the endocentric notion of society by her rebellious nature. She refuses to be content with motherhood and divorcehood.

If Mammachi is described as bold and Ammu daring when then their descendants Rahel can be called as dare-devil, for she is an emancipated woman and holds the central position of power in the circle, i.e. society. Through her, Arundhati Roy has proved that women cannot be criticised for being a divorcee and a women can become the protector of men, but as power has a tendency to corrupt the power holder, so it does to Rahel and she loses the grace and decency of a woman. She plays dominating role in the sexual act; it seems as if poor as poor Estha is not acting but acted upon as he did in the hands of his abuser. She is a transgressor. She come incest-which no one looks forward to as a welcome practice in the world of social animals called human beings.

This novel was a revolutionary attempt on the part of Arundhati who tried to open the eyes of Indian Community towards the Callousness of

treating women as objects. Women thus treated are considered soulless beings, sub-human and playthings for men. This imbalance in society explains much of the unhappiness prevailing in our families and the battered lives of children who are exposed to this very partial and unjust view of life. The end result is a paralyzed society unable and unwilling to grow.

She has used the theme of marginalization in her novel as a medium to exhibit the low-spirited lives of women in the orthodox Indian society. She has also brought out the sufferings, pains, prejudice, physical and sexual violence of women in the devoted world. Roy has also not failed to criticize the social institutions such as family, marriage and religion which act as the authoritative factor for marginalization in her novel.

The novel reflects the sage of oppression on one hand and on the other; it depicts deep sense of protest. - *The God of Small Things: Voice and Expression to the Sufferings of Subaltern* In the novel, the female characters refuse to let themselves be caged in the rules and laws set by an extremely conservative society.

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The Fight about Self in Kamala Das' *My Story*

Dr. Pamposh Ganjoo

The objective behind this paper is to explore all the reasons which can trigger or pave the way for fight. Whenever we hear this word the first reaction is full of negativity/remorse. But here the meaning sounds little different as it is not that fight which can harm others. It is a fight about self-defence because we all humans do expect certain things in return. This is applicable to both men and women, particularly in case of women, it has always remained a debatable discussion, because of the mindset of patriarchy. Women have always been the worst hit, whether it was their family or society. From here onwards what emerged on the surface was a struggle which had its own challenges. Kamala Das' personal life is the replica of all this.

She, in her autobiography, *My Story* is quite expressive about certain aspects which may sound unconventional to some of the readers. *My Story* presents a story of negligence, pain and betrayal which Kamala Das had to face throughout her life. The only silver lining we see in her destiny was that she was little fortunate enough to find out an outlet of her pain through her writing. But what about rest of the women who go through such agony? The only option they are left with is to adjust somehow and never complain about it. Das gives a clear-cut message that women must not suffer silently. After all they too have their choice and desires. All they need is love, gratitude and acknowledgement. This will definitely boost their morale. They ought to be expressive and will have to fight hard against atrocities and assault committed upon them. Keeping this into consideration this paper will trace all the incidents which persuaded Das to raise voice and speak boldly.

Whenever we hear/write the word discrimination the first reaction will be how to overcome it? This type of attitude definitely reflects our behaviour as we humans were entitled to live a biased free life but when it comes to discrimination, we have ample number of instances from History. Collectively discrimination has been faced across the world, but if we go into specifics, it is the History/discrimination of women which has always remained a debatable discussion.

The reason being the patriarchal mindset which always wants women to be voiceless and marginalized. Whether we talk about family or society the story was same everywhere. It was the story of negligence, pain and dominance (inflicted by patriarchy). On the whole women lived a restricted life. It was not only the common man who took the lead and spoke against women, even the renowned theorist, philosophers and well-known thinkers also spoke the same. "As Sidonie Smith explained in *A Politics of Women's Autobiography* both classical and Christian declare that women were inferior. A woman said Aristotle was less perfect than a man" (Harris 3).

These derogatory remarks knew no boundaries. If a woman dared to cross her limitations, she had to face the penalty and criticism everywhere. This went on till the onset of Feminism (in West). The pioneers of Feminists (Like Mary Wollstonecraft, Elaine Showalter, Virginia Woolf and Kate Millet) tried their best to nullify/raise voice against discrimination (through their writing) as it had scattered the society. Among men J.S. Mill's *The Subjection of Women* too remained an eye opener for all. The agenda of Feminists was quite clear that they were looking for a society devoid of discrimination, where women can think freely about their own self. But this struggle had its own challenges and obstacles.

Likewise, Feminism in India began to spread rapidly during nineteenth and twentieth century. The prominent among Feminists were Savitri Bhai Phule (First female educationist of India), Kamla Bhasin and Sharmila Rege. Among men the prominent ones were Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Rabindranath Tagore. This revolution emerged in Indian literature too. There were many women novelists like Nayartara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur and Gita Hariharan who emerged on the literary platform with challenges being faced by their heroines. The struggle of women was highlighted in autobiographies like *On Balance* by Leila Seth and *Listen to Me* by Shashi Deshpande. Currently we have Sudha Moorthy a well-known literary icon. Her experiences (as a woman) gets reflected in her works and interview. Women centric issue (with the passage of time) was not confined only to literature, it got reflected in several cinematic adaptations as well.

When it comes to women centric issues Kamala Das too is a well-known name. The reason being that her own life went through severe turbulence which in a way compelled her to speak boldly on certain issues which were considered as taboos. This earned her a tag of confessionalism in literature. The same ideology is applicable to her autobiography *My Story*. This autobiography in a way presents a story of every woman who has suffered silently. This discrimination against women was very much prevalent right from the inception of society.

Normally, a woman was left with few options like she had to adjust and accept everything as a part of her destiny. To walk out from the toxic relationship was not advisable, it used to happen in rarest of the rare cases. The reasons behind this were several and the most disturbing pertained to the derogatory remarks from society. But *My Story* turned out to be a wakeup call for all women so that they can speak for themselves. Of course, some of the content in *My Story* may not be approved by a well-polished and cultured reader but we need to understand that behind everything there lies a cause and consequence will have its own impact.

Kamala Das throughout her life fought literally for her identity. She turned out to be revolutionary with solid reasons. Das like any other woman can be taken as a normal person, she too had expectations from life, but life took a chaotic turn for her. There are certain incidents in *My Story* which are enough to make everyone understand that the basis of everything lies in love, respect, care and value. If this lacks then everything will fall like a pack of cards.

This is applicable to every relation we come across. At times certain relations play a pivotal role. "Humanistic Psychology tells us that eight five percent of happiness in life comes from good relationships and only thirteen percent from achievement and success" (Pathak 86). But what if there is no sense of belonging/cooperation? It is obvious that everything we have to handle on our own. Kamala Das became the sole witness of all this at a very tender age. She became a victim of isolation (Which was very much prevalent in her family right from her childhood days) because of the marital discord of her parents. "She had already grown up with a feeling of neglect as her work alcoholic father had little time for her and did not know how to show his affection for his children. And her mother 'Vague and indifferent' was most of the time engaged in writing. She felt her parents were horribly mismatched and her brother and she . . . had been born of an arid and loveless union." (Satchidanandan xii-xiii).

What is pertinent to mention that parents owe a sense of responsibility towards their children. When it comes to a good parenting, the need of the

hour is to strike a balance between professional and personal life. By and large parents are said to be the first counsellors/care takers of children. Childhood as such has always been taken as the best phase of human life. However, the bond which children share with parents seeks nurturing, it is only then it can turn out to be productive and everlasting. If parents fail, it is obvious that children will be the worst hit and will look for other ways and means. There is a high chance that they may engross themselves in certain things (Whether intentionally or unintentionally) which are said to be unethical. Das was capable enough to witness such unpleasant moments. Her childhood turned out to be full of isolation.

Whether it was family or her school friends she was compelled to maintain the distance because of the treatment she received. What we can interpret out of this is the delicacy of human mind being controlled by circumstances. *My Story* as such is full of poetic expressions which express her pain. Childhood on the whole is believed to be a stage of exploration, children have their own queries which need to be answered. At times they like to have their own role models. But in case of Das we see only gaps/ blanks that have been left out. She met with the same situation, even in adulthood. She was never allowed to bloom.

While going through this autobiography there is one question which strikes our mind that is why Kamala Das suffered throughout her life? The primary reason lies in her being a woman. History is the witness that women never lived for their self. They were meant to serve and live for others. This is the stereotypical / patriarchal mindset where men enjoyed privileges in family and society and women were on the backseat. Das describes herself as a dark-skinned girl another notion of patriarchy where woman was assessed on the basis of her appearance. Fair complexion was said to be the hall mark of a woman's beauty.

Das in *My Story* points out that dark skin always haunted her right from her childhood days till she entered in wedlock and even later also. There is a small episode in *My Story* where Das talks about her rejection (Poetry recitation) in school due to dark skin and the appreciation earned by her class mate (who was fair and blonde). This presents the ideology of patriarchy where a woman was always objectified and had to be hunted. Feminist across the world are against this ideology so is Kamala Das in *My Story*. If we see all this logically, there are certain aspects pertaining to our life (Especially in the context of our appearance) which we cannot erase.

But, how many of us have been able to understand this truth? Not many (Especially with reference to women). It is only the enlightened mind who

know how to express gratitude towards everything that God has bestowed to us. When it comes to colour of skin, somehow it gets connected with the physical attributes (a part of the race). We do have dark skinned, fair and blonde women across the world. The present scenario also holds the same. We have case history of women across the world who have touched the pinnacle of success irrespective of their appearance. What matters at the end of the day is that women must built up their identity.

Kamala Das (Through *My Story*) wanted all women to expand their mental horizon, love their own self and let men understand that every woman is unique in her own way. Moreover, myths and superstitions beliefs around womanhood must be all together nullified. She recalls an incident when she had her first menstrual cycle “.... she was told she was ready to be a mother. Impressed by Kunti’s method of getting good sons in the *Mahabharata* she based her body to the sun and prayed for a son” (Satchidanandan XVI). But later on, she claimed that nothing happened immediately (From the divine intervention).

This again speaks about the stereotypical conventions where men stored the limelight of religious scriptures too. Looking back to womanhood all that Das wants is that menstrual cycle must be taken as a normal process which every woman experiences in her life. Of course, it has got a deep connection with motherhood which itself speaks about strength and power that God has bestowed to every woman. The need of the hour is to celebrate the womanhood and not to take it as a curse. If we celebrate the birth of boy, there should be no hesitation in celebrating the birth of a girl child too.

There are several other instances in *My Story* which only reflect the patriarchal mindset. The ideology of chasing and hunting was very much prevalent in seeking alliances where women had no say. Kamala Das’ own marriage was the replica of all this. “.... her marriage was fixed even before she was prepared for it, her fiancé hurt and humiliated her, pushing her into a dark room and crushing her breasts an experience she recalls in the famous poem ‘*An Introduction*’ there was title companionship and warmth” left out between the two. Eventually with the passage of time “She was left cold and frigid in the face of his violent physical demands and his reflection of his earlier sexual exploits. Here was a man she felt ‘who did not ever learn to love’.” (Satchidanandan XV). Marriage devoid of love, respect and care is bound to fail. This was the plight of most of the women as they were advised to accept the brutality of their husband and in-laws. The only silver lining we see in case of Das that she was well educated with the result she met several people. But the tag of being a married woman always haunted her.

She was neither happy in marital life nor in the relationships she had outside.

My Story speaks of her struggle as she always wanted to have a stable life. Marriage is said to be a life time union and here we are not in favour of extramarital relation (if marriage fails). The interpretation to be drawn from Das' marriage is that men should never take their wives for granted. They need to understand their (wives') emotions. There is nothing like receiving end in marital union. For an everlasting union the onus has to come from both sides.

Kamala Das in *My Story* clearly speaks about the gaze, whereas woman was described as a commodity to be used for consumption only. The status of woman (whether she was single, married or divorcee) was hardly an issue. She was treated as a soft target. This goes well with the incidents which women have experienced on daily basis. It hardly matters whether it is family (Where they become victims of domestic violence) or a public place and they prefer to remain silent on it, because of the fear from society. Das through *My Story* has urged all women to break down all these conventions/barriers as they deserve a respectable place, and create a society free of violence.

The moment we read "*My Story*" we see Kamala Das in different roles. She describes herself a poet, a wife, a mother (of two sons) and above all a woman with aspirations. So are the women in modern times. They are educated; working, handling multiple tasks (Whenever the need arises) but still some of the misogynists describe them as frail and delicate. The problem of course lies in mindset and the remedy lies in fight for the self. This fight a woman needs to initiate right from the day she starts growing up and those involved with her need to change their mindset and merge with her. This fight is about equality, where a woman must walk shoulder to shoulder with her counterpart (man) and not behind him. Kamala Das' *My Story* is an eye opener to every woman that it is better to fight for the self before it is too late.

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Postcolonial Feminism

Nathalia D. Souza

Feminism is fundamentally about fighting for justice, equality, and freedom for all genders. Yet, over time, it has become clear that not all feminist perspectives have received equal attention. Dominant feminist narratives, largely influenced by Western scholars and activists, have often concentrated on issues such as wage equality, reproductive autonomy, and legal rights. While these are undeniably significant, they tend to reflect the realities of women in affluent Western societies and may neglect the distinct struggles faced by women in formerly colonized nations. This is where postcolonial feminism becomes essential. Rather than opposing feminism, it expands its reach by highlighting the experiences of women in non-Western, postcolonial contexts.

Emerging in the 1980s, this branch of feminism emphasizes how gender-based challenges intersect with the enduring effects of colonialism, racial discrimination, and global economic disparities. In contrast to Western feminism's tendency to generalize women's experiences, postcolonial feminism insists on recognizing the influence of cultural heritage, historical context, and social conditions. By doing so, it brings a richer, more inclusive dimension to feminist discourse, one that embraces a wider range of voices and lived realities from around the world.

Perlego Study Guide defines postcolonial feminism as “a branch of feminism that focuses on gender liberation through the eyes of non-Western women, especially those who live in former colonies. It works to incorporate minorities in discourse as it addresses issues such as racism, politics,

economics, gender, and the effects of colonialism on non-Western, non-white women in the postcolonial world” (“What Is Postcolonial Feminism?”).

Postcolonial feminist theory focuses on amplifying the voices and experiences of women from regions that were once under colonial rule. It highlights the intersecting forms of oppression these women endure, not only from patriarchal systems but also from lingering colonial influences. This perspective challenges both traditional Western feminist frameworks and conventional postcolonial thought for overlooking the unique and multifaceted struggles faced by women in these contexts. By doing so, it underscores the importance of resisting both gender-based and colonial forms of domination.

Postcolonial feminism explores the ongoing influence of colonialism on gender dynamics, cultural identity, and societal frameworks in regions often referred to as the Global South. Women in these settings encounter multiple, intersecting forms of oppression, not only gender-based discrimination but also racial bias, economic hardship, and cultural exclusion stemming from historical colonial rule. Rather than viewing them solely through the lens of patriarchy, this perspective acknowledges that their realities are shaped by enduring legacies of imperialism, which continue to affect their lives in profound ways.

A key concern raised by postcolonial feminism is its challenge to Western feminism’s tendency to generalize women’s experiences across cultures. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty famously argued, Western feminist scholarship has often portrayed Third World women as a homogenous group, silent, oppressed, and in need of saving (Mohanty 61). This narrative not only erases the diversity of experiences among women in the Global South but also reinforces a colonial mindset that positions Western women as more enlightened or empowered.

Scholars such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have pushed this critique further by asking whether the “subaltern,” the most marginalized individuals, can truly speak within dominant systems of power (Spivak 271). Her work challenges us to consider how even well-intentioned feminist efforts can reproduce the very hierarchies they aim to dismantle. Similarly, Trinh T. Minh-ha has emphasized the importance of representation, arguing that the way we talk about and depict non-Western women matters deeply (Minh-ha). These scholars remind us that feminism must be attentive not only to gender but also to history, culture, and power.

Postcolonial feminism also draws strength from literature and storytelling. Writers like Buchi Emecheta have used fiction to illuminate the lived realities

of women in formerly colonized regions. Her novel *The Joys of Motherhood* explores the tensions between tradition, motherhood, and colonial influence in Nigeria, offering a personal story woven with political undertones (Emecheta). Through such works, postcolonial feminism becomes firmly grounded in observable facts, but a lived reality, rooted in ideas that have resonated across eras have been silenced.

Importance and Relevance in Contemporary Feminist Discourse

Postcolonial feminism is significant in contemporary feminist conversations because it highlights women from places that were once colonies, whose tales were not always told this way, heard, or understood within mainstream feminism. It shows how history, especially colonialism, still affects women's lives deeply, mixing with issues of race, class, and power worldwide. Instead of assuming all women have the same experiences, postcolonial feminism urges attention to different cultures and histories. This inclusion strengthens feminist ideas, making them fairer by incorporating voices from across the globe. In a world affected by globalization and economic control in varied ways, postcolonial feminism offers a powerful lens to understand and fight the unique challenges women face everywhere.

This perspective is needed because traditional Western feminism sometimes ignores or oversimplifies the struggles of women from non-Western countries. Postcolonial feminism helps make feminism more inclusive by ensuring these women's voices and issues are heard and understood rather than ignored or misrepresented. It also asks Western feminists to be aware of their own biases and not assume their way of thinking about feminism applies universally.

This chapter introduces postcolonial feminism by highlighting how it challenges mainstream feminist ideas that often exclude the voices of women from former colonies. It begins by explaining fundamental concepts and placing postcolonial feminism within its historical and academic background, emphasizing the overlapping impact of race and gender on social experience, class, and the legacy of colonialism. The chapter explores key thinkers and important themes such as identity and representation, together with the complex issues confronted by postcolonial women. It engages with ongoing conversations and disagreements within the field and discusses why postcolonial feminism remains vital to contemporary feminist movements and scholarship worldwide.

Historical and Theoretical Background

The Effects of Colonial Rule on Gender and Culture: Colonialism

extended beyond merely taking control of land and resources, but also reshaping societies in deep, lasting ways. Colonial authorities frequently enforced their dominance over local societies, cultural values, languages, and social systems, disrupting traditional ways of life, including gender roles. Colonial rule frequently excluded women from leadership roles and reinforced male dominance, even in societies that formerly had more balanced or matriarchal structures. Cultural practices, storytelling, art, and religion were often suppressed or replaced, impacting how people saw themselves and their identities (Loomba 45).

Rise concerning the legacy of colonial rule

The rise of postcolonial theory aimed to explore and make sense of colonial legacies, challenge the ongoing effects of colonialism after independence. Including thinkers like Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha examined how colonial ideas shaped the portrayal and treatment of colonized peoples. The theory analyzes how language, literature, and history justified colonialism and how those tools can be used to resist it. Postcolonial theory encourages reclaiming stories, questioning dominant narratives, and celebrating cultural diversity and resilience (Young 103–18).

Where .Feminism Meets Postcolonial Studies

Feminism and postcolonial theory together provide perspectives on the interplay between gender and colonialism. Postcolonial feminism critiques mainstream feminism for not reflecting the realities of women in formerly colonized countries. It highlights how race, class, and culture uniquely influence their lives and calls for more inclusive conversations about gender equality that recognize history, identity, and context (Hamill, “Postcolonial Feminism” 35).

Key Concepts in Postcolonial Feminism: Postcolonial feminism challenges the dominance of Western feminist ideas by insisting that feminism include the voices and realities of women from formerly colonized regions. These women often have distinct cultural values, histories, and social challenges. Decolonizing feminist thought means recognizing these differences and building a broader and more accepting view of gender identities and equality that respects local traditions and lived experiences.

Intersectionality: Race, Class, Gender, and Empire: Intersectionality is central to postcolonial feminism, emphasizing that the dynamics of gender are shaped by its connection to race, class, and historical background. Women in postcolonial societies face multiple layers of discrimination, not only gendered but also ethnic, economic, and colonial legacies. Postcolonial

feminism addresses this complexity (Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders* 45).

Critique of Western Feminism: Postcolonial feminists critique Western feminism's tendency to universalize women's struggles. Many Western feminists have portrayed women from the Global South as helpless victims without acknowledging their cultural contexts or strengths, silencing active resistance. Postcolonial feminism promotes listening to these diverse experiences and avoiding speaking on behalf of others (Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes" 336).

Voice and Representation: A powerful aim of postcolonial feminism is to give space to historically silenced women, including those from colonized countries and indigenous communities. Representation means giving these women the space to voice their experiences, stories, shape identities, and influence gender justice conversations. It supports literature, media, and activism that challenge stereotypes.

Foundational Thinkers

Postcolonial feminist literature is enriched through the work of influential thinkers such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Sara Suleri. Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" questions whether marginalized women can be truly heard within dominant systems, highlighting risks of misrepresentation (Spivak 271). Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes" critiques Western feminism's homogenizing portrayals of "Third World women," urging nuanced, contextual understanding (Mohanty 61). Suleri's works, like *Meatless Days*, blend narrative and critical reflection, exploring colonialism's effects on identity and memory (Suleri).

Key Themes and Concepts

The complexity of postcolonial women's experiences is best understood through themes of intersectionality, voice and silence, hybridity and identity, and resistance and agency.

Intersectionality stresses the interconnected structures of inequality. Mohanty critiques Western ideologies that generalize the Third World Feminine population monolithic group defined only by victimhood (Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders* 45).

Voice and Silence explores who speaks and who remains unheard. Spivak's work reveals how subaltern women are often silenced by dominant powers, and even well-meaning feminists can inadvertently silence them

(Spivak 285). Literary examples, such as Ammu in Arundhati Roy's acclaimed debut novel, embody this struggle (Roy 178).

Hybridity and Identity concern the cultural blending and identity negotiation caused by colonial legacies. Homi Bhabha defines hybridity as a space creating new identities through cultural mixing (Bhabha 112). Suleri's memoir illustrates women's complex navigation between tradition and colonial modernity (Suleri 56).

Resistance and agency affirm that postcolonial women actively confront oppression. Mohanty emphasizes understanding resistance in specific local contexts (*Feminism Without Borders* 74). Literature reflects this resistance, as seen in Marie N Diaye's *Trois femmes puissantes* and Roy's novels (N Diaye 112; Roy, *Ministry* 245).

Case Studies and Literary Analysis

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* explore postcolonial African women's lives. *Purple Hibiscus* depicts Kambili's journey to self-expression under patriarchal repression linked to colonial legacies. *Half of a Yellow Sun* addresses political conflict's impact on women, highlighting erased female suffering (Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*; *Half of a Yellow Sun*).

Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* focuses on Tambudzai's pursuit of education in colonial Rhodesia, highlighting colonial education's dual role as empowerment and alienation. The novel explores the "double bind" of resisting patriarchy and colonial legacy, with characters like Nyasha embodying identity struggles (Dangarembga).

These literary works provide a critical mirror on realities often ignored by dominant discourses, revealing intersections of gender, race, class, and history.

Critiques of Western Feminism

Postcolonial feminism strongly critiques Western feminism's universalizing assumptions (Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders* 17). Mohanty's *Under Western Eyes* criticizes the homogenizing label "Third World women," which portrays non-Western women solely as victims needing Western rescue (Mohanty 336). This overlooks diverse struggles like caste discrimination or resource exploitation that are culturally specific (Mohanty 22).

Postcolonial feminism promotes localized feminist movements emerging from within communities rather than being imposed externally. Spivak urges listening to marginalized women instead of voicing their experiences on

their behalf (Spivak 287). Feminist struggles focus on specific issues according to cultural context, honoring local knowledge (Mohanty 39).

The critique also targets the “savior complex” in Western feminism, which denies agency to women from the Global South, echoing colonial superiority (Spivak 287). bell hooks emphasize addressing intersecting oppressions, including race and class, to foster genuine solidarity (hooks 23). This intersectional, collaborative approach aims for inclusivity and respect across feminist movements.

Relevance of Postcolonial Feminism

Postcolonial feminism remains crucial today as globalization, migration, and transnational politics reshape women’s lives. Systems of power and inequality rooted in colonial histories continue to manifest in various contemporary forms.

Migration and displacement expose women migrants to layered vulnerabilities, including exploitation and xenophobia. Many women from the Global South work as underpaid domestic or care workers in the Global North, yet remain marginalized (Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders* 78). Movements like Migrant Rights International campaign for these women’s labor rights within a critique of neo-colonial exploitation. Refugee women face sexual violence and limited access to services. Postcolonial feminism stresses listening to their experiences and shaping humanitarian policies accordingly (Spivak 287).

Globalization deepens inequalities as multinational corporations exploit cheap female labour in postcolonial countries, exemplified by tragedies like Bangladesh’s Rana Plaza collapse (Mohanty 91). Feminist activism supports fair trade and labour protections, challenging narratives that romanticize globalization while hiding exploitation.

Migration and Displacement

The movement of people across borders, whether due to war, economic necessity, or climate crises, has become one of the defining features of our time. Women migrants often face multiple layers of vulnerability, including exploitation, xenophobia, and precarious labor conditions. Postcolonial feminism highlights how these challenges require contextual understanding but must be connected to colonial histories and global inequalities.

For instance, many women from the Global South migrate to wealthier nations to work as domestic workers, caregivers, or labourers. Their labour sustains households and economies in the Global North, yet they are

frequently underpaid, unprotected by labour laws, and vulnerable to abuse (Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders* 78). Organizations such as **Migrant Rights International** and grassroots movements like **Justice for Domestic Workers** in the UK advocate for the rights of these women, framing their struggles within a broader critique of globalization and neo-colonial exploitation.

The refugee crisis also reflects this intersection of gender and geopolitics. Women fleeing conflict zones often face sexual violence and limited availability of medical services and learning opportunities in refugee camps. Postcolonial feminist frameworks emphasize listening to these women's stories and ensuring that humanitarian policies are shaped by their voices rather than imposed by external agencies (Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 287).

Transnational Feminism and Solidarity

Postcolonial feminism shapes transnational feminism, which builds cross-border feminist connections while respecting cultural differences. Unlike earlier Western feminism, transnational feminism favors collaboration and mutual learning over imposing universal models (Mohanty 114).

Global movements like MeToo and Ni Una Menos illustrate global feminism's expansion but also reveal challenges in addressing local contexts (hooks 45). Postcolonial feminism reminds activists to root solidarity in localized experiences led by those most affected.

Media and Representation

Postcolonial feminism critiques who control narratives and whose stories are told, challenging Western media's recurrent portrayal of Global South women as helpless individuals (Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes" 336). Digital platforms provide marginalized women with spaces to voice their perspectives, as seen in activism by Afghan women resisting Taliban oppression and Indigenous campaigns for land rights (Lorde 28).

Conclusion: Reimagining Feminist Futures

Postcolonial feminism provides a vital lens to understand the intersections of gender, race, class, culture, and colonial history. It challenges Western feminism's universalizing tendencies, urging recognition of women's diverse contexts and voices (Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders* 17). Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?" urges listening to marginalized voices instead of assuming their voice (Spivak 287). This focus on voice and agency is essential for authentic feminist movements. Literature and storytelling by

figures like Adichie and Dangarembga deepen understanding of postcolonial women's experiences, showing feminism as both a political and cultural struggle.

In today's globalized, migratory world, postcolonial feminism informs debates on labour, refugee rights, digital activism, and solidarity, highlighting ongoing inequities (Mohanty 91). Movements like MeToo and climate justice embody connected struggles. Reimagining feminism means fostering collaborative, inclusive, and decolonized practices that respect diversity and build mutual responsibility. Postcolonial feminism envisions a world where every voice matters and feminism bridges cultures in pursuit of justice and transformation.

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Eco-criticism and Eco-feminism in Indian Literature

Dr. Vishnupriyan T

This paper delves into the intersections of eco-criticism and eco-feminism within Indian literature, examining how ecological degradation and gender oppression are intricately woven into literary narratives. Through the works of Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Kamala Markandaya, Mahasweta Devi, Ruskin Bond, Amitav Ghosh, and contemporary voices like Shashi Tharoor and Aravind Adiga, the study illustrates how Indian writers portray the deep connection between women and nature, reflecting broader socio-cultural and environmental concerns. The analysis underscores literature's role not only in mirroring ecological and gender issues but also in advocating for resistance and change. The paper emphasizes the significance of eco-critical and eco-feminist frameworks in understanding postcolonial Indian society, highlighting literature's transformative potential in promoting ecological awareness and gender equity.

In contemporary literary studies, eco-criticism and eco-feminism have emerged as pivotal frameworks for analyzing the intersection of environmental and gender issues. Literature serves as a reflective medium, offering insights into the complex relationships between humans, society, and the natural world. Eco-criticism examines how literature represents nature and the environment, while eco-feminism explores the parallel oppression of women and ecological systems under patriarchal structures.

Indian literature, with its rich cultural heritage and diverse ecosystems, provides a fertile ground for eco-critical and eco-feminist analysis. Indian

authors frequently depict the interdependence of human societies and the natural environment, often highlighting women's experiences to reveal the socio-environmental dynamics of their settings. This paper examines the literary contributions of Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Kamala Markandaya, Mahasweta Devi, Ruskin Bond, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, and Aravind Adiga, illustrating how their narratives encapsulate the ecological and gendered dimensions of Indian society.

Eco-criticism: Concept and Relevance

Eco-criticism, an interdisciplinary approach that emerged in the 1970s, examines the interconnections between literature and the environment. The field considers how literature depicts ecological phenomena, critiques human exploitation of nature, and fosters environmental consciousness. Eco-critics analyze texts to uncover representations of landscapes, climate, flora and fauna, and human-environment interactions.

In India, eco-criticism holds particular significance due to the country's vast biodiversity, ecological fragility, and complex cultural attitudes toward nature. Indian literary texts often oscillate between reverence for nature, as seen in classical poetry and epics, and critique of environmental degradation resulting from industrialization, urbanization, and colonial exploitation. Eco-criticism in the Indian context offers insights into how literature can challenge ecological exploitation and promote sustainable practices.

Furthermore, Indian eco-critical analysis must account for traditional ecological knowledge embedded in folklore, myth, and rural practices. These narratives frequently position nature as sacred, illustrating an ethical relationship between humans and the environment that contemporary environmental discourse can learn from.

Eco-critical and Eco-feminist Perspectives in Indian Literature

Indian literature provides a uniquely rich landscape for exploring the intersections of ecology and gender through eco-critical and eco-feminist lenses. From ancient scriptures to contemporary novels, Indian writers have consistently highlighted the intricate interdependence between human societies and their natural environments. Traditional texts like the *Vedas*, the *Ramayana*, and the *Mahabharata* often present nature not merely as a backdrop but as a living, sacred entity, intertwined with human life. Forests, rivers, mountains, and animals are imbued with spiritual and cultural significance, reflecting a worldview that values ecological balance and the

ethical stewardship of the environment. These classical narratives form the foundation upon which modern Indian literature builds its eco-critical discourse.

In contemporary literature, eco-critical perspectives reveal how industrialization, urbanization, and globalization have disrupted this delicate balance, creating social and environmental crises. Authors such as Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, and Mahasweta Devi depict environments affected by human exploitation and, simultaneously, how such environmental degradation mirrors social inequalities. The landscapes in their narratives are often symbolic, representing psychological states, social marginalization, or the effects of colonial and postcolonial development. For instance, in Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*, the oppressive heat and arid landscape reflect the protagonist's mental distress, while in Roy's *The God of Small Things*, the polluted backwaters of Kerala symbolize the intersection of social injustice and environmental neglect.

Eco-feminist readings of Indian literature further illuminate the parallel subjugation of women and nature. Indian women, particularly those from rural or marginalized communities, are frequently depicted as intimately connected with the land—they cultivate it, manage its resources, and sustain their families through ecological labour. Literature portrays this connection not only to highlight women's agency but also to reveal the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on women. In Mahasweta Devi's tribal narratives, for example, women are both victims of patriarchal and state oppression and active custodians of ecological knowledge, resisting forces that threaten both their communities and the natural world.

Moreover, Indian literature frequently critiques socio-economic and political structures that contribute to ecological and gendered injustice. Through character development, plot, and symbolism, these works underscore how exploitation of the environment and subjugation of women are interlinked. By presenting narratives where nature and women are simultaneously resilient and vulnerable, authors encourage readers to rethink societal values, ethical responsibilities, and the consequences of human intervention on the environment. Ecocritical and eco-feminist perspectives thus provide a lens to appreciate the moral and philosophical dimensions of Indian literature, emphasizing the need for environmental stewardship and gender equity as intertwined concerns.

Eco-feminism: Theoretical Background

Eco-feminism emerged in the 1970s as a theoretical framework combining

ecological and feminist concerns to examine the interconnected oppression of women and the natural world. The term was first coined by French feminist Françoise d' Eaubonne in 1974, emphasizing the idea that the patriarchal exploitation of women is mirrored in the exploitation of nature. Eco-feminism posits that social hierarchies, environmental degradation, and gendered oppression are not isolated phenomena but mutually reinforcing constructs shaped by culture, politics, and economics.

The core premise of eco-feminist theory is that both women and nature have historically been subordinated by patriarchal structures that prioritize domination, control, and exploitation. In literary studies, this framework enables scholars to analyze how narratives depict these interconnections. Eco-feminism questions the dichotomies imposed by patriarchal thought, such as male/female, culture/nature, mind/body, and human/non-human, which have historically justified hierarchies of power and exploitation. By highlighting these dualities, eco-feminist criticism foregrounds the voices of women and marginalized communities and draws attention to the ethical implications of human actions on the environment.

In the Indian context, eco-feminism is particularly significant because women's roles are closely tied to ecological labour. Women often manage household resources, agricultural land, and water supplies, positioning them as both vulnerable to and responsible for environmental change. Literature that foregrounds these experiences, such as the works of Kamala Markandaya and Mahasweta Devi, illustrates the social and ecological consequences of marginalization. Eco-feminist readings emphasize women's agency in these narratives, portraying them not solely as victims but also as knowledge-bearers, resisters, and stewards of the environment.

Furthermore, eco-feminism in Indian literature intersects with postcolonial theory. Colonial and postcolonial histories introduced extractive economic practices, displacement, and environmental degradation that disproportionately affected women and marginalized communities. Eco-feminist criticism thus examines how historical, social, and political contexts shape narratives of environmental and gendered oppression. It also emphasizes the role of literature in challenging dominant ideologies, fostering ecological consciousness, and advocating for social justice.

Through its dual focus on ecology and feminism, eco-feminism encourages readers to recognize the interconnectedness of social and environmental issues. It provides a framework for understanding the ethical, cultural, and political dimensions of environmental justice while highlighting literature as a tool for reflection, critique, and change. In essence, eco-feminism

bridges the gap between human rights and environmental sustainability, offering a holistic approach to analyzing Indian literature and its treatment of nature and women.

Analysis of Selected Authors

Anita Desai

Anita Desai's novels frequently explore the psychological landscapes of women alongside the physical landscapes they inhabit. In *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), the protagonist Maya's mental distress is mirrored in the natural environment around her, including oppressive heat and decaying gardens. Desai creates a symbolic relationship between Maya's inner turmoil and environmental stagnation, aligning with eco-feminist notions that women's oppression is linked with the degradation of their surroundings.

In *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), Desai employs the Himalayan setting to depict solitude and introspection. The narrative illustrates the transformative and restorative potential of nature, emphasizing how women negotiate spaces of autonomy within restrictive social structures. Desai's works demonstrate the intertwined nature of gender and ecological consciousness, highlighting how literary representation can critique social hierarchies while valorizing nature.

Arundhati Roy

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) foregrounds ecological and social concerns through a complex narrative structure. The novel critiques caste hierarchies, patriarchal oppression, and environmental exploitation, particularly in the context of Kerala's fragile backwaters. Roy portrays rivers, canals, and trees not merely as backdrops but as entities whose degradation reflects social injustice.

Roy's eco-feminist lens is evident in her portrayal of female characters who navigate intersecting oppressions of gender, caste, and environmental vulnerability. By demonstrating the intimate connections between marginalized humans and the natural world, Roy underscores how ecological exploitation and social marginalization reinforce one another, urging readers to reconsider notions of development and progress.

Kamala Markandaya

Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) captures the struggles of rural women confronting the disruptions of industrialization and environmental change. The protagonist Rukmani embodies resilience and adaptability as she contends with soil depletion, floods, and the intrusion of commercial agriculture. Markandaya portrays women as intimately connected

with the land, reinforcing eco-feminist arguments that ecological degradation disproportionately affects women who rely on natural resources for sustenance and survival.

The novel also critiques socio-economic structures that marginalize rural communities, linking environmental exploitation with systemic inequality. Markandaya's narrative illustrates the ethical responsibility of humans to preserve ecological and social balance, highlighting literature's role in fostering ecological awareness and advocacy.

Mahasweta Devi

Mahasweta Devi's literary corpus foregrounds the lives of marginalized tribal communities, emphasizing women's ecological knowledge and resilience. In works such as *The Book of the Hunter* (1995) and *The Hunt*, Devi portrays women as custodians of the land and traditional ecological practices. Her narratives critique the destructive effects of state policies, industrial expansion, and patriarchal exploitation, highlighting the intersection of environmental and social oppression.

Devi's eco-feminist approach is evident in her valorization of female agency. Women characters resist ecological and social subjugation, asserting their role in the preservation of both community and environment. Devi's works illuminate the ethical imperatives of environmental justice and gender equity, bridging literary expression with socio-political activism.

Ruskin Bond

Ruskin Bond's writings often depict the serene and unspoiled landscapes of the Himalayan region. His stories, such as *The Blue Umbrella* (1980), celebrate the beauty of nature and the simplicity of rural life. Bond's portrayal of nature reflects a deep ecological consciousness, emphasizing the importance of preserving natural habitats and the interdependence between humans and the environment.

Amitav Ghosh

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) explores the Sundarbans, a vast delta region in India, highlighting the complex relationship between humans and nature. The novel addresses themes of ecological conservation, displacement, and the impact of climate change. Ghosh's narrative underscores the vulnerability of both the environment and the communities dependent on it, offering a poignant commentary on ecological and social issues.

Shashi Tharoor

Shashi Tharoor's *The Elephant, the Tiger, and the Cell Phone* (2007) provide insights into India's development trajectory, touching upon environmental concerns and the challenges of modernization. Tharoor's reflections offer a critical perspective on the balance between progress and ecological sustainability, urging readers to consider the long-term implications of development.

Aravind Adiga

Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* (2011) delves into the complexities of urban life in Mumbai, touching upon issues of environmental degradation and the clash between development and nature. Adiga's narrative critiques the rapid urbanization and the consequent displacement of communities, highlighting the environmental and social costs of unchecked development.

Tribal and Indigenous Authors**1. Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar**

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (2014) and *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015) delve into the lives of Santhal tribal communities. His narratives highlight the intersection of ecological degradation and the marginalization of indigenous women, aligning with eco-feminist themes of resistance and resilience.

2. Jacinta Kerketta

Jacinta Kerketta's works, including *Kahaniyon Ki Khoj Mein* (2013), explore the lives of tribal women in Jharkhand. Her stories often depict the spiritual and cultural connections between women and nature, reflecting eco-feminist concerns about the exploitation of both.

3. Suman Muthe

Suman Muthe, a social worker and writer from Maharashtra, has authored numerous works focusing on the lives of tribal women. Her writings address issues of gender, ecology, and social justice, providing a platform for the voices of marginalized communities.

4. Sakthi Arulanandam

Sakthi Arulanandam, an eco-feminist poet and artist from Tamil Nadu, integrates themes of nature and gender in her works. Her poetry often reflects on the interconnectedness of all life forms, emphasizing the need for ecological and social harmony.

5. Temsula Ao

Temsula Ao's narratives, rooted in the Naga community, explore the lives of women in the North-Eastern states of India. Her works often depict the close relationship between women and their natural environments, highlighting issues of displacement and cultural erosion.

Conclusion

The exploration of eco-criticism and eco-feminism in Indian literature demonstrates how literary narratives serve as both mirrors and critiques of the complex interconnections between ecological degradation and gendered oppression. From classical texts that imbue nature with sacred and moral significance to contemporary novels and tribal narratives that depict environmental crises and social inequities, Indian literature offers a rich tapestry for understanding the human-nature relationship.

Through the works of Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Kamala Markandaya, Mahasweta Devi, Ruskin Bond, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Aravind Adiga, and contemporary women and tribal writers such as Anuradha Roy, Kiran Desai, Temsula Ao, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, and Jacinta Kerketta, it becomes evident that ecological and gender concerns are deeply intertwined. These authors portray women as both vulnerable to and resilient against the socio-ecological forces that shape their lives. By foregrounding the experiences of women, marginalized communities, and indigenous populations, literature illuminates the ethical dimensions of environmental stewardship and social justice.

Indian literary texts often reveal the consequences of patriarchal domination, colonial histories, industrialization, and globalization on both human communities and the natural environment. Eco-feminist and eco-critical frameworks enable a deeper understanding of these narratives by highlighting the interdependence of social, cultural, and ecological systems. They reveal how environmental degradation disproportionately affects women, particularly those in rural and tribal contexts, while also showcasing the potential for agency, resistance, and ecological activism.

Furthermore, the literature examined underscores the transformative potential of storytelling. By blending ecological awareness with feminist critique, these works not only document crises but also inspire reflection, empathy, and social action. Literature becomes a conduit for ethical engagement, urging readers to reconsider human relationships with nature, society, and one another. The narratives encourage sustainable practices, highlight the importance of community-based ecological knowledge, and

advocate for gender equity and social justice.

In conclusion, eco-criticism and eco-feminism are indispensable lenses for interpreting Indian literature, revealing how narratives construct meaning at the intersection of environment, gender, and society. They emphasize the moral, cultural, and political dimensions of human interactions with the natural world and offer insights into how literature can contribute to ecological and social transformation. By analyzing the works of diverse authors—from canonical figures to contemporary women and tribal voices—this study illustrates that Indian literature is not merely reflective but also a participatory force in shaping ethical perspectives on environmental sustainability and gender equity.

Ultimately, the synergy of eco-critical and eco-feminist perspectives in Indian literature affirms that environmental consciousness and gender justice are inseparable. The narratives studied here exemplify how literature can challenge oppression, advocate for the marginalized, and foster a more harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world, reaffirming the enduring relevance and power of the literary imagination in addressing contemporary social and ecological challenges.

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A Dalit Feminist Reading of Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*, and P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*

K.J. Meenasri

Dalit Feminism is a part of Indian feminist discourse that voices out for gender-justice and equality. The 'othering' of women cannot be viewed apart from the 'othering' of lower-caste individuals. Gender-justice bears no meaning if it does not entail gender justice for women of all races. Scholars such as Sharmila Rege and Urmila Pawar have emphasized on the necessity of Dalit Feminism. There is an interconnection between the oppression faced by women and caste-based oppressions. Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* and P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* examine the physical and psychological violence that women endure in both public and private spheres, and also highlight how caste and patriarchy converge to perpetuate exploitative practices against women. This research article aims to analyze the double marginalization faced by the lower-caste women and how Dalit Feminist perspectives can illuminate the complex relationships between caste, gender, and power, emphasizing the need for intersectional approaches to social justice.

Indian Feminist literature is an amalgamation of the voices and experiences of women writers from India. It addresses the major issues and concerns from the perspective of Indian women. The major themes dealt with are identity crisis, gender discrimination, domestic violence, culture

and tradition, women's role in society and so on. Indian feminist discourse, which ought to bring gender-justice to all Indian women, at least in theory, has suppressed the caste question to such an extent that 'feminism' itself has been seen as a modality of subjugating women from Dalit communities. Critics like Uma Chakaravarti argued that, the gender issue cannot be comprehended without bringing in the caste question within the Indian social structure. Thus, the Dalit feminist discourse, which arises from the interconnected web of caste, gender and class, challenges the brahminical patriarchy with a multi-axis approach.

Dalit Feminist writers play a significant role in depicting the society and the trauma of Dalit women in their poetry, prose and novels. The most important Dalit Women writers are Baby Tai Kamble, Bama, Meenakshi Moon, P. Sivakami and many others.

Baby Kamble and P. Sivakami were well-known Dalit activists and feminist writers. Kamble's autobiography, *The Prisons We Broke*, is considered the first autobiography by a Dalit woman in any Indian language. She wrote articles on Dalit lives, and her poetry collection, *The Mind Speaks*, voiced out for the empowerment of the Mahar community. Whereas, P. Sivakami is a former IAS officer, activist, and Dalit-feminist writer. Her notable works include *Pazhayana Kazhidalum*, *Kurruku Vettu*, *Nalum Thodarum* and *Kadaisi Mandhar*. Apart from being one of the most prominent Dalit novelists in India, having written six novels and more than sixty short stories, she has also constantly voiced her opinions on contemporary social and political issues. Dalit women's autobiographies, such as Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* and P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* are protest narratives against the exploitation of Dalit women by upper caste people, as well as the internal gender hierarchies within Dalit families. The themes of their works deal with intersectional oppression of caste, class and gender, resistance against violence and social justice.

Dalit Feminism aims to deconstruct the prevailing narratives that uphold their oppression by empowering Dalit women to express their agency and reclaim their stories. The term 'Dalit Feminism' was coined by an Indian sociologist and feminist, Sharmila Rege. Dalit feminist discourse fought the contradictions between the rhetoric of the elite, the Brahminical agenda of education, as well as liberal feminism and their practices and forged a new political consciousness. Dalit feminism exposes the double standards of Brahmin men and their religion as well as the reproduction of women's oppression among non-Brahmins. Dalit feminism as a radical discourse interrogated false dichotomies like public versus private and masculinity versus femininity and transcended them by organizing women and asserting

their autonomy. It centred its efforts on a double task of refashioning Dalit women and building their self-confidence with the upliftment of their community.

Dalit feminism exposed the continuity and discontinuity between the upper-caste and Dalit agendas of education and gender reform. Dalit feminism critiqued the compounded nature of caste, class, and gender and sought to bring Dalit women into the public sphere instead of fully entrenching domestic ideologies. One of the major assertions of Dalit feminism center's on the claim to self-representation as they no longer wanted to be content with upper-caste feminists' representation. Dalit women's writings challenged the homogenous idea of 'woman' shared by all women. Their narratives demonstrated how their everyday lives differed from those of non-Dalit women due to their forced labour. According to Paik, Dalit women's perspectives open up the possibility for more democratic and inclusive approaches to politics and society.

The Dalit Feminist theory, as a theoretical framework, claims that caste oppression, gender subjugation, and class exploitation are all intertwined. It encapsulates the reality of Dalit women's lives and experiences. It also voices out for the Dalit women's perspectives, experiences that are often hidden by mainstream writers. It also seeks the recognition of Dalits' sensibilities. It also highlights the strength and resilience of Dalit woman who appeal for change and self-empowerment through education and their collective actions. Thus, it is applied to critically evaluate Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* and P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*.

The Prisons We Broke is a head-on confrontation with Brahminical hegemony and patriarchal domination. It discusses the experiences of the Mahar community's oppression. Mahars were not only physically located on the margins of the village but also on the margins of the 'social imaginary'. The upper caste people cut Mahars off from the city by labelling them as unclean, impure, polluting, and as untouchables. Kamble's narrative displays the intersection of oppression faced by Dalit women in the name of caste, gender and class.

The upper caste denied the Mahars access to acquire knowledge. The entire Mahar community had sunk deep in the mire of dreadful superstitions. Generation after generation, Mahar's lives were rotten and perished by following such superstitious practices. They firmly believed in the Hindu religion, but it was always unjust and unkind to them. For example, the Mahars were never allowed to use the regular road that was used by Brahmins. Even when somebody from the upper-caste arrived that way, the Mahars

had to leave the road and take another shrubby path. When they met each other on the road, the Mahars had to say, "The humble Mahar woman falls at your feet master." (Kamble 24)

This custom should be followed even by a small kid of the upper-caste. If a Mahar woman fails to address the master, she'll be abused to everyone's heart's content. This was the plight of Mahar women in the public spheres. Similarly, there were caste rules even for tucking the pleats of their saree. A Mahar woman has to hide their saree borders under pleats; otherwise, it was considered an offence to the upper-caste. The Mahar women sold firewood for their survival. When they walked through Brahmin-lane, they were made to stand far away from Brahmin's building.

The Brahmin Kaki would shout instruction after instruction and leisurely bargain with poor Dalits. They were never paid fairly. As per Kaki's instruction, the Mahar women have to keenly remove the strands or threads of their cloth. Otherwise, the Mahar women will be abused for causing 'purity-pollution'. Every essence of the Mahar women's life was stuck to the wood. Yet Brahmin women objected to what they found sticking there. They lived in the houses that were built with the blood and sweat of Mahars. "Does it rot their skin? Doesn't it pollute Brahmin then?" (Kamble 74)

Women were made to believe that if she has a husband, they have the world. If she doesn't, then the world holds nothing for her. The early practices like 'Sati' bear witness to the claim. Kamble's narrative displays how 'masters of *kumkum*' bestowed them nothing but grief and pain. Kamble's plot puts forth various incidents that align with De Beauvoir's idea of marriage. According to De Beauvoir, "Marriage is an oppressive and exploitative economic arrangement, which reinforces social inequality, and binds women to domesticity." (Waugh 321)

In the Mahar community, young girls aged eight to nine were sent as daughters-in-law in terms of marriage. Some young girls couldn't remember their own marriage. For them, marriage meant nothing but calamity. The poor Mahar daughters-in-law have to endure the abuses of everyone- from *sasu* to neighbours. As in many other communities, the *sasu* considered their daughters-in-law as enemies. The daughters-in-law would be easy prey, who would be beaten by her husband and driven out. This physical violence caused deep psychological scars on the already oppressed women.

Sharmila Rege in her essay, "Brahminical Nature of Violence against Women" states that, "In the capital city of New Delhi, two women die of burns every day; the cases being either of suicide or dowry murders. In 1991, the number of women who faced the torture of rape was estimated at

two million, and the majority of the victims were tribal, Dalit.” Kamble, in her novel, states how Maharwada, every day, resounds with the cries of the poor wives.

Such acts of violence even lead to chopping off the women’s noses, to breaking open their heads, and to crushing their backbones. Those poor women will be left without food, clothing, which leads to their miserable existence. The life of the lower-caste women was shaped by such a fire of calamities. All these cruelties made the Mahar women strong, but their minds cried out against this oppression.

The class-based oppression and ‘othering’ even lead Mahars to eat the dead carcasses of animals and rotten food. Even among their own community, they divided those rotten foods based on economic status. After doing all the lowly jobs, Mahars were provided with leftovers, rotten food. A hungry Mahar tries to get food even from unlikely sources, for example, cactus shrubs. “Eating cactus shrubs is like killing oneself.” (Kamble 56), and the poverty-stricken condition of Mahars made them consider an animal epidemic as a boon. Though it caused health issues and foul smells, their state of poverty prevented them from throwing away such animals.

Mahar women and their societal position as lower-class isolate them further in their own community. Food allocation in the family is heavily biased in favour of men, and even in the agriculturally prosperous state of Punjab, women’s average consumption of calories is only two-thirds of that of men, despite the fact that women in this region perform at least fifteen hours of arduous labour. They were left with only leftovers. As Kamble describes, “The daughters-in-law, worried whether any food would be left for them at all, ... Decorum demanded that they eat only after the children had finished. The poor souls could do nothing but just stare at the plate, licking their lips, hoping against hope that some food would be left for them.” (Kamble 54)

Baby Kamble’s *The Prisons We Broke* and P. Sivakami’s *The Grip of Change* are some of the narratives that describe the own story of the oppressed without fictionalizing it. These novels reduced the difference between the world and the word. Their narratives are a political initiative to engage with Dalit patriarchy and social patriarchy. Their writings are historically located and sociologically constituted.

Their narrative questions the larger social system for its anti-Dalit stance. While Kamble’s novel shows the plight of Mahar women of Maharashtra, P. Sivakami’s novel demonstrates the pain and sufferings of a Parayar woman

of Tamil Nadu. *The Grip of Change* exposes the life of an exploited lower caste woman, Thangam, who faces triple marginalization-economic oppression, gender subordination and caste discrimination.

According to Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon, the sexual violence against Dalit women is disproportionately public rather than domestic because working as labour is peculiar to Dalit women's lives. Violence against Dalits is a permanent threat. It functions as a means to punish Dalit men and women for asserting their rights against caste hierarchy. Most of such violence, like murder, gang rape and naked parade, torments Dalit women.

This structure of violence makes them easy prey for the lust and wrath of upper caste men. The death of Thangam's husband forced her to work on the farm of the landlord, Paranjothi Udayar. Her widowhood made her a surplus or sexually available woman subject to exploitation. Thangam's plight resonates with that of all other lower-caste women. She was brutally treated by upper caste landlord and also threatened to maintain silence. Her voiceless state represents the collective struggle of Dalit women. Thus, her personal is also political.

The 'brahminical patriarchy' is a term coined by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. It is a structural concept that doesn't refer to the patriarchal practices followed by Brahmin men; instead, it represents the multiform nature of patriarchy against women in India. Anyone, regardless of caste or gender, who believes, practices, preaches, or encourages any discrimination based on the hierarchical structure would be considered a follower of Brahminism.

Therefore, Ambedkar calls patriarchy the twin sister of Brahmanism. Using this concept, this paper describes how lower caste women were 'othered' by the men of their own community.

Despite the physical and psychological sufferings, Thangam also became the victim of verbal abuse. When Thangam demanded the share of her husband's land, it was denied as she didn't have children. Her brothers-in-law tried to exploit her sexually. As they realized the fact that she would not yield to their demands, they even spread false accusations against her.

Further, Thangam was mercilessly beaten up by the landlord's wife and brothers. Thangam describes her tormentation as, "They hit me, and flogged me with a stick stout as a hand. They merely killed me. No, in the village, none of my relatives came to help me. They abused me and threatened to kill me if I stayed in that village any longer. They called me a whore." (Sivakami 58)

With her battered body, she approached Kathamuthu for help. He was a

respected Dalit leader who fought for Dalits' justice, but he made use of the position he was in. When Thangam begged for justice, he penalised those who abused Thangam, but later he behaved like an upper caste man. She got justice only after yielding to Kathamuthu's sexual desires.

This struggle of Thangam depicts the poor conditions of lower caste women as victimised by the men of the upper caste and of her community. It not only affected these women's right to life and survival but also made a strong critique of patriarchy. Thus, Thangam's exploitation explains how she became the victim of brahminical patriarchy.

'Lower' caste women are most prone to violence as they face oppression at three levels. Firstly, caste-based oppression. Secondly, class, as labourers subject to class-based oppression, mainly at the hands of 'higher' castes who form the bulk of landowners and lastly gender, as women who experience patriarchal oppression at the hands of all men, including men of their own caste. Due to her poverty, Thangam works on the fields of Paramjothi Udayar.

There she was molested by him, and her lower rank position makes her voiceless in society. Thangam explains "I remained silent, after all, he is my pay master. He measures my rice." (Sivakami64) This incident explains how she got exploited because of her class position in society. Thus, the violence against women cannot be seen as either a caste issue or a gender issue as it is located in the links between the two.

The education of women and girls was an integral part of Ambedkar's vision of social emancipation for the Dalits. Kamble explains how women were determined to get their children educated. Meanwhile, P. Sivakami's narrative portrays the importance of education through Gowri. Gowri, like Mahar women in Maharashtra, represented the growing awareness in their community. Using Gowri as a mouthpiece P.Sivakami voices out for the lower-caste women's rights.

Gowri, daughter of Kathamuthu, strictly condemns her father's inhumane act of molesting Thangam. Gowri, who understood the exploitation of women, resisted the patriarchal domination. She protested early marriage and advocated the imposition of education. She crossed the threshold of her house, resisted her father's inhumane practices and also freed herself from the tyrannical chains of oppression.

Several cultural ambivalences related to the themes of power, marginalization, based on caste, gender, and class can be witnessed throughout the novels. Despite the claims of 'Unity in diversity', caste-based

discrimination and gender inequality still prevail. The dominating history still hides 'her-story'. From mainstream narrators to Dalit male writers, they objectified women in their novels or associated them with usual stereotypes.

From eating dead carcass to preventing entire community from eating it, from spending money for religious practices to saving money for education, from hesitating to pollute Brahmins house to entering temples, from masking their identities in domestic spaces to claiming for their rights through protests in public spheres, from living as oppressed individuals to become revolutionary icons, These novels portray the remarkable role played by the Dalit women in the upliftment of their community.

After undergoing trauma for generations, the radical and revolutionary movements like Black Panther Party, anti-Vietnam War protests that were happening in the 1960s around the world awakened the quest for liberation among Dalits. Their quest was converted into protests because of the guidance of Dr. Ambedkar. He provided the Dalit protest a form and a force which challenged the very foundations of 'varnashramadharma'.

He, who was aware of the strength and resilience of women, dismantled their superstitious beliefs, gave them voice and also made them 'agents of transformation'. He insisted that women be the first ones to take a step towards reform. He insisted on the importance of education and promised enlightenment through education. By following the principles of Ambedkar, the Dalits gave up on their religious beliefs and took education as a tool for transformation.

These two novels bring to light experiential worlds as well as discursive practices that have rarely been discussed in the mainstream literature. Using a Dalit feminist approach, this paper not only critiques patriarchy and other forms of oppression but also shows the remarkable dignity and resilience of Dalit women. These novels are an expression of protest and stands as a 'voice for the voiceless'. By emphasizing the power of education, their narrative displays how literacy can revolutionize society.

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Woman's Subjugation and Survival in Imayam's *Arumugam*

S. Ezhil Theodara

Over the centuries Literature has evolved beyond an entertainment. Being one of the parts of School of Humanities, Literature is concerned with perception and dynamics of human existence and of the world, and strives to portray the reality. Throughout centuries, authors have utilized fiction, poetry, and drama to write about gender roles and the social circumstances and many such topics. Many started to express their struggles and oppression through literature where literature becomes a 'voice for the unheard voices', under which women started to voice out their struggles. Throughout the ages woman has been portrayed by both man and woman differently in literature and to analyze those female characterizations and to voice out their own voice and perspective there emerged a theory called Feminism. Feminism as criticism and as a movement further solidified this work by challenging patriarchal systems and fighting for women's political, social, and economic rights. Feminist literary studies thus come not only to examine texts by or about women but to question more broadly the representation and resistance of power, identity, and voice in cultural narratives. Feminism as such is based on the principle that women should have access to the same freedoms and opportunities as men, moving beyond equal rights in law to question more ingrained cultural attitudes of gender dominance. It aims to uncover how patriarchal values structure institutions and personal relationships. Feminism branched out into different waves and strands over

time, tackling different aspects of women's subordination—from voting and education to sexuality, work, and representation. At the heart of contemporary feminist philosophy is an appreciation that womanhood cannot be described monolithically.

Women's subjugation and survival document the coexisting realities of oppression and survival among women in different societies. Subjugation implies the structural dominance and exclusion of women through multiple levels of control—social, political, economic, and cultural, that curtails their freedom, agency, and rights. Such subjugation is not homogeneous but highly complex, with intersecting identities like race, caste, class, and sexuality overlaying individual experiences of subordination. Survival, however, is the multidimensional reaction of women as they negotiate, challenge, and survive these oppressive systems to reclaim their existence, dignity, and agency.

From an intersectional perspective, women's oppression can be realized as greater than gender-based discrimination. It entails acknowledging how intersecting systems of power converge and produce specific dilemmas for women based on their social locations. For example, women belonging to marginalized castes or ethnic groups typically experience more severe conditions and violence compared to women belonging to dominant groups as a result of overlapping oppressions. Nevertheless, women's survival is not just evident in material survival but in acts of resistance, cultural productions, and solidarity that stake claims to justice and change.

Intersectionality is a model applied to understand how different social identities like race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability intersect to create special patterns of discrimination, privilege, and experience in people's lives. Instead of looking at each social category in itself, intersectionality highlights that an individual's experiences are determined by the convergence of these multiple categories, producing intricate layers of disadvantage or advantage. For instance, a Black woman will have issues that are not the same as a white woman or a Black man because her race and gender intersect to cause particular kinds of oppression that cannot be understood when one examines either aspect in isolation.

Intersectionality, theory of interlocking oppressions, first formulated and elaborated by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), emphasizes the study of the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations. The word "intersectionality" was first used in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a renowned American civil rights lawyer and critical race theory scholar. Crenshaw's ground-breaking work brought

attention to how both the legal and social institutions tended to overlook the unique experiences of Black women—whose experiences cannot fit into a single category of discrimination. While Crenshaw gets the credit for coining the term and its central concepts, intersectional thought was developed by previous activists and scholars like the Combahee River Collective, a collective of Black lesbian socialist feminists in the 1970s, who wrote of “interlocking oppressions” of racism, sexism, and sexuality. W.E.B. Du Bois also theorized about the mutual reinforcement of race, class, and culture in social stratification, even though his work did not explicitly address gender. Intersectionality is “The theoretical structures that enhanced a platform to such narratives embrace a paradigm of race, class and gender identity and other variables like age, sexual orientation, ethnicity and dis/ability.” (Writers Editors Critics 160). It is the theory which is experience-based framework which explores the disentangling issues from their essential oppressions and homogeneous entities. Theoreticians like Patricia Hill Collins and Audre Lorde has talked about the matrix of dominance and theory difference which is also included in Intersectional analysis. Intersectionality continues to play an important role in explaining how individuals can both be privileged and oppressed at the same time and to shed light on social justice movements and inform policy and activism.

In the Indian context, Intersectionality can be understood by examining how various social identities like caste, religion, gender, class, and ethnicity intersect to create intricate patterns of discrimination and oppression specific to India’s socio-political context. In contrast to the Western emphasis primarily on race and gender, Indian intersectionality would have to include caste, a system of strong social hierarchy deeply embedded in society that significantly influences individuals’ lives, particularly for marginalized-caste women such as Dalits and Adivasis. For example, Dalit women tend to suffer complex layers of oppression as a result of the combined impact of discrimination based on caste, gender, and marginalization from the economy, leading to severe exposure to violence and limited justice. Predominantly caste and gender intersect to form the experience of violence, economic marginalization, and political exclusion uniquely for marginalized women, and it is essential for constructing social justice movements and legal reform within India. This intersectional perspective enables us to uncover the various layers of domination, empowering attempts to confront survival strategies and resistance by women who live at these points of intersection in Indian society.

Literature has long been a mirror that tries to reflect the complexities of

human experience, and one of its enduring themes has been the struggle for equality and recognition. Translation in literature facilitates to learn about other language's culture, way of life and history. Particularly works translated from Tamil Literature makes us understand more about Tamil culture, power relations, and people's struggle through caste, class and religion. In recent decades literature has made efforts to depict the reality, people's struggle due to their identity which is a construct. Subalterns have been written about by many authors. The word 'subalterns' refers to "of inferior rank or position" which commonly comes in the usage of army hierarchy. But Marxist Antonio Gramsci, takes the meaning from it that he calls subalterns are the people or peasants who lack autonomous political power due to hegemonic dominant groups. In the postcolonial situation particularly in India, the terms signify people who are compelled to be at the margins such as Dalits, Naxalites, women, working class individuals and lower caste individuals, those who undergo oppressions, subordination in all aspects and their voice goes unheard. In accordance with Gayatri Spivak, postcolonial scholar, affirms that the subalterns cannot speak. And countless numbers of writer and theorist have begun to speak for these voiceless people through presenting their agonies in the writings. Imayam, a renowned Tamil author, brought the agonies of oppressed people out into the main stream writing through his narration. Imayam's *Arumugam*(2006) presents the life of subalterns who are oppressed through class, caste and gender. The novel deals the intersectional oppression happening to women in their daily life. The novel is a Bildungsromans novel revolves around the protagonist Arumugam, who come across many layers on oppression happening to women and their intersectional traumas becomes his trauma too. The novel deals with the various topics which are said to be taboo topics by the society like showing the real plight of the prostitutes, homosexual molestation, abuse of power, and the unheard voices of the subalterns. The characters in the novel goes through many struggles based on caste, class and gender which gives them trauma where they cannot forget those memories, and eventually this makes them into a different person but their societal positions never got better. As Kimberle Crenshaw, in her seminal work, "Demarginalizing the intersection of Race and Sex: Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracial Politics":

"This focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination",

points out how marginalization happens in many layers through various domains. And the critical essay, "Intersectionality: A Tool for Gender and Economic Justice", states that, "Intersectionality is a tool for analysis, advocacy and policy development that addresses multiple discriminations and helps us understand how different sets of identities impact on access to rights and opportunities."

Intersectionality as a theoretical framework helps to understand and analyze that one form of oppression is not independent from other forms of oppression rather it is an intersection of multiple forms of oppressions and discriminations. In Arumugam novel, the characters go through oppressions in multiple ways which eventually leads them to trauma and repressed memory. The novel sets in Pondicherry and in mainly in places like Auroville and Chekkumedu. Even integrating these social locations is also a key aspect in intersectional analysis. As Intersectionality being the theory of interlocking oppressions, in the novel it helps to brings out how the characters are oppressed by the Matrix of Dominance, theory of differences based on gender oppressions, and how social locations also have dominance over the marginalized characters or how it determines the identity of the characters.

Patricia Hill Collin in her critical essay, "Black Feminist thought in the Matrix of Domination", gives the centrality to the oppressed and analysis the 'Matrix of Domination' in intersectional analysis. In that she talks about the dichotomous nature of the society where, "...one side of the dichotomy be privileged while the other is denigrated." (Collin 3). The novel presents this dichotomous nature of the society where the 'Others' are denigrated and misused by the privileged people in terms of their gender, class, caste and race to some extent. The definition of community according to Collins in "... community as arbitrary and fragile, structured fundamentally by competition and domination" (Collin 2). In Indian context, the concept is a community majorly structured by caste consciousness, and then comes gender and religious structures. In all these structures are constructed through the dichotomy of either privileged or underprivileged. When it comes to caste structures in India, the socially acclaimed privileged upper caste people oppresses the underprivileged Dalit people. India is country where these caste divisions are majorly structured the domination of the upper caste people to get hold of the power. Dhanabhagyam, being a widowed Dalit woman, gets misused by Jerry Albert a privileged white man. Using Dhanabhayam's vulnerable nature Jerry Albert persuade her to commit adultery. In the case of Dhanabhagyam, her body has been used as a tool, for instance, for Albert it is tool to satisfy his sexual needs and for Dhanabhagyam her body became

a commodity for some financial gains.

In a research paper, "The Female Body as a Commodity" the researcher states that woman who is subjugated in the means of intersectional oppressions are "...the poor woman would not have much to choose from, with the decisions made based on survival needs: either she works, or she starves."(Soon Wai Yee 7). Poverty and discrimination goes hand in hand where people who are wealthy does not get affected by any means but people who are in the margins go through all kinds of oppressions and pushed to do any kinds of job to feed themselves. In the novel not only Dhanabhagyam, most of the female characters like Vasantha, and prostitutes like Chinnaponnu and Abitha, are marginalized in terms of poverty which lead them to commodify their body. Contradictory to Dhanabhagyam's character, Vasantha comes from a Nayudu clan also faces the same situation as Dhanabhagyam. Even though in the novel caste issue is not the central issue, Imayam has portrayed the major character Arumugam as a Parayan (dalit) boy and has subtly talked about the caste system prevailed in India, where in the novel the Parayans were bounded laborers to these upper caste people like Nayudus but the Parayans started working in Auroville and stopped working for these upper caste people which lead these people also to work in Auroville kind of places.

"These days, even woman belonging to upper caste families such as Vanniers, Mudaliars, and Pillais worked in Auroville."
(Imayam 43)

On the other hand, Vasantha coming from an upper caste family also works in Aruville, then in a cardboard manufacturing company and then because of unfortunate circumstances she is forced by her situation to work as a prostitute. When there is this argument that upper caste women also get subjugated but not that much of the lower class woman, but in the case of Vasantha, who was left hopeless by her family because of their caste pride gets harassed by the manager in the cardboard company then forced by her situation she started to work as a prostitute. In the case of Dhanabhagyam and Vasantha, both are controlled in terms of gender oppressions. As Patricia Hill Collins states, "...gender oppression seems better able to annex the basic power of the erotic and intrude in personal relationships via family dynamics and within individual consciousness."(Collins 4), that is to say, women are controlled in terms of gender where the men and the family has the power to oppress them. Dhanabhagyam had become the victim to the erotic needs of Albert a white man, who is kind of provider to her family and so she had

to satisfy his needs lead to gender and class subjugations. And Vasantha, controlled by her family, tries to break away from her family but gets harassed, became a sex worker and gets subjugated through class, caste and gender. This shows how power is unequal for the Subalterns. Other than Dhayabhayam and Vasantha, the novel deals with the oppressions of the prostitutes. Chinnaponnu, a prostitute takes good care of Arumugam after he ran away from his mother. But her death was a mysterious and horrible death. The novel clearly portrays the plight of the prostitutes. Chinnaponnu, a prostitute who rescues and takes care of Arumugam, Abidha a young prostitute for whom Arumugam had feelings and pimp called Bhagyam, all had circumstances which lead them to prostitution. They are doubly marginalized in terms of class and race. The novel talks about how prostitutes are treated in terms of health and beauty. "Lorde identified issues of class, race, age, gender, and health as being fundamental to female experience." (Varghese) Audre Lorde, theorist in intersectionality, includes health in intersectionality, where people are discriminated in terms of health. In the novel, a woman prostitute who is healthy and looks beautiful paid a lot and they had sophisticated hotels for their work. Whereas these prostitutes in Chekkumedu is less paid and brutally tortured by the men. In intersectional analysis, social locations also get included in analysis, where location refers to place of oppression. The two prominent places where the novel takes place is Aruville and Chekkumedu. "Our 'location' is embedded in relations of hierarchy within a multiplicity of specific situational and conjunctural sphere." (Anthias 130) Aruville, the purpose of Aruville is to embody and promote human unity, both materially and spiritually. But in the novel, the author has shown the dark side of the place where Indian people are discriminated and used by the foreigners by helping them in their financial needs. Here the location is embedded in relation of hierarchy in terms of class and race situation. And Chekkumedu, major prostitution area portrays how the low class prostitutes are brutally oppressed by those men who come to satisfy their needs. Here the location is embedded in relation of hierarchy in terms of class and gender.

Through the Intersectional analysis Imayam's *Arumugam*, the different and multiple layers of oppression happening still in Tamil society is pointed out. the analysis consist of how the female characters undergo more than two layers of marginalization and how they are subjugated to the oppressive situation in terms gender, class and caste and to which worst extent the for their survival especially how they are pushed to sell their body in terms of survival.

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Deconstructing the Male Gaze: Feminist Criticism in Literature and Film

Mr. Subhash Chandra Bose Y

The concept of the “male gaze,” first articulated by Laura Mulvey in 1975, identifies how visual arts and literature often depict women from a masculine, heterosexual perspective, reducing them to objects of male desire, pleasure, and power. In literature and cinema, the male gaze shapes narrative strategies, character development, and visual framing, reinforcing patriarchal ideologies. Feminist criticism seeks to interrogate and dismantle these structures, highlighting ways in which women writers, directors, and artists reclaim agency, narrative authority, and subjectivity.

This paper explores the presence and impact of the male gaze in literature and film while analysing feminist interventions that subvert and critique this perspective. It examines classical and modern literary works, including Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and *A Room of One’s Own*, Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, as well as cinematic examples like Agnès Varda’s *Cléo from 5 to 7*, Chantal Akerman’s *Jeanne Dielman*, and Sofia Coppola’s *Lost in Translation*. Through comparative analysis of textual and visual narratives, this study demonstrates the transformative power of feminist critique in challenging gendered power dynamics and reimagining women’s roles in literature and film.

The “male gaze” is a critical concept in feminist theory that identifies

the ways in which women are represented as passive objects rather than active subjects in literature, art, and cinema. Laura Mulvey's seminal essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), argues that classical Hollywood cinema constructs female characters as spectacles for male viewers, while male characters occupy positions of power and agency. Mulvey identifies three interconnected levels of the gaze:

1. **The gaze of the camera**, which frames women according to male desire.
2. **The gaze of male characters**, who act as the narrative's active observers.
3. **The gaze of the audience**, which is conditioned to align with a masculine point of view.

While Mulvey initially developed the theory for cinema, it has since been extended to literature, visual arts, and media studies. Female characters are frequently depicted primarily in relation to male narratives or perspectives, limiting their agency and subjectivity. Feminist criticism challenges these portrayals by foregrounding women's voices, interiority, and autonomy. Contemporary authors and filmmakers use various strategies to subvert the male gaze, creating space for women's experiences, resistance, and empowerment.

Male Gaze in Literature

Classical Examples

- **Shakespearean Women:** In *Hamlet* and *Othello*, characters such as Ophelia and Desdemona exist largely in relation to male protagonists, reflecting societal patriarchal expectations. Ophelia's madness and death are framed through male perspectives, denying her psychological complexity.
- **Victorian Novels:** In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, women are idealized and moralized within rigid social codes. However, Jane's narrative voice, moral agency, and self-determination subtly challenge the patriarchal gaze.

Modern and Postcolonial Interventions

- **Virginia Woolf:** In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf critiques male-dominated literary traditions and highlights the structural constraints that have historically silenced women writers. *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) explores female interiority and subjectivity, emphasizing women's agency in shaping their own narratives.

- **Arundhati Roy:** *The God of Small Things* (1997) depicts Ammu and Rahel negotiating patriarchal and societal oppression, highlighting how male-centric social hierarchies impact women's lives. Roy's narrative subverts traditional male perspectives by presenting events through female subjectivity.
- **Margaret Atwood:** *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) presents a dystopian society in which the male gaze is institutionalized, controlling women's bodies, identities, and sexuality. Atwood critiques the systemic objectification and commodification of women.

Male Gaze in Film

Classical Cinema

Hollywood films of the 20th century often reinforced male dominance by presenting women as eroticized objects. Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) exemplifies voyeurism, in which women are framed as spectacles for male pleasure, while male characters and the camera assume positions of power and control.

Feminist and Subversive Cinema

- **Agnès Varda:** In *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962), Varda presents a female protagonist's perspective, emphasizing her emotions, anxieties, and subjectivity, thereby challenging traditional cinematic framing.
- **Sofia Coppola:** *Lost in Translation* (2003) subverts the male gaze by prioritizing women's internal experiences and perceptions rather than presenting them as objects of desire.
- **Chantal Akerman:** *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) foregrounds the daily labor and lived experiences of women, offering a radical critique of patriarchal invisibility and societal neglect of women's labor.

Critical Approaches and Theoretical Frameworks

Laura Mulvey's Theory of the Male Gaze

Mulvey identifies the mechanisms through which cinema encodes women as passive objects, emphasizing the interrelation between the camera, male characters, and spectators. The theory highlights the implicit reinforcement of patriarchal ideologies through visual pleasure and narrative structure.

Intersectional Feminist Critique

Intersectional feminism examines how gender intersects with race, class, sexuality, and postcolonial identity to compound oppression. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) portrays women negotiating both patriarchal and postcolonial pressures, demonstrating the multidimensionality of female oppression and resistance.

Narrative and Visual Subversion

Contemporary literature and cinema employ narrative and visual strategies to challenge the male gaze:

- Non-linear storytelling that resists male-dominated temporal frameworks.
- Female points of view that center women's subjectivity.
- Fragmented narratives that disrupt patriarchal expectations of coherence.
- Gaze reversal, in which women observe men, subverting traditional power dynamics.

Conclusion

Deconstructing the male gaze reveals how literature and film have historically perpetuated gendered power imbalances. Feminist criticism empowers women as subjects rather than objects, interrogating societal, cultural, and visual frameworks that perpetuate patriarchal control. Authors and filmmakers reclaim narrative and visual authority, producing works that prioritize female experiences, agency, and autonomy. Contemporary feminist interventions in literature and film continue to challenge the male gaze, fostering multidimensional representations of women and promoting gender equity in storytelling.

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Women's Studies, Intersectionality, and Social Justice: A Critical Analysis

Dr. G. Smitha

Women's Studies, emerging in the late 1960s, functions as a critical field that interrogates systemic inequalities, gender hierarchies, and intersecting social identities. By integrating feminist theory, critical race theory, indigenous perspectives, and political economy, the discipline examines the complex ways in which power, oppression, and privilege operate. Intersectionality, pioneered by Kimberlé Crenshaw, reveals how overlapping identities—race, class, gender, and sexuality—shape experiences of marginalization. Critical engagement with gender, sexuality, race, class, disability, health, and activism demonstrates how Women's Studies not only critiques societal structures but also informs policy, law, and advocacy. This interdisciplinary approach fosters inclusive practices, advances equity, and envisions transformative social justice strategies.

Women's Studies is an interdisciplinary academic field dedicated to analyzing gendered power structures, historical inequities, and social oppression. Emerging during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the discipline arose in response to traditional scholarship that marginalized women's voices and experiences. It critically interrogates the cultural, political, and economic forces that produce systemic inequalities while advocating for social justice and equity. By engaging with frameworks such as intersectionality, feminist legal theory, critical race theory, and indigenous feminist perspectives, Women's Studies provides a lens to examine complex identities and structural discrimination. This study explores how these approaches collectively

challenge normative assumptions, illuminate marginalized experiences, and inform strategies for inclusive social change.

Women's Studies and Intersectionality

Women's Studies critiques traditional paradigms by centering women's experiences and interrogating systems of oppression. Intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, provides a framework for understanding how race, gender, class, sexuality, and other identities intersect to shape experiences of marginalization. This approach challenges single-axis analyses and promotes holistic solutions to inequality, emphasizing that structural injustices are interconnected and cumulative. For instance, the experiences of a low-income woman of colour differ significantly from those of a middle-class white woman due to intersecting social and economic disadvantages.

Gender and Sexuality

Theories of gender and sexuality challenge binary understandings of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual categories. Simone de Beauvoir argued that gender is socially constructed, while Judith Butler introduced performativity theory, positing that gender identity is continually shaped by societal norms. The LGBTQ+ movement and transgender studies expand this discourse by highlighting nonconforming identities, advocating for inclusive policies, and questioning rigid societal norms. Recognizing gender as fluid and performative is essential to understanding how oppression operates and how inclusivity can be fostered.

Race, Ethnicity, and Indigenous Feminist Perspectives

Critical race theory (CRT) exposes systemic racism embedded in institutions, laws, and policies, moving beyond individual prejudice to structural inequalities. Indigenous feminist perspectives further challenge mainstream feminism by addressing colonial histories, land dispossession, and community-centered approaches to gender justice. The contributions of women of colour—scholars, activists, and leaders—underscore the importance of intersectional analyses in uncovering diverse forms of oppression and resistance.

Class, Labor, and Economic Inequality

Feminist political economy examines how capitalist structures disproportionately disadvantage women, particularly in low-wage and unpaid labor. Intersectional analyses reveal how class amplifies gendered inequalities, affecting access to education, healthcare, and career opportunities. Addressing these systemic disparities requires alternative economic models that recognize

the value of unpaid care work and promote equitable distribution of resources.

Disability, Health, and Reproductive Rights

Feminist disability studies highlight how ableism intersects with gender to produce compounded marginalization. Similarly, reproductive justice frameworks emphasize women's autonomy over their bodies, including access to healthcare, contraception, and safe abortion. These perspectives underscore the importance of policy, advocacy, and inclusive institutional practices in promoting equity and wellbeing for marginalized communities.

Violence, Trauma, and Activism

Gender-based violence, including domestic abuse, sexual assault, and systemic harassment, disproportionately affects women and marginalized genders. Healing and justice require trauma-informed care, restorative justice practices, and policy reforms. Feminist activism—from the suffrage movement to #MeToo—demonstrates the transformative potential of collective action in advancing gender equity and social justice.

Law and Policy

Feminist legal theory critiques laws and legal systems that perpetuate patriarchal norms, advocating for equitable reforms in family law, employment law, and human rights protections. Intersectional and critical analyses inform policymaking by highlighting structural inequalities, thus promoting inclusive legislation and social accountability.

Conclusion

Women's Studies, enriched by intersectionality and interdisciplinary approaches, provides critical tools for analysing systemic inequality, power dynamics, and the experiences of marginalized populations. By interrogating gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, and indigenous perspectives, the field challenges traditional knowledge frameworks and offers strategies for social transformation. Critical engagement with law, policy, activism, and economic structures highlights the relevance of academic scholarship for real-world change. Embracing these frameworks is essential to advancing equity, inclusion, and justice in contemporary society.

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Women and Water: An Intersectional Reading of Ashokamitran's "Water"

M. Gowshikaa

Literature is an artistic expression of human experiences through language, which helps in expressing emotions and imagination. It also shapes culture and people, through its different genres includes, poetry, drama, fiction, non-fiction, etc., which made them to question all such ideologies and social values in terms of class, race, gender, caste and religion. It plays a major role in creative thinking and interpreting in a more complex way through its different genres in which promoted writing.

Such writings helped in the evolution of the literature to turn into more complex literary theory. This helps the writers and readers to question each text in a deeper way in order to address the gaps and reflect the reality in the society. Over each time period, theory transforms and evolves into theories in an inclusive way for the site of multiple critical analysis. It intersects with multiple identities and issues in the contemporary society, beginning from Classical to Contemporary and intersectional theories.

Authors of different genres explains issues faced by each individual in the society dealing with gender roles, cultural values, power structures, oppressions, history and identity formation. They use to define each thing through writing, and these literary theories helps in the critical analysis for better understanding. Likewise, 'Feminist literary theory' which evolved in a powerful transformative way, examines the oppressions and suppressions faced by the women in the patriarchal society.

Feminist literary theory mainly reflects the position and representation

of women in terms of gender roles in the society and text. It showcases the endless sufferings faced by the women and their suppressed voices due to marginalization in the society. It helps them to seek equality and individuality to resist their own voices and identity. This theory mainly acts as a “voice to those voiceless”, providing a platform to express their pains and thoughts through writing in a literary way.

Focusing mainly upon the women’ rights, empowerment, equality, education and liberation in order to free themselves from those societal conventions developed by the patriarchy, and to critically question those conventions and ideologies in the text and society. Feminist literary theory has evolved more complex, beginning from first wave feminism, second wave, and third wave feminism, witnessing the evolution and growth of women in each movement to restore their own identity, power and voice and to resist those ideologies and marginalization in the male dominated society.

Feminism have branched into many types from, liberal feminism to intersectional feminism, talking about “universal womanhood” including class, race, sexuality, gender and culture to represent one’s own identity. The idea of intersecting all identities to represent them as a whole was introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw, which is called to be “Intersectionality”, she was the one who coined the term, to understand the endless sufferings of women in the society.

Ashokamitran was the pen name of Jagadisa Thyagarajan, an Indian writer regarded as one of the most influential figures in post-independent Tamil Literature. He began his prolific literary career with the prize-winning play “Anbin Parisu” and went on to author more than two hundred short stories, and a dozen novellas and novels. A distinguished essayist and critic, he was the editor of the literary journal “Kanaiyaazhi”. Most of his works have also been translated into English and other Indian languages, including Hindi, Malayalam, and Telugu. Most of his stories revolve around the life of middle-class people. And, he was famous for his subtle satire, which he uses to portray each character in his works seemed to be his literary style. Ashokamitran’s famous works include novels like “Thanneer”, “18-vadhu Atchakkodu” (translated as The Eighteenth Parallel), and “Karaintha Nizhalgal” (translated as Star Crossed), and also his Sahitya Akademi Award-winning short story collection, “Appavin Snehidar”.

Kimberle Williams Crenshaw is an American lawyer, scholar, and civil rights advocate, is the one who coined the term, ‘intersectionality’ in 1989,

a concept which revolutionized feminist and critical race theory. Her works depends upon gender, race, class and power which showcases those systems of oppression are always interlocked and not seemed to be isolated. In her essay, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”, where she describes different forms of discrimination such as racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia which intersects each other to shape those unique experiences of marginalized individuals, especially Black women. The idea of intersectionality influences scholars like bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Spivak, in which they expand the feminist discourse to include race, class, caste and nation to understand the global social identities to seek social justice and equality in a wider way.

In order to understand subjugation of women in the society, which doesn't come individually but as a whole intersecting identities like class, race, gender, caste, sex, religion, culture etc., implementing intersectionality to find the agencies which suppresses and exploits them continuously. Because, oppression of women differs from one woman to the other, depending upon their intersectional identities but need to examine as a whole thing, in which all women face oppression under patriarchal ideologies for being a woman. This research seeks to analyse and recognise the ‘overlapping systems of oppression and discrimination’ in the novella’s women characters individually through the lens of ‘intersectional feminism’ that revolves throughout the plot.

The idea of intersectionality in the context of Indian society deals more with ‘caste’ as a prominent intersecting point in examining those social identities, where, the oppression begins with the variation among the upper caste and lower caste people in a multifunctional society of male dominance. The caste and class struggles seemed to be more complex in terms of socio-political power and ideology-based ruling. The various social identities like caste, class, gender, race, religion, culture, etc, in this context form an agency to marginalize and subjugate those women folks in the society.

In a context of Indian society, a woman from a middle-class family faces oppression and marginalisation in the upper-class ruling society, where she has to face oppression for her class structure and also for her gender, in which this kind of oppression and double marginalization were created by the male power in the society. Likewise, the women character in the novella undergoes oppression and exploitation continuously for her survival, where “Water” plays a major role in the plot and acts as a metaphor in describing

the miserable state of women and itself in an intertwined way.

Describing, the Indian society which always functions as considering men to be superior one and women as inferior, defining their state and position as 'subaltern'. Describing, their helpless state as they were seemed to be powerless and subjugated by the male dominance throughout the history, the writer gives a vivid and graphic description. The women of such state always loss their own identity and power, remaining as 'silenced voices' in the hands of patriarchy is discussed here in this paper, through analysing the women character of the novella in an intricate way.

"Water" is a novella that deals with the struggles of each individual during the severe water crisis. The narration primarily focuses upon Jamuna's struggles and hardships in getting water and surviving the dominant society. This work was originally written in Tamil as "Thanneer" by Ashokamitran during 1973, and was translated into English by Lakshmi Holmstrom as "Water" in the year 2002. The plot of the story sets in the summer of 1969 in Chennai, where there is a severe water crisis in the city resulting in the chaos and drought. Here, the element 'water' plays a significant role in briefing each character and their struggles in surviving the drought and hardships in their life.

As, a metaphor to survival and struggle, 'water' flows throughout the entire plot in defining each individual struggles in order to survive and tackle those marginalisation as empowering themselves naturally. It also discusses about the realities of the contemporary world in defining the social status of the woman in a male dominated society. Many researchers and scholars have analysed the novella using the idea of eco-critical values and eco-feminism in order to critique upon the behaviour of the human towards the nature, women and ecosystem. Eco-feminism mainly deals with the exploration of the connection between nature and women as they were intertwined each other defining the oppression and exploitation undergone equally because of the dominance of patriarchy in the ecosystem.

It mainly compares both women and natural elements to uplift their sufferings, and contrast with the dominant ideologies focusing only upon gender and sex and not the other social identities that intersect there. So, this paper uses 'intersectionality' to deconstruct other identities intersecting the oppression in the novella.

This research critically evaluates each women character in the story, highlighting their sufferings and pains due to patriarchy and other social orders in the society. Mainly, to showcase the gender-based injustices experienced by each women character in the novella, which describes the ill effects of

caste and class structures upon the women folks of the society. To understand the oppression and marginalization undergone by the women, this research uses 'intersectionality' to analyse it in a vivid way.

Intersectionality as a theoretical framework helps in the understanding of the different forms of oppression and marginalization undergone by an individual, defining how multiple identities intersect within the structures of power. As, Kimberley Crenshaw states,

“This focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination”,

It shows marginalization and discrimination always happen in a multiple layered way through various social agencies. And, to define one's identity through various multiple systems of oppression including, class, caste, gender, race, culture, etc, drawing out that oppressions are always interconnected, not isolated. As, it enables multi-layered feminist readings of characters and power in the text.

Likewise, in the plot of “Water”, Jamuna, a young middle-class woman struggles to cope with the hardships of life and the city with wide water scarcity. The narration follows Jamuna's life throughout the end; in the meantime, it draws out the other woman characters describing their painful side and sufferings due to marginalisation and oppression. The research briefs out the intersecting agencies of each woman in the plot, thereby analysing their agency for oppression in an intricate way.

The main theme of the novella is water scarcity in the city and the struggles of the people to get water in order to survive, but the prime focus is upon the middle-class working women, whom struggles hardly to get a single pot of water describing their miserable, endless state of labour in the Indian society. As, defining the plight of working-class women. Here, women and water are compared to each other to describe their state and nature. As, both are commodified and exploited by the man in the society. Mainly, 'Water' is used as a metaphor to define their miserable, oppressed status as a women belonging to the patriarchal society.

To understand such oppression and marginalization of the women, along with other social identities such as class, caste, sex, gender, culture and rituals in this context, which can be achieved through the careful analysis of all the women characters in the plot. Deconstructing social identities from Jamuna to other women characters, in which all women characters face oppression and discrimination from the society and forcefully silenced by the male ones

in a multi-layered way.

The 'operating system of oppression' as discussed earlier goes with the conventions and customs build by the upper-class people in the Indian society, mainly by men. Jamuna as a women belonging to the middle-class family struggles daily to get a sufficient amount of water, as she has to wake up so early to stand in the queue to get a single pot of water. As, she left her mother and lives separately with her sister, Chaya, in order to achieve her dream of becoming a heroine. She faces oppression and exploitation for being an independent woman. For instance, the owner of Jamuna's house always gazes at her body as a sight for "sexual pleasure".

As, she also got exploited by Bhaskara Rao, whom Jamuna befriends to become an actress. The working of patriarchy is witnessed through the character, BhaskaraRao, as he exploits and oppresses Jamuna for his own desire and greediness and finally left her pregnant without any concern. This describes that how women were objectified for the male gaze, and seeing 'female body' as a 'sight for sexual pleasure and exploitation' by the men in the society. In one such instance in the plot, Jamuna got marginalized for touching an orthodox Brahmin woman, because Jamuna belongs to middle class as the women of upper-caste gets impure. They follow some kind of ritual named, 'Madi', to cleanse themselves from dirt and impure. In order to clean themselves they waste water, but never allow others to fetch extra water from the tap, this how Indian society of dominance works in defining their ideologies.

Another, important character named 'Teacher Amma', who is an educated working woman, lives near to Jamuna. She works as a teacher in a school; she too wakes up early to fetch water from nearby taps and tanks. She faces oppression in a way; she was married very early at her age of fifteen to a sick man who is older than her. And, she has to take care of her sick husband, who is bedridden and her mother-in-law, who always curses her.

There she faces domestic violence and abuse every day, even though she is educated. She has to cook them and feed them, and then she has to get back to her work and again she has to do those household chores in a repetitive way, which describes her endless futile labouring. Her dreams were scattered when she got married to a sick man and she is going through lot of agony and sufferings both physically and mentally as she has to look after all things starting from fetching water to feed them, but the people of her own never respects her and always insults and oppresses her.

This describes the miserable state of a woman in Indian households, where women were married only for domestication and exploitation. Then,

Jamuna's mother, who is aged lives in her brother's house, she was almost bedridden and forgets her memory almost due to her sickness. But, when Jamuna and Chayavisither, she repeatedly tells Jamuna about her early marriage life, where her mother-in-law made Jamuna's mother to do all the household chores and domestic labours by herself, and she too faces oppression from her mother-in-law.

Even though, she forgets most of the things, she remembers those instances describing her traumatized state under oppression, which still haunts her, even after many years. As, Indian ideologies always works with oppression and marginalization due to the patriarchal structures, where women always seemed to be inferior to men. Likewise, in this case it works to all characters.

Then, Chaya, a younger sister to Jamuna, who is well-educated and also a working woman, faces oppression from her male bosses as a woman worker. As, a Teacher Amma tells to Jamuna about the oppression faced by women in their working place. And, there is also a main connecting point to all these women characters, as apart from women all these characters have 'water scarcity' as a common problem in which they united and exploited. All characters are questing themselves in finding water and thirsting for their own identity and power.

This research showcases how patriarchy works and follows, intersecting the social identities of oppression as interwoven in each character of the text, describes that oppression never comes isolated and seen as a whole thing. All the women characters of the novella are seemed to be the victims of the patriarchy and the dominant ideologies as discussed below, in terms of class, caste, gender, sex and ritual. At, the end there is a 'hope' in the plot as women were rebuilding themselves in order to survive.

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Revisiting Feminism in Contemporary Indian Women Fiction: Voices, Visions, and Global Resonances

Dr. H. Akther Banu

The chapter, *Revisiting Feminism in Contemporary Indian Women's Fiction: Voices, Visions, and Global Resonances*, examines how Indian women novelists have transformed feminist consciousness within postcolonial and global contexts. Moving beyond traditional feminist discourse, these narratives engage intersectional concerns—class, caste, culture, and globalisation—while preserving indigenous perspectives. Some authors who explore Indian women's struggles for self-determination through the lens of global feminist principles include Kiran Desai, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, and Kamala Markandaya. The stories they share offer a diverse array of perspectives and experiences that transform feminism from a theoretical concept to a lived reality.

Western Feminist Theories and Early Voices

Simone de Beauvoir, the pioneer of the movement, contested the belittling of women in her book, *The Second Sex*, first published in French in 1949 and subsequently translated into English to make it accessible to the rest of the world. It gradually swept across the world, advocating just rights for women – political, social, economic, educational, cultural, and psychological. De Beauvoir points out, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman ... it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature ... described as feminine.” Feminism means different things to different people, including a wish to change and challenge the existing order of things to achieve a more

balanced and saner parity and equality between the sexes and to work for human dignity as an individual and woman.

In the nineteenth century, Alexander Dumas, a French dramatist, first used the term “feminism” to refer to the then-emerging movement for women’s rights that was mostly restricted to politics. Women constitute roughly half the world’s population, but their role in various fields of activity has been totally disproportionate to their numerical strength. Considered the weaker sex, they have been subjected to social, economic, and political injustices. An awareness of the inequalities present in society resulted in the Women’s Liberation Movement as late as the mid-nineteenth century. It was in the later part of the twentieth century that it became more vigorous, only to make people examine their age-old beliefs and concepts. According to Linda Gordon, feminism is “an analysis of women’s subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it.”

Alice Jardine views feminism as a movement by women which takes on different and very specific forms in different contexts. She considers feminism “a movement from the point of view of, by, and for women.” The Women’s Liberation Movement also inspired many feminist novelists like Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, Doris Lessing, Sylvia Plath, Iris Murdoch, Marilyn French, and Margaret Atwood. These feminists made a commendable contribution to the spread of feminism. They strongly protest against every cruelty to women in the name of religion or morality. They boldly demand human rights and dignity for women, who remained dumb and docile for centuries in the male-dominated world. Women earlier did not dare to defy the rigid norms laid down by society because of some handicaps and social constraints. While men were allowed to ignore social decorum and notions of morality, a woman writer could not go beyond certain limitations, even in her portrayal of women characters.

Bhavana Dwivedi points out,

Feminism is a concept that emerged as a protest against male dominance and the marginalisation of women. Feminism recognises the inadequacy of male-created ideologies and struggles for the spiritual, economic, social, and racial equality of women who have been sexually colonised and subjugated.

It is an expression of the mute and stifled female voice, which has been denied equal freedom of self-expression

Sarah Grimke observes,

Man has subjugated women to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish gratification, to minister to his sensual pleasure, and to be instrumental in promoting his comfort; but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill. He has done all he could do to debase and enslave her mind.

Feminism strives to undo this tilted and distorted image of women whose cries for freedom and equality have gone, and still go, unheard in a patriarchal world.

Virginia Woolf, who may be called one of the earliest feminists, wrote,

Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its normal size.

Emergence of Feminist Consciousness in Indian English Fiction

The issues raised by Western feminists inspired the feminists in India, and the women novelists have dexterously championed the cause of women in Indian fiction. To go back to the history of women's writing, it was Toru Dutt who first wrote both in French and English about women, and other women writers followed her. Cornelia Sorabji tried to penetrate the silken curtain of the purdah and reveal the nuances of femininity. A later writer, Iqbalunnisa Hussain, in her *Purdah and Polygamy: Life in an Indian Muslim Household*, also tried with commendable success to present the inhibitions in a typical Muslim family.

The trio, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, and Raja Rao, did not pay much attention to women's emancipation. Although they had in their hand excellent material on the freedom movement and the role women played, they let themselves miss out on this opportunity. Anand is deeply involved in championing the cause of the underprivileged, except for *The Old Woman and the Cow*. Gauri, its heroine, is a fine example of his idea of women's emancipation. Narayan's portrayal of women characters ranges from the meek and submissive wife of Margayya in *The Financial Expert* and Savitri in *The Dark Room* to the vibrant and radical women characters like Daisy and Rosie in *The Painter of Signs* and *The Guide*, respectively. But Daisy and Rosie are not examples to be emulated, and Anand obliquely warns us of the destructive repercussions 'feminism' will have on society.

Domestic injustice and oppressive tradition plague the women of Raja Rao's stories; however, the author offers no solutions to their plight. In *The Serpent and the Rope*, his ambitious female characters take on the role of a

loyal wife, similar to Savitri. Despite the pervasive influence of Indian culture on him, he is unable to provide effective solutions to the problems faced by women.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's portrayal of women is too optimistic to be realistic. His women are tender, charming, and virtuous and play a significant role in effecting social change. But in spite of being tender and virtuous, they are victimised. Kajoli in *So Many Hungers!* Undergoes immense suffering and misery, but her spirit remains invincible. Mohini in *Music for Mohini* effects social reforms in Behula village, steeped in superstitions and obsolete customs.

Thus, male writers, owing to a misconception about or ignorance of women in general, have failed to give an honest or real portrayal of their women characters. They have either exposed their weaknesses and drawbacks or placed her on a high pedestal and deified her. Thus, the delineation of the real woman has somehow escaped the pens of male writers.

It is only after the Second World War that women novelists of repute started enriching Indian fiction in English qualitatively. A few Indian writers in English attempted to challenge the traditional myths about man-woman relationships. Some succeeded in their attempt, if not in finding an ideal viable solution, but at least in bringing home to women an awareness of the existing inequalities and imbalances in society.

A striking feature of twentieth-century fiction is the dominance of the women novelists. There is, nevertheless, a profound difference between women's writing and men's. Men writing about women tend to become unrealistic by either highlighting their weaknesses or their defiance and belittling them at home and in society. But contemporary women novelists who are avowedly feminists have taken a different stance to present women in a positive and contributing role. Mulk Raj Anand acknowledges that "the women writers are more eloquent, intense, and sensitive. Few male writers can convey the same sense of intensity in their writings."

Although Indian English novels were male-dominated for a long time, with all major English novelists in the pre-Independence period being men, the post-Independence era has seen the emergence of women writers who have made significant contributions to the field and greatly enriched it.

Re-Imagining Female Identity: Contemporary Indian Women Novelists

The post-Independence novel displays confidence coupled with bold experimentation. New techniques have transformed the old sociological,

historical, and political modes of writing. The female literary tradition comes from a still-evolving relationship between women writers and their society. The self-awareness of the woman writer has translated itself into a literary form. There has been a phase of self-discovery, a turning inward, and a search for identity. Major women novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Nayanthara Sahgal, Shobha De, Bharati Mukherjee, Uma Vasudev, Shashi Deshpande, Dina Mehta, Geetha Mehta, Arundhati Roy, and Kiran Desai seek to trace the development of Indian women's sensibility to respond to the modern situation. Self-development and sexual awareness have led the novelists to the study of relationships between women, including mothers and daughters, sisters, friends, and female communities. Generally, these novelists encompass the full spectrum of women's experiences in India.

Kamala Markandaya demonstrates how the imbalances in economic and social order have conditioned the emancipation of Indian women. Her fictional world exudes a fine feminine sensibility. Her women are memorable. A realistic depiction of the conflicting demands placed on Indian women by their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers may be seen in the writings of Kamala Markandaya. She goes on to say that women are particularly impacted by the socio-economic conditions. A classically structured novel about hunger and deprivation, *Nectar in a Sieve* is Markandaya's debut work. It justifiably draws comparisons to *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck, *Cry the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton, and *Murugan the Tiller* by K.S. Venkataramani as a tour de force on the life, labour, agony, sorrow, and tragedy of the peasant. The narrator-protagonist, Rukmini, recounts her family's fall into poverty through echoes of the past. Rukmini and Ira, her daughter, are the ones most impacted by the socioeconomic situations. She goes through a series of miseries. Ira, the daughter, turns to prostitution to keep her family from starving after her husband falls unfaithful. Markandaya describes the societal traditions and norms in great detail, illuminating how they contribute to women's misery. Marriages are arranged by the parents, and the bridegroom's social standing is determined by the amount of the dowry.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala is mostly preoccupied with the travails of white women in India. She writes from her perception of life and her own bitter experiences in an alien land. Her portrayal of women is very limited and narrow, and it provokes Shantha Krishna Swamy to comment that "the examples of women in her fiction seem to make people unacquainted with India believe that all Indian women are contemptible, flighty, or neurotic and pathetic creatures."

Anita Desai explores the disturbed psyche of modern Indian women. Her women characters try to strike a balance between instinctual needs and intellectual aspirations. Deeply exhausted by this trapeze act, they are further bewildered when the existential absurdity of it is unmasked before them. Loneliness and lack of communication and communality greatly affect their psyche and masculinity, and institutional pressures further exacerbate their societal and familial relations.

Nayantara Sahgal is another important novelist whose main concern is the passivity of Indian women. Her depiction of India both in the pre- and post-Independence days is noteworthy. She exposes the gender bias in a patriarchal society, as in *The Day in Shadow*. The novel is a sensitive record of the suffering of a woman in her native society when she chooses to divorce her husband. Sahgal works out her feminist ideas in a limited province. She usually restricts herself to studying one class – the elite. Most of her works, however, address the impersonal world of politics in a story to parallel the personal world of man-woman relationships.

Shobha De presents in her novels many sensitive aspects of human relationships in general and man-woman relationships in particular. De portrays the myriad facets of contemporary social reality. About her *Sultry Days*, a reviewer writes, “While men pose to be the masters and claim to be in complete command over all situations in life, in reality they are like misguided, pampered, spoilt children who need support and sustenance from a woman, whether she is a mother, a wife or a sister.”

Bharati Mukherjee is another significant contemporary novelist whose novels express the nomadic impulse of Indians, who, in their quest for material advancement, migrate to the West and, consequently, though they are excited, face many problems in adapting to the new milieu and assimilating the alien culture. Mukherjee is at her best in the depiction of the cultural clash between the East and the West. She has become a celebrity for her distinctive approach to expatriate hood as a unique experience of exile. Her novel *The Holder of the World* reinforces expatriation as a journey of the human mind.

Arundhati Roy, the Booker Prize winner for her debut novel, *The God of Small Things*, believes that society can successfully achieve its goal only when there is no disparity between the rich and the poor, between the Dalit and the privileged.

Kiran Desai is the youngest woman to have won the prestigious the Man Booker Prize of 2006, for her second novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* as well as the National Book Critics Award. She was also shortlisted for the

Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction. In this novel, Kiran Desai portrays a globalised India, where the past and future coexist in an uneasy juxtaposition, lives are merged and pushed into diverse corners, and migration is a fundamental aspect of life. *The Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* was published to unanimous acclaim in over 22 countries. In 2015, the *Economic Times* listed her as one of the 20 most influential global Indian women. Her third novel, *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny*, was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2025.

The 21st century saw a shift in women's writing towards a modernist medium that fused feminist and womanist statements. Despite a score of weaknesses, it must be admitted that these women writers are working, and their novels, on the whole, have life and substance and present a convincing picture of human existence. The overall picture is one of hope. Women play a more significant role in Indo-English literature compared to their counterparts in any other Indian language. One of the major factors responsible for their prominence is that they all come from the higher economic, social, and educated strata of Indian society—most of them educated abroad and thoroughly westernised in their outlook. There can be no two opinions that a strong, sound education in English provides a woman writer a big and thrilling start in her writing career.

Global Resonances and New Directions in Feminist Writing

Indian women's fiction is a synthesis of gender and culture within India. Its engagement with the global feminist thought is noteworthy. Feminism has become a very dynamic discourse with its interconnectedness, surpassing geographical and linguistic boundaries. Indian women novelists emerged on the global stage with themes of migration, identity politics, environmental justice, and transnational womanhood. Their narratives showcased the wonderful culmination of glocal feminism, an amalgamation of the global and the local, where global issues of gender equality combine with culturally specific experiences.

Kimberle Crenshaw first spoke about intersectionality and emphasised how gender interacts with class, caste, race, and sexuality to shape women's lives. This model echoes emphatically in Indian fiction, where writers like Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, and Bharati Mukherjee depict how colonial legacies and social hierarchies continue to define women's identities.

Some authors, like Namita Gokhale, Githa Hariharan, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, turn mythological characters like Sita, Draupadi, and Parvati into symbols of strength, determination, and freedom. In this way,

they assist in creating “decolonised feminism,” which is a method for women to speak up in the context of their own cultural backgrounds. These reinterpretations engage with global feminist discourses on agency and representation, while simultaneously resisting the homogenising tendencies of Western feminist paradigms.

Conclusion

Feminism in the Indian context has crossed many milestones- from protest to introspection, from estrangement to assertion, and from individuality to universality. Initially started as a struggle against patriarchy evolved into a deeper philosophical analysis of the nature of identity, autonomy and coexistence. Indian Women novelists have transformed feminist thought into a vivacious chronicle of self-discovery and social transformation. Unlike the Western modern of radical feminism, which often emphasises confrontation, the Indian literary tradition has inclined to favour reconciliation and renewal.

The feminist ideology of writers like Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Bharati Mukherjee, Arundhati Roy, and Kiran Desai is not radical but thoughtful. Their novels depict women navigating the tension between tradition and modernity, framing feminism as an ethical and spiritual pursuit of equilibrium and completeness. These authors redefined feminism as a transformative humanism, a timeless ideal of compassion, equality, and creativity that aspires to the freedom of women and all individuals, by reinterpreting femininity through the perspective of Indian philosophy. Contemporary Indian women writers have incorporated ecological and spiritual dimensions into feminist literature. The books of Arundhati Roy and Anita Nair mix feminist principles with environmental consciousness. They picture a balance between being a woman and living in nature. This ecofeminist view stresses the connection between environmental harm and gender inequity. It says that both society and the environment need to be sustainable. The “voices and visions” of these authors transcend national boundaries, reverberating with universal issues of equality, environment, and empathy. Their anecdotes illustrate that feminism is not a singular concept but a continuous continuum of experiences influenced by society, history, and imagination. In reinterpreting womanhood within the Indian context, these authors reframe feminism as a transformative humanism—an eternal vision of equality, creativity, and compassion that seeks not just the emancipation of women but also their elevation.

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Feministic Concerns in George Orwell's Fiction: A Critical Appraisal

Dinesh Kumar

Eric Arthur Blair, who wrote his novels with the pen name, George Orwell, is one of the most prominent and significant writers of the twentieth century, Although he is primarily known for his political ideology and social criticism, but his feministic outlook and feministic concerns are generally overlooked and negated.

A close and incisive study of his works shed considerable light on his representation of women and gender roles. Despite his sharp awareness of class and power structures, Orwell understanding of gender relations remains fraught with contradictions. No doubt, his novels offer significant insight into the patriarchal structures of his time and his own conflicted views on gender, power, and social justice.

In the present study, an attempt has been made to trace and investigate Orwell's representation of women and the underlying feminist (or anti-feminist) impulses within his fiction. Keeping in view the feminist literary theory, the readers find his novels not simply as political allegories, but as narratives deeply embedded in the gender ideologies of his time.

A minute analysis of Orwell's works spotlight that his female characters can be seen torn between two extremes: the submissive, domestic woman and the liberated yet objectified sexual being. In *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, Rosemary, the heroine of the novel, is delineated as practical and emotionally stable, yet her realism contrasts sharply with Gordon Comstock's idealism and frustration. Orwell's narrative sympathy leans toward the male's existential struggle, while the woman represents the domestic sphere that confines, yet sustains him.

In the same way, in *Coming Up for Air*, George Bowling's wife, Hilda, symbolizes the oppressive routine of middle-class life. The novel's nostalgic yearning for a lost England is paralleled by a yearning for lost masculine autonomy, suggesting that Orwell's critique of modernity is intertwined with anxiety about female power and the feminization of culture.

In both the novels, the females are explored as pragmatic and materialistic, bound by social conventions. These details vividly and graphically illustrate the author's critique of middle-class hypocrisy besides revealing his discomfort with women who conform to or exploit patriarchal norms.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the readers come across Orwell's most famous female character, Julia who has been delineated as a complex female character within feminist interpretations. On the apparent level, Julia is a prototype of resistance through sexuality—her affair with Winston Smith is a rebellion against the Party's Puritanical control over the body. At one place, she asserts: "I'm good at staying alive," her defiance is pragmatic rather than ideological.

Feminist critics have assessed Julia's character according to their angle of perception. Daphne Patai, for example, argues that Orwell reduces her rebellion to mere sensuality, denying her the intellectual depth afforded to Winston. On the other hand, critics like Sandra Newman points out that Julia embodies a form of embodied resistance—an assertion of autonomy over her own desire, which challenges the state's patriarchal control.

In this way, while Julia's character remains confined within the male protagonist's perspective, her rebellion carries feminist implications. The Party's attempt to suppress sexual expression mirrors patriarchal efforts to regulate women's bodies and agency, making Orwell's dystopia a broader metaphor for gendered power.

In other words, Julia's portrayal stands out as an emblem of sexual rebellion. Her defiance of the Party's puritanical control over the body and desire marks her as a subversive figure. However, as a writer, Orwell, too, limits her resistance to the realm of sexuality, never allows her to grow into a fully ideological rebel like Winston. This ambivalence exposes Orwell's struggle to reconcile personal freedom with political liberation, especially regarding women.

Taking into consideration the feministic aspects in *Animal Farm*, Orwell constructs a political allegory of revolution and tyranny, but women (or female animals) are largely absent from the revolutionary narrative. In case

of few female characters, Clover and Mollie, the readers witness nothing but vanity. Clover, the maternal mare, embodies compassion and moral consciousness but lacks the authority to act against the corruption of the pigs. Mollie, the vain mare, represents self-interest and escapism.

Feminist readings of *Animal Farm* suggest that Orwell's exclusion of strong female figures reflects both the social realities of his time and the metaphorical silencing of women in political revolutions. As critic Lisa Jardine observes, Orwell's political fable "mirrors the male monopolization of political discourse," where women's contributions are domesticated, marginalized, or rendered invisible.

Thus, even in a work that condemns totalitarianism, Orwell unconsciously reproduces gender hierarchies, underscoring the limitations of his revolutionary vision.

As far as the idea of feminism is concerned, Orwell's novels may be investigated through Simone de Beauvoir's concept of woman as "the Other." Orwell's male-centered narratives often define women in as a counterpart of male consciousness. In other words, the women are not independent, rather reflections of male fears, desires, and failures.

In addition to it, if we apply the lens of socialist feminism, one perceives that Orwell's sensitivity to class oppression does not extend fully to gender oppression. While he critiques capitalist exploitation, he seldom recognizes domestic labor, sexual politics, or the intersection of gender and class as sites of struggle.

However, Orwell's preoccupation with control, surveillance, and dehumanization—central themes in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*—aligns with later feminist analyses of patriarchal power structures. His vision of the Party's control over thought, speech, and sexuality prefigures what Michel Foucault and later feminist theorists would call "bio-political control."

If on the one hand Orwell's attitude toward women is ambivalent, on the other hand, he usually portrays females as superficial in societal decay. Besides, his critique of domination, hypocrisy, and conformity resonates with feminist resistance. His acknowledgment of the personal as political—particularly in the control of intimacy and identity—anticipates key insights of second-wave feminism.

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Contours of Modern Indian Womanhood in the Fictional World of Nayantara Sahgal

Dr. Ekta Chahal

Nayantara Sahgal's literature depicts the subtle process by which Indian women have progressed from subjection and silence to autonomy and self-realization. Sahgal's narratives, set in post-independence India's sociopolitical landscape, reflect the conflict between tradition and modernity, person and institution, emotion and ideology. Through her female characters, Nita, Leela, Simrit, and Sonali, Sahgal redefines femininity as a dynamic construct fashioned by education, knowledge, and moral courage. This chapter delves into the dimensions of modern Indian women as shown in four of her major novels: *A Time to Be Happy*, *Storm in Chandigarh*, *This Time of Morning*, and *Rich Like Us*. It looks at how Sahgal turns women from passive beneficiaries of patriarchal authority to self-aware change agents, reflecting India's greater feminist awakening.

The emergence of the modern Indian woman has been a major issue in Indian English fiction. Nayantara Sahgal, one of India's most prominent female novelists, situates her examination of gender within the contexts of politics, family, and personal ethics. As Jawaharlal Nehru's niece and a member of the Nehru-Gandhi political lineage, Sahgal's awareness was influenced by both the liberation fight and postcolonial political disappointment. Her literature exemplifies an intertwining of the political and the personal—a awareness that the two are inextricably linked in defining identity.

Sahgal's women are not typical rebels; rather, they are thoughtful individuals who challenge the values that constrain them. They depict the

Indian woman's progressive change from dependency and obedience to awareness and autonomy. Her works depict a journey of the feminine self from passive acceptance of social norms to the assertion of individuality, dignity, and emotional honesty.

The four books examined in this chapter follow this transformation over the decades since India's independence. In *A Time to Be Happy* (1958), Sahgal depicts the early stages of self-awareness. In *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) and *This Time of Morning* (1965), she depicts the psychological anguish of educated women imprisoned in loveless marriages and inflexible traditions. In *Rich Like Us* (1985), she portrays a mature feminist consciousness that combines political activism and personal liberation. These pieces provide a composite portrayal of modern Indian femininity, capturing its inconsistencies, challenges, and successes.

Sahgal's debut novel *A Time to Be Happy* explores the dilemmas of a newly independent nation and its citizens seeking meaning beyond colonial legacies. The protagonist, Nita, embodies the emerging modern Indian woman—educated, introspective, and questioning the traditional frameworks of family and marriage.

Unlike the submissive heroines of earlier Indian fiction, Nita refuses to be confined within the boundaries of passive domesticity. Her love for her cousin Gautam is genuine but unsanctioned by societal norms. The novel juxtaposes two India—one clinging to orthodoxy and another striving for intellectual and emotional emancipation.

Sahgal uses Nita's subdued rebellion as a metaphor for India's own postcolonial quest for morality and cultural identity. Her internal opposition takes the form of an assertion of reason and dignity, and the tone is restrained yet strong. Sahgal presents her lifetime concern—the moral freedom of individuals inside oppressive systems—through Nita.

Womanhood is in the early stages of self-definition in this early work. Instead of destroying tradition, the modern Indian woman starts to emerge as a reformer who seeks to strike a balance between self-respect, rationality, and affection. Sahgal's story emphasizes that genuine modernity is about developing integrity and autonomy rather than copying the West.

Sahgal's perspective changes from idealistic to pragmatic with *Storm in Chandigarh*. The personal crises of the book's main characters, Inder and Saroj, as well as Vishal and Mara, are set against the backdrop of political unrest between Punjab and Haryana following the split of states. Both literally and figuratively, the storm represents the upheaval in interpersonal relationships and society.

The main female character, Saroj, perfectly captures the annoyance of a bright woman stuck in a patriarchal marriage. Her husband, Inder, sees his wife as an extension of his ego and is emotionally distant and controlling. Saroj's path is gradually realizing how empty her life is. A recurrent Sahgal topic, the emotional sterility of her marriage links public and personal instability by reflecting the political chaos outside.

However, Mara is just as lonely despite being forceful and worldly. By using these disparate women, Sahgal challenges the constrained opportunities for women, both traditional and contemporary, to reach their full potential.

Sahgal's concept of women underwent a sea change with her portrayal of Saroj. Saroj made the moral choice to recover her identity by divorcing her marriage; it is neither impetuous nor scandalous. The new Indian woman who dares to challenge the sanctity of marriage when it compromises dignity is symbolized by Saroj's suffering and tenacity.

Through *Storm in Chandigarh*, Sahgal reaffirms that emotional reciprocity and psychological equality must be the cornerstones of women in contemporary India. Instead of being an act of disobedience, the transition is inner and aware

Sahgal expands on her examination of personal liberty in the face of political disenchantment in *This Time of Morning*. Set in Delhi's affluent political circles, the book illustrates how Nehruvian principles are eroding and how moral compromise is becoming more prevalent in government. In this context, the nation's search for moral compass reflects women's search for identity.

The main character, Simrit, is a mother and writer who is trying to make sense of her unhappy marriage to Som, a driven bureaucrat. Simrit's desire for genuineness and love stands in stark contrast to Som's fixation with status and compliance. She regains her independence of thought and repressed emotions through her connection with Raj, an intellectual.

Although subtle, Sahgal's treatment of Simrit is revolutionary for her era. Simrit's decision to divorce her spouse and her emotional candor represent Indian women's freedom from moral dishonesty. Simrit's liberation is attained with self-reflection and bravery, in contrast to the confrontational feminist paradigm of the West. She is a symbol of the "quiet revolution" among middle-class Indian women, who are intelligent, conscious, but nonetheless bound by cultural guilt.

Sahgal's writing strikes a mix between fury and moderation, implying that the fight of the modern woman is not against men but rather against the

ideals that uphold inequity. This Time of Morning, the title of the book, represents awakening on both a personal and a societal level. Simrit's emergence as a person is comparable to India's awakening to its democratic conscience.

One of Sahgal's best-known books, *Rich Like Us*, was published in 1985 and was honored with the Sahitya Akademi Award. It depicts how gender, class, and politics intersected during the Emergency era (1975–77), going beyond personal experiences. The lives of Rose, an Englishwoman married into an Indian business family, and Sonali, a civil worker, are entwined throughout the book.

The moral core of the book, Sonali, stands in for the independent, educated Indian woman who opposes dictatorship and corruption. Her refusal of political and patriarchal control is a metaphor for her resistance to bureaucratic exploitation. Rose, on the other hand, demonstrates cross-cultural awareness and perseverance by assimilating into Indian society without losing her uniqueness.

Sahgal presents womanhood as complex, based on empathy, intelligence, and moral obligation, through these two women. Sahgal's personal political position opposing tyranny is reflected in Sonali's refusal to sacrifice her morals during the Emergency. The novel asserts that the fight for women's liberation is inextricably linked to the fight for a decent society by fusing feminist and democratic values.

Rich Like Us stands out for its sophisticated feminist tone. Sahgal shifts his focus from portraying domestic strife to examining systemic tyranny. Her women are conscious of their societal roles as intellectuals and changemakers, and they no longer only pursue personal bliss. According to Sahgal, the educated, morally upright, and globally active modern Indian lady becomes the moral conscience of the country.

The conflict between ingrained traditions and newly emerging modern principles is reflected in Sahgal's fiction. Her women reinterpret tradition rather than completely rejecting it. They can challenge patriarchal presumptions without losing their cultural roots thanks to education, travel, and exposure to international views.

Political beliefs are reflected in interpersonal connections in Sahgal's world. Authoritarianism in government is analogous to emotional tyranny in marriage. Her view that freedom must start at home before it can thrive in society is further supported by this blending of domains.

Sahgal uses reflection to help his protagonists grow. Instead of dominance, they aim for equality and emotional honesty. The development of feminine consciousness in India after independence is symbolized by their journey from silence to speech.

Sahgal's modern lady is characterized by moral courage. Nita's subdued dignity, Saroj's separation, Simrit's self-affirmation, and Sonali's resistance to corruption are all examples of moral triumphs over concessions.

Sahgal is viewed by critics like Meenakshi Mukherjee and Jasbir Jain as a writer who combines feminist humanism and political realism. Sahgal expanded the canvas to incorporate the nation-state and international politics, whereas previous Indian women novelists concentrated on domestic settings. In addition to being daughters, spouses, and lovers, her women are also citizens.

Rather of being radical, Sahgal's feminism is frequently characterized as "liberal." She supports ethical courage and awareness-based reform rather than confrontation. Sahgal's heroines "redefine freedom not as isolation but as the ability to choose with responsibility," as Jasbir Jain notes.

Gandhian principles of moral strength and sincerity are also reflected in her writings. Sahgal advocates the moral rejuvenation of the family system, in contrast to Western feminists who frequently criticize it. Thus, her conception of contemporary Indian femininity is innovative yet culturally grounded—a blend of justice, compassion, and reason.

The slow but significant change in Indian femininity in the decades after independence is depicted in the fictional universe of Nayantara Sahgal. Her educated, perceptive, and morally conscious women represent the country's own maturation process. Sahgal charts the development of the Indian woman from emotional dependence to intellectual independence, starting with Nita's awakening in *A Time to Be Happy* and ending with Sonali's outspoken integrity in *Rich Like Us*.

In Sahgal's work, the "contours" of contemporary Indian female are determined by consciousness—an internal understanding that selfhood and equality are human rights, not privileges—rather than by resistance. Her main characters represent fortitude without resentment and uniqueness without estrangement. Sahgal has contributed a complex representation of female strength based on morality and empathy to Indian English writing by giving voice to their hardships.

In the end, Nayantara Sahgal imagines a society in which political and moral freedom are inextricably linked to gender equality. In a culture still

navigating its moral awakening, her women are voices of reason, compassion, and bravery, standing in the heart of India's changing narrative rather than on the periphery.

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From Silence to Speech: The Subaltern Woman's Voice in *13 Reasons Why* and Beyond

Dr. Devika T.S.

This chapter explores the intersections of gender, power, and narrative agency through an analysis of *13 Reasons Why* within the broader framework of women in world literature. Drawing upon Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of subalternity, Judith Butler's concept of performativity, Michel Foucault's notion of surveillance, Sara Ahmed's affect theory, and Maria Nikolajeva's idea of aetnormativity, the study situates Hannah Baker as a transnational figure of the silenced female subject. Her posthumous voice, articulated through cassette-tape testimony, becomes a metaphor for women's testimonial traditions across cultures—ranging from confessional writing to oral storytelling—where female experience resists containment through narrative reclamation. By linking Hannah's struggle for self-expression to the long lineage of women's literary resistance, the chapter argues that world literature provides a shared space where women convert silence into speech, surveillance into self-awareness, and emotional vulnerability into political agency.

Women's writing and women-centred narratives in world literature have long served as sites of resistance against systems of control that silence or marginalize the feminine voice. From the muted heroines of Victorian realism to the defiant subjects of postcolonial and contemporary fiction, literary women continue to negotiate between imposed silence and self-expression. Across genres and cultures, female characters embody what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls the "subaltern"—a subject who is spoken for, but rarely allowed to speak in her own terms. This chapter explores how women

in literature challenge this historical silencing through narrative reclamation. By focusing on the female protagonist of Netflix's adaptation of *13 Reasons Why*—Hannah Baker—the discussion situates her within a continuum of global female figures who resist domination through voice, testimony, and memory. The study employs theoretical frameworks from Spivak, Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, Maria Nikolajeva, and Sara Ahmed to examine how the narrative dramatizes female subalternity, performative gender identity, and emotional resistance, aligning Hannah Baker's struggles with a broader feminist literary tradition that seeks to make women's pain legible within the public sphere.

The dynamics of silencing that shape Hannah Baker's story in *13 Reasons Why* reflect a broader pattern visible across women's literature, where patriarchal and institutional authorities mediate, distort, or suppress female experience. Maria Nikolajeva's concept of **aetonormativity**—the dominance of adult perspectives over children's and adolescents' voices—offers a compelling lens to understand this imbalance. When transposed into feminist criticism, aetonormativity becomes an emblem of patriarchal textual control, mirroring how women's voices in literary history have been filtered through masculine interpretation. Just as the adolescent subject in youth fiction is contained by adult norms, the female subject in global literature is constrained by cultural and institutional structures that define acceptable expressions of womanhood. In *13 Reasons Why*, Hannah's attempts to articulate her trauma are systematically reframed by adults who prioritize order, morality, and social reputation over her emotional truth. This echoes the experiences of countless women in literature—from Tess in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* to Offred in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*—whose voices are permitted only when aligned with the expectations of patriarchal discourse.

In this context, *13 Reasons Why* may be read not merely as a narrative about teenage mental health, but as a **female testimony of resistance** within a global literary continuum. The structure of the series—alternating between Hannah's recorded voice and the mediated narrative of Clay Jensen—mirrors what feminist scholars identify as the “ventriloquized woman”: a figure whose speech exists but is repeatedly reframed through male narration. The authority granted to Clay's interpretation reflects the pervasive aetonormative and patriarchal logic that privileges male rationality over female emotion. Similar patterns of narrative displacement can be observed in world texts like Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), where the unnamed female narrator's voice is doubted and medicalized, or Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), where African women's experiences are articulated within colonial and patriarchal hierarchies. In each case, women's self-

expression confronts systemic efforts to translate their inner worlds into externally sanctioned meanings, revealing the global persistence of gendered interpretive dominance.

Aetonormativity, therefore, provides not only a framework for analysing adolescent narratives but also a **metaphor for the condition of women's writing itself** - a space where authority and agency are constantly negotiated. Hannah's story demonstrates how emotional expression becomes subject to validation only when filtered through acceptable channels. When she speaks, her pain is dismissed as exaggeration or instability; when she withdraws, her silence is pathologized. This binary of speech and silence parallels the representational strategies in global women's fiction, where female articulation is both feared and fetishized. Writers like Anita Desai, Toni Morrison, and Nadine Gordimer have portrayed similar dilemmas, showing that to speak as a woman is to risk being misunderstood, and to remain silent is to risk erasure. In each case, the tension between authenticity and acceptability defines the politics of women's speech.

Moreover, the aetonormative imbalance in *13 Reasons Why* is amplified by the medium of storytelling itself. The cassette tapes, which should ideally center Hannah's own voice, paradoxically become objects of interpretation controlled by others. The act of listening—once a metaphor for empathy—becomes instead a performance of authority. Clay's emotional reactions, institutional investigations, and audience interpretations all displace Hannah's self-narration, turning her testimony into a site of collective judgment. This echoes feminist readings of testimonial literature, where women's confessional voices—whether in slave narratives, autobiographical fiction, or courtroom testimonies—are often subjected to institutional and public scrutiny that undermines their original intent. By dramatizing this mediation, the series aligns itself with a long tradition of women's narratives that expose the tension between **speaking to be heard** and **being spoken for**, a problem central to both feminist and postcolonial literary theory.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's seminal question, "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" (104), becomes particularly significant in reading *13 Reasons Why* as a feminist text. Spivak's notion of the *subaltern*—a subject doubly marginalized by gender and social hierarchy—captures the predicament of women whose voices are spoken through dominant systems rather than by themselves. Hannah Baker epitomizes this position: her attempts to narrate her experiences are repeatedly invalidated by the mechanisms of power that govern her world—parents, teachers, institutions, and peers. Her voice, though recorded, is consistently filtered through male and institutional interpretation,

rendering her both audible and ignored. This paradox recalls women in postcolonial literatures whose testimonies are absorbed by the very structures they seek to resist. Whether it is the silenced voices of colonized women in Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi," the self-erasure of Firdaus in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, or the internalized muteness of Pecola Breedlove in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, these narratives expose how female articulation becomes both a strategy of survival and a site of suppression.

Spivak warns that when the subaltern woman attempts to speak, her words are often reinterpreted within patriarchal and colonial discourses that claim to "rescue" or "represent" her (Spivak 82). The same dynamic structures *13 Reasons Why*. Hannah's posthumous cassette-tape testimony is received not as a direct assertion of agency but as material for investigation and moral judgment. Her peers debate her reliability; adults analyse her motives; the audience consumes her trauma as entertainment. This illustrates what Spivak terms **epistemic violence**, the process by which marginalized voices are recoded to fit dominant narratives of truth and propriety. In world literature, similar acts of interpretive containment occur when women's pain is aestheticized or moralized—when Antigone's defiance is reinterpreted as madness, or when Shakespeare's Ophelia is remembered not for her insight but for her fragility. Hannah, like these predecessors, becomes a spectacle of suffering, her story reclaimed only in fragments, through mediation, after her death.

Judith Butler's theory of **performativity** deepens this understanding by showing how Hannah's identity, like that of many women in literature, is shaped through repeated performances of socially sanctioned femininity. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that gender is not a stable essence but an effect of continual enactments within a field of regulatory norms (25). Hannah's life within the social ecosystem of *13 Reasons Why* is governed by the performative scripts of attractiveness, sociability, and moral conformity expected of young women. Her deviation from these norms—whether by expressing discomfort, asserting boundaries, or rejecting advances—renders her vulnerable to ridicule and exclusion. The same logic operates in many literary traditions: Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* is punished for transgressing domestic ideals; Clarissa Dalloway in Virginia Woolf's modernist London internalizes the repression of emotional expression; and Sethe in Morrison's *Beloved* defies maternal norms only to be ostracized. Each woman performs her identity within a field of constraint, illustrating how gender itself functions as a disciplinary mechanism.

Hannah's performative struggles reveal that female subjectivity is always caught between visibility and vulnerability. Butler reminds us that the feminine subject's body is not merely a site of expression but of **regulation**—a surface where power writes its expectations. Hannah's school, community, and even her peers enact surveillance akin to what Foucault calls the *panopticon*, internalizing control through self-monitoring behaviour. Her gestures, attire, and responses are constantly evaluated, shaping her into the "docile body" that Foucault describes (199). The connection between Butler and Foucault is crucial: the disciplining of Hannah's femininity echoes the broader mechanisms of control imposed on women's bodies across history and geography. Whether in the veiled discipline of patriarchal households or the corporate pressures of neoliberal modernity, women in world literature—from Achebe's Anowa to Lahiri's Ashima Ganguli—reveal how identity is scripted by external power. In this sense, Hannah Baker is not an isolated adolescent but part of a long global lineage of women whose stories dramatize the fraught politics of speaking, performing, and surviving under watchful eyes.

Michel Foucault's theory of power, discipline, and surveillance provides a valuable framework for understanding how women's subjectivities are regulated in both life and literature. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that modern institutions—schools, hospitals, prisons, and families—function as apparatuses of control that produce "docile bodies" through constant observation and normalization (199). In *13 Reasons Why*, the school setting becomes a microcosm of this Foucauldian structure, where Hannah's individuality is scrutinized and her emotions monitored. Her teachers, peers, and counsellor, consciously or unconsciously, participate in a culture of surveillance that demands conformity to specific ideals of femininity and behaviour. This network of observation and judgment mirrors the disciplinary spaces inhabited by women in global literary traditions: the convents of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, the colonial classrooms of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, or the patriarchal drawing rooms of Jane Austen's novels. Across time and geography, the feminine body becomes a site of inspection—a symbol of how power maintains itself through the internalization of social control.

In Hannah's case, surveillance operates not only through adults but also through peers and technology, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of visibility. The circulation of her photograph and the rumours surrounding her sexuality evoke what Foucault describes as the "panoptic gaze," where power functions not through direct punishment but through the fear of being constantly watched (Foucault 202). This resonates with the global portrayal of women

in the digital age, where female visibility online often leads to vulnerability rather than empowerment. The scrutiny faced by Hannah parallels the experience of fictional women like Celie in *The Color Purple* or Firdaus in *Woman at Point Zero*, who are subjected to community policing that transforms personal identity into public spectacle. In all these narratives, women's exposure—whether physical, emotional, or digital—becomes a means of enforcing silence and compliance. What appears as freedom of expression is often another mode of control.

Sara Ahmed's **affective theory** offers a complementary perspective by examining how emotions circulate within these systems of control. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed asserts that feelings such as shame, guilt, and fear are not private experiences but social forces that “stick” to certain bodies, shaping how they are perceived (8). In *13 Reasons Why*, shame becomes attached to Hannah's body as a way of managing her difference and silencing her pain. Her emotional expressions—grief, anger, confusion—are dismissed as melodrama, reinforcing patriarchal stereotypes that equate femininity with emotional excess. This mechanism extends beyond Hannah's story: throughout world literature, women's emotions are politicized, weaponized, and controlled. Sethe's maternal guilt in *Beloved*, the unnamed narrator's anxiety in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, and Pecola's self-hatred in *The Bluest Eye* each demonstrate how emotional suffering is individualized rather than recognized as a symptom of structural oppression. Ahmed's framework helps us see that emotion itself is a site of power: women are taught which feelings to display, which to suppress, and which to internalize.

Within this affective economy, women's silence is not simply the absence of speech but an emotion-laden form of social compliance. Ahmed's notion of “affective economies” reveals how emotions travel between subjects, reinforcing hierarchies of empathy and indifference (10). Hannah's pain, for instance, is absorbed by others as guilt or fear but rarely as solidarity, replicating the very disconnection that led to her isolation. Similarly, in many women-centered narratives—from Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* to Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*—female anguish becomes a communal object of pity rather than a political statement of injustice. These stories show how emotional circulation sustains patriarchal order: sorrow is sentimentalized, anger is condemned, and joy is conditional. In this light, Hannah Baker's death is not only a personal tragedy but a systemic commentary on how societies absorb women's emotions while silencing their meaning. Her posthumous voice, transmitted through analogue tapes, resists this affective absorption by reclaiming emotion as a form of testimony—a refusal to let her feelings be reinterpreted without her consent.

At first glance, Hannah Baker's posthumous cassette recordings appear to represent the tragic silence of the oppressed female subject. Yet, when read through feminist and postcolonial lenses, these recordings become an act of subversive authorship—a deliberate strategy to reclaim narrative authority from systems that once silenced her. In this sense, Hannah's tapes function like the **letters, diaries, and oral testimonies** that populate women's world literature, where self-expression becomes an alternative archive of truth. Her voice, transmitted through the intimate and material medium of analogue tapes, defies institutional mediation. Like Celie's epistolary defiance in *The Color Purple* or Ramatoulaye's self-articulation in *So Long a Letter*, Hannah writes herself into existence through sound, refusing the textual and moral constraints of patriarchal storytelling. Her use of an obsolete medium underscores the urgency of resistance—it demands slow, personal listening in a culture of digital distraction, forcing each listener to bear witness to her suffering in real time.

This mode of testimony connects Hannah to a long lineage of women who have used non-traditional or marginalized forms of communication to assert presence in patriarchal spaces. The oral tales of Scheherazade in *The Thousand and One Nights*, the diary of Anne Frank, and the poetic lamentations of Sylvia Plath all transform private pain into public discourse. In each case, storytelling becomes both survival and defiance—a means to resist annihilation by narrative omission. Hannah's tapes embody this same paradox: they are both confessional and accusatory, intimate yet confrontational. By naming each person complicit in her trauma, she transforms personal narrative into collective indictment. Her storytelling thus transcends victimhood and enters the realm of what Chandra Talpade Mohanty describes as "feminist consciousness through experience," where narration becomes an act of political awakening.

However, the agency Hannah gains through these recordings remains **ambivalent and contested**. Because her voice circulates only after her death, her story cannot participate in dialogue; it is interpreted, debated, and appropriated by others. Clay Jensen, positioned as both listener and mediator, functions as a gatekeeper who grants her posthumous words legitimacy. This mediation reproduces the patriarchal dynamics that Spivak critiques: even when the subaltern woman speaks, her speech is reframed by dominant voices. A similar pattern occurs in canonical women's texts where female articulation is recuperated by male interpretation—such as in the mythic retellings of Eurydice or in the literary framing of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In these narratives, women's testimonies are heard only when filtered through others' comprehension. Hannah's tapes, therefore, become

a site of **both resistance and containment**, symbolizing the perpetual struggle of women to own their stories fully within a culture that continually translates them.

Despite this mediation, the tapes retain a revolutionary quality by rejecting digital surveillance and institutional archiving. The materiality of analogue sound resists reproduction and control, creating a space of **feminist intimacy** where Hannah's words confront each listener individually. This personal mode of address disrupts the collective desensitization that often follows public tragedy, demanding moral and emotional accountability. The refusal of erasure embedded in Hannah's tapes echoes similar strategies in testimonial literature—Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, and Kamala Das's *My Story*—where women reclaim control over their narratives despite vulnerability to judgment. Each of these voices transforms confession into confrontation, reshaping private pain into political awareness. Likewise, Hannah's act of storytelling, though tragically posthumous, insists that emotional truth itself is a form of resistance—a refusal to disappear quietly within structures that prefer compliant silence.

The global significance of *13 Reasons Why* lies not only in its narrative of trauma but in its capacity to provoke ethical engagement with the politics of women's voices. As a cultural text, it reactivates conversations about the representation of female suffering, selfhood, and silence in ways comparable to classic and contemporary women's narratives across the world. Like the heroines of Tsitsi Dangarembga, Chimamanda Adichie, or Anita Desai, Hannah Baker's voice invites us to reflect on how societies construct, suppress, and circulate women's pain. Her tapes echo the testimonies of generations of women who have sought to document their lived realities against the erasures of social propriety and moral censorship. When read through the critical frameworks of Spivak, Butler, Foucault, and Ahmed, Hannah's story becomes not a Western teen tragedy but a **transnational feminist allegory** - one that illuminates how patriarchal systems of knowledge reproduce silence while disguising it as discipline, care, or protection.

In the classroom, such texts acquire heightened importance. The integration of women's narratives—fictional or visual—into pedagogy offers a transformative opportunity to reimagine literature as a space for emotional intelligence, cultural dialogue, and critical empathy. When educators and students engage with stories like *13 Reasons Why*, *So Long a Letter*, or *The Color Purple*, they do not merely read about oppression; they witness its affective operations in language and structure. Sara Ahmed's notion of

affective economies can thus guide pedagogy toward what she calls “shared emotional landscapes,” where discomfort, compassion, and recognition coexist productively (Ahmed 10). By creating environments that allow students to explore feelings of unease or sorrow rather than suppress them, teachers transform emotion into inquiry. In doing so, the classroom becomes a microcosm of feminist practice—a place where listening itself becomes an ethical act.

This pedagogical approach aligns with Foucault’s idea that resistance begins with awareness of surveillance and constraint. In literature classrooms, open discussions about Hannah’s experience can reveal how institutional and social systems shape women’s behaviour and emotional expression. Similarly, Butler’s theory of performativity can help students recognize how gender norms are rehearsed and reinforced in everyday life, extending far beyond the fictional world. As Ananya Madan notes, “critical engagement with adolescent and female-centered narratives enables students to re-evaluate structures of empathy and authority” (97). Through guided dialogue and reflective activities, learners begin to see that literature is not just a mirror of experience but a map of power—one that reveals whose voices are privileged, whose are ignored, and how such hierarchies might be reimagined.

Ultimately, the educational and cultural value of *13 Reasons Why*—and of women’s world literature more broadly—does not lie in offering closure but in sustaining conversation. The discomfort it generates serves as a productive tension, compelling both readers and educators to confront their complicity in systems that silence women. By acknowledging emotion as an epistemological tool and by listening without imposing interpretive dominance, classrooms can evolve into spaces of collective reflection rather than surveillance. In this light, Hannah Baker’s posthumous narrative stands beside the letters of Celie, the diary of Anne Frank, and the confessions of Kamala Das as enduring symbols of how women in world literature convert pain into power, silence into testimony, and isolation into solidarity. Her voice, mediated yet unforgettable, reminds us that the struggle for articulation is not only literary but ethical - an ongoing effort to ensure that women across cultures are heard in their own terms.

In conclusion, the narrative of *13 Reasons Why*, when examined through the theoretical intersections of Spivak’s subalternity, Butler’s performativity, Foucault’s surveillance, Ahmed’s affect, and Nikolajeva’s aetonormativity, transcends its immediate context as a contemporary adolescent drama. It becomes part of the vast and evolving corpus of women’s world literature, where the struggle to speak and to be believed defines the contours of female

identity. Hannah Baker, like countless women who precede and follow her in literary history, transforms silence into narrative resistance. Her story, mediated through the fragile medium of cassette tapes, reclaims the right to self-definition against patriarchal systems of representation. In reading her voice alongside global female figures -Scheherazade, Celie, Sethe, Firdaus, Ramatoulaye, and countless others - we discern a shared grammar of defiance that unites women's testimonies across borders and centuries. These narratives, whether ancient or modern, remind us that women's speech remains both a radical act and a collective inheritance—one that continues to challenge, to disturb, and to heal. Through them, world literature becomes not merely a record of women's suffering but an ever-expanding archive of female agency, memory, and hope.

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