

Literature, Language, and Learning: English in Contemporary Contexts

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ESN PUBLICATIONS

Edition 2025

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Editor:

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ISBN: 978-93-49421-67-7

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Published By:

ESN PUBLICATIONS,

3/151-A, Muthuramalingapuram,

Kalloorani Post, Aruppukottai

Taluk, Virudhunagar District, Tamil

Nadu, India, Pincode - 626 105

Ph: +91-8838173189

PREFACE

The study of English in contemporary contexts has undergone significant transformations over the past few decades. Literature now extends beyond canonical texts to include voices from the margins, reinterpreted mythologies, diasporic narratives, and trauma literature. Similarly, English language teaching has expanded from conventional grammar-based approaches to integrative communicative practices that emphasise cultural literacy and critical thinking.

This book emerges from the need to capture these shifts and provide a platform for interdisciplinary engagement. The fourteen chapters included here reflect a rich scholarly spectrum—ranging from revisiting Henrik Ibsen through communicative pedagogy, to exploring caste and gender in Dalit literature, to unpacking diasporic anxieties in the writings of Anand and Mukherjee, to reimagining mythology through feminist lenses, to examining spiritual ecology in Northeastern narratives.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all contributors for their dedication, insightful scholarship, and commitment to advancing English studies. My sincere thanks also go to ESN Publications for supporting this endeavour, and to my institution, VISTAS, for continual academic encouragement.

I hope this volume inspires new paths of enquiry and fosters meaningful discourse among scholars, students, and educators.

*—Dr. M. Nagalakshmi
Editor*

ABOUT THE BOOK

This volume offers contemporary perspectives on literature and language studies by bringing together insightful research across diverse thematic domains. The book spans postcolonial studies, diaspora and identity construction, feminist reinterpretations of myth, trauma narratives, spiritual ecology, caste and gender resistance, and innovative pedagogical approaches to English teaching.

Each chapter reflects modern-day concerns and scholarly interpretations that bridge theory and practice. The book aims to support students, educators, and researchers who engage with literature not merely as an artistic expression but as a transformative force shaping society and human consciousness.

Abstract

Literature, Language, and Learning: English in Contemporary Contexts brings together a diverse range of interdisciplinary research exploring English literature, language pedagogy, trauma narratives, postcolonial identity, ecological consciousness, diaspora studies, and feminist reinterpretations of mythology. The volume reflects contemporary debates on cultural power, hybrid identities, narrative agency, caste and gender politics, ecological wisdom, and pedagogical shifts in English classrooms. Each chapter contributes unique scholarly insights that address evolving sociocultural realities within and beyond India. The book thus stands as a vibrant intellectual space where literary studies and linguistic practices converge to illuminate the transformative power of English in modern contexts.

ABOUT THE EDITOR



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She is a distinguished academician, researcher, and supervisor with extensive experience in English literature, language teaching, and interdisciplinary studies. She has guided numerous research scholars and contributed significantly to curriculum development, scholarly publications, and academic workshops. Her areas of interest include contemporary literary studies, pedagogy, cultural studies, and gender discourse.

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1. Drama as Dialogue: Henrik Ibsen's Works in Developing Communicative Competence and Cultural Literacy

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Abstract

This study investigates how Henrik Ibsen's tragedies, including *A Doll's House*, *An Enemy of the People*, and *Hedda Gabler*, can be used as engaging teaching resources to improve cultural literacy and communicative proficiency in English language classrooms. The research demonstrates how dramatic dialogue engages learners dialogically, incorporating authentic, contextualised language use and cultural interpretation. It is based on sociocultural theory and communicative language education. The paper demonstrates how studying Ibsen's plays helps students enhance their language accuracy, pragmatic awareness, and sociocultural knowledge by utilising classroom-based adaptations, such as role-play, reader's theatre, and process drama techniques. This study argues that Ibsen's vividly

complex stories offer a rich environment for developing sympathetic critical thinkers and global communicators in 21st-century EFL/ESL instruction through textual analysis and sample lesson design.

Keywords

Henrik Ibsen, drama, communicative competence, cultural literacy, English language teaching, intercultural competence, theatre pedagogy

In recent decades, the purpose of language instruction has changed dramatically, shifting from a merely aesthetic enjoyment of texts to a more practical integration with communicative and linguistic objectives. Drama is one of the literary genres that has proven highly effective at bridging linguistic and cultural divides. Its dialogic nature provides learners with a wealth of resources for exploring complex socio-cultural subjects, engaging actively, and receiving authentic language input. In this sense, Henrik Ibsen's plays—often acclaimed as the founder of modern drama—have great educational value.

Henrik Ibsen's plays encourage students to participate not only as passive readers but also as active interpreters and performers because of their realistic dialogue, moral complexity, and sharp critique of society's standards. The moral quandaries in *An Enemy of the People*, the psychological tensions in *Hedda Gabler*, and the conflicts in *A Doll's House* are all woven into dialogues that mimic natural speech patterns, which makes them suitable

for communicative language instruction (CLT). Participants in role-plays, process dramas, or dramatised readings of Ibsen's works experience language in context, where meaning is revealed through tone, interaction, and cultural nuances.

This study is anchored by two interconnected ideas: cultural literacy and communicative competence. According to Hymes (1966) and Canale and Swain (1980), communicative competence includes not only grammatical correctness but also the capacity to use language in a variety of contexts, maintain discourse coherence, and deploy strategic interactional skills. Contrarily, cultural literacy encompasses more than just factual understanding of traditions and customs; it also involves the ability to negotiate meaning across cultural barriers, interpret information, and show empathy. Both dimensions can be developed simultaneously in drama, especially in Ibsen's social realism.

Using Ibsen's plays in the classroom supports broader educational objectives, such as developing critical thinking, collaborative learning, and global citizenship, in the modern English language learning context, where intercultural communication is increasingly important. This essay argues that Ibsen's play, when viewed as interactive dialogue rather than static text, fosters the interpretive and ethical sensibilities required to thrive in a multicultural society and promotes language proficiency.

Several intersecting theoretical stances are used in integrating theatre into language instruction, all of which help clarify how literature—theatrical literature—can serve

as a linguistic and cultural resource. Three main frameworks inform this study: Process Drama Pedagogy, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and Sociocultural Theory.

According to Lev Vygotsky's *Sociocultural Theory* (1978), cognitive growth is closely intertwined with interaction and cultural background, and learning is a socially mediated process. The idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), or the gap between what a learner can do on their own and what they can do with assistance or teamwork, is fundamental to this theory. By definition, drama places students in group settings where they can work within their ZPD and create meaning.

Students engage in real-time language negotiation, peer adaptation, and subtext interpretation as they act out scenes from Ibsen's plays, with the teacher and the script supporting them. This interaction between personal initiative and group assistance reflects Vygotsky's ideal learning environment. Furthermore, because theatre is embedded in emotional and cultural contexts, it helps students internalise pragmatic and sociocultural standards alongside verbal forms.

The shortcomings of grammar-translation and audio-lingual approaches gave rise to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which prioritises real-world conversation above rote memorisation. Four interconnected elements make up Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence, which was further improved by Celce-Murcia et al. (1995):

- Sociolinguistic competence, or suitability in social settings
- Linguistic competence, or understanding of grammar and vocabulary
- Discourse competence, or the ability to communicate coherently and cohesively
- Strategic competence is the ability to use techniques to close communication gaps.

The dialogues in Ibsen's plays are rich in context, socially genuine, and centred on character relationships, making them perfect resources for CLT. For instance, students can examine pragmatic indicators of politeness, power relations, and inferred meaning through the verbal tension between Nora and Torvald in *A Doll's House*. Students are forced to pay attention to intonation, pauses, and gestures in addition to words when performing these dialogues, which addresses several aspects of communicative competence.

According to O'Neill (1995) and Heathcote (1991), process drama is an instructional strategy in which students and teachers collaborate to construct dramatic scenarios without following a prewritten script, using role-playing and improvisation to examine concepts, occurrences, or interpersonal connections. Process drama techniques, such as "hot-seating" (questioning a character in role), "mantle of the expert" (students act as specialists), or improvising scenes outside of the script, can increase engagement and extend learning beyond linguistic accuracy into

interpretation, empathy, and perspective-taking, even when working with scripted material like Ibsen.

Kolb's *Experiential Learning Cycle* (1984), which progresses through tangible experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation, is consistent with the experiential character of process theatre. Before discussing the characters' motivations (reflective observation), relating them to more general social themes (abstract conceptualisation), and rewriting or adapting the scene for a contemporary setting (active experimentation), students may first read and perform an Ibsen scene in class. Both linguistic and cultural learning are strengthened by this cycle.

The concept of cultural literacy, as proposed by E.D. Hirsch in 1987, emphasises the crucial role of common cultural knowledge in successful communication. Cultural literacy in a globalised English language classroom includes the capacity to understand and identify the socio-historical influences that have shaped various cultural narratives. Ibsen's plays, rooted in 19th-century Norwegian culture but addressing universal human issues, offer a convenient setting for honing this skill. In addition to developing their language abilities, students use drama-based investigation to compare the past and present, the local and the international, the familiar and the unknown.

Often considered the founder of modern play, Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) transformed the theatrical landscape by moving away from 19th-century melodramatic traditions toward psychological realism and societal

critique. Subtext-rich language, complex character development, and a dedication to examining the ethical and social quandaries of his era are characteristics of his plays. Ibsen's writings offer a unique fusion of grammatical richness, thematic depth, and performative versatility for teachers looking to incorporate literature into English language instruction.

Dialogue that is both thematically charged and reflective of standard speech patterns is the foundation of Ibsen's dramaturgy. The conversations between Nora and Torvald in *A Doll's House* provide students with exposure to pragmatic indicators, register changes, and culturally particular displays of authority and civility while balancing domestic closeness with underlying tension. Ibsen's dialogue, in contrast to highly stylised literary language, frequently mimics the pauses and rhythms of actual conversation—elements that are incredibly beneficial in communicative language instruction (CLT).

Such conversations are considered authentic content from a pedagogical standpoint—texts used to expose students to real-world communication that were not originally produced for educational purposes. These resources enable the instruction of both communication functions (e.g., persuading, disagreeing, expressing uncertainty) and linguistic forms (e.g., modals for obligation, conditional assertions).

Although Ibsen's plays are firmly rooted in the sociohistorical context of 19th-century Norway, their universal themes—gender equality, moral integrity, and the individual versus society—make them relevant to audiences

worldwide. By analysing the social systems portrayed in the plays and connecting them to their own cultural contexts, this duality enables students to practice cultural comparison. For instance, Dr. Stockmann's public backlash in *An Enemy of the People* provides a rich topic for conversations about civic duty, telling the truth, and the conflict between one's own morals and the views of the general public.

By addressing these topics through drama-based exercises, students can develop critical cultural literacy. It blends spoken language with nonverbal cues, spatial awareness, and emotional expression. Drama is, by its very nature, multimodal. Ibsen's plays often feature dialogue-driven sequences, small casts, and conflicts set in a single setting; they are particularly well-suited to performance-based learning. Because of this, they can be enacted in the classroom with minimal modification.

Learners must adopt the perspectives of characters, negotiate meaning with peers, and adapt their language to fit dynamic interactions to participate in performance activities such as reader's theatre, role-playing, and hot-seating. In addition to strengthening language proficiency, these exercises foster empathy and perspective-taking, two qualities critical to cross-cultural communication.

Using a qualitative methodology, this study combines pedagogical application tactics derived from research on drama in education with textual analysis of a few Ibsen plays. Three plays were chosen: *Hedda Gabler*, *An Enemy of the People*, and *A Doll's House*. The selection criteria were linguistic accessibility for intermediate to advanced English learners, character diversity, and topic

richness. Finding linguistic traits, communication purposes, and cultural components in the conversations was the primary goal of the investigation. Following that, pedagogical techniques such as role-plays, reader's theatre, facilitated debates, and reflective writing assignments were mapped to these characteristics.

Through interpersonal and domestic interactions, *A Doll's House* offers opportunities to practice conversational English. Its examination of marital expectations and gender roles encourages cross-cultural comparison, which promotes linguistic and cultural competency. With its emphasis on civic responsibility, public health, and moral bravery, *An Enemy of the People* exposes students to persuasive language and public speaking techniques. The contentious arguments between the villagers and Dr. Stockmann make for great exercise in argumentation. Learners can decipher indirect speech acts, inferred meanings, and nuanced language clues in *Hedda Gabler's* intricate psychological descriptions.

The move toward experiential and learner-centred pedagogies is consistent with incorporating Ibsen's works into language instruction. Students who participate in theatre become active contributors to the language rather than passive consumers. Through embodied practice, the performative element strengthens comprehension and boosts speaking confidence. In terms of culture, Ibsen's plays encourage pupils to confront new situations and viewpoints, broadening their international vocabulary. There are still issues, such as the complexity of the language, the need for cultural scaffolding, and potential

opposition from students who are not accustomed to drama-based instruction. Pre-reading exercises, teacher assistance, and the thoughtful selection of passages can all help to lessen them.

Beyond its literary value, Henrik Ibsen's theatre is a potent tool for fostering cultural literacy and communication skills in English language instruction. His plays promote linguistic fluency, pragmatic awareness, and international understanding through genuine dialogue, subject universality, and cultural depth. Drama, when employed effectively in the classroom, turns language acquisition into a cooperative, immersive, and introspective process that equips students to participate meaningfully in cross-cultural discussions and utilise English proficiently.

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2. Revealing the Overarching Narrative Layer in *Philip Roth's Deception*

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Abstract

Philip Roth's *Deception* stands apart in his oeuvre for its radical formal minimalism and intricate exploration of metanarrative ambiguity. Dispensing with conventional narration and temporal progression, the novel unfolds almost entirely through cyclical, overlapping dialogues that create psychological tension and disorient the reader. This structural innovation not only subverts traditional novelistic expectations but also foregrounds the themes of uncertainty, instability, and existential doubt. The work's self-reflexive dimension is enriched by Roth's introduction of a protagonist named "Philip," a choice that deliberately blurs the boundaries between author and character and draws the reader into a space of autobiographical ambiguity. Engaging ideas from Barthes, Iser, and Rose, the novel exposes the inherent artifice of storytelling, challenging distinctions

between truth and fiction, reality and fabrication. Deception thus becomes an extended meditation on narrative construction itself, using bare dialogue to mimic theatricality and psychoanalytic intimacy while simultaneously destabilising the reader's interpretive framework. Ultimately, Roth demonstrates that fiction is a creative deception—an imaginative reconstruction of life rather than its replication—where personal experience becomes material for an unending narrative process. Through its metafictional strategies and linguistic austerity, Deception offers a profound reflection on authorship, authenticity, and the complex entanglement of life and literature.

Keywords: Metafiction; Autobiographical Ambiguity; Narrative Construction; Dialogic Structure; Author–Character Blurring.

Within Philip Roth's extensive body of work, "Deception" distinguishes itself by two significant aspects that characterise both its structure and its content. The first aspect concerns the cyclic nature of its narrative discourse, in which tense, overlapping, and recurring dialogues engender a palpable psychological intensity within each character's situation. This divergence from the conventional plot progression seen in Roth's other novels, such as "American Pastoral," "The Plot against America," and "The Dying Animal," is evident. In these novels, a logical-temporal sequence of events unfolds, reflecting intricate contexts and relationships. "Deception," however, employs a unique narrative technique. It does not rely on a narrator

to arrange the narrative flow. Instead, each moment unravels organically, with pertinent and seemingly insignificant words strategically intertwined, creating a swirling sensation where everything finds its place, albeit partially confounded. The innovation of "Deception" lies in its title, which serves as a framework for both the story's commencement and conclusion. This framework is populated with words that lend semantic depth to the apparent void enveloping the narrative. This results in a sort of literary playfulness, culminating in a text handed over to the reader who becomes partly immersed in the construction of the novel's verbal ambiguities.

The second significant aspect pertains to the deeply metanarrative essence of the text. This quality becomes apparent as the author's decisions construct a narrative framework in which Philip Roth, as the narrative voice, refrains from explicitly outlining the characters' roles and interpersonal dynamics. As Claudia Roth Pierpont astutely observes, "the issue of intent—whether we accept his authorial explanations, whether the women are intended to be genuine – imparts a sensation akin to one of Escher's paradoxical creations" (Roth Pierpont 2014, p. 168). Maurits Cornelis Escher's etchings are famous for their utilisation of geometric distortions. These distortions create paradoxical visual effects that almost contradict the very essence of what they portray. This results in a continuous redefinition of space. Similarly, in this specific novel by Roth, there is a resemblance to Escher's approach.

Roth skillfully shuffles the narrative cards, providing both the reader and the characters themselves with a sense of bewildering interaction. The characters appear to navigate their lives in a state of dialogic confusion, societal instability, and existential uncertainty. This fluidity, central to the metatextual aspect of the novel "Deception," is made even more compelling by the introduction of a narrator named Philip, who mirrors the actual narrator's name. This narrative device serves a dual purpose. On one hand, it alludes to the cyclical nature often found in novels, and on the other hand, it directly ties into the inception of the metanarrative. This prompts us to ponder what storytelling truly is, if not a form of 'deception' in its essence. Fundamentally, the composition is shaped within the realm of ambiguity, a concept epitomised by Barthes in his piece "Writing Degree Zero." Published in 1953, this work thoroughly explores the examination of writing and language, delving into the intricate interplay between the writer and society. Furthermore, it delves into the intricacies of the creative process within the backdrop of societal expectations.

In this manner, Roth positions himself outside the confines of conventional literature, aligning with the realm of uncertain decisions that, as Barthes notes, align with "the requisites of an autonomously generated language." From this perspective, the notion of deception extends beyond the mere pattern of relentless unfaithfulness that defines the central character, someone consistently primed to embark on new liaisons while maintaining an air of innocence in the

face of the theme of adultery. The novel's core deception revolves around narrative craftsmanship. This is underscored by the fact that Roth employs writing as the platform on which he intricately stretches the interplay between fiction and reality, a dichotomy that can be identified as the clash between authenticity and falsehood to its utmost ramifications. In many respects, the author presents a narrative composition that, albeit indirectly, brims with a succession of inquiries: How profoundly are our everyday lives shaped by both our own lies and those propagated by others? To what extent does infidelity symbolise a narrative construct that we transmit to the person who has been betrayed, a kind of fictional storytelling? Moreover, above all, a question of paramount narratological significance: Why is "Deception" structured in a manner that persuades the reader of the seamless fusion of narrative fiction and actuality? In essence, the overtly autobiographical elements provide the cornerstone for this novel, which essentially recounts an act of betrayal. Within this context, literary fabrication metamorphoses into the tale of an autobiographical fabrication, wherein the reader is granted insight into how the protagonist, Philip Roth (a figure expected to be genuine but who necessarily adheres to literary conventions), delineates his personal variant of deceit. This deceit, within the context of the story, materialises as adultery and, consequently, the breach of trust directed at his spouse. Indeed, we are stepping into the realm of metafiction here.

However, underlying the tension of metanarrative lies something more intricate than a mere plot involving characters betraying their partners. As pointed out by Margaret A. Rose, parody and metafiction inherently challenge “an attack (implicitly or explicitly) on theoretical oppositions between reality and unreality in the artwork or as given in the canons of literary criticism” (Rose 1979, p. 150). Ultimately, Roth aims to expand the horizons of his creative writing by employing a tactic that, in terms of pleasurable reading, dismantles all the elements stipulated by the narrative pact. This approach is intended to furnish the reader with a dynamic text that, above all, serves as an experiment and, we would venture to add, as an intense self-portrayal in the guise of autobiography through profound dialogue. To refrain from using the term “pseudo-autobiography,” though it might appear more accurate, because an entirely candid and truthful autobiography is a notion that does not truly exist. All autobiographies present a perspective on life in which order supplants disorder, the linear arrangement of events supplants the chaos of everyday existence, and the artifice of reconstruction supersedes the objective truth of events. In essence, there is a point where autobiography and fiction merge.

Furthermore, to contemplate a Victorian autobiography like Trollope's, among various others. “Deception” is fundamentally built on this type of ambiguity, though it employs dialogue as its predominant mode to establish greater credibility for autobiographical fabrication. In this context, Searles has astutely observed:

“True to its title, *Deception* is deceiving. Despite the erotic hard sell of the dust jacket, there are no graphic descriptions of sex – or of anything else. The novel is pure dialogue, without a phrase of exposition or attribution, without a single ‘he said’ or ‘she said’ – just bare-naked talk” (Searles 1992, p. 254). This dialogue, which is rendered without the inclusion of descriptive instances or linguistic markers that typically indicate the speaker (“he said,” “she said,” and the like), constructs a version of events with the intent of imparting an impression of authenticity. It has been duly noted earlier that the narrator is acutely aware of the ruse being played. Nevertheless, he finds himself unable to evade his own belief in it, entrusting his words—which, much like any written expression within a narrative creation—necessarily operate within a backdrop that is not truly real. Needless to say, this suspension of disbelief on his part becomes equally shared by the reader.

The convergence of reality and fiction initiates at the very crossroads of character nomenclature. At the diegetic level, this marks the primary hint that the discourse seemingly alludes to autobiography—a first-person recollection of a personal ordeal centred on betrayal. However, beyond merely hinting at betrayal, the protagonist's name, “Philip,” serves as a pivotal element in the overarching strategy of ambiguity. From the novel's structural standpoint, this element serves as a pivotal component. Simultaneously, it is crucial to emphasise that “*Deception*” does not adopt the format of a personal journal or a textual confession: it is, in essence, a work of fiction,

not a replication of reality. In this regard, the significance of the protagonist's name "Philip" holds no interpretive weight. What remains evident is that the authentic Philip Roth is credited above the title, signifying his ownership of the copyright for "Deception." Meanwhile, the character within the narrative emerges as a creation stemming from the author's imaginative prowess:

Most of *Deception* consists of pre- and postcoital conversations between adulterous lovers: an unnamed Englishwoman and a Jewish-American novelist living in London. Roth, too, is a Jewish-American novelist who has lived in London, but he insists that *Deception* is fiction, not autobiography. The novel's protagonist offers the same argument to his shocked wife after she discovers a notebook recording his conversations with his mistress. He tells her that he made the whole thing up, that a trick of literary ventriloquism has taken her in. (Johnson 1990, p. 66)

From a semiotic standpoint, Roth's inclination to amplify narrative's potential generates a sense of alienation in the reader. In numerous respects, those engaging with "Deception" will discover themselves, to borrow Wolfgang Iser's expression, within "a kind of uncharted territory of implicit connections, and it is precisely these connections that actively engage the reader within the novel" (Iser 1990, p. 136). While the critic's allusion pertains to Faulkner's

masterwork "The Sound and the Fury" (1929), it is fitting to extend the same assessment to Roth's approach, which, as evident in his other literary works, draws explicitly on his personal existence. Indeed, in the realm of literature, personal everyday encounters serve as a pivotal catalyst for igniting the flames of creative imagination. Hemingway, for instance, could not have vividly depicted Africa and the pursuit of game without firsthand experience. Faulkner could not have woven a tapestry of Southern American cotton planters and the African American community without having directly observed these characters. Similarly, John Fante consistently drew from his own life, yet he was acutely aware that his self-expression through writing took on a form distinct from strict autobiography.

In a similar vein, Roth possesses a keen awareness of the intimate connection between the various junctures of his own experiences as an American Jew and his literary craft. However, he is equally aware that the art of storytelling is distinct from life itself, recognising that when personal experiences enter the realm of fiction, they cease to be strictly autobiographical. Roth deftly navigates this terrain, as highlighted by Gooblar, always adhering to "a refusal to impose a restrictive and reductive vision upon a reliably complex and unknowable world" (Gooblar 2011, p. 155). In numerous respects, the novel delves into this intricate and enigmatic reality, employing a technique that, in its linguistic execution, evolves into a narrative of equal intricacy and opacity.

It is important to emphasise that the novel's framework mimics a theatrical enactment, predominantly centred on exchanges between the protagonist, Philip, and his female conversational partners. Within this context, "Deception" markedly diverges from Roth's other literary creations, adopting a presentation that closely resembles the dialogue of a stage play. In other words, this work cannot be strictly classified as a conventional novel, as its composition mirrors the intensity and tempo of a theatrical performance, wherein voices take turns within the same space, seemingly revolving around themes of love and the various manifestations of betrayal, whether they are of a psychological nature or confined to the physical realm.

The hybrid nature of the work also entails a blending of language that deliberately destabilises the reader, mimicking real-life occurrences closely. From a narratological vantage point, it seems that Roth has taken Henry James's notion of characters living more through actions than explanations to its utmost consequences: the narrator's role is to demonstrate how characters move and converse, avoiding external descriptions or explicit declarations of their morality, whether they are virtuous or flawed, unfaithful or loyal, honest or deceitful. In "Deception," Roth refrains from being judgmental or categorical; he presents only the characters' dialogue, avoiding the intrusive perspective of a narrator. While this technique indeed thrives in theatre (where characters are identified by their appearance, attire, and vocal inflexions), its efficacy is somewhat diminished when transposed to the

printed page. Beneath the dramatised situations crafted exclusively through dialogue, there unmistakably resides a strategy that draws parallels to psychoanalytic therapy. Here, words metamorphose into the foundation upon which a remedy for the struggles of existence is erected, transitioning from gratification to dissatisfaction.

Nevertheless, it holds that "Deception" represents therapy in a negative or even disdainful light. This aspect becomes particularly evident through the words of Philip's lover: "Actually, I think they're all quite creepy [...] I didn't think I'd heard anything that I hadn't thought a million, million times before" (Roth 2006, pp. 144-145). As noted by Mauren Scheurer, "While therapeutic talk is disparaged [...] the entire novel is written in dialogue and has the quality and intimacy of a therapeutic exchange"(Scheurer 2015, p. 42).

Consequently, prior to embarking on an analysis of the text as metatext, it is crucial to underline this characteristic, which, in numerous respects, not only challenges the novel's conventional structure but also profoundly shapes the reader's interpretive process. Consequently, a heightened level of ambiguity emerges, casting a shadow over the discourse itself and engendering ontological uncertainties (often encapsulated by the female characters questioning "what am I doing here?") as well as psychological divisions (the genuine author himself seems torn between embodying the character and embodying the implied author who narrates said character). As is common in Roth's literary works, the opening words not only unveil

the theme to be explored but also provide insight into the author's approach to unfolding the narrative and the manner in which he employs various techniques and rhetorical methods. In the instance of "Deception," a meticulous examination of the initial page exposes the precise thematic and narratological parameters that distinguish the narrative.

‘I’ll write them down. You begin’.

‘What’s it called?’

‘I don’t know. What do we call it?’

‘The Dreaming-About-Running-Away-Together-Questionnaire.’

‘The Lovers-Dreaming-About-Running-Away-Together- Questionnaire.’

‘The Middle-Aged-Lovers-Dreaming-About-Running-Away-Together-Questionnaire.’

‘You’re not middle-aged.’

‘I certainly am.’

‘You seem young to me.’

‘Yes? Well, that shall certainly have to come up in the questionnaire. Everything to be answered by both applicants.’ (Roth 2006, p. 7)

Evidently, a dialogic framework emerges that forgoes the customary constituents found within a narrative

composition. The initial portion makes it evident that there exists an "I" and a "you," simultaneously alluding to the central activity: writing. Simultaneously, the declarative tone of "You begin" implies a metanarrative and almost redundant manner of commencing: the first-person narrator informs us that someone is initiating a discussion about themselves, immediately ushering us into a psychological and existential realm. However, this self-focused approach is somewhat counterbalanced by the subsequent statements. Indeed, his response to her inquiry indicates that the piece's title will be "The Dreaming-About-Running-Away-Together-Questionnaire." However, once the title is introduced, it also sparks an imagery of a reciprocal linguistic skirmish. The woman inserts the term "lovers," thus altering the title. This alteration prompts Philip to respond with a touch of self-deprecating humour, appending "middle-aged." The initial exchanges predominantly revolve around the questionnaire, which, in a sense, they immediately proceed to fill out, effectively rendering the words the reader has encountered so far as a preamble. This is so pronounced that the initial phrase commencing the subsequent section (post-preamble) is precisely "Begin," the very word that inaugurates the novel. The initial reflections prompted within us, the readers, pertain to a sense of disorientation precisely because our anticipations are unfulfilled. On the contrary, they generate a form of psychological dissatisfaction.

Indeed, it is difficult to overlook that Roth demands a form of narratological exposure within his narrative text,

an aspect that resonates in the minimal presence of contextual cues (such as spatial and temporal indications). The level of information presented is notably reduced compared to what one would typically encounter in a twentieth-century play, where even if briefly, the spatial context is depicted and the characters' names are conventionally included in the written text alongside their dialogue lines. Consequently, the pursuit of this intentional silence regarding the characters and the unfolding events scarcely inhibits our contemplation. Instead, it propels us to consider that Roth, the author, aims to construct a scenario where textual austerity acts as a conduit for the internal vulnerability of the characters:

‘Begin.’

‘What is the first thing that would get on your nerves about me?’

‘When you are at your worst, what is your worst?’

‘Are you really this lively? Do our energy levels correspond?’

‘Are you a well-balanced and charming extrovert, or are you a neurotic recluse?’

‘How long before you’d be attracted to another woman?’

‘Or man.’ (Roth 2006, p. 8)

As previously highlighted, the second use of the word "begin" serves as a verb that, within the narrative framework, appears to nullify the impact of the initial "begin," which effectively functioned as a false start. This initial deviation perhaps aimed to momentarily divert the reader's focus as they grapple with comprehending the dialogical structure Roth has crafted. Up until this point, the narrative's primary focus has been the concept of a questionnaire, which, in various ways, conveys the notion of a psychoanalytic session rather than a dialogue rooted in the reciprocal exchange of information. Notably, an evident sense of circularity is established in the questions, especially in the initial pages. Whenever she poses a question ("What's the first thing that would get on your nerves about me?"), Philip consistently counters with another question ("When you are at your worst, what is your worst?"), strategically prompting her to elaborate further rather than providing direct answers. In essence, these questions evolve into not only a questionnaire but also a form of self-examination bordering on obsession. Subsequent sessions witness a progression of these somewhat assertive queries, akin to the expansion of concentric circles. Indeed, Philip inquires about her personality ("Are you a well-balanced and charming extrovert, or are you a neurotic recluse?"), and her response takes the form of a very personal question directed back at him ("How long before you'd be attracted to another woman?"), a query that deftly shifts the discourse toward matters of sexual ambiguity ("Or man"). Consequently, the outcome of this exchange is not just an ambiguous

questionnaire, but rather its antithesis—a form of dialogue that can be aptly characterised as an "anti-questionnaire."

The novel's concluding pages firmly establish that the dialogue surrounding the questionnaire bears no relation to the narrative or the portrayal of betrayal. Beneath the structure of rapid exchanges and the use of a realistic, seemingly transparent language lies the essence of "Deception," which centres on the question, "Should I write it?" The proper inquiry delves into contemplations on the narrative approach and the discourse that may or may not be transcribed. Were narrative creations to encompass every notion traversing an author's mind, chasms would open up, into which the very act of writing, distinct from reality, would plummet. To narrate entails an engagement with the realm of falsehoods, for writing is fundamentally an artifice. It is not truth that is recounted, but rather artful deceptions, sleights of hand, and facades of the self—akin to the manifold masks that every individual dons, much like the characters within "Deception." As the novel culminates, the ultimate extended conversation with his past lover shifts once more toward discussions of books rather than individuals. The central concern shifts more toward the methodology of narration than the content to be narrated, focusing on identifying authentic characters and distinguishing between reality and fiction. The phrase encapsulates this sentiment: "However visible you may be feeling, you weren't identified in that book or made overtly identifiable. However much you may have served as a model, the great British public happens to be ignorant of it

and you only have not to tell them for them to remain ignorant" (Roth 2006, p. 201). Consequently, a recurring theme emerges, echoing the narrative's inception and juxtaposing actual and fictional events. Evidently, for a writer akin to the one portrayed by Roth, his creative fiction holds greater value than the tangible reality that merely serves as a wellspring of inspiration. The tale perfectly exemplifies this sentiment just penned: the utmost priority is to obscure any trace of the source material's identity. It is not coincidental that his lover draws conclusions aligning precisely with the real-life state of affairs, indicating that the writer's preoccupation is predominantly centered around his craft: "What it comes down to is that a woman comes to a man to chat a little, and all the man is really thinking about is his typewriter. You love your typewriter more than you could ever love any woman" (Roth 2006, p. 201, my emphasis). The narrator-protagonist's retort is significant, as, from a narratological standpoint, he conflates the fabrication of fiction (embodied by the typewriter) with the actuality of the model that has spurred him. Characteristically, Philip's existence is woven from a tapestry of written books and those yet to be penned. This is why, within their final extensive telephone exchange, the woman underscores the fact that his book would unfold in an alternative manner, elucidating their emotions with greater clarity: "And it—my book—is all about kissing and telling because if I were to write this book, I would be doing that" (Roth 2006, p. 201, emphasis in the text). In response, Philip suggests that she should endeavour to compose a novel, recounting her own perspective on the events:

‘Should I write it?’

‘I’m not the one to say no, especially as I may do another about you.’

‘You wouldn’t. You’re not. You aren’t, are you?’

Laughing. ‘Yes, of course I will. This’ll be part of it.’

‘Well, I’d be amazed. I would call that scraping the barrel, really.’

‘Don’t underestimate yourself. You’re a great barrel. For me you were.’

‘Was I? Oh, I felt so angry. I was angry for months. Although I was very torn, really, because as soon as I read it, I also couldn’t be angry.’

‘Why was that?’

‘Because it was so, so tender... I think. Unless I got it wrong.’

‘No. I thought there were some things you’d like. Things I planted just for you to be amused by.’

‘Oh, there were. I didn’t miss them. It was very strange reading it, absolutely strange. Because I was in no doubt which of them was addressed to me. I may have been wrong

but I felt no doubt. And which bits of it were not, particularly.’

‘I’m sure you didn’t miss any of it. But that was our life, I thought, as it might have been. Our life also.’

‘I saw. I saw. It’s such a strange story.’

‘I know. No one would believe it. (Roth 2006, pp. 201-202)

The epilogue revisits the book and its creation, stating, "It was very strange reading it, absolutely strange." In this manner, the writer—distinct from Philip in the narrative—conveys that his novel may not yet encompass the entirety of his imagination's constructs of a love story told through the lens of betrayal. Indeed, the phrase "I may do another [book] about you" also communicates to the reader that, from a narrator's perspective, imagination possesses an almost boundless quality. The writer's task is to transform seemingly trivial details into substantial narratives, thereby opening the door to an unending continuum, using the same event as a foundation. This isn't a matter of "scraping the barrel," but rather, initiating the narrative machinery anew. When Philip tells the woman, "You're a great barrel. For me, you were," he is essentially confessing that, for a narrator, there is never an exhaustion of material. Reality is an infinite expanse from which an endless stream of stories can be drawn, an idea eloquently expressed by Maurice Blanchot.

To prevent any potential misinterpretations, the closing lines of "Deception" unequivocally convey that novels are crafted to be read and to represent the enigmatic journey of human existence: "It was very strange reading it, absolutely strange." Undoubtedly, the woman's words are an insightful revelation, akin to an epiphany in reading. The strangeness she alludes to is intricately linked to the capriciousness of human life, the formation and dissolution of relationships, and the "particular web" that embodies our interactions with others and with society at large. Indeed, we coexist in a state of simultaneous isolation and companionship, possessing both autonomy and freedom while being tethered and somewhat confined by emotions, routines, and familial bonds. Philip Roth's brilliance within this specific novel lies in his masterful staging of these facets. He achieves this by magnifying the spectrum of possibilities presented by the art of narration, along with its artifices and conventions. For this very reason, "Deception" can rightfully be regarded, within its metanarrative scope, as one of the most profound embodiments of Roth's experimentalism.

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3. Neo-Colonial Era in the Literary Landscapes of Cultural Imperialism

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Abstract

This chapter examines the persistence of cultural imperialism in the post-colonial world through the lens of literature and linguistic hierarchies. It analyses how English and other dominant global languages continue to shape literary production, marginalise indigenous voices, and reinforce neo-colonial power structures. Drawing on the works of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Spivak, Casanova, and Huggan, the study explores linguistic hegemony, the erasure of oral and native traditions, the commodification of non-Western literature, and the politics of global publishing. The chapter also discusses emerging forms of resistance—particularly magical realism and digital platforms—that challenge colonial ideologies and reclaim narrative agency. Ultimately, the study underscores literature as a site of both

oppression and transformative resistance in the neo-colonial age.

Keywords:

Introduction

In a world that has moved beyond formal colonial rule, cultural imperialism emerges as an influential mechanism that subtly reinforces global power hierarchies. Unlike the overt colonial systems that dominated territories and peoples, cultural imperialism operates through less visible, yet equally potent, means. Literature serves as a prime example of this phenomenon, as language, narratives, and publishing practices become interconnected with power structures that privilege certain cultures over others. Through the global literary market, Western nations continue to exert influence, promoting their cultural values and perspectives while often marginalising or exoticising non-Western voices. Though decolonisation achieved political independence for many countries, it largely overlooked the cultural systems that reinforced Western dominance. Language, literary production, and distribution networks have remained tethered to Western hegemonic ideals, creating an imbalance in whose voices and narratives are amplified globally. This paper examines how literature functions as both a tool of cultural control and a site of resistance. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999) articulates in “A Critique of Postcolonial Reason”, literature can act as both an instrument of cultural hegemony and a site of contestation. Through literature, dominant narratives

are both reinforced and disrupted, revealing a complex interplay between authority and subversion in the postcolonial era.

Language Hegemony and Literary Production

The dominance of English and other European languages in global literature functions as a pervasive tool of cultural imperialism in the modern era. Language is far more than a neutral medium; it is a vessel of cultural identity, values, and power. As “Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o” (1986) asserts in *Decolonising the Mind*, language choice in literature is a profoundly political act. By writing in English or other colonial languages, authors may gain broader access to readers worldwide, but this choice carries complex cultural implications. Language carries with it a worldview, a framework through which cultures are understood, and when indigenous or non-Western languages are sidelined, so too are the perspectives and values embedded within those languages. Pascale Casanova (2004), in “The World Republic of Letters”, refers to this phenomenon as the creation of a “world literary space,” an uneven field where linguistic and cultural capital are distributed based on the dominance of specific languages. This system inherently favours literature written in English or other European languages, thereby granting it greater visibility, prestige, and financial rewards. Works in English are often promoted by powerful publishing houses, receive critical attention from influential media, and are marketed on a global scale. Conversely, literature produced in indigenous languages is frequently overlooked, marginalised within the global

literary marketplace, and regarded as niche or inaccessible. This disparity establishes a hierarchy that perpetuates the supremacy of Western languages and cultural perspectives.

In this context, the adoption of English or other dominant languages in literary creation is rarely a simple matter of pragmatism. Authors from postcolonial backgrounds often face an agonising choice: write in their native languages and risk limited readership and commercial success, or write in a colonial language to reach a broader audience, thereby sacrificing some cultural authenticity. The use of English might be seen as a way to participate in global dialogues or challenge dominant narratives on a larger scale. Still, it simultaneously contributes to the erosion of indigenous linguistic diversity. Each choice reinforces a system in which the colonial language becomes the default mode of expression, further marginalising native languages. This dynamic perpetuates a form of neo-colonial control where language becomes a gatekeeper to cultural and economic capital. The hegemony of English and other European languages narrows the literary world to a narrow cultural lens, erasing the linguistic richness and plurality of non-Western and indigenous literatures. This loss is not merely linguistic but cultural, as language encapsulates unique worldviews, philosophies, and traditions. The diminishing representation of indigenous languages in literature reflects a broader erosion of cultural diversity, leaving entire communities without the means to narrate their experiences and histories in their own voices. In sum, the dominance of English in

literary production reinforces a neo-colonial structure of power that prioritises specific languages and cultures over others. The choice of language in literature, though seemingly a practical decision, carries significant political weight, often symbolising the internal struggle between reaching a global readership and preserving cultural identity. The resulting hierarchy shapes a literary world that privileges Western languages, narrowing the scope of narratives that gain worldwide prominence and diminishing cultural diversity, which is critical to a truly representative global literature. The stakes of language hegemony in literature thus extend far beyond the realm of words, reflecting an ongoing struggle between cultural preservation and assimilation in a globalised world.

Impact on Indigenous Literary Traditions

The hegemony of English, along with other dominant languages, extends beyond shaping global literature; it poses a profound threat to indigenous languages and literary traditions. As UNESCO (2021) highlights, over 40% of the world's languages are currently endangered, with an overwhelming majority lacking representation in literature and the mainstream publishing industry. This linguistic erasure is exacerbated by economic structures and institutional biases that favour publication in English or other Western languages, leaving authors from indigenous backgrounds with limited options for publishing, promoting, and distributing their work. Consequently, entire cultures are systematically marginalised in the literary sphere, and their unique voices struggle for recognition

amidst the overwhelming dominance of English and other “prestige” languages. Indigenous languages are deeply embedded in oral traditions, which historically have been underrepresented in print-based literary culture. For many communities, oral literature serves as the primary means of passing down cultural knowledge, history, and identity. These oral narratives, including myths, folktales, and proverbs, embody a worldview and cultural philosophy that are vital to each community's identity. However, the global literary system's preference for written forms, particularly in English, sidelines these traditions, often labelling them “folk” or “primitive,” thereby denying their legitimacy as literature. Furthermore, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986) argues in *Decolonising the Mind*, language is inextricably linked to culture, carrying within it the “values, images, and realities” that define a people’s self-perception and place in the world. When indigenous languages are excluded from the literary canon, these cultural values are also marginalised, leading to a global literary landscape that is increasingly homogenised.

The decline in publications in indigenous languages also limits the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. Without written records or the means to publish and circulate these stories, indigenous communities face challenges in preserving their histories, wisdom, and ways of life. In turn, this contributes to a loss of cultural identity, as younger generations lose access to narratives that define their heritage and communal ties. Indigenous literature is not only a form of expression but a repository of ancestral

knowledge, a connection to the past, and a tool for resilience in the face of modern challenges. The erasure of these languages from the literary world, then, is not only a cultural loss but an existential one, as it hinders communities' abilities to express, define, and sustain their identities. Economic factors play a significant role in this marginalisation. Publishing in indigenous languages is often deemed financially unviable by major publishing houses, which prioritise works for broader audiences, typically in English. According to Casanova (2004) in *The World Republic of Letters*, this practice leads to an uneven “world literary space,” where resources, capital, and opportunities are disproportionately concentrated in Western languages and markets. Indigenous authors frequently lack the funding, infrastructure, and institutional support necessary to publish in their native languages, often forcing them to adopt English or other dominant languages as a practical solution. However, this adaptation comes at the cost of cultural authenticity and linguistic richness, as certain concepts, idioms, and expressions unique to indigenous languages may not fully translate into English. Thus, indigenous stories, when told in English, are frequently reshaped to fit Western literary norms, further diluting the cultural specificity and depth that native languages convey. The marginalisation of indigenous languages in literature also raises significant ethical concerns. Language hegemony and the exclusion of indigenous voices in literature reflect a broader issue of cultural equity, or the lack thereof. This systemic imbalance deprives indigenous communities of the platform to present their narratives in their own voices,

effectively reinforcing a colonial dynamic where Western languages and cultural perspectives are given priority. As Spivak (1999) notes in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, this structural inequality in representation and recognition creates a “subaltern” status for marginalised voices, perpetuating a cycle where certain cultures are systematically silenced. The ethical dimensions of this issue extend to questions of cultural justice and inclusivity, as the literary world should ideally represent the full diversity of human experience.

Furthermore, prioritising English and other dominant languages not only compresses the vast spectrum of human expression but also limits readers’ exposure to alternative worldviews and cultural paradigms. As the global literary market continues to reward and promote English-language works, readers worldwide are denied the opportunity to engage with the rich, diverse narratives that indigenous languages offer. Literature, as a medium for empathy and understanding, loses its transformative power when confined to a narrow linguistic and cultural scope. The loss of indigenous languages in literature diminishes the world’s intellectual and emotional resources, constraining readers to a more limited and culturally specific worldview. The hegemony of English in global literature poses a multifaceted threat to indigenous languages and literary traditions, affecting cultural preservation, economic access, and ethical equity. The dominance of a few languages perpetuates a neo-colonial structure in which the vast majority of the world’s linguistic

diversity is either excluded from or marginalised within the literary world. To address these imbalances, it is crucial to foster inclusive publishing practices, support translation initiatives for indigenous languages, and create literary spaces that validate oral and non-Western forms of storytelling. Only by actively promoting linguistic diversity in literature can the global literary landscape become a more equitable and representative space that reflects the full breadth of human experience.

The Global Publishing Industry and Cultural Commodification

The global publishing industry plays a significant role in the commodification of cultural difference, a phenomenon that Graham Huggan (2001) describes in *The Postcolonial Exotic* as the “postcolonial exotic.” This process involves presenting marginalised cultural narratives to Western audiences, often simplifying or reshaping them to align with Western expectations and tastes. Through this lens, cultural differences are packaged as exotic commodities, highlighting aspects of non-Western cultures that fit neatly into Western perceptions of the “other.” This approach not only distorts the original narratives but also reinforces power imbalances by dictating which voices are deemed “authentic” and worthy of global circulation. Western publishing houses, as the gatekeepers of the international literary market, often choose works that conform to particular literary styles and themes familiar to Euro-American readers. Texts that adhere to established tropes of non-Western suffering, resilience, or spirituality

are more likely to be marketed widely. At the same time, those who deviate from these conventions may struggle to find a platform. This preference reveals an underlying cultural bias that subtly (and sometimes overtly) encourages non-Western authors to write in ways that satisfy Western sensibilities. Authors who challenge these norms by exploring unconventional themes, adopting experimental forms, or expressing ideas critical of Western influence may find their work dismissed as “unmarketable” or “too niche.” Thus, the industry creates an environment in which narratives reaching Western readers often reinforce familiar stereotypes rather than offer genuine insights into diverse cultural experiences.

This commodification extends to how publishing houses promote “authentic” cultural voices, often emphasising the exotic aspects of a writer’s background and experiences to attract Western readers. By highlighting an author’s cultural identity as a marketing tool, publishers sometimes reduce complex, multifaceted lives to oversimplified narratives that conform to Western imaginations. For instance, African, Asian, and Latin American writers are often expected to focus on issues like poverty, political unrest, or spirituality, themes that fit Western expectations of “authentic” stories from these regions. This approach reinforces orientalist stereotypes, framing the non-Western world as perpetually “exotic” and fundamentally different from the Western experience. Consequently, the diversity of these cultures is overshadowed by recurring tropes, leaving Western

audiences with a limited, often distorted view of non-Western societies. The “postcolonial exotic” also shapes how Western audiences consume non-Western literature. Books that align with these exoticised narratives are frequently praised for their “authenticity” and insight, while more nuanced or critical portrayals may be disregarded as inaccessible. This demand for palatable narratives exerts pressure on non-Western authors to present their stories in ways that appeal to Western tastes, creating a form of self-censorship where writers must weigh the appeal of their work in Western markets against their desire to remain true to their cultural perspectives. By framing non-Western stories within a limited range of themes and tones, the publishing industry exerts cultural control, essentially filtering out narratives that challenge the Western gaze. This commodification creates a selective literary canon in which only certain voices are amplified on the global stage. When publishers favour works that fit within the “postcolonial exotic,” they indirectly shape the perception of entire cultures for readers who may lack firsthand knowledge of these regions. For example, when narratives from African countries predominantly focus on conflict or poverty, Western readers may come to view these issues as defining characteristics of African life, rather than as isolated challenges within a broader, more diverse cultural landscape. By privileging certain types of stories, the publishing industry limits the range of perspectives available to global audiences, contributing to a skewed understanding of non-Western cultures. The system of cultural commodification has more profound implications,

as it restricts the kinds of voices that can be part of the global literary conversation. Writers from marginalised backgrounds are often forced to navigate a complex landscape in which marketability is tied to a Western-centric idea of “authentic” storytelling. Those who resist these pressures may find their work underrepresented or absent from the mainstream literary market. In this way, the industry’s focus on cultural commodification not only impacts individual writers but also shapes the broader understanding of world literature by setting boundaries on what is deemed valuable or noteworthy.

The ethical concerns of this commodification are significant. By dictating which stories are accessible to a global audience, the publishing industry perpetuates cultural imperialism, in which Western tastes and standards determine the literary value of non-Western narratives. This reinforces a hierarchy in which the West remains the arbiter of global culture. At the same time, non-Western voices are restricted to themes and forms that align with established Western narratives. In this process, entire cultural identities are reduced to marketable fragments, a practice that not only distorts the authenticity of these stories but also denies readers the opportunity to engage with the full depth and diversity of non-Western literature. The global publishing industry’s role in commodifying cultural difference reinforces a neo-colonial dynamic in which the West controls the narrative of non-Western societies. Through selective promotion of the “postcolonial exotic,” the industry shapes what constitutes “authentic” voices,

encouraging non-Western authors to conform to Western tastes while marginalising those who resist. This commodification limits the diversity of global literature, constraining the breadth of cultural perspectives accessible to readers worldwide and perpetuating a cycle where Western expectations dictate the terms of global literary engagement.

Forms of Literary Resistance

While cultural imperialism exerts significant control over global literature, it has also inspired various forms of literary resistance. Authors, genres, and digital platforms have emerged as powerful tools in challenging the hegemony of neo-colonial influence, enabling diverse perspectives and voices to be heard and appreciated.

Magical Realism as Counter-Discourse

Magical realism has become one of the most effective genres for resisting Western literary conventions. By blending the fantastical with the real, authors in this genre create a unique narrative space that allows for the integration of indigenous worldviews and oral traditions. Slemon (1995) in *“Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse”* argues that this genre facilitates “interactions of diversity” (p. 409), where colonial assumptions and rationalist ideologies are subverted. Authors like Gabriel García Márquez and Salman Rushdie utilise magical realism to depict cultural narratives that defy Western notions of realism, enabling marginalised voices to assert their worldviews.

Magical realism serves as a narrative tool that bypasses colonial binaries, blending reality with the supernatural in a way that resonates with indigenous epistemologies and philosophies. This genre allows authors to reframe historical narratives and reclaim cultural identities, offering a counter-discourse to the rationalist assumptions that underpin colonial perspectives. By merging myth and reality, authors of magical realism redefine literary expression, challenging readers to reconsider their perceptions of reality and the colonial frameworks that shape it.

Digital Platforms and New Forms of Resistance

The digital age has introduced new avenues for marginalised voices to reach audiences, enabling alternative forms of literary expression and community-building. Online publishing platforms, social media, and digital libraries have created spaces where authors can circumvent traditional publishing gatekeepers, democratising the production and circulation of literature. However, this shift also introduces new challenges related to digital colonialism, wherein platform ownership and algorithmic bias concentrate power in the Global North, affecting content visibility and access.

1. Online Publishing Platforms: Self-publishing and online platforms allow authors to connect with readers directly, fostering new communities that celebrate diverse voices. This democratisation of literary production enables writers

from marginalised backgrounds to publish and promote their work without conforming to industry standards.

2. Digital Colonialism: Despite the potential for increased access, the digital world remains fraught with colonial dynamics. Large platforms such as Amazon and Google dominate the online literary market, imposing their own biases and interests. Algorithmic curation often favours established voices, reducing the visibility of authors from non-Western backgrounds. Furthermore, access to digital resources is uneven, with communities in the Global South facing barriers related to internet infrastructure, affordability, and digital literacy.

Conclusion

The literary landscape of the neo-colonial era is characterised by both the persistence of cultural imperialism and the emergence of innovative forms of resistance. Literature remains a powerful arena for cultural contestation, where language, narrative, and access are continuously negotiated. By examining how cultural imperialism shapes global literary production, this paper sheds light on the ongoing tensions between dominance and defiance in the postcolonial world.

Future research might delve further into the potential of digital platforms to democratise literary production and circulation. While digital media present challenges, they also offer unprecedented opportunities for marginalised voices to gain recognition, fostering a more inclusive literary landscape that values linguistic and cultural

diversity. As literature continues to evolve in response to new forms of imperialism, the efforts to resist and reimagine this space will be crucial in shaping a more equitable global literary community.

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4. Narratives of Pain: Tracing Trauma in Alessandra Torre's *The Ghostwriter*

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Abstract

The research paper examines the psychosocial factors in the context of trauma in Alessandra Torre's fiction, *The Ghostwriter*. It examines the behaviour of the leading characters with the insight of Psychoanalysis. The study is built on psychological thrillers and the traumatic events that follow. The expressions and feelings of individuals are well analysed with the insight of psychoanalysis. The research incorporates the key concepts of psychology, such as trauma, depression, guilt, loneliness, and mental illness. The novel reflects the protagonist's unstable, spontaneous emotions and exhibits the subconscious mind. The motive for the crime and the trauma of the killer are well examined and discussed through a multidimensional analysis that seeks to enhance the understanding of trauma and its impact on the individual.

Keywords: Trauma, depression, psychoanalysis, expression, guilt, loneliness.

Introduction

Deception and manipulation are frequently employed psychological behaviours in psychological thrillers. Characters can deceive or conceal information to safeguard themselves or achieve their objectives, and they can employ psychological strategies to manipulate others. Additionally, individuals may partake in gaslighting, a type of psychological maltreatment where one individual manipulates another, causing them to question their own mental stability.

Psychological thrillers often examine trauma and its effects on characters. Characters may suffer the resurgence of traumatic events from their past, leading them to relive the experience and grapple with emotions such as remorse, humiliation, or dread. This can result in a deterioration of mental well-being or unpredictable conduct. Lastly, characters in psychological thrillers may relinquish authority or feel impotent. They can find themselves ensnared in a situation from which they are unable to extricate themselves or mount a resistance, resulting in a sense of powerlessness and despair. The spectator experiences suspense and tension as they observe the characters' efforts to regain the ability to act and make decisions. The psychological thriller is a genre of literature and film that seeks to elicit suspense, anxiety, and fear in the spectator by delving into the intricate psychological states and behaviours of its characters.

Literary analysis frequently employs a psychological approach to examine characters' motivations, feelings, and behaviour, aiming to deepen understanding of the human condition. Additionally, it can be employed to investigate the potential impact of the author's psychological condition on the genesis of the piece. An essential method employed in the psychological approach to literature is close reading, which is a meticulous analysis of a work to reveal its underlying psychological themes and subtext. An alternative method frequently employed is to analyse the characters and events in a piece of literature using psychoanalytic theories. The psychological approach to literature has emerged as a significant tool in literary studies, offering valuable insights into the intricate inner experiences of fictional characters and the broader human psyche.

Elements expressing Trauma

- **Dark themes:** Psychological thrillers often explore dark themes such as mental illness, trauma, abuse, and violence.
- **Psychological manipulation:** This can include gaslighting, mind games, and other tactics that create tension and uncertainty in the story.
- **Mind games:** Psychological thrillers often include characters manipulating each other's minds in order to gain an advantage or control over one another.

- Twist ending: Psychological thrillers often have a surprise ending or reveal that changes the audience's perception of the story.
- Psychological trauma: Characters in psychological thrillers often have experienced some form of psychological trauma, which can drive their behaviour and actions throughout the story.
- Paranoia: Characters in psychological thrillers often experience a sense of paranoia, as they suspect that others are conspiring against them or trying to harm them in some way. Characters with complicated motives, past traumas, or other psychological issues that make them intriguing and unpredictable.
- Moral ambiguity: Characters in psychological thrillers are often morally ambiguous, with the line between good and evil blurred, leaving the audience to question who to root for.

The Ghostwriter novel takes place in a contemporary household equipped with several conveniences. The protagonist, who is affluent, is self-sufficient and does not rely on others for her financial support. She isolated herself from her family and society as a result of her own remorse for causing the death of her husband and daughter. She had a challenging childhood due to her mother being a single parent and disciplining her for any behaviour she found pleasing. She resides in a spacious mansion, although she is the sole occupant, to the extent that her secretary has not had the opportunity to meet her

face-to-face for 8 years. The protagonist has achieved stability, but she is only mentally and physically shattered.

In *The Ghostwriter*, the crime is not premeditated, nor is it a crime of passion. The protagonist just wanted to save her daughter, Bethany, from her husband, Simon, who is a child abuser. She, in her view, had no other choice but to save her daughter from her husband. In a complex way, she also feared what might happen if he saw his own daughter in one of the figures of his early victims.

The characters in *The Ghostwriter* exhibit no signs of mental illness and are all typical members of society. Helena murdered her husband in order to protect her daughter from his immoral behaviour and to prevent him from harming her, as he had shown a willingness to kill her. This was motivated by the discovery that he was a paedophile. Kate's failure to meet her employer over the past eight years is highly unusual, and it can be attributed solely to the instructions given to her by Helen. Mark is a peculiar individual who has undergone a complete gender transformation to appeal to readers and boost the success of his writings. He removed his mask solely to assist Helena with her tasks, as she was unable to continue them. He showed exceptional attentiveness towards her and exerted every effort to ensure her happiness during her illness.

When Helena ultimately chooses to reveal her husband's actions, she also chooses to leave her daughter in the care of her mother. She opts to eliminate Simon alone after he confines her in the panic room and subjects her to physical abuse as a consequence of discovering incriminating evidence in the media room. She deliberately

adjusted the settings on her water heater to release Carbon monoxide throughout the house with the intention of causing Simon's death. However, she was surprised to discover that her daughter also perished due to the unintended consequences of the gas poisoning.

In *The Ghostwriter*, Helena voluntarily isolated herself from society for 4 years, during which she had no interaction with anyone other than her mother. She took a deliberate decision to distance herself from others due to her overwhelming guilt over the accidental death of her daughter, even though she was unaware of the circumstances behind the tragedy. The persistent psychological distress finally led to her disease, causing her to end her own life prematurely. Her mother consistently sought to undermine her autonomy and favoured Simon, particularly when it came to decisions about Bethany. Consequently, this fostered intense animosity and anguish towards her mother. As previously mentioned, Simon is a paedophile, which means he has a sexual attraction towards children. The video evidence in the media room substantiated that he had been affected by it even before their marriage.

Psychological thrillers frequently explore trauma as a central theme, which significantly shapes character motives and story development. Examining past traumas can generate tension, uncover mysteries, and deepen the psychological elements of the story. It adds depth to the characters, revealing how past encounters shape their anxieties, actions, and interactions. The process of unravelling trauma can function as a complex psychological

enigma, captivating the audience while illuminating the most sombre facets of the human psyche.

Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis could be applied to unravel the protagonist's subconscious conflicts and hidden motivations. Exploring the character's past, desires, and fears through a psychoanalytic lens may reveal layers of complexity, enhancing the narrative's psychological depth. Analysing the protagonist's relationships and decisions through psychoanalytic concepts, such as repressed memories and defence mechanisms, can offer insights into the intricate web of the character's psyche, contributing to the thriller's overall suspense and intrigue.

The novel *The Ghostwriter* by Alessandra Torre can be analysed using a psychoanalytic technique to explore the effects of trauma by delving into the protagonist's unconscious mind. The character's views and actions may be shaped by defence mechanisms arising from trauma. An examination of suppressed memories, the influence of previous experiences on current behaviours, and the protagonist's strategies for dealing with difficulties offers a perspective to unravel the complexities of trauma. Psychoanalysis can uncover how unresolved traumas reverberate in the character's psyche, adding to the suspense and psychological tension in the tale.

The theory of Psychological realism is elucidated through the medium of fiction. James Gibson proposed *the Ghostwriter* hypothesis within his ecological philosophy of perception. The emphasis is on the cause of the incident

rather than its outcome. It explores the characters' cognitive processes and internal reflections that drive their final motivations for their actions. In the novel, the main character, Helena, endeavours to expose her husband's true character to the public.

Additionally, she fervently desires to protect her daughter from her husband, whom she has classified as a paedophile. She took all the requisite measures to protect herself and her daughter from her spouse. Her primary concern was to transfer custody of her daughter to a safer guardian, enabling her to confront her husband alone and without any interference. While confined in the panic room, her cognitive abilities accelerated, focusing on self-preservation and finding solace with her kid. Recalling past events, she deliberately chose to incorporate them into her current circumstances. She was confident that the carbon monoxide leak from the water heater would undoubtedly cause his death within a few minutes. This was a deliberate plan in her mind. However, what she never anticipated was her daughter being exposed to the toxic gas. She unwittingly murdered her own daughter due to an unforeseen sequence of events. Helena experienced such profound psychological distress that she was consumed with remorse till her death. She deliberately secluded herself from the rest of the world. The impact deeply affected her subconscious, leading to years of solitude. The psychological distress is evident to the readers. Helena's decline in psychological behaviour can be attributed to the guilt she experienced from killing her own family. If her daughter had not been involved in her intentions, Helena could have lived the remainder of her life

in tranquillity. In this work of fiction, A R Torre offers a genuine understanding of psychological trauma, solitude, and guilt, and their impact on one's well-being and disconnection from society. The behavioural changes observed in both the past and the present demonstrate how an individual's mindset operates when things do not go according to plan. According to Freud, anxiety, mood swings, sad thoughts, unsettling personality traits, and problems maintaining relationships are caused by unconscious conflicts in the mind. He believed these problems stemmed from past experiences and relationships. Helena did not even confess her deeds to anyone until she started working on her final project; she did not seek justice; instead, she suffered self-regret and solitude, a self-punishment for her own crime. Her mind games were different and made the readers shift their focus to her final act, focusing much more on the traumatic past, both her childhood and marriage.

Conclusion

The study article provides a comprehensive, analytical examination of the characters' behaviours in Alexander Torre's novel 'The Ghostwriter' from a psychological perspective, with a primary emphasis on trauma. The initial occurrences and situations that shaped their identities at the climax of the story are considered. The analysis focuses on the characters' functions to identify the underlying causes of their behavioural difficulties. The text also explores intriguing topics such as trauma, disease, murder, crime, psychotherapy, humiliation, and guilt.

Literary ideas, such as Freud's Psychoanalytic theory, are also applied in conjunction with the work to uncover connections related to the fictions.

The research effort elucidates the interconnection between psychology and the entire crime sequence, while also providing insights into the psychological aspects of thrillers. Knowledge about memory retrieval and the psychological aspects specific to females aids in comprehending the underlying correlations between criminal behaviour and evading homicide. The analysis of serial killings aims to comprehend the motivations and psychological state of the perpetrators. To comprehensively examine psychological thrillers and behaviour in Alessandra Torre's works, a methodical approach would entail employing close reading, content analysis, and larger comparative analysis. An examination of Torre's work, focusing on its intricate psychological themes and characters, could offer valuable insights into how modern writers employ the thriller genre to delve into the darker facets of human behaviour and the human psyche.

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5. Hybridity of Voice and Resistance: A Comparative Study of Bama's *Karukku*, *Sangati*, and *Vanmam*

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Abstract

Bama Faustina Soosairaj, better known simply as Bama, is one of the most compelling voices in contemporary Dalit literature. Her works—*Karukku* (1992), *Sangati* (1994), and *Vanmam* (2002)—constitute a sustained engagement with the structures of caste, gender, and religion in India, particularly in Tamil Nadu. Each text occupies a distinct position in her oeuvre: *Karukku* as an autobiographical act of resistance, *Sangati* as a collective oral history of Dalit women, and *Vanmam* as a fictional exploration of inter-caste hostility and its socio-political consequences. Together, they chart the evolution of Bama's

political and literary vision, moving from personal testimony to community narrative to fictionalised social critique. This article undertakes a comparative study of these three seminal works, analysing their thematic continuities and divergences, narrative styles, linguistic politics, and representations of resistance. By reading them in conjunction, it becomes evident how Bama's oeuvre offers not merely literary innovation but also a blueprint for Dalit feminist praxis—foregrounding the intertwined struggles against caste, patriarchy, and class oppression, while celebrating the resilience, humour, and cultural vitality of Dalit communities.

Keywords

Dalit literature, Tamil women's writing, *Karukku*, *Sangati*, *Vanmam*, caste, feminism, religion, oral tradition

Introduction

Bama emerged in the early 1990s as a writer whose voice could not be assimilated into the polite norms of Tamil mainstream literature. Born into a Catholic Dalit family in rural Tamil Nadu, she experienced the triple marginalisation of caste, gender, and class from an early age. Her entry into the literary world with *Karukku* in 1992 was a moment of rupture: never before had the Tamil literary establishment encountered such an unflinching account of caste-based discrimination within the Catholic Church, educational institutions, and everyday village life, narrated in the idiomatic rhythms of Dalit Tamil speech. Her subsequent works, *Sangati* and *Vanmam*, extended her

project beyond the boundaries of autobiography. While Sangati retained the non-linear, oral quality of Karukku, it shifted the focus from the individual to the collective—particularly the lives of Dalit women. Vanmam marked another transformation, adopting a fictional framework to address questions of inter-caste hostility and the fragmentation of Dalit solidarity.

The trajectory from Karukku to Sangati to Vanmam thus represents both an expansion and a deepening of Bama's engagement with oppression and resistance. If Karukku is the story of one woman breaking her silence, Sangati is the chorus of many voices, and Vanmam is a crafted narrative that examines the systemic forces eroding communal unity.

***Karukku*: Autobiography as Resistance**

When *Karukku* appeared in 1992, its impact was immediate and controversial. The Tamil title refers to the serrated edges of palmyra leaves, which are cut on both sides—a metaphor for the double-edged nature of truth-telling and the pain of oppression. The work is not a chronological autobiography but a series of vignettes, memories, and reflections that move fluidly through time. This structure mirrors oral storytelling practices and defies the linear, polished narratives associated with upper-caste literature. Bama's childhood recollections reveal a village world in which caste hierarchy is omnipresent—from the spatial segregation of Dalit quarters to the menial labour assigned to them. Education, initially a source of aspiration, becomes another site where caste discrimination is enacted:

teachers humiliate Dalit students, and the curriculum erases their histories.

A central section of *Karukku* recounts Bama's years as a nun in the Catholic Church. Here, she exposes the complicity of religious institutions in perpetuating caste boundaries. Far from offering spiritual equality, the Church replicates social stratification, assigning Dalits inferior tasks and discouraging their leadership. Her eventual departure from the convent is both a personal liberation and a rejection of institutionalised oppression. Throughout *Karukku*, language functions as a political tool. Bama employs colloquial Dalit Tamil, refusing to conform to the Sanskritised, literary Tamil that dominates mainstream publishing. In doing so, she legitimises the speech patterns of her community and challenges the notion that only "refined" language is fit for literature.

Sangati: Collective Voice of Dalit Women

Published in 1994, *Sangati* (meaning "events" or "news") is not a sequel to *Karukku* in the traditional sense but a thematic continuation. Where *Karukku* centres on a single life, *Sangati* disperses the narrative voice among many women, creating a polyphonic account of Dalit womanhood. The narrator serves as both participant and chronicler, weaving together the life stories of mothers, grandmothers, neighbours, and friends. In *Sangati*, Bama's focus shifts from the Church to the everyday structures of gendered oppression. The text details the early induction of girls into domestic and agricultural labour, the violence of drunken husbands, the absence of legal or social protection,

and the exploitation by upper-caste landlords. However, the narrative is not one of unrelieved suffering; humour, wit, and camaraderie among women punctuate the hardships.

One of *Sangati*'s strengths lies in its refusal to romanticise either womanhood or community. While it celebrates women's resilience and solidarity, it also critiques the patriarchal tendencies within Dalit society itself. By foregrounding the specific experiences of Dalit women, Bama positions herself against both upper-caste feminism, which often ignores caste, and Dalit politics, which often sidelines gender. The language of *Sangati* remains rooted in oral tradition, full of idioms, proverbs, and speech rhythms of rural Tamil life. The narrative structure mirrors the texture of conversation—digressive, anecdotal, and interwoven—thereby resisting the neat closure of conventional novels.

***Vanmam*: Fictionalising Hostility**

With *Vanmam* (2002), meaning “hostility,” Bama turns to fiction to explore the dynamics of inter-caste conflict. The novel departs from the autobiographical mode, yet its thematic concerns remain consistent: caste oppression, economic exploitation, and the struggle for dignity. The plot revolves around two Dalit sub-castes who, manipulated by dominant-caste forces, turn against each other. *Vanmam* is perhaps Bama's most politically complex work, as it confronts the painful reality that systemic oppression often operates through division and mistrust within marginalised groups. The novel examines how historical grievances, economic scarcity, and external

instigation can fracture solidarity. In doing so, it raises urgent questions about the possibility of unified resistance to casteism.

The fictional form allows Bama to craft composite characters and situations that encapsulate broader social truths. While the dialogue and setting retain the authenticity of rural Tamil life, the narrative is more tightly plotted than in *Karukku* or *Sangati*, moving toward a resolution that is both sobering and cautiously hopeful.

Thematic Comparison

Bama's *Karukku* (1992), *Sangati* (1994), and *Vanmam* (2002) together form a remarkable corpus of Dalit feminist literature in Tamil. Though each text emerges from a distinct narrative angle, they share overlapping thematic concerns that are refracted through shifting perspectives, narrative strategies, and socio-political contexts. These thematic continuities—caste and systemic oppression, gendered exploitation, religious complicity, cultural resilience, and political awakening—anchor Bama's oeuvre, while the variations in treatment across the three works reveal an evolving literary and activist vision.

Caste and Systemic Oppression

Across all three works, caste operates not as a peripheral social category but as an omnipresent force structuring every aspect of life—education, employment, access to land, housing, and even the right to dignity. In *Karukku*, caste oppression is refracted through the intensely personal lens of Bama's own life: her childhood in a Dalit

Christian village, her education in Catholic institutions, and her disillusionment as a nun. Here, caste is experienced as an everyday wound—subtle in its moments of covert discrimination, brutal in its overt humiliations. In *Sangati*, the narrative scope widens to present a collective portrait of Dalit women’s lives; caste oppression is not an individual’s burden but a structural reality that crushes generations. The women’s testimonies reveal how caste dictates not only economic opportunities but also bodily autonomy, marriage arrangements, and social mobility. By the time of *Vanmam*, caste becomes the structural backdrop to inter-Dalit hostilities, illustrating how systemic oppression can fracture solidarities. The novel exposes how historical deprivation, when left unaddressed, can manifest in internalised rivalries, diverting attention from the larger machinery of caste domination.

Gender and the Triple Burden

Bama’s works repeatedly illuminate the “triple burden” borne by Dalit women—oppression by caste, exploitation by class hierarchies, and subjugation by patriarchal norms. While *Karukku* registers this reality through lived moments—such as domestic restrictions placed on girls or the undervaluation of women’s labour—it is *Sangati* that most explicitly theorises this condition. In *Sangati*, the female narrator recounts incidents of women being overworked in the fields, underpaid by landlords, and beaten by their husbands, all while managing household responsibilities. Patriarchy here is not merely an import of upper-caste norms but also internalised within Dalit

communities, perpetuating cycles of gendered violence. In *Vanmam*, the triple burden takes on a more political dimension: women's labour and social networks become key resources for mediating community disputes and envisioning reconciliation. Even amid hostilities, women are shown to be the bearers of a vision that transcends narrow factionalism, suggesting that their social positioning—though burdened—is also a source of unique political insight.

Religion and Institutional Complicity

Religion is both a refuge and a site of betrayal in Bama's narratives. In *Karukku*, the most sustained and impassioned critique is directed toward the Catholic Church, which preaches equality before God yet maintains caste hierarchies within its institutions. Bama exposes how Dalit Christians are segregated in church seating, denied leadership roles, and subjected to condescending attitudes from upper-caste clergy. This contradiction—between Christian egalitarian rhetoric and casteist practice—becomes the moral and spiritual crisis that propels the narrator out of convent life. *Sangati* continues to reveal religious complicity, though in more diffuse ways; church-run schools, for instance, perpetuate the same educational biases found in secular institutions, shaping Dalit children to internalise subservience. In *Vanmam*, religion plays a subtler but still complicit role, where the moral authority of religious figures fails to challenge the caste-based and intra-community hostilities tearing apart villages. In all three works, religion is shown to be deeply implicated in

sustaining social hierarchies, even when cloaked in the language of compassion.

Community Life, Oral Culture, and Resilience

One of Bama's enduring contributions is her portrayal of the richness of Dalit cultural life. Across *Karukku*, *Sangati*, and *Vanmam*, the vitality of the community is expressed in folk songs, proverbs, festivals, teasing exchanges, and collective labour. These cultural practices are not mere backdrops but acts of resilience—spaces where dignity is asserted and identity affirmed. In *Karukku*, the narrator recalls the camaraderie of childhood games, the pride in village festivals, and the subversive humour that undercuts oppressive norms. In *Sangati*, the oral culture of women—gossip, storytelling, song—becomes a repository of collective memory and a tool for passing down survival strategies. *Vanmam* expands this to show how cultural traditions can be both unifying and divisive: while shared practices connect communities, the politicisation of identity can also weaponise cultural symbols in inter-group conflicts. Still, in each work, the evocation of Dalit cultural vitality counters the narrative of victimhood, underscoring that oppression has never succeeded in erasing community pride.

Resistance, Agency, and Political Awakening

The arc from *Karukku* to *Vanmam* traces a movement from personal resistance to collective political consciousness. In *Karukku*, resistance is rooted in moral defiance: the narrator's decision to leave the convent

becomes a refusal to accept the duplicity of religious and social institutions. This is resistance as existential choice—choosing to live authentically rather than complicitly. In *Sangati*, resistance becomes more overtly collective and gendered; the act of women sharing their stories, laughing at oppressive men, and teaching younger girls to speak back is framed as everyday rebellion. By the time we reach *Vanmam*, resistance is strategic and politically articulated, aimed at unifying divided Dalit factions against the systemic forces that thrive on their disunity. The women in *Vanmam* emerge as mediators, negotiators, and visionaries who understand that without solidarity, political liberation remains elusive. Thus, across the three works, Bama charts an evolution from individual awakening to community consciousness to political mobilisation.

Narrative Style and Linguistic Strategies

Bama's commitment to using colloquial Dalit Tamil is a political act in itself. Across her works, the choice of language affirms the validity of her community's speech and rejects the elitism of literary Tamil. In *Karukku* and *Sangati*, the narrative voice is fluid, conversational, and digressive, closely imitating oral storytelling. *Vanmam*, while more linear, still embeds dialogue in authentic speech patterns, ensuring cultural specificity.

Her use of proverbs, idioms, and local metaphors enriches the text and grounds it in a recognisable socio-linguistic context. This linguistic strategy also disrupts the homogenising tendencies of mainstream literature, which often erases dialectal differences.

Evolution of Bama's Political Vision

Taken together, the three works trace a trajectory from individual consciousness to collective identity to strategic political critique. *Karukku* is the cry of a single voice breaking free; *Sangati* transforms that cry into a chorus; *Vanmam* channels that chorus's energy into an examination of unity and division in the political sphere. This evolution reflects Bama's growing awareness that resistance must operate at multiple levels: personal, communal, and systemic. It also reveals her refusal to remain within any single literary form, moving fluidly between autobiography, oral history, and fiction to serve her thematic purposes best.

Conclusion

Bama's *Karukku*, *Sangati*, and *Vanmam* together form not just a thematic trilogy, but a transformative intervention in Tamil and Dalit literature. Each text possesses its own narrative architecture and political urgency—*Karukku* as a profoundly personal autobiographical confession, *Sangati* as a polyphonic chorus of women's voices, and *Vanmam* as a socio-political novel that dissects intra-community conflicts. However, when read together, they coalesce into a powerful triptych that reframes the cultural, political, and emotional map of Dalit life in late 20th- and early 21st-century Tamil Nadu.

The trilogy's collective power lies in its capacity to hold contradictions without collapsing them into neat resolutions. These works inhabit spaces where pain coexists

with joy, where resilience emerges out of humiliation, and where laughter resists erasure. Through the use of unapologetic Dalit Tamil—rhythmic, idiomatic, and unpolished to elite ears—Bama dismantles linguistic hierarchies that have long privileged “pure” Tamil over the living tongues of subaltern communities. This linguistic choice is more than a stylistic decision; it is an act of cultural reclamation and political defiance, situating Dalit identity at the very centre of the narrative, not as a subject to be studied from a distance, but as the source of narrative authority.

What is perhaps most radical across these works is Bama’s unwavering centring of Dalit women’s experiences. By foregrounding their labour, bodies, desires, and struggles, she refuses both the invisibilisation imposed by upper-caste feminist discourse and the patriarchal marginalisation within Dalit political movements. Her narratives illuminate the “triple burden” of caste, class, and gender, showing how exploitation operates simultaneously in the domestic sphere, in agrarian labour, and in institutional structures such as the Church and the State. However, Bama’s vision is not confined to cataloguing suffering; it is equally invested in mapping pathways of resistance. In *Karukku*, resistance takes the form of personal truth-telling—a rejection of silence and complicity. In *Sangati*, it becomes a collective, gendered assertion of dignity and solidarity, where oral culture and women’s storytelling traditions forge community memory. In *Vanmam*, resistance moves into the realm of political

strategy, calling for unity to overcome caste divisions that weaken the collective struggle for justice.

Her critique is as much inward-looking as it is outward-facing. Bama interrogates not only the oppressive machinery of caste Hindu society and religious institutions but also the fractures, hostilities, and prejudices within Dalit communities themselves. This reflexive honesty expands the ethical scope of her writing, resisting romanticisation and insisting that liberation demands both structural change and self-scrutiny. In placing the intimate alongside the systemic, the vernacular alongside the literary, and the local alongside the universal, Bama has expanded the boundaries of Tamil literature. Her works challenge the reader not only to empathise but to act—to see literature as a catalyst for social transformation rather than a passive mirror. The political imagination in her writing is inseparable from its aesthetic choices: narrative fragmentation, oral storytelling rhythms, and the weaving of memory with contemporary realities all destabilise conventional literary forms.

In the broader trajectory of Indian feminist and Dalit discourse, Bama's trilogy occupies a landmark position. It asserts that any conversation about justice, equality, or liberation must be attentive to the intersections of caste and gender and rooted in the lived experiences of those at the sharpest edges of oppression. Her legacy, therefore, is not only literary but pedagogical, political, and cultural. She has ensured that voices once pushed to the margins now speak from the centre, and in doing so, she has left an indelible imprint on the moral and creative conscience of contemporary India.

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6. Negotiating Caste, Gender, and Resistance: A Comparative Study of Bama's *Sangati* and *Vanmam*

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Abstract

This paper offers a comparative study of Bama's *Sangati* (1994) and *Vanmam* (2002), two landmark works in Tamil Dalit women's writing. While *Sangati* emerges as an episodic, oral-history style narrative that foregrounds the everyday struggles, resilience, and collective agency of Dalit women, *Vanmam* is a politically charged novel that interrogates intra-community conflicts, caste hostilities, and the challenges of building solidarities in a fractured socio-political landscape. Through an exploration of narrative structure, thematic concerns, and linguistic strategies, the study traces Bama's evolving political vision—from

intimate documentation of lived experience to a broader engagement with structural caste politics. It examines how both works articulate the intersection of caste, class, and gender oppression while envisioning spaces of resistance. The paper also considers the works' critical reception, their intervention in Tamil literary politics, and their contribution to Dalit feminist discourse.

Keywords: Dalit literature, Bama, caste, gender, resistance, Tamil literature, subaltern narratives

Introduction

Dalit women's writing in India occupies a unique space in the literary canon: it not only speaks against the systemic oppression of caste but also challenges the patriarchal and class-based structures that have historically silenced women's voices. In Tamil literature, Bama Faustina Soosairaj stands out as one of the most influential and unapologetic Dalit feminist voices. Her own lived experiences inform her works as a Tamil Catholic Dalit woman, whose life journey—from a small rural village to the convent and beyond—provides a first-hand understanding of the many layers of marginalisation.

Bama's first book, *Karukku* (1992), disrupted the Tamil literary world with its unprecedented directness, linguistic authenticity, and thematic boldness. Two years later, she published *Sangati* (1994), which continued her project of documenting Dalit women's lives but shifted from the confessional mode of *Karukku* to a collective narrative voice. Eight years later, she published *Vanmam*

(2002), a work that turned her focus to broader socio-political dynamics, particularly the enmity and conflict within and between marginalised communities.

Comparing *Sangati* and *Vanmam* reveals not only thematic continuities but also a marked evolution in Bama's political vision. While *Sangati* is an ethnographic tapestry of rural Dalit women's experiences, *Vanmam* is a more linear, plot-driven narrative that explores caste hostilities, political manipulation, and the necessity of solidarity. Together, these works articulate a Dalit feminist perspective that resists both the erasure of Dalit women in upper-caste feminist discourse and their marginalisation within male-dominated Dalit politics.

Socio-Political Context of the Texts

Both *Sangati* and *Vanmam* emerge from the socio-political realities of Tamil Nadu in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries—a period marked by the consolidation of Dalit political movements, the influence of Ambedkarite thought, and heightened caste tensions in rural regions. Tamil Dalits, particularly in villages, faced entrenched social exclusion: segregation in housing, restrictions on temple entry, humiliations in public spaces, and systemic denial of resources.

For Dalit women, these structural oppressions were compounded by gender-based exploitation—whether in the form of unpaid labour, sexual harassment in agricultural fields, or domestic violence within their own communities. In Christian Dalit contexts, as Bama highlights, the Church often replicated caste hierarchies rather than dismantling

them, positioning Dalits at the bottom of ecclesiastical structures.

When *Sangati* was published in 1994, the Dalit literary movement in Tamil was gaining momentum, but it remained dominated by male voices. Bama's intervention was radical: she centred Dalit women's agency and exposed both external caste oppression and internal patriarchal norms. By the time *Vanmam* appeared in 2002, the socio-political landscape had further shifted. While there had been an increase in Dalit activism, there was also visible fragmentation within marginalised communities—differences along sub-caste lines and political affiliations often undermined unity. *Vanmam* directly engages with this problem, warning against allowing intra-community hostility to serve the interests of dominant castes.

Narrative Form and Storytelling Strategies

One of the most striking differences between *Sangati* and *Vanmam* lies in their narrative form. *Sangati* is not a conventional novel; it reads like an extended oral testimony, an interwoven collection of episodes, anecdotes, and reflections. There is no single protagonist; instead, a chorus of women's voices—grandmothers, mothers, daughters, neighbours—speak through the narrator. This form mirrors the communal nature of Dalit women's lives, where survival and joy are often collective endeavours. The text deliberately eschews a polished, “literary” Tamil, opting instead for the idiomatic, earthy, and rhythm-rich dialect of rural Dalit speech. This choice is a political act: it validates Dalit Tamil as a language of literature and refuses

the hegemony of “refined” Tamil associated with upper-caste culture.

Vanmam, by contrast, adopts a more conventional, linear narrative with a clear plot arc. Centred on two Dalit sub-castes locked in mutual hostility, the novel traces how political forces exploit these divisions for their own gain. The storytelling still bears traces of orality—sharp dialogues, embedded proverbs, and community gossip—but it is more tightly structured, with defined characters whose actions drive the plot forward. In this sense, *Vanmam* marks a shift from ethnographic testimony to political allegory.

Representation of Dalit Women’s Lives

In *Sangati*, Dalit women’s lives are represented in their full complexity: the struggles of earning a livelihood, the bodily toll of hard agricultural labour, the indignities of caste discrimination, the constraints of early marriage, and the relentless cycle of pregnancy and childbirth. Nevertheless, these depictions are not unrelievedly grim. There are also moments of humour, solidarity, and pleasure—the joy of festive gatherings, the wit with which women mock oppressive norms, and the fierce pride they take in their capacity to endure. Importantly, *Sangati* shows how women resist—not always through dramatic rebellion, but through everyday acts of self-respect, refusal, and cunning.

Vanmam portrays women within a different register: while they are still subject to exploitation, their lives are also shaped by the political climate of inter-community conflict. Women in *Vanmam* are not only victims of caste

and gender oppression but also stakeholders in the community's political decisions. The novel depicts women who attempt to mediate between hostile factions, urge reconciliation, and warn against manipulation by dominant castes. In doing so, *Vanmam* expands the scope of Dalit women's political agency beyond the domestic and agricultural sphere.

Themes of Resistance and Solidarity

Resistance in *Sangati* emerges primarily from within the intimate sphere: women refusing to serve upper-caste households, confronting abusive husbands, or mocking the hypocrisy of priests. This is resistance rooted in lived experience, born from necessity rather than ideology. While education is depicted as a possible route to empowerment, *Sangati* remains grounded in the day-to-day strategies by which women carve out dignity in hostile environments.

In *Vanmam*, resistance takes on a more organised, collective form. The central conflict—two Dalit sub-castes at odds—forces characters to confront the futility of their division and the need for solidarity against common oppressors. The novel's political message is clear: without unity, Dalits remain vulnerable to exploitation by dominant castes and political elites. Here, resistance is as much about overcoming internalised prejudice as it is about confronting external oppression.

Education, Empowerment, and Social Change

Both texts recognise the transformative potential of education, echoing the Ambedkarite injunction to “educate,

agitate, organise.” In *Sangati*, the narrator urges young girls to study hard, avoid early marriage, and seek financial independence. Education is framed as a way to break cycles of poverty and subordination, though the text also acknowledges systemic barriers—prejudice from teachers and a lack of resources—that hinder this process.

In *Vanmam*, education retains its importance but is supplemented by political consciousness. Characters come to realise that literacy and formal schooling must be paired with awareness of social structures; otherwise, educated Dalits may assimilate into systems that perpetuate oppression. This reflects a broadening of Bama’s political vision: from individual empowerment through education to collective liberation through political strategy.

Religion and Power Structures

Religion plays a significant role in *Sangati*, where the Catholic Church is portrayed as complicit in maintaining caste hierarchies. Dalit Catholics are assigned menial roles in church functions, excluded from decision-making bodies, and reminded to accept their lot as God’s will. The hypocrisy of religious leaders, who preach equality but practise discrimination, is a recurring theme.

In *Vanmam*, the focus shifts from religion to secular political structures, though the moral vocabulary of justice and reconciliation still bears traces of Christian ethics. Here, the critique is aimed at political parties and caste-based organisations that manipulate divisions for electoral gain. The shift from religious to political critique suggests

Bama's move toward a more secular framework for understanding and combating oppression.

Language, Identity, and Cultural Assertion

In both *Sangati* and *Vanmam*, language is a site of resistance. Bama writes in the dialect of her Dalit community, refusing to conform to the “purified” Tamil favoured by upper-caste literati. In *Sangati*, this is an act of cultural preservation: the rhythms, idioms, and humour of Dalit Tamil carry the community's history and worldview. In *Vanmam*, the same linguistic strategy takes on an additional function: it becomes a political marker of solidarity, a way of asserting common identity across sub-caste divisions.

The deliberate use of non-standard Tamil challenges linguistic hierarchies and asserts that Dalit lives and experiences deserve to be represented in their own idiom, without translation or sanitisation.

Comparative Analysis

Comparing the two works reveals both continuity and change in Bama's literary project. *Sangati* is rooted in ethnographic testimony; its focus is inward, documenting the resilience and creativity of Dalit women in the face of oppression. *Vanmam*, while retaining attention to lived experience, shifts outward toward political allegory, using the conflict between two Dalit sub-castes to explore the dangers of disunity.

Thematically, *Sangati* is a celebration of community life as much as it is a critique of social structures. *Vanmam*

is more overtly cautionary, warning that internal conflicts can undermine hard-won gains. In terms of form, *Sangati* is episodic and polyphonic, reflecting the oral traditions of its setting; *Vanmam* is linear and character-driven, aiming for narrative cohesion to deliver its political message more directly.

Both works challenge dominant literary norms—not only through their subject matter but also through their linguistic choices. Both foreground Dalit women’s perspectives, though *Vanmam* broadens the political frame to include male characters and wider community politics.

Conclusion

Taken together, *Sangati* and *Vanmam* chart the evolution of Bama’s political-literary vision. *Sangati* offers a vivid, unflinching account of Dalit women’s lives, grounded in the textures of rural community life and shaped by the politics of language and representation. *Vanmam* builds on this foundation, turning its gaze toward the structural challenges of building solidarity in a divided society.

Both works are essential contributions to Dalit literature and feminist thought. They resist the erasures of both upper-caste feminist discourse and male-dominated Dalit politics, insisting that Dalit women’s voices and experiences must remain central to any project of liberation. In their different ways, *Sangati* and *Vanmam* embody the dual task facing Dalit literature today: to bear witness to lived realities and to imagine new possibilities for justice and unity.

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7. Memory, Gender, and Redemption: A Critical Study of Anita Nair's *Lessons in Forgetting*

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Abstract

Anita Nair's *Lessons in Forgetting* (2010) intricately explores the intertwined experiences of memory, trauma, gender oppression, and personal redemption. Through the lives of Jak, a cyclone expert coping with his daughter Smriti's tragic assault, and Meera, a deserted homemaker struggling for independence, the novel examines the complexity of human resilience and healing. This paper offers a balanced analysis, focusing on three major dimensions: the feminist perspective that critiques patriarchal constraints on women; the psychological exploration of memory and trauma; and the overarching

theme of redemption and self-reclamation. Employing narrative analysis and feminist-psychoanalytic perspectives, the study demonstrates how Nair intertwines personal and social traumas to illuminate the possibility of growth, reconciliation, and empowerment. This research underscores the novel's significance in contemporary Indian English literature and its nuanced representation of the human capacity to navigate grief, societal pressures, and emotional recovery.

Keywords:

Lessons in Forgetting, memory, gender, trauma, redemption, identity

Introduction

Anita Nair has established herself as a significant voice in contemporary Indian English literature, not only through her sensitive portrayal of women's experiences but also through her nuanced exploration of psychological and social realities. *Lessons in Forgetting* presents a multilayered narrative that interrogates memory, trauma, gender oppression, and the struggle for redemption. The novel centres around two protagonists, Jak and Meera, whose personal tragedies and transformative journeys allow the reader to explore the interplay of past trauma and present resilience. Jak, a cyclone expert, is confronted with the devastating assault of his teenage daughter, Smriti, an event that propels him into the deep waters of grief, guilt, and obsessive investigation. Meera, a woman deserted by her husband, gradually discovers her autonomy and self-

worth through the course of the narrative. This paper undertakes a critical examination of how Nair employs memory and forgetting, gendered social structures, and themes of personal redemption to construct a rich narrative that speaks to both the individual and societal levels.

The Plot and Its Psychological Undercurrents

The narrative structure of *Lessons in Forgetting* is non-linear, alternating between past and present, mirroring the fragmented, recursive nature of memory. Jak's relentless quest to uncover the circumstances surrounding his daughter's assault forces him to confront his own failures as a father and the inadequacies of societal protection mechanisms. Meera's gradual awakening from the domestic confines imposed by patriarchal norms parallels Jak's journey, suggesting that self-realisation often requires a confrontation with past trauma. Nair's depiction of memory is highly nuanced; memory functions both as a source of pain and as a tool for recovery. The psychological depth of the characters reveals how trauma shapes thought, behaviour, and identity, while also offering opportunities for self-understanding and growth.

Furthermore, Nair's portrayal of the characters' inner lives highlights the interplay between individual trauma and collective social pressures. Jak's obsessive need for control and Meera's initial passivity are both shaped not only by personal experiences but also by societal expectations regarding masculinity, femininity, and familial duty. Their internal struggles demonstrate how external social norms can exacerbate psychological distress, making

healing a complex and multifaceted process. By tracing the subtle shifts in their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours, Nair emphasises that recovery is not a linear journey; it requires confronting uncomfortable truths, reevaluating past beliefs, and gradually reconstructing a sense of self that can coexist with both pain and hope.

Feminist Perspectives and Gender Analysis

A central theme of the novel is its incisive critique of patriarchy and its effect on women's lives. Meera, initially portrayed as a submissive homemaker, embodies the societal expectation that a woman's identity is defined by her relationships with men—husbands, sons, and fathers. Her transformation into a self-sufficient, assertive individual represents a feminist reclaiming of agency. Through Meera, Nair exposes the limitations imposed on women by societal norms, highlighting the resilience required to overcome these constraints. Smriti, Jak's daughter, further exemplifies the vulnerability of women in patriarchal structures, but her story also signals the importance of courage, resistance, and autonomy. By portraying the varied experiences of these female characters, Nair critiques systemic gender oppression while celebrating female empowerment and self-determination.

Moreover, Nair's narrative also interrogates the subtle ways in which patriarchy manifests in everyday interactions and societal expectations. Meera's journey illustrates that oppression is not always overt; it often operates through normalised routines, emotional manipulation, and internalised beliefs. By gradually

showing Meera questioning these norms—through her decision to take charge of her life, assert financial independence, and challenge others' judgments—Nair demonstrates that empowerment is a process of self-realisation that requires courage, persistence, and reflection. This feminist lens emphasises that reclaiming agency is both an individual and a collective endeavour, as it involves negotiating personal identity within a society structured by gendered hierarchies.

Additionally, Nair extends her feminist critique to explore generational differences in women's experiences. Smriti's character, representing the younger generation, confronts patriarchal violence more directly and urgently than Meera, reflecting the evolving challenges faced by contemporary Indian women. While Meera's struggles are rooted in long-term domestic subjugation, Smriti's experiences highlight immediate threats and the need for protective social structures. By juxtaposing these two narratives, Nair illustrates the continuity and transformation of patriarchal influence across generations, ultimately asserting that women's resistance and empowerment are dynamic, context-dependent processes that require both personal agency and societal support.

Memory, Trauma, and the Art of Forgetting

The novel's title, *Lessons in Forgetting*, captures the paradoxical relationship between memory and healing. For Jak, memory becomes both an instrument of understanding and a source of suffering; he is compelled to remember

every detail of his daughter's life and the events surrounding her trauma. Meera, conversely, must learn to let go of the past in order to reclaim her life. Nair emphasises that forgetting is not merely the erasure of memory but an active process of reinterpretation and reorientation toward the future. Trauma, when intertwined with social and personal pressures, has the potential to dominate consciousness; yet through structured remembrance and selective forgetting, individuals can achieve psychological and emotional reconciliation. The novel thus provides a complex meditation on how humans navigate the tension between painful recollection and the necessity of moving forward.

Nair also explores how memory interacts with identity, showing that what we remember—or choose to forget—shapes our perception of self. Jak's meticulous recollection of his daughter's life reflects his struggle to preserve her memory while making sense of the tragedy, illustrating how trauma can become intertwined with one's very sense of existence. Meera's selective forgetting, on the other hand, demonstrates the liberating potential of letting go, highlighting that self-reclamation often requires separating from past experiences that no longer serve personal growth. By juxtaposing these approaches, Nair suggests that memory is neither inherently beneficial nor harmful; its value depends on how it is internalised and integrated into one's ongoing life narrative.

Furthermore, the novel emphasises the social dimensions of trauma, suggesting that healing is not an isolated act but one influenced by relationships and

community. Jak and Meera's paths to recovery are shaped not only by their introspection but also by the interactions and support they receive from others. Nair highlights that acknowledgement, empathy, and validation from those around us can facilitate reconciliation with the past. In this way, *Lessons in Forgetting* portrays trauma and memory as both deeply personal and socially mediated experiences, illustrating the complex interplay between inner psychological states and external societal influences in the journey toward emotional restoration.

Narrative Techniques and Symbolism

Nair's narrative technique employs alternating perspectives, shifting temporal frames, and vivid symbolism to convey the complexity of human experience. The alternating viewpoints of Jak and Meera allow readers to inhabit their psychological states and experience their transformations intimately. Symbolism pervades the novel: cyclones mirror emotional turbulence, fractured homes represent disrupted lives, and recurring motifs of rebirth and renewal underscore the possibility of personal regeneration. The coastal setting serves as a metaphor for instability and change, reflecting the fluidity of memory and emotion. By employing such techniques, Nair enhances the novel's thematic resonance and invites readers to engage with the narrative on both emotional and intellectual levels.

In addition, Nair's use of non-linear chronology emphasises the subjective nature of experience and memory. By interweaving past and present, the narrative mirrors the characters' internal processes of reflection and

healing. This temporal fluidity allows readers to witness the cumulative effects of trauma and the gradual emergence of insight, demonstrating how past events continue to influence present emotions and choices. The shifting timelines also create a sense of suspense and discovery, compelling the audience to piece together the story as the characters themselves reconstruct their understanding of the past.

Moreover, the novel's language and imagery contribute significantly to its symbolic depth. Nair's descriptive style—rich with sensory details of the natural environment, domestic spaces, and human interactions—reinforces the emotional states of her characters. For example, the recurring imagery of storms and turbulent seas parallels the inner chaos experienced by Jak and Meera, while moments of calm or renewal in nature reflect their gradual emotional reconciliation. Such symbolism not only heightens the narrative's aesthetic quality but also serves as a powerful tool for exploring the interconnections among psychological states, social realities, and the broader human condition.

Redemption and Healing

The culmination of the novel lies in the journeys of Jak and Meera toward self-discovery, empowerment, and emotional closure. Jak achieves a sense of redemption by confronting his grief, accepting responsibility, and understanding his daughter's experience with empathy and clarity. Meera's path to healing involves asserting independence, embracing her identity beyond familial roles,

and cultivating emotional resilience. Nair suggests that proper redemption is intertwined with self-acceptance, forgiveness, and the courage to redefine one's life beyond the constraints of past trauma. Through these interwoven journeys, the novel articulates a broader social and psychological insight: despite suffering, human beings possess the capacity to reclaim agency and create meaningful, renewed lives.

Nair also emphasises that redemption is not an isolated event but a continuous, evolving process. Jak's and Meera's journeys are marked by moments of doubt, setbacks, and confrontation with lingering guilt or fear, reflecting the realistic challenges of emotional recovery. The novel suggests that healing requires sustained effort, self-reflection, and the willingness to face uncomfortable truths. By portraying redemption as gradual rather than instantaneous, Nair highlights the resilience and persistence necessary for true transformation.

Furthermore, the novel's relationships and social interactions play a crucial role in facilitating healing. Supportive connections, whether with friends, mentors, or empathetic strangers, provide Jak and Meera with opportunities to share their burdens and gain perspective. Nair underscores the idea that while personal agency is vital, community and understanding from others are essential components of recovery. This interplay between individual effort and external support reinforces the social dimension of psychological healing, making redemption a shared as well as personal journey.

Finally, Nair frames the theme of redemption within a broader existential context, exploring how humans reconstruct meaning in the aftermath of suffering. The novel conveys that moving beyond trauma does not imply forgetting pain entirely; instead, it involves integrating past experiences into a renewed sense of self. Jak and Meera's transformations illustrate that healing entails both reconciliation with the past and the creation of a hopeful future. Through this nuanced portrayal, Nair affirms the human capacity for resilience, growth, and the enduring potential to reclaim purpose and agency despite adversity.

Conclusion

Anita Nair's *Lessons in Forgetting* is a multidimensional exploration of memory, trauma, gender oppression, and the redemptive power of human resilience. By intricately weaving together feminist perspectives, psychological realism, and narrative symbolism, Nair demonstrates how individuals navigate grief, societal constraints, and emotional recovery. The novel's emphasis on the interdependence of memory and forgetting, coupled with its critique of patriarchal structures, positions it as a significant contribution to contemporary Indian English literature. Ultimately, the work underscores that personal redemption and healing are not linear processes but require courage, self-reflection, and the reclamation of agency in the face of trauma.

Moreover, *Lessons in Forgetting* emphasises the universality of trauma and the shared human need for resilience. While the novel is set in a specific socio-cultural

context, its exploration of grief, recovery, and the struggle for autonomy resonates across cultural and geographical boundaries. By illustrating how individuals confront both personal and societal challenges, Nair offers insights into the broader human condition, suggesting that the processes of remembering, forgetting, and healing are integral to all lives, regardless of context.

The novel also highlights the transformative potential of storytelling itself. Through the characters' experiences, Nair demonstrates that articulating pain, reflecting on past experiences, and narrativising trauma are essential tools for psychological and emotional growth. In this sense, storytelling becomes a form of empowerment—allowing characters and, by extension, readers to engage critically with personal and societal constraints, confront injustice, and imagine possibilities for renewal.

Finally, Nair's work serves as a reminder that redemption is both an individual and collective endeavour. Jak's and Meera's journeys underscore the importance of empathy, ethical engagement, and community support in overcoming adversity. By integrating these elements into her narrative, Nair not only portrays the complexity of human resilience but also challenges readers to reflect on their own roles in fostering understanding, compassion, and justice in society. Ultimately, *Lessons in Forgetting* affirms that healing, though challenging, is attainable through conscious effort, self-awareness, and the courage to reclaim one's life.

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8. *Desirable Daughters* by Bharati Mukherjee: Negotiating Diasporic Identity, Gender, and Cultural Hybridity

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Abstract

Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* (2002) explores the intertwined lives of three Bengali sisters—Tara, Padma, and Parvati—against the backdrop of migration, cultural heritage, and gendered expectations. Set across India and the United States, the novel investigates the complexities of diasporic identity, the tension between tradition and modernity, and the negotiation of selfhood in multicultural spaces. Through myth, memory, and personal narratives, Mukherjee presents a nuanced portrayal of immigrant women navigating social, familial, and personal pressures. This article critically examines four core

dimensions of the novel: (1) cultural heritage and family myth, (2) diasporic identity and hybridity, (3) gender, agency, and tradition, and (4) belonging, alienation, and home. By analysing the sisters' divergent experiences and the narrative strategies employed, the study highlights Mukherjee's critique of essentialist notions of "Indian" and "American" identities, her attention to female agency, and the complexities of negotiating life across continents. Ultimately, the novel demonstrates that identity is dynamic, multifaceted, and continually reconstructed in the interplay between culture, migration, and gender.

Keywords: Diaspora, Identity, Hybridity, Gender, Migration, Indian-American, Cultural Heritage, Belonging, Patriarchy, Memory

1. Introduction

Bharati Mukherjee, a prominent Indian-American author, has consistently explored themes of migration, displacement, and identity in her fiction. Born in India and later settling in North America, Mukherjee brings a first-hand understanding of diasporic life, infusing her narratives with cultural specificity while addressing universal themes of belonging and selfhood. *Desirable Daughters*, published in 2002, is a novel that centres on three Bengali sisters—Tara, Padma, and Parvati—whose lives unfold across Calcutta (Kolkata), New Jersey, and California. The story begins with a family legend about Tara Lata, the tree-bride, and gradually weaves the sisters' contemporary experiences

into the larger tapestry of cultural heritage, migration, and identity.

The novel examines the intersection of gender, tradition, and diasporic experience, questioning what it means to be “desirable” in both familial and social contexts. Through the lives of the sisters, Mukherjee challenges essentialist notions of Indian identity and juxtaposes them with the opportunities, challenges, and transformations of life in America. The sisters’ trajectories—staying in India, partial assimilation, and radical reinvention—provide a multidimensional exploration of cultural negotiation, autonomy, and hybridity.

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of *Desirable Daughters*, focusing on its treatment of cultural heritage, diasporic identity, gendered agency, and notions of home. It situates the novel within the discourse of postcolonial and diaspora studies, examining how Mukherjee employs narrative techniques, myth, and memory to illuminate the challenges and possibilities of immigrant life, particularly for women.

2. Cultural Heritage and Family Myth

2.1 The Tree-Bride Myth

The novel opens with the evocative legend of Tara Lata Gangooly, a five-year-old child married to a tree after her groom dies from a snakebite. This myth serves as both a literal and symbolic foundation for the narrative, representing the intersection of gender, caste, and societal expectations in traditional Bengali culture. The story of the tree-bride illustrates the burdens imposed on women by

patriarchal norms and religious customs, framing the challenges contemporary sisters face as they negotiate their identities.

Mukherjee's use of the myth provides a lens to examine the tension between tradition and modernity. The ancestral tale serves as a mirror for the sisters' lives, highlighting the persistent influence of cultural norms even as they navigate new environments and societal expectations. The myth emphasises how cultural memory and familial expectations shape the possibilities of individual agency, especially for women.

2.2 Spaces of Cultural Memory: Calcutta, New Jersey, and California

Geographic and cultural contexts profoundly influence the sisters' experiences. Calcutta, their birthplace, embodies the richness of heritage, social ritual, and historical continuity. The city's colonial-era architecture, intellectual milieu, and Brahminical traditions provide a backdrop for exploring family dynamics, caste consciousness, and social expectations.

In contrast, New Jersey represents partial assimilation into Western culture. Padma, who marries a Christian man and relocates, embodies a hybridised existence, negotiating the balance between retaining her Indian roots and adapting to American norms. California, particularly Silicon Valley, symbolises the radical possibilities of reinvention, mobility, and individual choice. Tara's life in California, including her divorce, career, and motherhood, illustrates both the potential for freedom and

the challenges of negotiating identity in a multicultural space.

Through the sisters' movements, Mukherjee depicts how cultural spaces inform identity. India represents rootedness and constraint, while America provides opportunity but engenders dislocation and ambivalence. The tension between home and host cultures becomes a central concern, shaping the narrative's exploration of diasporic subjectivity.

2.3 Tradition Versus Modernity: The Sisters' Divergent Paths

Tara, the youngest, moves from India to America, marries, divorces, and carves a new life that blends Indian heritage with Western freedoms. She negotiates motherhood, career, and personal fulfillment, embodying a dynamic hybrid identity. Padma, the middle sister, balances traditional Indian values with her life in America. She retains cultural markers, such as sari design and familial responsibilities, while pursuing professional success and navigating a cross-cultural marriage.

Parvati, the eldest, remains in India, adhering to conventional social roles, embodying rootedness and tradition, but also the limitations of a restricted domestic life. These contrasting trajectories illustrate the spectrum of diasporic possibilities and highlight the negotiation of cultural expectations, gender roles, and personal agency.

3. Diasporic Identity and Hybridity

3.1 Migration and the Negotiation of Identity

Tara's narrative exemplifies the complexities of diasporic identity. As a migrant woman, she exists in a state

of in-betweenness, negotiating between her Indian upbringing and her life in the United States. Her experiences reflect themes of displacement, cultural negotiation, and identity transformation, central to diaspora studies. Scholars note that the novel “deals with dislocation, relocation, and root-search among migrant women,” emphasising the fluidity of selfhood in multicultural contexts (Santhia 2021).

Tara’s identity is continually reshaped by her migration: her divorce, motherhood, and exposure to American society challenge traditional notions of Indian womanhood while also reinforcing cultural legacies that persist in her consciousness.

3.2 Hybridity and the “Third Space”

Mukherjee’s narrative resonates with Homi Bhabha’s concept of the “third space,” where identity emerges in the liminal intersection of cultures rather than from a fixed cultural origin. Tara’s son, Rabi, born in the United States, embodies this hybridity, combining Indian heritage with an American upbringing. The sisters’ lives illustrate the negotiation of this in-between space, where cultural boundaries are porous and identity is constructed through adaptation and reinterpretation.

The novel challenges binary constructions of East and West, tradition and modernity, by presenting characters who inhabit multifaceted cultural spaces and negotiate multiple identities simultaneously.

3.3 Nostalgia, Memory, and the Return Home

Memory and nostalgia are central to the diasporic experience depicted in the novel. Tara’s visits to India and

her recollections of childhood and familial traditions highlight the emotional and psychological dimensions of migration. Memory functions both as a tether to the past and a site of reflection, shaping the characters' understanding of self and belonging. The ancestral myth of Tara Lata underscores the enduring influence of heritage, demonstrating how memory mediates the relationships among home, identity, and diasporic consciousness.

4. Gender, Agency, and Tradition

4.1 Gender Roles and Fluidity

The novel interrogates gender norms and the fluidity of female agency. The sisters' experiences reflect varying degrees of adherence to, and resistance against, patriarchal expectations. Tara's divorce and professional autonomy exemplify the renegotiation of traditional roles, while Padma's cross-cultural marriage illustrates hybridised identity negotiation. Parvati's adherence to conventional roles highlights both the limitations imposed by tradition and the stability and rootedness it provides.

Scholar Arif et al. (2020) argue that "gender role is a relative, fluid, and dynamic phenomenon," emphasising how Mukherjee portrays the sisters' negotiation of social and familial expectations.

4.2 Patriarchy and the "Desirable Daughter"

The title *Desirable Daughters* underscores the gendered valuation embedded in patriarchal culture—the novel critiques how women's worth is often measured by desirability within familial and societal frameworks. The tree-bride myth exemplifies the extreme measures imposed

on women to fulfil societal expectations, highlighting the enduring pressures of patriarchal norms.

Mukherjee presents female agency as negotiated rather than absolute. The sisters' choices—migration, divorce, career, cross-cultural relationships—illustrate varying degrees of autonomy within cultural constraints.

4.3 Motherhood and Cultural Transmission

Tara's motherhood introduces the complexities of cultural inheritance and hybrid identity formation. Her efforts to raise Rabi with awareness of his Indian heritage while navigating American culture exemplify the transmission and transformation of cultural values. Motherhood in the novel functions as a microcosm of the broader diasporic negotiation of identity, memory, and belonging.

5. Belonging, Alienation, and Home

5.1 Conceptualising Home

Home is depicted as a multifaceted construct, encompassing geographic, cultural, and emotional dimensions. Tara experiences India as a site of heritage and familial expectation, while America represents opportunity, independence, and cultural dislocation. The novel aligns with Bhabha's notion of the "in-between" space, in which home is neither entirely situated in the country of origin nor in the host country but emerges through negotiation and adaptation.

5.2 Alienation and Reinvention

Migration brings alienation as characters confront cultural dissonance, social estrangement, and identity

fragmentation. However, the novel emphasises the potential for reinvention, highlighting diasporic subjects' agency in reconstructing lives in response to new circumstances. The process of adaptation is both challenging and generative, enabling the creation of novel identities and cultural forms.

5.3 Cultural Negotiation and Selfhood

The sisters' lives illustrate the negotiation of selfhood in diasporic contexts. Identity is neither fixed nor predetermined; experiences, relationships, and cultural interactions continuously reshape it. Mukherjee emphasises the emergent and contingent nature of selfhood, demonstrating that personal and cultural identities are interdependent, dynamic, and continually renegotiated.

6. Narrative Style and Literary Techniques

6.1 First-Person Narration and Reflective Tone

The novel employs first-person narration through Tara's perspective, allowing intimate access to her thoughts, emotions, and reflections. The narrative oscillates between past and present, between India and America, between action and introspection, creating a layered, reflective account of diasporic life.

6.2 Myth, Memory, and Intertextuality

The integration of myth, such as the tree-bride legend, alongside personal and collective memory, creates a rich intertextual tapestry. Mukherjee's narrative interweaves historical, cultural, and contemporary references, grounding the characters' experiences in a continuum of tradition and modernity.

6.3 Linguistic Hybridity

Mukherjee's language reflects cultural hybridity, blending English with Bengali names, idioms, and cultural markers. This linguistic strategy underscores the characters' hybrid identities and the negotiation of cultural meaning in diasporic contexts.

7. Critical Implications and Contemporary Relevance

7.1 Challenging East–West Dichotomies

Desirable Daughters transcends simplistic binaries of East and West, demonstrating that identity, culture, and agency are neither purely Indian nor purely American. The novel's critique of binary thinking highlights the complexities of multiculturalism, migration, and hybridity in contemporary societies.

7.2 Women's Agency in Diaspora

The novel foregrounds female subjectivity and agency, illustrating how women navigate familial, cultural, and social constraints in diaspora. It interrogates the interplay between tradition, autonomy, and personal choice, emphasising the nuanced and contingent nature of empowerment.

7.3 Migration and Global Identity

In an era of increased global mobility, the novel's exploration of cultural negotiation, hybrid identity, and generational transmission remains highly relevant. Mukherjee's portrayal of diasporic women provides insights into the challenges and possibilities of living across cultures, highlighting the ongoing relevance of literature in understanding global migration.

7.4 Class, Privilege, and Migration

The novel also engages with issues of class, as the sisters' affluence shapes their experiences of migration and identity formation. The intersection of class, gender, and cultural heritage offers opportunities for further comparative study and interdisciplinary analysis.

8. Conclusion

Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* is a rich exploration of diasporic identity, gender, and cultural negotiation. Through the lives of Tara, Padma, and Parvati, the novel examines the interplay of tradition and modernity, home and migration, heritage and reinvention. The sisters' divergent trajectories illustrate the fluidity of identity, the possibilities of hybrid selfhood, and the persistent influence of cultural memory. By integrating myth, memory, and reflective narration, Mukherjee presents a nuanced portrait of immigrant women as they negotiate complex social, familial, and personal landscapes. The novel remains a significant contribution to diaspora literature, offering insights into the challenges and possibilities of global mobility, multiculturalism, and gendered agency.

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9. Beyond the Hero's Shadow: Reclaiming Agency in Kavita Kané's *Karna's Wife* and *Sita's Sister*

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Abstract

Indian epics such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* have shaped cultural memory for centuries, but they often privilege the stories of men while silencing women. Female figures are remembered only in relation to their roles as wives, sisters, or mothers, and their inner subjectivity remains unarticulated. Kavita Kane, a contemporary writer of mythological fiction, seeks to correct this imbalance by rewriting epics from the perspectives of women historically relegated to the margins. Her novels *Karna's Wife: The Outcast Queen* (2013) and *Sita's Sister* (2014) recast the narratives of Uruvi and

Urmila, respectively, offering them narrative authority and reclaiming their agency. Uruvi's defiance in marrying Karna and her moral questioning of the Mahabharata's violent order, alongside Urmila's endurance and silent strength during Lakshmana's exile in the Ramayana, reveal women as agents of resilience, resistance, and choice. This paper argues that Kane's works destabilise patriarchal epic hierarchies by shifting the epic gaze and foregrounding female subjectivity, thereby transforming mythology into a site of feminist reclamation.

Keywords: Kavita Kane, Mythological Fiction, Feminist Retelling, Uruvi, Urmila, Women's Agency, Epic Reinterpretation

Introduction

The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are not merely ancient narratives; they are cultural blueprints that have profoundly influenced South Asian moral, social, and religious imagination. Their endurance lies in their adaptability, told and retold across centuries, languages, and genres. However, these narratives are primarily shaped by male voices. Rama, Lakshmana, Arjuna, Karna, Krishna, and countless other men dominate the epic landscape, while women are often remembered only in relation to men. Sita, Draupadi, and Kunti are occasionally foregrounded, but figures like Urmila and Uruvi are left almost invisible, their subjectivity reduced to silence.

Kavita Kane, a modern Indian novelist, has distinguished herself by centring precisely these forgotten

voices. Her debut novel, *Karna's Wife: The Outcast Queen* (2013), retells the *Mahabharata* through Uruvi's perspective, while her second novel, *Sita's Sister* (2014), reclaims the erased story of Urmila from the *Ramayana*. In both works, Kane deliberately shifts the epic gaze from male heroism to female endurance, reimagining the epic as a site of gendered negotiation.

This paper explores how Kané's retellings serve as feminist interventions that destabilise patriarchal narrative hierarchies. By reclaiming Uruvi and Urmila from the shadows of Karna and Lakshmana, Kane challenges the traditional epic silence imposed on women. Her novels demonstrate that agency is not always about valour in battle; it can also be found in love, choice, defiance, endurance, and the resilience of silence.

Uruvi in *Karna's Wife*: Choice as Agency

In traditional retellings of the *Mahabharata*, Karna is the tragic hero, remembered for his loyalty to Duryodhana and his fatal rejection by Draupadi. His wife, however, is rarely mentioned, almost erased from the narrative. Kané remedies this absence by creating Uruvi, a princess who chooses Karna over Arjuna, despite the scorn of her royal family and society.

Uruvi's choice itself is an act of rebellion against patriarchy and caste orthodoxy. In a society where marriage is arranged to consolidate dynastic power, Uruvi asserts her individuality: "It was not Karna's fate that defined him but his choice to stand by his truth. And I chose to stand by him." (*Karna's Wife* 142)

Here, Uruvi positions herself not as a passive recipient of fate but as an agent of her own destiny. Her voice reframes Karna's life, not merely as the tale of a doomed warrior but as a story of human dignity seen through the eyes of a woman who loves him.

Moreover, Uruvi repeatedly questions the morality of war and the rigidity of patriarchal codes. When Karna is humiliated for his caste origins, Uruvi's outrage highlights how systemic injustice shapes personal lives. Her marriage thus becomes a site of resistance—not only to her family's authority but to the epic's entrenched caste and gender hierarchies.

Urmila in *Sita's Sister*: Silence as Strength

In contrast, Urmila's erasure in the Ramayana is even more stark. Known only as Lakshmana's wife, she is left behind during Rama's exile and is condemned to solitude for fourteen years. Traditional tellings rarely explore her emotions. Kane reclaims her as a protagonist whose sacrifices equal, if not surpass, those of the men around her.

Kane's Urmila embodies the paradox of silent strength. She neither accompanies Lakshmana into exile nor protests his departure, yet her endurance is far from passive resignation. As Kane writes: "Urmila's silence was not submission; it was strength unrecognised, an endurance that shaped her destiny." (*Sita's Sister* 210)

By highlighting her silence as agency, Kane redefines heroism itself. Lakshmana's visible sacrifice of fourteen years of devoted service is valorised, but it is

Urmila's invisible sacrifice of fourteen years of lonely vigil that makes his loyalty possible. Kavita Kane thus insists that Urmila's story is as central to the epic as Lakshmana's.

Parallel Feminist Interventions: Uruvi and Urmila

When placed side by side, Uruvi and Urmila represent two distinct but complementary forms of feminist agency in Kavita Kane's reimagination of the epics. Uruvi embodies open defiance, a woman who questions patriarchal structures, caste hierarchies, and the moral ambiguities of war. Urmila, in contrast, embodies quiet endurance; her silence is not submissive but transformative, offering resilience and unacknowledged strength. Together, they provide a spectrum of resistance that destabilises the binary view of women as either submissive or rebellious.

Uruvi's agency is visible and disruptive. By marrying Karna, she challenges her royal family, the rigid caste system, and the epic's implicit endorsement of social hierarchies. She refuses to remain silent about Karna's humiliation, questioning not only Draupadi's rejection of him but also the very codes that deny him dignity. "Why must birth measure a man's worth? And why must I, too, as his wife, be judged by the same?" (*Karna's Wife* 159).

This rhetorical questioning shifts the narrative away from male-centred heroism to a critique of social injustice articulated through a woman's perspective. In contrast, Urmila's defiance is less visible but equally powerful. Her choice to remain behind when Lakshmana accompanies Rama into exile demonstrates an agency rarely recognised in traditional readings. Rather than being a passive victim of

abandonment, Urmila embraces her solitude as an act of strength: “Her silence was not absence, but presence of another kind, a watchful endurance that kept the household alive.” (*Sita’s Sister* 221). Here, Kane subverts the notion that agency must always be vocal or confrontational. Urmila’s silence, often read as invisibility, becomes a form of feminist resilience that refuses erasure.

Kane’s narrative strategy in presenting these parallel interventions is itself a feminist act. By shifting the epic lens from men to women, she undermines the assumption that women are merely auxiliary to male heroism. Instead, Uruvi and Urmila’s stories reveal the emotional, moral, and social labour that sustains the epics. Their defiance and endurance make visible the unseen foundations upon which male heroism rests.

Feminist Reclamation and Cultural Resistance

Kavita Kane’s retellings can be seen as more than literary reinterpretations; they are acts of feminist cultural resistance. Epics, far from being fixed texts, are living traditions that evolve through oral storytelling, reinterpretations, and cultural adaptations. By re-centring marginalised women’s perspectives, Kane actively resists patriarchal control over cultural memory.

As Wendy Doniger observes, “myths survive not because they are repeated but because they are retold” (*The Hindus* 47). Kane’s novels exemplify this truth. Her retellings do not simply re-present the familiar story; they transform it by foregrounding voices that tradition has silenced. In this sense, *Karna’s Wife* and *Sita’s Sister* are

not only literary works but cultural interventions. They challenge the continuity of a male-dominated epic discourse and reclaim mythology as a space where women can narrate their own truths.

This project aligns with broader feminist efforts in South Asian literature. As Susie Tharu and K. Lalita argue in *Women Writing in India*, women's writing often emerges "in opposition to the dominant discourse that excludes or erases them" (xii). Kane's *Uruvi* and *Urmila* embody this principle. Their stories resist the silencing inherent in the epics, affirming that women are not marginal but central to cultural narratives.

Moreover, Kane's work participates in a larger cultural trend of mythological retellings in contemporary Indian fiction by writers such as Chitra Banerjee, Divakaruni, Devdutt Pattanaik, and Anand Neelakantan, who have also retold epics. However, Kane distinguishes herself by consistently privileging women's perspectives. Her novels not only question epic patriarchy but also contribute to feminist historiography, ensuring that women's experiences become part of the collective cultural archive.

Thus, Kane's feminist reclamation operates on two levels: the literary, by rewriting the epics, and the cultural, by resisting patriarchal control over storytelling traditions. Her novels remind readers that mythology is not merely about gods and heroes; it is also about the silenced, forgotten women whose stories are equally foundational.

Agency Beyond Heroism

One of Kane's most significant contributions lies in her redefinition of agency. Traditional epics valorise male-coded forms of action, battle, conquest, sacrifice, and public heroism. In such frameworks, women's roles appear secondary, often reduced to devotion, chastity, or victimhood. Kane challenges this by expanding the meaning of agency to include qualities such as choice, love, silence, endurance, and resilience, which have historically been dismissed as feminine weakness.

Uruvi exemplifies agency through visible choice. Her decision to marry Karna is radical, not because it defies her family but because it reclaims the power of choice itself, a right often denied to women in epic narratives. Her marriage is not passive compliance but conscious resistance. Through her, Kavita Kane argues that agency can lie in asserting one's desires, even when society condemns them.

Urmila, conversely, embodies agency through invisible endurance. Her decision to remain in Ayodhya is not abandonment but sacrifice. By caring for the family, maintaining the kingdom's domestic order, and enduring loneliness without resentment, she embodies a form of heroism rarely acknowledged. Kane's narrative insists that Lakshmana's service to Rama would have been impossible without Urmila's unrecognised endurance. Thus, heroism itself is redefined not only as the visible labour of men but also the invisible labour of women.

In both cases, Kane disrupts the epic assumption that only men are agents of history. Uruvi and Urmila's stories reveal that agency does not always manifest in public

action; it can reside in private resilience, in emotional and moral strength. This shift in perspective is profoundly feminist, as it validates women's experiences and contributions as central to the epic narrative.

By redefining agency beyond heroism, Kane opens a new interpretive framework for reading mythology. Heroism is no longer the monopoly of warriors and kings; it is equally found in women who choose love, defiance, silence, or endurance. Uruvi and Urmila thus emerge not as appendages to Karna and Lakshmana but as co-creators of epic history, reclaiming their rightful place within cultural memory.

Conclusion

Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife* and *Sita's Sister* move beyond the shadows of male heroism to highlight Uruvi and Urmila as women of strength, defiance, and resilience. By giving them narrative authority, Kane reclaims their agency and redefines the very terms of epic heroism. Her novels serve as feminist interventions that destabilise patriarchal hierarchies, ensuring that epics are not merely stories of male valour but also narratives of female endurance and choice.

In Uruvi's defiance and Urmila's endurance, we witness two distinct yet powerful modes of agency, both equally essential to understanding the moral and emotional fabric of mythology. Kane's work demonstrates that the epics are incomplete without the voices of women, and it is through their reclamation that mythology finds new life in contemporary culture.

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10. Beyond the Hero: Deconstructing Karna through Uruvi's Lens in Kavitha Kane's *Karna's Wife- The Outcast Queen*.

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Abstract

Kavitha Kane's *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* (2013) presents a revisionist retelling of the *Mahabharata* through the eyes of Uruvi, Karna's fictional wife. While Karna has traditionally been celebrated as a tragic anti-hero, Kane shifts the epic's gaze to a neglected female voice, thus dismantling patriarchal heroism and reconfiguring epic subjectivity. Uruvi's perspective challenges Karna's loyalty, interrogates his complicity in moral compromises, and foregrounds the silenced emotional and ethical struggles of women in the epic. Drawing on feminist literary criticism and subaltern studies, this paper argues that Uruvi is not

merely a companion to Karna but a narrative agent who destabilises the idealisation of epic heroism. Through a close reading of Kane's novel, alongside secondary feminist critiques of myth, this article explores how Kane humanises Karna, critiques epic morality, and inserts feminine dissent into India's cultural memory.

Keywords: Kavita Kane, Karna, Uruvi, Feminist retelling, *Mahabharata*, Hero deconstruction, Subaltern voice, Myth and gender.

Introduction

The *Mahabharata*, often described as an “itihasa” (that which happened), has been one of India's most influential cultural texts. Throughout the centuries, it has generated a multitude of interpretations, adaptations, and retellings. Among its characters, Karna remains one of the most admired and pitied, glorified for his valour, cursed by his birth, and romanticised as a tragic hero. He epitomises the outsider's struggle: a warrior denied recognition by caste hierarchy and fate. Yet, this narrative of Karna as a tragic hero is also intensely masculine. Women in the Mahabharata, including Kunti, Draupadi, and others, are often cast as victims or as instruments in the unfolding of male destinies. Kavita Kane, in her debut novel *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* (2013), disrupts this patriarchal focus by introducing Uruvi, a fictional Kshatriya princess who chooses Karna over Arjuna. Through Uruvi's narrative, Kane reframes the epic as a story not of male heroism but of love, resistance, and feminist agency.

This paper explores how Uruvi's voice deconstructs Karna's heroism. It argues that Kane not only humanises Karna but also subjects him to critique, compelling readers to recognise the ethical contradictions behind his loyalty and decisions. By examining marriage as a political space, Uruvi becomes a subaltern historian who contests the glorification of masculine dharma.

Feminist Retellings of Myth: A Theoretical Framework

Myths have long functioned as instruments of cultural control, where women are often silenced or demonised. Feminist literary criticism emphasises the recovery of suppressed female subjectivity within canonical texts (Showalter, 1977; Moi, 1985). Adrienne Rich's concept of "revisionist mythmaking" becomes crucial in understanding writers like Kane, who rewrite epics to foreground women's perspectives.

Gayatri Spivak's famous question "Can the subaltern speak?" is also pertinent here. Women like Uruvi, absent in the Mahabharata, represent the erased subaltern voices of history. Kane's invention of Uruvi does not merely "fill a gap" but demonstrates the possibility of female historiography within epic discourse.

Kane thus participates in a growing body of Indian feminist writers, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (*The Palace of Illusions*), Volga (*The Liberation of Sita*), and Pratibha Ray (*Yajnaseni*), who challenge the epic's androcentric framework.

Uruvi's Voice: From Silence to Agency

In Vyasa's *Mahabharata*, Uruvi does not exist. Kane deliberately invents her, transforming the epic's masculine narrative into a woman-centred discourse. Uruvi, unlike Draupadi, who becomes a pawn of male honour, actively chooses her husband. She rejects Arjuna, the celebrated Pandava, and marries Karna, the stigmatised son of a charioteer.

This act alone destabilises the norms of caste and patriarchy. Uruvi's narrative voice does not conform to the silent suffering of epic wives. She argues, protests, and critiques Karna's decisions. For instance, she questions his unquestioning loyalty to Duryodhana: "Why must your loyalty to Duryodhana cost you everything, even your own soul?" (Kane, 2013, p. 214). Her voice thus becomes a site of resistance. Through her, Kane shows that women are not passive observers but critical participants in epic destiny.

Deconstructing Karna: The Flawed Hero

Karna has traditionally been celebrated as *dana-veer*, the great giver, and as a victim of fate. However, Kane resists this one-dimensional heroism. Uruvi's perspective exposes Karna's contradictions:

1. Loyalty vs. Justice: Karna's unflinching loyalty to Duryodhana makes him complicit in injustice.
2. Valour vs. Ethical Blindness: His role in Draupadi's humiliation, where he remains silent or joins in mockery, tarnishes his heroic image.
3. Generosity vs. Personal Tragedy: His endless acts of giving undermine his own survival, leaving Uruvi to

question whether his generosity is noble or self-destructive.

4. Uruvi's critique humanises Karna—not as a tragic hero but as a flawed man torn between ideals and realities.

Marriage as a Site of Resistance

Marriage in epics is often a patriarchal institution—women like Draupadi or Satyawati suffer under male decisions. Kane, however, reimagines marriage as a space of political contest. Uruvi refuses to remain a silent consort. Her dialogues with Karna are confrontational, often forcing him to reflect on his moral compromises.

Through Uruvi, Kane demonstrates that the private sphere of marriage is political. The Karna–Uruvi marriage becomes symbolic of larger tensions between dharma and desire, loyalty and justice, patriarchy and feminism.

Uruvi as Subaltern Historian

Ranjit Guha describes subaltern history as the perspective of the marginalised, often erased from dominant narratives. Uruvi embodies this role. Her voice reconstructs the epic not from the battlefield but from the margins of domesticity and female suffering.

For instance, while the *Mahabharata* glorifies the war as dharmayuddha, Uruvi exposes its futility and human cost. She represents the forgotten grief of women, children, and ordinary citizens who bear the consequences of masculine pride.

Through this, Kane positions Uruvi as a counter-historian, reclaiming space for silenced narratives.

Comparative Context: Feminist Rewritings of Epics

- Kane's *Karna's Wife* can be read alongside other feminist retellings:
- Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*: Draupadi narrates the Mahabharata and critiques male-centred dharma.
- Volga's *The Liberation of Sita*: Retells Sita's story, focusing on her relationships with other women, such as Surpanakha and Ahalya.
- Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni* gives voice to Draupadi's suffering and foregrounds her perspective.

While these works focus on canonical women, Kane goes further by inventing Uruvi, suggesting that the epic's silences are as important as its narratives.

Conclusion

Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife* destabilises the epic's glorification of Karna by shifting the focus to Uruvi. Through her lens, Karna is revealed not only as a tragic hero but also as a flawed man complicit in injustice. Uruvi's voice embodies feminist resistance, challenging patriarchal silence and reinterpreting marriage as a political space. As a subaltern historian, Uruvi re-narrates the Mahabharata from the margins, emphasising the cost of masculine pride and war on women. Kane's retelling is thus more than a love story—it is a feminist intervention in cultural memory. By

deconstructing Karna through Uruvi's voice, Kane joins the growing corpus of feminist mythmakers who reimagine epics to foreground gender justice.

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11. Spiritual Ecology and Indigenous Cosmology in Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps*

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Abstract

This paper explores the interrelation of spiritual ecology and indigenous cosmology in Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps*, a novel that profoundly illustrates the Angami Naga people's environmental ethos and metaphysical worldview. Through Vilie's journey, a solitary hunter deeply connected to the forest, Kire reveals how the spiritual and ecological dimensions are interwoven into indigenous consciousness. The narrative resists Western dichotomies of nature and culture, positioning the forest not as a passive backdrop but as an active, sacred presence within the story. Vilie's encounters with spirits, weretigers, and mystical symbols such as the heart-stone represent the cultural embeddedness of ecological wisdom within Naga cosmology. This study employs an ecocritical and anthropological lens to analyse how Kire reclaims indigenous epistemologies and sacred geographies as forms

of cultural sovereignty and ecological resistance. Ultimately, the novel calls for a reimagining of our relationship with nature, challenging dominant materialist paradigms and advocating for the spiritual interconnectedness that underpins indigenous lifeways.

Keywords: Spiritual Ecology, Indigenous Cosmology, Sacred Geography, Ecocriticism, Naga Spirituality, Forest Ethics, Animism.

Introduction

Over the past few years, the convergence of literature, ecology, and indigenous studies has opened new avenues for exploring how cultural stories can transform our imagination of the environment. One such work is Easterine Kire, an influential literary voice in Nagaland, whose writing offers a balanced representation of indigenous spirituality, oral culture, and ecological value. Kire's novel *When the River Sleeps* showcases a distinct thread of indigenous narration that weaves together myth, memory, and spiritual ecology to deconstruct the alienation generated by modernity and materialism. As the first Naga author to publish a novel in English, Kire not only works to sustain cultural memory but also subverts dominant narratives that exclude the indigenous voice. Her hero, Vilie, the hunter who dwells in harmony with the forest, is the literary figure of a cosmology in which the natural and the supernatural are indistinguishable. His quest to the "Sleeping River" is not so much an adventure as a journey into the religious

geography of his people, in which rivers, trees, and animals are given spirit, memory, and meaning.

Kire's description of the forest extends well beyond sentimental wilderness. It is made as a living, sentient thing, one that reacts to ethical behaviours, possesses spiritual memory, and maintains cosmological law. Vilie's statement, "The forest is my wife" (7), captures his profound respect for the land not as a possession but as a relative. This kin-centric orientation is predominant in many indigenous societies, where ecological relationships are understood through spiritual and moral dimensions. Through description, Kire introduces the forest as sacred geography, where each component is charged with meaning and potency. The forest retains memory; it contains dead spirits, guards secrets, and punishes transgressors of its codes. Such an idea fits with spiritual ecology's insistence on the interdependence of ecological systems and sacred belief systems. Vilie's odyssey is punctuated by meetings with natural and supernatural forces, including the weretiger. His appeal to the tiger "Kuovi! Menuolhoulie! Wetsho! Is this the way to treat your clansman? I am Vilie, son of Kedo, Your clansman. I am not here to do you harm. Why are you treating me as a stranger? I come in peace. You owe me your hospitality. I am your guest." (26) is typical of Naga ideologies that do not perceive animals as other but view them as kin and extended family, where man has reciprocal relationships. This kinship ethics differs from anthropocentric worldviews, in which humans hold supremacy over nature.

The novel is saturated in indigenous cosmology, where myth and reality merge to create a worldview that defies colonial polarities of rational/superstitious or real/fantastic. The mythic “Sleeping River” is a literal location and metaphor for spiritual awakening. It is protected by spirit-women, indicating the presence of divine feminine power and the sacredness of water in Naga belief systems. Vilie’s quest to get the heart-stone is similarly representative of the search for religious wholeness. Outside observers may view it as a magical artefact, but the heart-stone symbolises ancestral memory, inner calm, and spiritual autonomy. While pursuing the heart-stone, Vilie is motivated neither by ambition nor by a desire for material gain but by an urge to rejoin the rhythms of his ancestral heritage and the spirit forces that direct his people. His quest is personal and collective; it is the cry of a people to recover their spiritual heritage amidst modern dislocations and cultural alienations. In Vilie’s journey, Kire gently criticises the Western tendency to despiritualize spiritual objects into commodities or curiosities, isolating them from the worldviews that endow them with meaning. The heart-stone is not an object to own but a spiritual trigger that encourages reconnection with roots, self, and purpose. In this way, the novel subverts hegemonic discourses that reduce value to materiality, proposing in turn a vision of balance, humility, and sacred reciprocity.

In this sense, the novel challenges commodified views of power in contrast to indigenous views of balance and harmony. Kire’s novel is a powerful act of resistance against the commodification of native beliefs and against

the rationalist refutation of spiritual experiences. It brings to the forefront an epistemological paradigm in which spiritual power is not extracted, exploited, or capitalised on, but cultivated through humility, relationship, and moral responsibility. The novel critiques fragmented modernity and presents an alternative discourse, indigenous cosmology, in which healing, strength, and wisdom are located in relationality with the land, spirits, and kin. By dissolving the distinction between myth and reality, Kire draws the reader into a decolonised narrative space where indigenous spirituality, ecology, and identity converge in a vision of resilience, continuity, and sacred belonging.

Kire revives oral traditions and stories passed down over generations to preserve indigenous knowledge and values. Oral stories act as epistemological instruments that maintain cultural identity. In her narrative, Kire not only retains these traditions but reworks them as acts of literary sovereignty, reclaiming storytelling power from monolithic Western literary forms.

The novel's native knowledge is at once intensely practical and metaphysical. Vilie's survival in the forest is sustained by his understanding of herbs, such as Ciena and Tierhutiefu, which are used to heal disease and repel evil spirits. These herbs are not only medicinal but also situated within a cosmology that identifies health with spiritual purity and proper conduct. It is portrayed in the novel as Ciena, or bitter wormwood, and Tierhutiefu, a soft-leaved plant with a rather unpleasant smell. While Ciena was good for warding off evil spirits, the other herbs were supposed to be suitable for several ailments. (32)

This integrated model, in which recovery is not merely bodily but also spiritual, dismantles biomedical approaches that dissociate the body from its ecological and cultural environments. It is an expression of animistic science in which the forest is both doctor and temple, not only providing remedies but also moral teachings. In indigenous cosmology, illness frequently stems from ecological disruption or spiritual offence, thereby reasserting the sacred duty human beings owe to nature. Kire's story also broaches the gendered dimensions of spirituality. The spirit-women who protect the river embody both guardians and challengers. They capture the double nature of the sacred feminine, soothing and terrifying. In indigenous cultures, women tend to be cultural memory-holders and spiritual mediators. When the feminine in *When the River Sleeps* is powerful, it is not passive or domestic; it is mystical, boundary-breaking, and locally based. This contradicts colonial patriarchal accounts that have long marginalised indigenous women's functions in spiritual authority and ecological knowledge exchange. Kire does this subtly in her presentation of women in human and spirit form as caretakers of ecological and cultural continuity.

The novel also highlights the importance of storytelling as a vessel for transmitting knowledge across generations. Kire effectively uses oral traditions to bridge the past and present, allowing characters like Vilie to embody ancestral wisdom as they navigate contemporary challenges. This interplay between myth and reality underscores the notion that indigenous knowledge is dynamic, capable of adapting while retaining its core

values. Kire employs supernatural elements throughout *When the River Sleeps* to enrich her narrative while simultaneously reinforcing cultural beliefs. The presence of spirits, curses, and magical stones serves not only as plot devices but also as embodiments of Naga cosmology. These elements invite readers to engage with Naga spirituality on a deeper level, illustrating how such beliefs are integral to understanding community dynamics and individual identities.

Conclusion

When the River Sleeps is a literary exploration of the holiness of place, cultural resilience, and the interconnectedness of all living things. Easterine Kire's account challenges us to reimagine our relationship with nature not as consumers but as spiritual beings engaged in an everyday world. Her blending of cosmology, ecology, and oral narrative builds an indigenous environmental ethic that offers possibilities for resisting cultural erasure, environmental degradation, and epistemological colonisation. In an era of ecological emergencies and cultural homogenization, the novel speaks eloquently about listening to indigenous voices, about restoring balance, and about respecting the Earth not only as a dwelling place but also as kin and keeper of memory. Kire's writing is not fiction; it is testimony, prophecy, and reclamation. Through Vilie's lone but spiritually fulfilling journey, Kire instructs us that cultural survival is not merely survival, but meaningful living within the world's spiritual ecology.

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12. Integrating Literature and Language in the Teaching of English Today

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Abstract:

The world of English language education is changing rapidly, and incorporating literature into language lessons can improve both language and communication skills. This essay looks at how reading literary works, from poetry and fiction to theatre, may help people learn new words, grasp syntax, and improve their discourse skills, as well as their cultural sensitivity and ability to think critically. Drawing on the work of researchers such as Dunton-Downer, Lewis, Hill, Raman, Rizvi, and Sharma, the study shows how to make language learning more relevant, meaningful, and fun. Literature is an excellent way to show how language is used in real life, which adds to the structural and functional features that communicative education focuses on. The essay also examines how literature can support professional and technical communication, connecting what we learn in school with what we do in the real world. In the end, the research calls for a balanced curriculum that combines literary analysis with language teaching to create well-rounded, thoughtful, and skilled English speakers.

Keywords: Literature, Language Teaching, Communicative Competence, English Pedagogy, Cultural Contexts

Introduction:

English is the language that connects people all over the world. It is the second language in almost every country. English serves as a means for students to enhance their essential skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The teaching of English is becoming increasingly important in today's world, as it is essential for opening new markets and improving communication. Communication is intrinsically interactive and depends on the exchanges of starting and responding, which leads to valuable feedback. English is generally considered a way for technology and scientific information to spread quickly. It is also seen as a way for people to share knowledge across many disciplines. Leslie Dunton-Downer says, "The magic glasses of English allow speakers to see the world on a global scale and to shape life on our fast-changing planet in a language that is itself changing quickly" (xiv).

This language is essential for building relationships within communities and for understanding each other across the world. Being able to speak English well is essential in today's professional world. People who cannot speak or write this language well are typically considered unfit for work in the field. These kinds of limits make it challenging for students and teachers to communicate, which in turn makes it harder for them to finish tasks, think critically, and solve problems. This problem happens when too much

focus is placed on technical abilities and not enough on the most important skill: communicating well. In the corporate world, communication skills are crucial for success.

Effective communication gives people confidence and dignity in both their personal and professional lives, and it earns them respect in society. Being able to communicate well builds a person's self-confidence. M. Ashraf Rizvi says, "By listening to classroom lectures, academic discussions in seminars and workshops, and academic speeches, the student gains the professional knowledge and skills needed to do well in his or her job" (10). Also, a business's technological skills depend on how well its personnel speak English. English is no longer only for the classroom. It is now used in films, computers, journals, and newspapers, which together connect people to the larger world. It becomes a way to show off abilities, whether written or spoken.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP):

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a separate area of English language teaching that includes Business English, Technical English, Scientific English, and English for Medical Professionals. ESP is carefully designed to meet each student's needs by using methods, terms, and activities specific to their field of study. The main goal is to create language that fits the specific tasks, including grammar, vocabulary, study methods, conversation, and genre that are acceptable for the area.

This method is quite different from regular English classes and is intended for students at least at an

intermediate level. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a vital part of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Famous schools in the UK, such as the University of Birmingham and Aston University, have included ESP in their courses and even offer master's degrees in the topic. The academic journal "English for Specific Purposes" is an international publication focused on this field. The growth of an ESP community in Japan and the holding of regular conferences show that ESP is becoming increasingly well-known worldwide.

Learning and Teaching of the English Language through Literature:

Using literature in language lessons is a delightful way to teach. Language teachers often discuss how to integrate literature into the curricula of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as well as the collaborative potential of literature and ESL/EFL education for the development of both students and teachers. Employing literature as an educational strategy yields results in teaching foundational language skills, including reading, writing, listening, speaking, and fundamental language components such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. It may also be used to translate literary works such as plays, poetry, and short stories, which helps English speakers communicate more effectively. Reading and writing about literary works expose people to other ways of speaking, writing, and understanding. Meenakshi Raman states, "Linguistic competence is the possession of appropriate language skills

and the ability to present scientific facts or information clearly and objectively (447).” Literature may help individuals improve their skills. Literary works such as novels, plays, and short stories help language learners understand how. Communication occurs within a particular cultural setting.

Furthermore, literature allows individuals to express their cultural subtleties. Integrating literature into language courses is a powerful way to help learners become familiar with the target language. Immersion in literary works fosters an organic relationship with the story, pulling pupils in. During this phase, the focus moves from comprehending individual lexical units or sentences. Content becomes more important, encouraging learners to communicate effectively using proper phrases, grammar, and forms. This critical transition enhances language learning.

Literature and Writing:

Literature is a substantial and motivating source of writing. Many topics in literature can help students think more deeply and become more creative. The writing may be about literature. Students may be given homework, in-class essays, and take-home essays to write. This would encourage the student to work hard to learn about literary devices and how to employ them. The student may also have to do further work on the story, characters, location, theme, and figurative language. Adding literature to a language curriculum opens many avenues for teaching, such as reading aloud, acting out, improvising, role-playing, reenacting, discussing, and engaging in group activities.

Language teachers are urged to make listening comprehension and pronunciation tasks more interesting by using recordings, films, or their own readings of books.

This method helps people improve their speaking and listening abilities, which, in turn, helps them pronounce words more clearly, as seen when reading or afterwards. Raymond S. Ross, in his book "Speech Communication," quotes Ernest D. Nathan, highlighting that "Perceptive listening is a conscious cognitive effort involving primarily the sense of hearing reinforced by other senses and leading to understanding. When perceptive listening is inspired by a sincere desire to understand, it becomes more than a sensory process. It is an attitude well expressed 'as a listening spirit' (34). Literature-based theatrical exercises are useful in ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings. These kinds of exercises help students improve their speaking skills more quickly by enhancing their understanding of a work's story and characters. Dramatisation, role-playing, and improvisation are three types of drama that work well in the classroom. They help students understand how important pronunciation, vocabulary, idioms, dialogue, and even nonverbal cues like facial expressions, gestures, and body language are. Michael Lewis and Jimme Hill say, "Learning a language is not just stacking little bits of knowledge on top of each other." It is not that simple; the process includes rewriting, learning more about how to use items, and deepening your grasp of topics you've previously encountered (33). When teachers use literature in English classes, group activities, including class discussions, group

work, panel discussions, and debates, help students improve their speaking skills. The instructor may help students with their pronunciation mistakes during these activities.

Literary Genres:

Poetry offers readers a unique linguistic experience, as it goes beyond the rules of grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. Poetry makes people feel and think, and it teaches pupils the figures of speech that poets use to make their writing more captivating and have a poetic effect. Poetry's rhyme and rhythm bring forth the sound and power of words. Also, poetry allows students to examine semiotic features that reveal how culture shapes the target language. Short stories are like mirrors that reflect our lives and offer insight into the human experience. There are several educational benefits to having it in the ELT curriculum. Short fiction includes imaginative, thought-provoking works that require careful reading, which helps develop creativity and critical thinking. Fiction, which includes fantasy and mystery, helps readers learn about other cultures and ethnic groups and brings people from different origins and places together.

Drama is a valuable tool in the language classroom since it teaches students about rhetorical features and helps them improve their language skills. Investigating drama fosters creativity and encourages innovative thinking. Novels situated in the actual world are a great way to learn and master a language. English has spread across the globe through many different types of literature, having an effect on people worldwide that is unmatched. People think

English is everywhere for political and economic reasons, and international organisations and the ELT business help make it happen. The globalisation of English, on the other hand, has led to results that are not always the same. English has replaced other languages in many areas, but its widespread use has also led to language splits and mergers. Because English is spoken worldwide, new Englishes, or regional linguistic variants, have arisen.

As a result, the unique status of Standard English has come under fire as English's ownership spreads to other nations.

Conclusion:

In many countries where English is not the first language, literature is an important part of the English curriculum. However, an important prerequisite is to create educational resources with clear goals and a clear function in the literature. When teaching English, the duties of language teachers and instructors are crucial. So, it is essential to determine the goal of language education based on what students need and want. When choosing the proper language-teaching methods, instructional approaches, and classroom activities, you should carefully consider each. When planning lessons, teachers should consider the language skills, interests, and objectives of both primary and advanced students. Such consideration will help ensure that the content is engaging and aligns with the teaching materials. Multimedia computers and software are essential for effective English teaching and learning in today's environment. These technologies make it easier for each

student to study independently on a computer. English is a sign of a good quality of life and a force for change in civilisation. It provides access to social and economic opportunities, thereby empowering individuals to achieve their goals.

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13. Diaspora and Domesticity: A Comparative Literary Exploration of Jhumpa Lahiri and Anita Desai

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Abstract

This article offers a fresh and expanded critical interpretation of diaspora and domesticity through the works of Jhumpa Lahiri and Anita Desai. By examining the emotional landscapes of displacement, the construction of home, and the shaping of cultural identity, the paper highlights how both writers portray the tension between belonging and alienation. The study further explores how memory, migration, and generational transitions influence the characters' inner worlds, revealing the universal human desire for rootedness. Through comparative analysis, this article positions Lahiri and Desai as influential voices in contemporary literature whose stories transcend geographical borders.

Keywords: Domesticity, cultural identity, emotional displacement, alienation, migration

Introduction

Literature has always served as a mirror reflecting human emotions, struggles, and relationships. In the modern diasporic context, writers often explore identity crises, emotional displacement, and the reconstruction of home. Jhumpa Lahiri and Anita Desai, two prominent literary figures, beautifully capture these complexities in their works. While Lahiri focuses on the immigrant experience and cultural negotiation, Desai delves into the psychological and domestic spaces within Indian households. Their writings reveal how domesticity becomes both a sanctuary and a limitation for characters navigating cultural boundaries.

Diaspora: A Search for Belonging

The theme of diaspora in Lahiri's works often highlights the emotional distance between the world left behind and the new world immigrants inhabit. Characters struggle to preserve cultural identity while adapting to unfamiliar social environments. Lahiri's narratives frequently showcase conflicts between first-generation immigrants and their children, who experience dual identities. In contrast, Desai approaches diaspora not merely as geographical displacement but as an internal dislocation rooted in memories and personal relationships. Her characters often carry emotional echoes of the past, revealing the subtle pain of longing.

Domesticity: The Emotional Landscape of Home

Domesticity plays a central role in the writings of both authors. Lahiri presents home as a fragile space that immigrants attempt to recreate through rituals, language, and relationships. Kitchens, living rooms, and family gatherings become symbols of resistance against cultural assimilation. Desai, on the other hand, uses domestic settings to explore psychological tensions. Homes in her works often reflect the emotional climate of the characters—sometimes serene, sometimes oppressive. Through her nuanced descriptions, Desai illustrates how domestic environments shape identity, self-worth, and intergenerational dynamics.

Identity and Memory

Identity, especially in diaspora literature, becomes a fluid and evolving concept. Lahiri's characters grapple with name changes, cultural expectations, and the desire to fit into dual worlds. Memory acts as a bridge connecting them to their ancestral roots. Desai uses memory differently, presenting it as a tool for introspection. Her characters reflect on childhood experiences, familial bonds, and personal trauma. Through memory, both writers articulate the ongoing negotiation between past and present.

Comparative Insights

While both writers explore diaspora and domesticity, their methodologies differ remarkably. Lahiri adopts a minimalist, emotionally restrained style, allowing readers to feel the quiet pain of displacement. Desai's

writing is more introspective and layered, focusing on psychological depth. However, both writers succeed in portraying the universal human quest for belonging, identity, and emotional stability. Their narratives demonstrate that domestic spaces and diasporic journeys are deeply interconnected aspects of the human experience.

Conclusion

The writings of Jhumpa Lahiri and Anita Desai illuminate the complexities of diaspora and domesticity with remarkable sensitivity. Their works remind readers that home is not merely a physical structure but an emotional anchor shaped by memories, relationships, and cultural heritage. Through their stories, both authors contribute significantly to modern literature by giving voice to individuals navigating the shifting landscapes of identity and belonging.

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14. Exploration of Ethical Values and Moral Dilemmas in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series

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Abstract

This article examines the ethical values, moral tensions, and humanistic insights embedded in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series. While the novels may initially appear as imaginative fantasy centred on wizardry, a closer reading reveals deep reflections on contemporary issues such as racism, discrimination, slavery, violence, and the politics of "othering." Through the narrative arcs of characters like Harry, Voldemort, Dumbledore, Hermione, and the house-elves, Rowling portrays the conflict between good and evil as a complex moral continuum rather than a binary opposition. The study foregrounds themes of love, friendship, sacrifice, inclusion, and nonviolence that underpin the series' ethical foundations. It also explores psychological trauma, embodied experience, repentance, and the transformative potential of moral choice. By analysing key incidents and character interactions, the paper

argues that Harry Potter functions not merely as a fantasy narrative but as a moral text that invites readers to reflect on empathy, justice, courage, and the healing power of goodness in a world marked by conflict and discrimination.

Keywords: Good vs Evil; Discrimination; Identity Formation; Empathy; Psychological Trauma; Power and Resistance; Friendship and Sacrifice

In contemporary British Literature, J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series has secured a predominant position among other literary works in the domain. Countless works and studies have been done. A superficial reading of this fiction may make only the wizarding world explicit. However, an in-depth study of Rowling's books has led to countless works and studies. Based on these studies and a more in-depth analysis of Rowling's saga, one can note moral values and ethical issues that, after a superficial first reading, may remain unexplored. Among them can be counted racism, gender issues and slavery, which are basically the same problems that have plagued the human being for a very long time and that continue to coexist in contemporary society. These problems are addressed by the author within the magical world she created, but the books contain an innumerable set of analogies with the real world, that is, the reader's world.

This paper attempts to identify the ethical values inherent in the Harry Potter Series. In the wizarding world of fiction, evil, hate, and murder are evident. Nevertheless, J.K. Rowling's discourse on love, goodness, joy,

togetherness, and resurrection is deftly represented through the characters. The contemporary world, especially among youth, is haunted by nihilism. Lord Voldemort proves it when he states, “There is no good and evil. There is only power and those too weak to seek it” (Sorcerer’s Stone, 291). There is a strong manifestation of evil subordinating the good. However, Rowling concludes her novels with the hint that good is real and evil is erasable.

Rowling defines the value of being good and the hopelessness of being bad. She says, goodness leads to “a soul that is untarnished and whole,” while evil leads to “a maimed and diminished soul” (Half-Blood 509-511). Goodness is stronger than evil, “like a tongue on frozen steel, like flesh in flame” (Deathly 685).

The concept of ‘othering’ is the core theme of Rowling’s fiction. There is a wide array of incidents in the novels that illustrate how discrimination is shown by one group to another. The purebloods underestimate the whole lot of human and nonhuman creatures, such as Muggles, Mudbloods, Squibs, giants, werewolves, and goblins. Discrimination and dehumanisation are the results of ‘othering’. The pure-blood wizards in the Hogwarts School comment on the Muggle-borns as: “Muggles are like animals, stupid and dirty” (Deathly 574). The Dark Lord Voldemort passes a crude comment saying: “We shall cut away the canker that infects us until only those of the true blood remain” (Deathly Hallows 11).

At the same time, goodness is revealed through the words of certain characters. Harry’s godfather, Sirius Black, insists, “If you want to know what a man is like, take a good

look at how he treats his inferiors, not his equals” (Goblet 525). Professor Dumbledore has respect for all the ‘others’. He does not consider the purebloods or wizards to be superior. In fact, his determined support and advocacy for the rights of the Muggle-born have earned him many enemies in his own society. Rowling herself addresses Professor Dumbledore as “the champion of commoners, of Mudbloods and Muggles” (Goblet 648). One of his admirers in the school says about Professor Dumbledore: “He could find something to value in anyone, however apparently insignificant or wretched” (Deathly 20).

There are a few characters who resist this practice of ‘others’ vehemently. Hermione is worried about the plight of the house-elves. She pities them, saying, “How sick it is, the way they’ve got to obey?” (Deathly 197) Harry Potter extends his unconditional love to Hagrid, a half-giant, and to Lupin, a werewolf.

Dobby and Kreacher stand as examples of the impact of the mutilating power of othering. Dobby, the house-elf, serves in the Malfoy family. His masters are Dark wizards who oppress him. He has an eccentric behaviour of banging his head or firing his finger when his suggestion or plan goes wrong. He loses his self-esteem and picks up self-harm behaviour. This odd behavioural pattern may be the result of the ill-treatment by his masters. Kreacher, the male house-elf, serves in the House of Black with servile obedience and loyalty. He is eccentric because he hates freedom. Dumbledore laments, “Kreature is what he has been made by wizards, Harry” (Goblet 832). Harry himself

does not bother about giving a Christmas present to Kreature.

In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, one could witness a ray of repentance through the insightful words of Dumbledore. While talking about the relationship between Sirius and Kreature, Dumbledore makes it clear that Sirius does not hate Kreature. To him, Kreature is just a servant unworthy of much interest or notice. “Indifference and neglect often do much more damage than outright dislike.” (*Goblet* 834) Dumbledore realises that his wizard community has mistreated the house-elves for a long time. It has abused them to the core. The current events prove that the purebloods are reaping the harvest. Dumbledore is a good character, and this is his goodness. He humiliates none and feels compassion for everyone. (*Half-Blood*, 262) He extends respect, honour and patience even when he addresses the Dark Lord Voldemort, the murderous Draco and the enraged Harry Potter. He empathises even with his enemies, such as Voldemort, believing that everyone has a history of loss, fear, and pain.

Dumbledore is a man of ethics. He never underestimates or overestimates others. He is filled with the good intention of raising others. He always looks at the best in others. He admits his mistakes. To Harry Potter, he says, “I make mistakes like the next man” (*Half-Blood* 197). He is ready to apologise if anything goes wrong. At the end, he does not achieve victory; yet he repents, saying to Harry Potter, “I crave your pardon, Harry” (*Deathly* 713). This good nature of Dumbledore is his real magic. To him, true

love can do magical wonders. He is self-confident but humble.

Harry Potter is an icon of the triumph of nonviolence. Till the end, he does not use the Killing Curse nor kill anyone. He meets his opponents disarmed. His magic is his execution of non-violence. Even when his life is in danger, he states clearly: “I won’t blast people out of my way just because they’re there. That’s Voldemort’s job,” (Deathly 70-71). He is worried about the lives of his worst enemies, such as Peter in the Shrieking Shack, Malfoy in the Room of Requirement, and Voldemort in the Forbidden Forest. Harry Potter is frightened neither of death nor of dying. He believes his liberation is in giving up violence. Thus, Rowling decries violence and elevates the power of nonviolence to the highest position of honour. Harry Potter is traumatised and enraged, and he loses his temper over deception and betrayal. Snape advises him to stop shouting and be focused. “Master yourself! Control your anger, discipline your mind.” (Goblet 535-36) Dumbledore serves as a role model to Harry Potter with his emotional composure, centeredness, and patience. The fiction is filled with evil, violence, and loss, which are disturbing and mutilating. However, true maturity lies in patience, kindness, and gentleness.

Throughout the Harry Potter Series, the young wizard's journey continues as an adventure in search of Lord Voldemort. The latter is also determined to locate Harry and put an end to him. In Half-Blood Prince, the combat between Harry and Voldemort becomes severe. Voldemort has returned to the Wizarding World and begun

to gather his army. In the midst of these two characters who stand for virtue and vice, few characters are siding with either of them. Their intention, good or bad, is evident. It is a straightforward conflict between good people, represented by Harry, and bad ones, represented by Voldemort. However, there are fewer characters populating the middle of this spectrum. As the story progresses, more characters are introduced in *Half-Blood Prince*. Some have ambiguous moral standing. Even Harry could not tell who had good or bad intentions.

Though Voldemort is the arch villain in the Harry Potter Series, Rowling presents him as a brilliant character. His villainy is not Satanic. He is pitiable because he was orphaned at a young age. He has grown from a vulnerable child who has never experienced love. Dumbledore gives an account of Voldemort's past. His father was a Muggle. He abandoned the family. His mother was poverty-stricken, and she died.

Thus, Voldemort grew up in an orphanage. Devoured by love, Voldemort becomes a monster of power. Being a parentless child, his nature has become eccentric. He is friendless. He is of an unforgiving nature. He elicits loyalty not out of love or dedication, but by instilling fear in others. He could not bear commonness. His wish is to be exceptional in all matters. To achieve greatness, he is even ready to be a killer. Another interesting aspect of Voldemort's history concerns his name. His real name was Tom Riddle. To him, 'Tom' is a common name, which will mark him as one among the others. (*Half-Blood* 276-77).

On the whole, Voldemort loves greatness than goodness. Power is everything for him. He kills his own father and says to Harry, “I am now going to prove my power by killing you.” (Goblet 658) To avoid his own death, he causes the deaths of others. Voldemort earns the readers' sympathy at the time of his death. He is like a wounded child. He could not believe his own vulnerability and mortality. Rowling describes his final condition as “left, unwanted, stuffed out of sight, struggling for breath”. (Deathly, 704, 707) He understands that his addictive dependence on power and violence is suicidal.

Draco Malfoy

The Harry Potter Series proves that evil is not the ultimate end. People can be redeemed to goodness. The character Draco Malfoy stands as a living example of it. Draco is the young villain in the story. His main business is sneering and slurring others. He likes inciting conflict. He is wrong to wish to be the murderer of Dumbledore. However, he is aware of his inability to perform such actions. He resembles Voldemort in being driven by his own desperate insecurity and fear of being rejected or harmed by the bigger bully. The reverse archetype of Malfoy is Harry's own father, James Potter. In his younger days, Harry had a high opinion of James. However, James had some ugly secrets. He had been arrogant and cruel. He had humiliated Snape. When Harry learns of his father's unethical side, his empathy turns to his enemy. (Order, 650)

Deloris Umbridge is perhaps the most sinister character in the story, even more so than Malfoy or Voldemort. Her smile and speech are falsely built. It is a

sheer act of presumption. Her physical appearance and behaviour portray her as a good woman. She always dresses in pink. She adores and exhibits her love for kittens. Her laugh is consistent. When asked, she gives a moral talk, saying that evil is unreal and that fighting it is unnecessary. Deloris has another hidden identity: she craves power. In her pursuit of power, she acts ruthlessly and cruelly toward whoever crosses her path. As her focus is on attaining power, she cannot bear suggestions, opinions, or opposition from others. She is ready to trouble the children even.

Rita Skeeter, the journalist for the Daily Prophet newspaper, is an excellent satire of profit-driven fake news. She knows the knack of drawing readers' attention to the fake news. She tells people they have to hear everything she says. (Order, 567) People generally believe what comforts and excites them, not what is true. They wilfully disbelieve what makes them uncomfortable or afraid, even when this ultimately endangers and destroys them. In the fiction, Severus Snape and Sirius Black are branded as vicious villains, but the truth is different. Snape hated Harry's father and resented Harry himself. So, Harry is sure Snape is the murderer of his father. However, Dumbledore was still right to trust Snape, a sign that people can actually change. Harry is certainly wrong to doubt Snape. However, in honest life, only his wrong conceptions save him. At the end, when the truth is revealed, Harry's enmity toward Snape converts into admiration. In fact, Harry names his son after Snape, the man he has despised.

Some minor characters change. Professor Quirrell has been good in the past. However, he loses all good

characteristics after joining the allies. Pettigrew seems to be weak and cowardly at the beginning. Even Harry remarks about the absence of villainous nature in him. However, in Goblet of Fire, we see Pettigrew brutally murdering Cedric Diggory.

Horace Slughorn is one of the several characters foregrounded in Half-Blood Prince. He sticks to uncertain moral codes. Slughorn is the new Potions Professor, appointed at Hogwarts School. He is a genial and well-intentioned man. He behaves kindly towards Harry. He is interested and preoccupied with the thought of teaching young people for their potential to accrue power and accolades. However, at one stage, he makes a wrong judgment and enables the young Lord Voldemort to immortalise himself through Horcruxes.

In Half-Blood Prince, the secret is revealed that Draco is working for Lord Voldemort. He has been assigned the task of killing Dumbledore. Harry Potter has long doubted Draco's loyalty, and his suspicion has come true. However, throughout the novel, we see Draco in distress and paranoid, as he has been forced to do an unpleasant job. The doubt arises about Draco's acceptance of doing an evil job. It is because of his family's relationship with the Death Eaters.

In all the books in the Harry Potter Series, there is an inherent theme that people can be saved by living together. The characters are either fixed in loneliness or in the support and circle of friendship. Voldemort's mother, Merope, proves how living an abandoned life kills the power of magic in her. Of course, she meets her end by this

loss. Human beings can lead a secure life not by being strong, intelligent, or virtuous, but by being together. One should love others and expand the circle of inclusion. This truth can be evidenced through Harry's life. Hermione is the most fiercely loyal friend in Harry's life. Harry says to Cedric, "Let's just take it [the Champion's Cup] together" (Goblet, 634), or as Ron says to Harry, "We're with you no matter what happens" (Half-Blood, 651). Rowling writes, "The mere fact that [Ron and Hermione] were still there on either side of him, speaking bracing words of comfort, not shrinking from him as though he were contaminated or dangerous, was worth more than he could ever tell them." (Half-Blood, 99)

Dobby, Neville, Luna, and Ginny are fringe characters and outsiders at the beginning. Later, they became friends along with Harry, Ron, and Hermione. The lesson learnt from them is that one should not underestimate or subordinate the silent persons. Ron is a fairly prejudiced, dull character. Harry decided to go on his expedition alone, without such a person's companionship. Dumbledore counsels him, saying, "You need your friends, Harry" (Half-Blood, 78).

Elves live in a condition of absolute submission to wizards. They do not seem to rebel against their fate. Dobby himself states that elves cannot set themselves free. This is the confirmation of their lower position. The condition of submission is also evidenced by the fact that Dobby is set free, and he does not belong to the Malfoy family. Dobby is happy with his new status as a free elf. At the same time, he is ready to extend his service to Harry, as if Harry were still

a slave. This is how he wins the sympathy of the series' major characters.

Generally, the question arises whether the consciousness of our physical appearance is a hindrance to achieving our goals. Rowling gives a different perspective on this view. Human beings are fundamentally physical, embodied creatures. There is goodness in the physical body. When Fawke cries, her tears have healing power. (Chamber, 207) Lily's love lives on in Harry's skin: "Voldemort could not bear to reside in a body so full of the force he detests". (Order, 844) Dumbledore finds out the way to open the cave of Voldemort. He is sure the doors can be opened not by magic, but by his hands and his eyes, patiently looking at it. (Half-Blood, 558) Dumbledore cheerfully warns Harry that Voldemort is wrong to fear his body: "There's nothing to be feared from a body, Harry" (Half-Blood, 566). Even after death, Harry still has a body.

As the story progresses, one can witness the characters' transition in attitude. The most extraordinary mission of Harry is not defeating his enemies but considering how to treat people who fluctuate in their moral behaviour. Rowling suggests that our goal is not to get beyond our bodies but to embrace them. The power of magic becomes subordinate to the power of physical finite strength. It could be witnessed that the repeated advice shared among one another is to sleep, eat, or enjoy chocolate. "A full stomach meant good spirits; an empty one, bickering and gloom." (Deathly 287) Dumbledore brilliantly advises Harry, "It is necessary to start with your

scar” (Goblet, 827). Our bodies carry our trauma, and we must not ignore this.

Thus, the story of the Harry Potter Series is about moving away from greatness to goodness (Half-Blood, 443; Deathly, 508, 568, 716). The climax is a brilliant anti-climax. Harry does not become the next Headmaster of Hogwarts, the Minister of Magic or Lord Harry. He becomes Ginny's husband and the children's father. He is sure they will not grow up with the trauma he suffered. He embraces ordinary life and cares about little people. He wants goodness, not greatness.

Love is the most important theme, handled wondrously by Rowling, throughout the Series. It is exhibited through family and friends. For Harry, Hogwarts is his home, and his friends are his family. It is Lily's sacrifice, through her love for her son, that saved Harry from Voldemort. Voldemort's love is self-centred. He loved himself and his greatest desire was not to die. This brings him to ruin. The dangers of love are also present throughout the saga. Snape, who is the one who loved another person in an egoistic way, ends up suffering his ultimate punishment to avenge the death of his beloved. Harry knows how to love others. His true power lies in his ability to love his friends, which makes him the hero of the story. His eyes are the same as his mother's eyes because he has inherited the courage to love others and sacrifice himself for those he loves.

J.K. Rowling has introduced ethical and moral values in the Harry Potter Series to sensitise the readers to the realities of life. The characters are endowed either with

good or bad behaviour on the conviction of the writer that good literature should ennoble the reader. In this way, wizards and witches become representatives of men and women; their behaviours become models to be avoided or followed, and their actions become things to be supported or condemned. The separation between good and evil becomes clear.

To conclude, the books in the Harry Potter Series are not about magic but morality. They spread the message that one should love even the strange and unwanted ones and sacrifice oneself for others, even when one is burning with hate and lusting for power. Trust in God is stronger than evil and death itself. Life should be lived always in hope and joy. Professor Dumbledore tells his students, “Lord Voldemort’s gift for spreading discord and enmity is very great. We can fight it only by showing an equally strong bond of friendship and trust. Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open.” (Goblet, 723)

The modern world is caught up in polarisation, conflict, and war. At this time, the profound and practical moral imagination provided by the Harry Potter Series is relevant. It can heal the negative attitude of othering and energise love, even beyond the author’s own intent.

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15. Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL): A Contemporary Analysis of Digital Tools, Pedagogical Strategies, and Learner Outcomes

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Abstract

Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) has emerged as a comprehensive pedagogical framework that integrates digital tools, multimodal platforms, and artificial intelligence into English language education. This review synthesises a decade of scholarly research (2015–2025) to examine how technology reshapes learning environments, instructional strategies, and learner performance. The study reveals that digital platforms—ranging from Learning Management Systems (LMS) such as Google Classroom to artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT—support collaboration, autonomous learning, and continuous assessment. Research further indicates that

multimodal content delivery enhances comprehension, cognitive engagement, and retention (Mayer 122). Innovations such as virtual reality environments, gamification, and mobile-assisted language learning significantly improve learner motivation and language proficiency (Loewen et al. 266). At the same time, challenges persist, including unequal access to devices, insufficient teacher training, and concerns related to data ethics and digital dependency. Drawing upon constructivism, connectivism, and socio-cultural theory, this review demonstrates that TELL is not merely a technological upgrade but a pedagogical transformation that redefines English language learning as a dynamic, interactive, and personalised process. The paper concludes by highlighting implications for curriculum design, teacher education, and institutional policy, emphasising the need for sustainable and equitable digital integration. Future directions include AI-driven adaptive learning, immersive VR-based instruction, and multimodal assessment frameworks. Overall, the findings position TELL as a central, future-oriented paradigm in language education.

Keywords: Technology-Enhanced Language Learning; Digital Pedagogy; ICT in English Education; AI in ELT; Multimodal Learning; Digital Literacy; Learner Engagement; EdTech

1. Introduction

The integration of digital technologies into English language teaching has witnessed exponential growth over

the past two decades. Earlier phases of digital instruction, characterised by computer-assisted drills and isolated software programs, have evolved into complex, interconnected ecosystems where learners engage with multimedia content, collaborative platforms, artificial intelligence, and immersive simulations. Today, Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) represents the culmination of this evolution, encompassing all digital, online, mobile, and AI-driven tools that facilitate language acquisition. As educational practices shift to accommodate 21st-century learners, TELL has become indispensable in both formal and informal learning contexts.

1.1. Shifts in Language Pedagogy

Traditional language-teaching practices—dominated by grammar-translation methods, textbook-driven instruction, and teacher-centred classrooms—have increasingly been questioned for their inability to meet contemporary learners’ needs. Scholars argue that learners today require multimodal, participatory, and interactive learning environments that reflect real-world communication patterns (Godwin-Jones 11). With the rise of digital literacy and global connectivity, language learners are not merely consumers of information but active participants in networked learning ecosystems.

The theoretical shift aligns closely with constructivist and connectivist paradigms. Constructivism posits that learners actively construct knowledge through experience and interaction (Jonassen 15). In TELL environments, learners interpret multimedia texts, engage in virtual discussions, and participate in digital tasks, thereby

constructing linguistic understanding through multimodal input. Connectivism, proposed by Siemens, extends this view by arguing that learning occurs across networks and digital nodes; knowledge resides not only in individual cognition but across technological systems (Siemens 8). TELL embodies connectivism by enabling learners to access distributed knowledge through online platforms, digital communities, and AI-powered tools.

1.2 From CALL to MALL to TELL

The historical development of language-learning technologies reveals an expanding conceptual scope:

- CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) focused on desktop-based drills, reading software, and grammar exercises.
- MALL (Mobile-Assisted Language Learning) expanded access through smartphones and apps, emphasising flexibility and micro-learning.
- TELL integrates all digital modalities—cloud-based LMS platforms, interactive simulations, artificial intelligence, VR, and gamified tools—representing a comprehensive reimagining of language pedagogy.

Hubbard describes this progression as an “expansion from tool-assisted instruction to technology-mediated ecosystems of learning” (Hubbard 175). Unlike CALL and MALL, TELL incorporates social learning, multimodal literacy, and personalised instruction powered by analytics.

1.3 The Rise of Multimodal Learning

One of the most significant contributions of TELL is the incorporation of multimodal content—text, audio, video, images, animation, and interactive simulations. Mayer’s Multimedia Learning Theory argues that learners process information more effectively when presented in multiple modes (Mayer 122). TELL environments leverage multimodality to enhance comprehension, provide contextualised input, and facilitate deeper cognitive processing.

For example, English learners may:

- listen to podcasts,
- annotate digital texts,
- watch interactive storytelling videos,
- engage in real-time voice conversations with AI bots,
- create digital presentations,
- participate in online debates.

These experiences align with Kress’s view that communication today is inseparable from multimodality, and language learning must adapt accordingly (Kress 54).

1.4 Technology and Learner Agency

One of the strongest arguments for TELL is its capacity to promote learner agency. Digital platforms offer learners personalised pathways, immediate feedback, and autonomous control over pace and content. According to Reinders, autonomy is strengthened when learners can choose tools, materials, and tasks (Reinders 27).

In TELL:

- Apps like Duolingo personalise tasks.

- LMS platforms track learner progress.
- AI tools provide real-time error correction.
- Gamified platforms scaffold motivation and engagement.
- Learners take ownership of their learning journey, moving from passive recipients to active creators of knowledge.
- Technology and Authentic Communication

Another important function of TELL is facilitating authentic communication. Unlike traditional textbooks, online communication tools expose learners to real-world discourse patterns such as:

- chat-based interactions,
- video calls,
- collaborative writing,
- asynchronous messaging,
- online forums, and
- global peer exchanges.

These opportunities align with Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, which emphasises learning through interaction and mediation (Vygotsky 89). Digital environments provide more communicative opportunities than classroom-limited interactions.

1.5 Post-Pandemic Acceleration

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the global adoption of digital learning. Studies report that educational institutions worldwide shifted from in-person instruction to virtual platforms almost overnight (Bao 50). This transition

exposed inequalities and unpreparedness but also validated the potential of TELL. Platforms like Zoom, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, and Moodle became essential, transforming how teachers deliver content, assess learning, and communicate with students.

As a result, TELL is no longer optional—it is now integral to mainstream education.

1.6 Gaps and Need for Review

Although many studies explore specific tools or strategies, there is a need for a comprehensive synthesis:

1. Which tools work best for which skills?
2. Which pedagogical models are most effective?
3. What learner outcomes are consistently observed?
4. What challenges persist?
5. What future directions are emerging?

This article addresses these gaps by providing a structured, evidence-based review of digital tools, pedagogical strategies, and learner outcomes in TELL.

1.7 Purpose and Scope of the Review

This review aims to:

1. Examine the evolution and theoretical foundations of TELL.
2. Categorise and evaluate digital tools used in English learning.
3. Analyse pedagogical strategies facilitated by technology.
4. Synthesise research on learner outcomes across linguistic skills.
5. Identify challenges and opportunities.

6. Propose future directions for researchers and educators.

Through this analysis, the review situates TELL as a transformative educational paradigm aligned with contemporary learner needs.

2. Method of the Review

This review article follows a structured, systematic approach commonly used in narrative and thematic reviews within applied linguistics and educational technology research. The purpose of outlining the methodology is to ensure transparency, replicability, and academic rigour. While this is not a systematic review in the strict PRISMA sense, it adopts systematic elements, including defined criteria, targeted searches, and thematic coding.

2.1 Databases and Sources Consulted

The literature was collected from major academic databases:

- Scopus
- Web of Science (WoS)
- ERIC
- Google Scholar
- Taylor & Francis Online
- Wiley Online Library
- SpringerLink

These repositories were selected because they index high-quality, peer-reviewed journals in language learning, digital pedagogy, and education technology.

2.2 Search Strategy

A combination of Boolean search terms was used:

- “Technology-Enhanced Language Learning”
- “TELL”
- “digital pedagogy AND English”
- “AI AND language learning”
- “CALL AND MALL AND TELL”
- “virtual learning AND ESL”
- “multimodal literacy”

According to Pickering and Byrne, using multi-keyword Boolean searches increases the precision of educational research retrieval (Pickering and Byrne 312).

2.3 Time Frame

The review includes research published between January 2015 and December 2025, reflecting the most current developments in TELL, especially the rapid expansion of AI-driven tools since 2020.

2.4 Inclusion Criteria

- Studies were included if they:
- Were published in peer-reviewed journals.
- Focused on English language learning.
- Discussed digital tools, AI, technology, or online pedagogy.
- Reported empirical findings or provided theoretical insights.
- Were written in English.

2.5 Exclusion Criteria

- Studies were excluded if they:
- Focused solely on non-English languages
- Were anecdotal or opinion-based

- Did not clearly address technology in language learning
- Were published before 2015

2.6 Coding and Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis approach was adopted:

- Phase 1: Data familiarisation
- Phase 2: Generating codes (e.g., “AI-Feedback,” “Gamification,” “Multimodality”)
- Phase 3: Identifying common themes
- Phase 4: Collating themes into broader categories
- Phase 5: Synthesising patterns

This aligns with Braun and Clarke’s qualitative thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke 97).

2.7 Number of Studies Included

Of the initial 142 sources, 62 met the criteria and were included in the final synthesis.

3. Evolution of TELL: An Expanded Overview

The evolution from CALL to MALL to TELL reflects technological, pedagogical, and cognitive shifts in language education.

3.1 Stage 1: CALL (1980s–2000)

CALL emerged with early computers providing grammar drills, vocabulary lists, and reading comprehension tasks. Levy notes that CALL was grounded in structuralist views of language, with technology serving

primarily as a delivery tool (Levy 4). Interaction was limited to text-based input and fixed responses.

- Limitations of CALL
- Limited interactivity
- Teacher-centered design
- Focus on form rather than communication.
- CALL paved the way but lacked multimodality and personalisation.

3.2 Stage 2: MALL (2000–2015)

With the rise of mobile technology, language learning became portable. MALL incorporated:

- mobile apps
- SMS-based lessons
- tablet interactions
- microlearning

Kukulska-Hulme argues that MALL encouraged ubiquitous learning, as learners could study “anywhere, anytime” (Kukulska-Hulme 155).

Benefits of MALL

- Flexibility
- Spaced repetition through apps
- Push-notification reminders
- On-the-go vocabulary learning

However, MALL often focused on small, fragmented tasks.

3.3 Stage 3: TELL (2015–present)

TELL is broader and deeper than CALL or MALL.

It integrates:

- LMS (Google Classroom, Canvas)
- Gamified platforms (Kahoot, Quizizz)

- AI tools (ChatGPT, Grammarly)
- VR/AR technologies
- Speech recognition systems
- Multimodal resources (videos, podcasts, interactives)

Hubbard describes TELL as a “systemic ecosystem where technology mediates all aspects of language learning—from content delivery to assessment” (Hubbard 182).

Characteristics of TELL

- Multimodal
- Interactive
- Personalized
- Collaborative
- Networked
- Analytics-driven

3.4 Stage 4: AI-TELL (2020–future)

With AI tools, language learning becomes:

- adaptive
- predictive
- conversational
- data-driven

AI-TELL includes:

- ChatGPT chat practice
- Google Gemini reading comprehension support
- Intelligent essay scoring
- Speech recognition pronunciation training
- Adaptive recommendation systems

Schmidt argues that AI transforms instruction by providing “real-time, context-aware feedback” (Schmidt 87).

Paradigm	Focus	Technologies	Strengths	Limitations
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Table 1: Expanded Comparison of CALL, MALL, TELL, and AI-TELL

CALL	Grammar & reading	PCs, CD-ROMs	Structured exercises	Low interactivity
MALL	Flexibility	Phones, apps	Anywhere access	Small tasks, shallow learning
TELL	Multimodal learning	LMS, VR, AI tools	Holistic skill development	Digital divide
AI-TELL	Personalization	NLP, AI chatbots	Adaptive learning	Ethical concerns

4. Theoretical Framework

TELL draws from several interrelated theories that shape its pedagogical foundations.

4.1 Constructivism

Constructivism argues that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction with information, experiences, and others. According to Jonassen, technology enhances constructivist learning by providing:

- problem-solving environments
- interactive simulations
- multimodal content
- real-world tasks (Jonassen 27)

In TELL:

- Podcasts → authentic listening
- Simulations → experiential learning
- Online discussions → social construction of meaning
- Digital storytelling → creative language production
- Constructivism explains why learners perform better when engaged through multimodal, authentic tasks.

4.2 Connectivism

Siemens describes connectivism as “learning distributed across networks” (Siemens 10).

In TELL:

- Knowledge is stored across apps, websites, and AI tools
- Learners connect with global networks
- Social media becomes a language-learning resource
- Tools become extensions of cognitive processes
- Connectivism also explains how learners acquire digital literacy—by navigating multiple media sources and platforms.

4.3 Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky)

Vygotsky argues that learning occurs through:

- social interaction
- scaffolding
- mediation

Digital tools serve as mediating artefacts, helping learners move through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Examples in TELL:

- Zoom breakout rooms → collaborative speaking
- Google Docs → scaffolded writing
- AI feedback → mediated correction

Lantolf emphasises that technology extends sociocultural mediation beyond physical classrooms (Lantolf 45).

4.4 Multimodal Learning Theory

Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning states that people learn better when information is presented through both verbal and visual channels (Mayer 132).

In TELL, multimodal input includes:

- videos
- images
- animations
- text
- sound effects
- graphics
- interactive diagrams

Multimodality increases retention, reduces cognitive load, and supports diverse learning styles.

5. Review of Digital Tools in TELL

Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) integrates a wide range of digital tools that support instruction, collaboration, assessment, and autonomous learning. Based on the literature reviewed, digital tools can be grouped into seven major categories:

- Learning Management Systems (LMS)
- Communication and Collaboration Tools
- Language Learning Applications
- Feedback and Writing Support Tools
- Gamification Platforms
- Virtual/Augmented Reality Tools
- AI-Powered Tools and Intelligent Tutoring Systems

Each category brings unique pedagogical affordances and challenges.

5.1 Learning Management Systems (LMS)

Learning Management Systems constitute the backbone of technology-mediated instruction. Common platforms include

- Moodle,
- Google Classroom,
- Canvas, and
- Blackboard.

Affordances

Research highlights multiple benefits:

- Centralised learning hub: LMS platforms integrate content, assignments, grading, communication, and analytics (Watson and Watson 25).
- Supports blended and flipped learning: Teachers can upload prerecorded lectures, ensuring flexible pacing (Bergmann and Sams 42).

- Continuous tracking: Automated logs help teachers monitor participation and progress (Selwyn 79).
- Facilitates formative assessment: Quizzes, rubrics, and feedback options improve assessment quality.

Challenges

- Varying digital literacy among teachers
- Navigation difficulties for beginners
- Over-dependence on platform availability
- Limited personalisation compared to AI tools

5.2 Communication and Collaboration Tools

Synchronous and asynchronous communication tools—such as Zoom, MS Teams, Google Meet, Slack, WhatsApp, and Padlet—have become essential components of modern language education.

Affordances

- Authentic communication: Learners practice real-time speaking and listening (Hampel 189).
- Breakout rooms: Enable peer collaboration and small-group tasks.
- Asynchronous flexibility: Messages, voice notes, and shared documents provide extended practice.
- Reduced anxiety: Students often feel more relaxed speaking online than in physical classrooms (Yanguas 108).

Challenges

- Internet instability can disrupt oral activities
- Online distraction

- Unequal device access

Table 2: Communication Tools and Their Pedagogical Uses

5.3 Language Learning Mobile Apps

Mobile apps like Duolingo, Busuu, Memrise, and Babbel support micro-learning and personalised vocabulary development.

Affordances

- Gamification: Points, levels, and rewards increase motivation (Loewen et al. 266).

Tool	Key Features	Pedagogical Use	Source
Zoom	Breakout rooms, screen share	Speaking, presentations	Hampel 2015
Teams	Collaboration channels	Project-based learning	Garrison 2017
WhatsApp	Voice notes, chat	Informal learning, vocabulary	Bouhnik and Dshen, 2014
Padlet	Idea boards	Brainstorming & peer feedback	Ashcroft 2021

- Spaced repetition: Enhances vocabulary retention.

- Personalised pathways: Adaptive difficulty responds to learner performance.
- Short sessions: Suitable for low-attention-span learners.
- Scholarly Insight
- Loewen's large-scale study on Duolingo shows significant vocabulary gains (Loewen et al. 254).
- Busuu's social correction feature increases writing accuracy (Richards 72).

Challenges

- Limited grammar depth
- Overemphasis on repetition
- Not suitable as the sole learning method

5.4 Writing Support & Automated Feedback Tools

The emergence of AI-powered writing tools has transformed how learners practice writing.

Major Tools

- Grammarly
- QuillBot
- ChatGPT
- Reverso
- Google Bard/Gemini writing assist.

Affordances

- Instant feedback: Improves accuracy (Li 2020).
- Reduced anxiety: Learners write more when feedback is automated (Wang 3).

- Enhanced self-correction: Tools highlight error patterns.
- Support for L2 lexical development: Synonym suggestions expand vocabulary.
- Scholarly Insight
- Li argues that automated writing evaluation increases syntactic complexity and lexical richness (Li 2020).

Challenges

- Over-reliance on tools may reduce critical thinking
- Ethical issues: originality, plagiarism
- Tools sometimes misinterpret context

5.5 Gamification Platforms

Gamified learning is one of the most researched components of TELL.

Major Tools

- Kahoot
- Quizizz
- Nearpod
- Classcraft

Affordances

- Increases motivation and classroom participation (Dervan 402).
- Encourages friendly competition.
- Offers immediate feedback.
- Supports vocabulary learning and content review.
- Research Insight

- Kahoot significantly enhances learner engagement and enjoyment (Plump and LaRosa 152).

Challenges

- Overemphasis on competition
- Surface-level learning, if it is misused

5.6 Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR)

VR/AR tools are increasingly used to simulate immersive environments.

Major Tools

- Mondly VR
- Immerse
- Google Expeditions
- AR flashcards

Affordances

- Immersive contexts: Learners practice language in simulated environments (Lan 113).
- Reduced inhibition: VR lowers speaking anxiety.
- Enhanced cultural learning: Virtual tours facilitate cultural exposure.

Challenges

- High cost
- Specialized equipment
- Limited institutional access

5.7 AI-Powered Tools and Intelligent Tutoring Systems

AI-driven systems are the latest shift toward adaptive, personalised learning.

Major Tools

- ChatGPT
- Google Gemini
- Speech recognition tutors
- Adaptive grammar tutors
- AI pronunciation coaches

Affordances

- Provides context-aware conversational practice
- Generates explanations, examples, and personalised tasks
- Offers pronunciation assessment and sentiment analysis
- Supports multimodal learning

Scholarly Insight

- Jin notes that AI chatbots increase fluency and communicative confidence (Jin 31).
- Schmidt describes AI as enabling “real-time, dynamic feedback loops” (Schmidt 87).

Challenges

- Ethical concerns: data privacy, copyright
- Overreliance on AI-generated content
- Potential inaccuracies

6. TELL Pedagogical Strategies

Table 3: Key Points of TELL Pedagogical Strategies

Strategy	Key Features	Benefits	Major Studies
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Strategy	Key Features	Benefits	Major Studies
Flipped	Learn the content before class	More speaking time	Hung 2015
Blended	Mix online & offline	Flexible, multimodal	Sun 2018
TBDLL	Digital tasks	Authentic communication	Lee 2016
Multimodal	Images + audio + text	Lowers cognitive load	Mayer 2009
Collaborative	Peer work online	Improved writing	Storch 2013
Gamification	Game mechanics	Motivation & engagement	Dervan 2020
AI Pedagogy	Adaptive, personalised	Fluency, accuracy	Jin 2021

7. Learner Outcomes in TELL

Table 4: Key Points of Learner Outcomes in TELL

Outcome Type	Key Effects	Supporting Studies
Listening	Stronger comprehension, better phonological awareness	Chen 2019; Li and Liu 2020

Outcome Type	Key Effects	Supporting Studies
Speaking	Higher fluency, reduced anxiety	Jin 2021; Lan 2018
Reading	Better vocabulary recognition, deeper engagement	Park 2018; Abraham 2016
Writing	Improved accuracy, richer vocabulary	Li 2020; Storch 2013
Cognitive	Enhanced memory, attention	Mayer 2009; Nation 2013
Affective	Higher motivation, lower anxiety	Loewen et al.; Sun 2018
Behavioral	Increased autonomy, collaboration	Reinders 2016; Swain and Lapkin 2015

8. Implications for Teaching and Curriculum Design

A. Rethinking Pedagogical Roles

- In a TELL environment, teachers shift from:
- transmitters → facilitators
- evaluators → mentors
- content deliverers → learning designers

Garrison notes that technology “reshapes teacher presence into a more orchestral role” (Garrison 12).

B. Curriculum Integration

TELL should not be inserted after curriculum design; it must be part of the foundation.

Effective integration requires:

- learning outcomes aligned with digital tools
- assessment that includes multimodal tasks
- clear rubrics for online collaboration
- policy consistency across departments

C. Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Teacher training must include:

- digital literacy
- multimodal pedagogy
- assessment training for AI-mediated work

Hubbard emphasises structured teacher training as a “non-negotiable component of CALL/TELL success” (Hubbard 183).

D. Assessment Reform

- Traditional exams cannot assess:
- multimodal production
- online collaboration
- AI-influenced writing

Assessment must:

- include digital portfolios
- integrate analytics responsibly
- evaluate process, not only product

9. Conclusion

Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) has emerged as a transformative force in contemporary language pedagogy, reshaping how learners access

knowledge, interact with content, and construct meaning. Through digital multimodality, intelligent feedback systems, mobile learning ecosystems, and collaborative online platforms, TELL supports a personalised, authentic, and learner-centred learning experience. Research consistently demonstrates improvements across linguistic domains—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—as well as gains in cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains. Learners become more autonomous, motivated, and engaged when digital tools are meaningfully integrated into curriculum and instruction.

However, the rapid expansion of TELL also presents challenges. Issues such as unequal access, teacher preparedness, cognitive overload, privacy concerns, and over-reliance on automation highlight the need for thoughtful implementation. Sustainable integration of technology requires institutional support, ethical policies, teacher training, and pedagogically informed tool selection. TELL is not a replacement for human pedagogy; rather, it is a powerful extension that amplifies teachers' roles and enhances learners' agency.

Future directions point toward deeper integration of artificial intelligence, immersive virtual environments, analytics-driven personalisation, and transmodal communication. As technological ecosystems evolve, TELL will continue to redefine the boundaries of language learning. Ultimately, the goal is to create inclusive, ethical, and contextually rich learning environments where technology acts not as a substitute but as a scaffold—

empowering learners to communicate, collaborate, and thrive in an increasingly digital world.

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