1

FROST'S FORESTS AND FIELDS: AN ECOCRITICAL ANALYSIS OF RURAL NATURE

Ms. Manju George, *Academic Lecturer, Bayan College, Oman/ P. HD Scholar, DBU, India*
Dr. Amit Dhawan, *Associate Professor, DBU, India*

Abstract

This paper presents an ecocritical reading of Robert Frost's poetry, engaging with the implications of the digital divide and situating his work within contemporary debates on environmental awareness and technological alienation. Frost's vivid portrayals of forests, fields, and rural life invite readers into a direct, sensory relationship with the natural world. Far from being a backdrop, these landscapes function as active agents intertwined with human experience, reflecting a deep ecological consciousness. Poems such as "Birches," "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," and "Mending Wall" critique human intrusion and underscore nature's intrinsic value. Alongside this ecological focus, the study contrasts Frost's analog sensibility with the digitized experiences of modern readers. His emphasis on physical presence, manual labor, and contemplative solitude challenges the disembodied, fast-paced nature of digital life. In doing so, Frost's poetry emerges as a counter-narrative to the alienation fostered by technological saturation, revealing a dual estrangement from both nature and meaningful textual engagement.

By integrating ecocritical and digital theory, this paper repositions Frost as a poet of enduring relevance, one who anticipates ecological crisis and critiques the loss of embodied experience. His work urges a reconsideration of our relationship with the environment and digital culture, reaffirming his significance in an era marked by environmental degradation and digital saturation.

Keywords: *Robert Frost, Ecocriticism, Environmental Consciousness, Digital Divide, Nature and Technology, Alienation, Embodied Experience, Pastoral Poetry, Human-Nature, Relations, Contemporary Relevance.*

Introduction

Eco-criticism, at its heart, is more than a study of nature in literature; it is a reflection on how stories, poems, and narratives shape our understanding of the world we inhabit. It asks us to look closely at how writers represent the earth, its creatures, and its fragile ecosystems, while also questioning the moral and political implications of humanity's presence within it. The digital divide, meanwhile, represents another kind of separation, one not between humans and nature, but between those who are connected to the digital world and those left on its margins. It highlights the inequalities of access to technology, information, and communication that define our modern age. When read together, ecocriticism and digital studies invite a deeper inquiry into what it means to be connected or disconnected from the environment, from technology, and, ultimately, from one another.

Robert Frost's poetry stands at a meaningful crossroads between these worlds. His work, grounded in the rural landscapes of New England, celebrates a tangible connection to the natural environment, its sounds, textures, and silences. Poems like "Birches," "Mending Wall," and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" reveal an intimacy with the earth that goes beyond pastoral admiration. Frost's woods, walls, and snow-laden paths become spaces where human presence and natural order interact, sometimes harmoniously and sometimes in quiet conflict. His reflections on solitude, labor, and the human impulse to

mend, build, or pause in wonder offer insights that feel remarkably relevant to our digitally mediated lives today. In an era when technology accelerates time and often distances us from direct experience, Frost's poetry invites a return to slowness, to physical engagement, and to mindful observation. His verses remind readers of the necessity of being present, of touching the bark, hearing the wind, and feeling the weight of snow. Seen through what may be called an eco-digital lens, Frost's poetry bridges the ecological and the technological, encouraging a renewed sense of balance between the natural and virtual worlds. Ultimately, this blended approach repositions Frost as not only a poet of rural New England but as a thinker whose work speaks to the twenty-first century's crises of connection, environmental, and digital alike. His verse urges us to confront a dual alienation: from the earth that sustains us and from the technologies that increasingly mediate our sense of reality. Through eco-digital criticism, Frost's poetry becomes a space for reflection and restoration, a guide for reclaiming authentic relationships with both nature and the tools that shape our modern existence.

Literature Review

Scholarly discussions of Robert Frost have long centered on his portrayals of rural life, solitude, and the spiritual resonance of the natural world. Early critics such as Lawrance Thompson and Lionel Trilling viewed him as a traditional pastoral poet, an observer of New England's moral and psychological landscapes. Yet, as literary studies evolved, so too did readings of Frost. Scholars began to notice that his depictions of nature were far from static; they carried an ecological awareness that reflected the dynamic relationship between humans and their environment. John Elder, for instance, observes that Frost's landscapes reveal a "reciprocal relationship between human consciousness and the living world" (122). Similarly, Joseph M. DeFalco notes Frost's persistent attempt to balance humanity's desire for order with nature's indifference, making him an early, if unintentional, environmental thinker.

More recent critics have expanded this view further. Scholars such as Richard Poirier and Jeffrey S. Cramer suggest that Frost's rural simplicity conceals complex ethical and ecological tensions. In "Mending Wall," for example, the act of rebuilding a boundary becomes a reflection on the ethics of separation between people, communities, and even between humans and the natural world. Likewise, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" has been reinterpreted as a moment of stillness that invites ecological mindfulness, a pause to sense one's embeddedness in nature rather than dominance over it. Glen Love's influential idea that literature functions within a broader ecological system rather than as a mere reflection of culture deepens this understanding. From this perspective, Frost's poems become living expressions of environmental consciousness, prompting readers to rethink their relationship with the earth.

Parallel to these literary developments, the emergence of digital humanities has opened new possibilities for interpreting texts in the age of technology. Scholars like N. Katherine Hayles and Matthew Kirschenbaum have explored how digital media reshape our ways of reading and understanding literature. Meanwhile, studies by Pippa Norris and Mark Warschauer on the "digital divide" have drawn attention to the inequalities of technological access and literacy. These disparities, who is connected and who remains excluded, echo the very divisions Frost quietly interrogates in his poetry. His meditations on walls, isolation, and belonging mirror the ongoing questions of who participates in, or is shut out from, both natural and digital spaces.

Recent interdisciplinary studies continue to strengthen these connections. Cisneros et al. (2023) examined how digital media and mapping technologies can empower marginalized groups in environmental movements, showing technology's potential to promote inclusion rather than deepen exclusion. Similarly, Miras, Ruiz-Baños, and Gómez-Trigueros (2023) revealed how the digital divide continues to shape education during and after the pandemic, reinforcing systemic inequalities. On the literary front, Mantara, Giovani, and Narahawarin (2024) revisited Frost's poetry through posthuman and

climate change perspectives, emphasizing nature's agency rather than treating it as a passive backdrop. Together, these insights highlight the growing need to bring ecological and digital thinking into dialogue.

Despite the breadth of research in both eco-critical and digital fields, few studies have sought to merge these frameworks in the study of Frost's work. This paper addresses that gap through the lens of eco-digital criticism. a hybrid approach that examines how Frost's tactile, sensory, and experiential world contrasts with the abstract, mediated realities of the digital age. By juxtaposing Frost's grounded vision with the disembodied nature of modern technology, the study repositions him as a poet whose reflections on disconnection, whether from the land or from one another, speak powerfully to our own time. Frost's verse, once read as purely pastoral, now resonates as an early meditation on the human cost of separation, reminding us that both ecological and digital alienation stem from the same loss of touch with the real.

Methodology

The present study takes an interdisciplinary path, blending eco-criticism and digital humanities to form what this paper terms eco-digital criticism, a framework that explores how literature reflects the intertwined relationship between nature, technology, and human consciousness. This approach opens new ways of understanding Robert Frost's poetry, which captures both the intimacy of human interaction with the natural world and the growing sense of distance that characterizes our technologically mediated lives. From the eco-critical perspective, the study draws on the insights of Cheryll Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell, and Greg Garrard, who view literature as a vital means of understanding environmental ethics and awareness. Glotfelty's definition of eco-criticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" underscores the importance of seeing nature not as a passive setting but as an active participant in shaping thought, feeling, and moral insight. When this idea is applied to Frost's work, his woods, walls, and birches become living presences that engage the human spirit, prompting reflection on the fragile bond between humanity and the natural world.

The digital humanities dimension of the study borrows from theorists such as N. Katherine Hayles, Sherry Turkle, and Matthew Kirschenbaum, whose ideas help situate Frost within modern conversations about technology and human experience. Hayles's concept of technogenesis, the mutual evolution of humans and digital technologies, offers a striking counterpoint to Frost's vision of organic interdependence between people and nature. Meanwhile, Turkle's notion of "the flight from conversation" speaks to the emotional isolation that comes with digital life, a disconnection Frost implicitly challenges through his emphasis on presence, labor, and sensory awareness.

Methodologically, the study engages in close readings of four key poems, "Mending Wall," "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," "Birches," and "The Road Not Taken." Each poem is examined through two interpretive lenses: Eco-critical analysis, which focuses on moral values and the relationship between humans and nature, and Digital hermeneutics, which interprets Frost's tactile imagery and contemplative pace as responses to, or anticipations of, the detachment created by technological mediation. Through this dual reading, the study reveals that Frost's poetry not only speaks to environmental ethics but also anticipates the alienation that arises in the digital age. His work becomes a timeless guide for thinking about balance, between connection and solitude, engagement and escape, the virtual and the real.

Findings

"Mending Wall" (1914) transforms an ordinary rural task into a profound meditation on human boundaries and belonging. The speaker's observation that "Something there is that doesn't love a wall" (Frost 1) subtly questions humanity's impulse to divide and control. From an eco-critical angle, nature's resistance to the wall, seen in the gaps and fallen stones, becomes a quiet act of defiance against human imposition. Through a digital lens, however, the wall takes on a symbolic resonance: it mirrors the digital divide, separating those with technological access from those without. The neighbor's assertion, "Good

fences make good neighbors" (Frost 27), reflects a mindset of exclusion rather than connection, echoing modern debates about privacy, access, and inequality. Frost's dialogue between the two men thus becomes an allegory for our age, reminding readers that both ecological and digital boundaries must be negotiated with empathy and ethical awareness.

"Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" (1923) captures a rare moment of quiet reflection. The speaker's pause before the dark woods represents a gesture of reverence toward the natural world, an awareness of beauty, mystery, and stillness. From an ecocritical standpoint, this moment illustrates respect for the nonhuman, a recognition that nature holds its own rhythms beyond human productivity. Viewed digitally, the poem's slow cadence and repeated line, "And miles to go before I sleep" (Frost 15–16), offers a counterpoint to the restless, always-connected pace of modern life. Frost's deliberate stillness becomes an act of resistance, reminding readers of the need for presence over performance, for reflection in an age of endless scrolling.

"Birches" (1916) beautifully links natural imagery with human aspiration. The birch trees, bent by ice but not broken, become symbols of resilience and renewal. The boy who climbs toward the sky and then returns to earth enacts a cycle of escape and return, a balance that mirrors ecological harmony. Through a digital perspective, this imagery resonates with our own oscillation between virtual immersion and real-world grounding. The speaker's wish to "get away from earth awhile / And then come back to it and begin over" (Frost 48–49) captures the allure of digital escapism but also the deep human need to reconnect with the tangible world. Frost's vision is not anti-technology but restorative: he invites a rhythm of engagement that values both imagination and embodiment.

In "The Road Not Taken" (1916), the "yellow wood" becomes more than a metaphor for choice; it represents the natural world's role in shaping human decision-making. Ecocritical readings reveal how the forest's subtle cues influence the traveler's moral and emotional journey. The diverging paths, both worn and covered with leaves, symbolize the ecological consequences of human actions, reminding readers that every choice leaves a trace on the landscape. The seasonal imagery of autumn underscores the natural cycle of change and decay, situating human decisions within the broader flow of life. While the poem is often interpreted as a reflection on individualism, an eco-critical lens reframes it as an acknowledgment of interdependence: that even our most personal choices are rooted in, and limited by. the natural environment.

By bringing eco-criticism and digital hermeneutics together, this study shows how Frost's poetry speaks to the dual estrangement of our time, our disconnection from nature and from one another through technology. His verses, grounded in physicality and patience, offer a timeless reminder that meaning arises not in separation but in relationship. Through ecodigital criticism, Frost's poetry emerges as both a warning and a guide, urging us to restore balance, slow down, and rediscover the world that sustains us, both materially and spiritually.

Discussions

Eco-criticism and digital humanities may have grown out of different intellectual traditions, yet both are deeply concerned with the same underlying issue: exclusion. Where eco- criticism exposes humanity's alienation from nature, digital humanities draw attention to the widening gap between those who are digitally connected and those who are left behind. When viewed together, these fields reveal how disconnection, whether from the earth or from one another, shapes modern life. Reading Robert Frost through this shared lens brings new life to his familiar imagery of walls, roads, and trees. What once seemed like purely rural symbols of New England life now speak directly to contemporary anxieties about belonging, access, and the fragile balance between connection and isolation in both ecological and technological worlds.

In "Mending Wall," Frost turns a simple, habitual act, two neighbors repairing a boundary after

winter, into a reflection on humanity's instinct to divide rather than unite. The wall, which physically separates the men, becomes a powerful metaphor for the barriers that define modern existence: the walls we build between ourselves and nature, and the invisible lines that divide those with technological access from those without. The speaker's observation that "Something there is that doesn't love a wall" (Frost 11) suggests that both nature and human empathy resist such separations. The poem quietly urges readers to rethink what connection really means, whether between people, communities, or ecosystems, and to recognize that not all boundaries protect; some merely confine.

Similarly, "The Road Not Taken" transforms an image of diverging paths into a meditation on opportunity, inequality, and human agency. The "yellow wood" represents both a natural landscape and a social metaphor, one that mirrors the unequal routes available to people, whether in environmental stewardship or in digital access. The traveler's uncertain choice reflects the moral weight of living in a world where every decision leaves an imprint on the land, on society, and increasingly, in the digital realm. Frost's quiet ambiguity reminds us that progress always involves trade-offs and that no path remains untouched by human influence.

In "Birches," Frost writes, "I'd like to get away from earth awhile / And then come back to it and begin over" (lines 48–49). This longing to escape, to transcend the burdens of everyday life, feels strikingly familiar today. Many of us seek temporary refuge from ecological anxiety or digital overload, only to rediscover the grounding need to return to reality. As Dr. S. Ambika notes, Frost's poetry "calls for a monistic identification with the ecosphere," a reminder that true fulfillment lies in unity rather than separation (Ambika 54). Seen through an eco-digital lens, the poem's oscillation between ascent and return becomes a metaphor for balance, between engagement with technology and reconnection with the natural world. Frost's vision invites us not to reject progress but to approach it with humility, recognizing that both nature and technology are part of our shared human story.

Ultimately, Frost's poetry, when read through eco-digital criticism, speaks powerfully to the twenty-first century. His landscapes are no longer just pastoral scenes; they become reflections of our own digital and ecological dilemmas. In his world, walls can become bridges, and the distance between the tangible and the virtual can be narrowed through mindfulness and ethical awareness. Frost reminds us that true progress lies not in domination or disconnection, but in balance, in learning to live harmoniously with both the earth beneath our feet and the technologies that shape our evolving sense of being.

Conclusion

Robert Frost's poetry stands as a meeting ground between ecological insight and human understanding, a rare harmony that speaks powerfully to the challenges of the digital age. His images of woods, walls, and winding paths are more than poetic landscapes; they are invitations to reflect on how we live, connect, and care for the world around us. Frost reminds us that nature is not a backdrop to human life but an active presence that shapes our emotions, ethics, and sense of belonging. When viewed through the lens of eco-digital criticism, Frost's poems take on renewed relevance. His grounded, tactile verse offers an antidote to the disembodied rhythms of modern technology. In his world, meaning is created through touch, rhythm, and reflection, values that digital culture often risks losing. By blending ecological consciousness with digital awareness, this study highlights how Frost's poetry becomes a bridge between two forms of disconnection: our separation from nature and our growing distance from one another through technology.

Frost's art does not reject progress; instead, it urges a measured coexistence, a way to move forward without losing touch with what makes us human. His call is not merely to rebuild walls but to mend them with purpose and compassion, to pause among the woods in awareness rather than escape, and to swing among the birches with imagination tempered by humility. In a world marked by environmental crisis and digital saturation, Frost's voice remains clear and necessary. His poetry reminds us that renewal begins not

with dominance or division but with empathy, presence, and balance. As readers in the twenty-first century, we are invited to see his verse not as a relic of a simpler time, but as a living guide, one that shows how to reconnect with both the earth and each other in spirit, creativity, and hope.

Bibliography

- Amer, Enas Subhi. "Literature and Ecology: Promoting an Eco-Consciousness through Children's Literature." International Journal of Language and Literary Studies, vol. 4, no. 3, 2022, pp. 192-201.
- Ambika, S. The Ecological Consciousness in Robert Frost's Poetry. Emerald, 2021.
- Berry, David M. "Post-Digital Humanities: Computation and Cultural Critique in the Arts and Humanities." arXiv, 1 May 2024, doi:10.48550/arXiv.2407.05922.
- Cisneros, L., T. Campbell, N. Freidenfelds, A. Lindemann, H. Elliot-Famularo, C. Chadwick, D. Dickson, and B-Y. Park. "Eco-digital Storytelling: Engaging Historically Excluded Populations in Environmental Action through Mentoring, Geospatial Technology, and Digital Media Storytelling." Frontiers in Education, vol. 7, 2023, article 1083064.
- DeFalco, Joseph M. The Hero in Robert Frost. University of Kentucky Press, 1963.
- Elder, John. Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature. University of Illinois Press, 1985.
- Frost, Robert. The Poetry of Robert Frost: The Collected Poems, Complete and Unabridged. Edited by Edward Connery Lathem, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm, editors. The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology. University of Georgia Press, 1996.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis. University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Kalekar, Sanjay Shriram. Ecology, Ecocritical Concerns and Sustainability in Selected Poems of Robert Frost. 30 June 2023, version v1, Zenodo, https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8133769.
- Kirschenbaum, Matthew G. Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination. MIT Press, 2008.
- Love, Glen A. Practical Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology, and the Environment. University of Virginia Press, 2003.
- Mantara, Arin, Evelin Giovani, and Marageretha F. Narahawarin. "Ecocriticism on Robert Frost: Investigating Posthuman Thinking, Climate Change, and Diverse Planetary Concern." Nusantara Journal of Multidisciplinary Science, vol. 2, no. 3, Oct. 2024, pp. 666-675.
- Miras, Sebastián, Mónica Ruiz-Bañuls, and Isabel María Gómez-Trigueros. "Implications of the Digital Divide: A Systematic Review of Its Impact in the Educational Field." Journal of Technology and Science Education, vol. 13, no. 3, 2023, pp. 936-950.
- Norris, Pippa. Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Poirier, Richard. Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing. Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Turkle, Sherry. Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other. Basic Books, 2011.
- Warschauer, Mark. Technology and Social Inclusion: Rethinking the Digital Divide. MIT Press, 2003.

2

WHISPERS FROM THE HILL: PORTRAIT OF MARGINALIZED ELEMENTS IN MAMANG DAI'S THE BLACK HILL

Sajana J R, *Research Scholar, B S Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai - 600048*
Sajanajr_english_july2024@crescent.education, 9994956533
Dr. Muththamizh Selvi S I, *Assistant Professor, B S Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai – 600048*

Abstract

Mamang Dai's novel The Black Hill intricately explores multiple layers of marginalization experienced by indigenous communities in Northeast India during British colonial rule. This study examines the novel's depictions of cultural, gender, and linguistic marginalization. It illustrates how colonialism causes significant cultural loss by upsetting tribal traditions, uprooting communities from their ancestral lands, and weakening their long-standing spiritual ties. The painful experiences of women in the novel are clear evidence of their marginalization. Additionally, the impact of colonialism and missionaries plays a vital role in this novel. English power silenced their Indigenous knowledge systems and histories. This research paper highlights how local communities and their customs are marginalized, forgotten, or silenced. This study aims to analyze how Dai represents these marginalized voices, shedding light on their histories, cultures, and the challenges they face in a rapidly changing world.

Keywords: *Mamang Dai, Marginalization, Colonialism, Indigenous knowledge, Culture.*

Mamang Dai is a poet, novelist and journalist who is known for her thoughtful engagement with the culture, history and ecology of Northeast India. Her indigenous roots as an Adi tribe are reflected through folklore, oral traditions, and the natural landscapes of Arunachal Pradesh. Her work explores the themes of identity, displacement, marginalization, and confrontation within tribal societies under colonial and modern pressure. She has emerged as a powerful voice for the indigenous communities in Indian literature. Her unique regional style and feminist perspective have earned her a wider audience and made her a remarkable writer in Indian literature.

Dai's The Black Hill revisits the nineteenth-century Arunachal Pradesh, where the interconnected network of relationships, values, norms, and cultures was eroded by colonial expansion, missionary activity and inter-tribal conflict. The novel deals with historical occurrences such as the execution of tribal leader Kajinsha and the mysterious desertion of French Jesuit Priest Father Nicolas Krick, which are intertwined with tensions between tribes and British colonial expansion. Tribal customs, beliefs, oral traditions, and their strong connection to the land are intensely depicted in the book. The major themes discussed in the novel are cultural identity, displacement, colonial intrusion, and resistance.

Minorities are representatives of marginalized communities that have been ill-treated by society. This research paper investigates women, culture, oral tradition, beliefs, and religion, which are considered minorities in the novel The Black Hill. English and Christian missionaries treat the tribes as peripheries and consider themselves superior. Here, women are considered the most vulnerable beings in a patriarchal society, and they face dangers due to the operation of the earth by men.

A male-dominated society considers women and nature as objects of possession and exploits them with their power and superiority; they also believe that women and nature are created for the welfare of men. Patriarchal society denied their identity and diminished their rights and wealth, which depicted their status in the world. Here, the researcher highlights the marginalization of women through the socio-cultural and political eminence of women in the indigenous Adi, Abor, and Mishmee communities. The majority of female characters in the novel are restricted by gender and tradition. In a masculine society, women are often portrayed as objects or scapegoats, and their purpose in life is to take care of the family, have male children, and carry out the social rules and traditions in silence. As stated in the novel, "If a woman looks after the house, prepares food and feeds her husband and her children, she will be loved, and she will be happy" (Dai 48).

The suppression and suffering of women are materialized in the name of sex, culture, power, and beliefs. This is portrayed through the female characters in the novel: Gimur, Auli, Chhomu, and Yenjee. Dai's portrayal of Yanjee as "a slave woman kept by Lamet; he had bought her from the plains people, perhaps, or from Burmese traders across the border" (Dai 73) gives strong proof of women's marginalization. Men treat women as objects, and are not ready to understand their emotional state. The cultural belief that women are primarily responsible for bearing children, especially male heirs, is specified with the words of Marpa, "You should have more sons… What is a man without sons?" (Dai 120). Through these lines, the researcher explains their loss of social status and personal freedom, providing additional evidence of their marginalization. However, women in this novel face double marginalization within Indigenous patriarchies and colonial discourses.

Colonial policies excluded women from political and legal power structures and imposed the idea that men are superior to women. Consequently, women who habitually held the roles of knowledge keepers and environmental curators have found their positions destabilized. Colonialism created a new gender order that treated women as inferior and weak. Here, colonialism violates tribal women's autonomy and authority, while their own communities worsen their bodies and identities. The research paper states that the harsh realities of women's dual oppression as colonial dominance and internal patriarchy have occurred in the name of culture.

Life is expressed through culture. It is a way of life. People in different places have unique identities because of their culture. Tradition and culture are unavoidable aspects of existence, as stated by Grayling: "Culture is what separates us from the rest of the living world" (Grayling). Similarly, the tribal characters in the novel try to preserve their oral traditions, which are their indigenous history and memory. Myths and stories shape people's lives, passed down through generations. Oral tradition has allowed people to gain knowledge of the past and history. Bruce A. Rosenberg explained this as, "it is the transmission of cultural items from one member to another, or others. These items are heard, stored in memory, and, when appropriate, recalled at the moment of subsequent transmission" (Rosenberg). Colonial intrusion weakens tribal culture as a periphery and portrays it as a barbaric culture.

The Adi and Mishmee tribes of Arunachal Pradesh highlight their resistance to cultural dominance and British colonial intrusion into their lands. Here, the researcher critically examines how indigenous culture has been marginalized. The character who exemplifies cultural marginalization in the novel is Father Nicolas Krick. The main objective behind him is to spread Christianity and Western values, which he imagines as superior to all cultures, and is stated as, "His mission was to keep an eye on the restless tribes inhabiting the hills and protect British interests. The Abor have been told about our laws. We'll see what happens" (Dai 4). This cultural imposition is portrayed as an attempt to convert and erase Indigenous identities and histories.

Through the misrepresentation and distortion of tribal history in colonial records, the novel tackles the trauma of cultural marginalization. Christian missionaries try to do the "colonization of the mind"

(Ngugi 16). They consider the tribes' beliefs and myths to be unnatural and unworthy. They consider this as a periphery. Dai portrays that Gimur went to Nago's house to know the reality of the French Priest. There she understands that “the minds of our people are easily stolen” (Dai 191). The conversation between Gimur and Lendem explains their loss of identity. Lendem, who opposed the entry of strangers in the village, now said that “the priest is a man just like us. If he wants to know something about us, why should we be afraid? We are honest people. If we speak the truth, Donyi Polo will protect us” (Dai 192).

The researcher also deals with the trauma of cultural marginalization through tensions in cross-tribal marriages. Kajinsha and Gimur love each other. Both are from different cultures and traditions. When Gimur enters Kajinsha's house, she faces cultural displacement. It has been stated as follows: “Gimur had never seen a house like this; it was different from the houses of Mebo because the entire building was divided into compartments” (Dai 75). Here, Gimur struggles to understand the new culture and tradition, where she faces cultural marginalization.

The researcher examines cultural marginalization through various symbols in the novel. Nature and landscape speak of tribal memory and a sense of belonging. However, the loss of culture is symbolized as the loss of landscape through colonization and modernization. Dai portrays the importance of land with these words, “What is land? Why is it so precious? 'Even her mother agreed that the land was everything, … It is where you were born!'” (70). The tribes want to protect their lands. They do not want to see outsiders on their land. When their own tribes help the colonizers, Kajinsha states that “it is important to teach our own brothers a lesson, they are giving up our land and showing strangers the way to come here” (Dai 8). Even then, the colonizers enter with crosses and guns to conquer not only their land but also their spirit. This paves the way for the erosion of culture and the imposition of marginalism. These symbols emphasize how Indigenous communities fight against cultural repression to protect their memory and identity. The Shaman said, “The land belongs to us. It is the soul of our ancestors. Where would we be, what would we do, without this land?” (Dai 70)

Rivers and mountains are natural features that represent the strong cultural ties that indigenous people have to their homeland. Local culture and identity are erased and marginalized when outsiders name or control these locations. When outsiders map and rename mountains and rivers, it signifies cultural erasure, as these features represent the indigenous people's deep ties to their land and identity. Even their natural features were considered as margins and stated as “sailing up a long river that the British called the Burhampooter, to a place called Gowhatee” (Dai 41). Henceforth, William Cronon's “The Trouble with Wilderness” gives insight into this disruption. Cronon argues, “The imposition of Western environmental values often disregards indigenous ecological practices, undermining traditional ways of living with the land” (Cronon 79). This imposition is seen in the paper, where the introduction of missionaries weakens indigenous spiritual customs and changes the locals' relationship with the land.

Next, the researcher depicts language marginalization, which was a significant issue experienced by the indigenous tribes of Arunachal Pradesh during British colonial rule. Despite having rich oral traditions and speaking their native tongues, the tribes know very little or no English. Native languages were marginalized and shown to be inferior as a result of colonial authorities' imposition of English as the language of instruction and communication. Dai explained this context as, "the East India government had changed the prevalent use of Sanskrit in native primary schools and introduced English as the medium better suited for imparting 'useful knowledge'" (Dai 52). These tensions created a barrier between the colonizers and the tribal people of the region.

The conflict between native beliefs and British colonial missionaries' attempts to impose Christianity illustrates religious marginalization. Here, the missionaries attempted to replace traditional spiritual practices and healing rituals with Christianity and medicine. When they understood that the tribes were deeply tied to nature and unaware of drugs and medicine, they used it as a tool to colonize them

religiously. The marginalization of religion is evaluated through the character Krick, who explains that he "realised that the people here had no faith in drugs and medical diagnosis" (Dai 178). They slowly spread that their religion is bound by myths and beliefs, instead of believing in a healer. Thus, they have experienced spiritual alienation as a result of colonial authorities' attempts to eradicate these customs and dismiss them as superstition.

Christian missionaries' hard work to prove their religion as superior is depicted through the lines, "began by organizing morning prayers, study, mass, and catechism for children. He gave holy communion, prayed and sang with them, blessed and baptized two children" (Dai 57). Even then, the tribes maintain their spiritual heritage by carrying on with their oral traditions and rituals.

In conclusion, "Whispers from the Hill: Portrait of Marginalized Elements in Mamang Dai's The Black Hill" demonstrates how Mamang Dai uses her personal narrative to draw attention to the tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh's battles against linguistic, cultural, and gender marginalization. The researcher gives voice to people who have been ignored in history books in the name of customs and beliefs. Tribal rituals, oral histories, and the land all come to represent the anguish of being marginalized and the fortitude to hold onto one's identity. The characters in the novel are incredibly resilient, clinging to their culture and memories despite attempts by outsiders to alter their way of life. Dai's writing reminds everyone of the value of preserving and honouring diverse cultures, particularly those that run the risk of being overlooked or inaccurately depicted.

Works Cited

- Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness". Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature, edited by William Cronon, W. W. Norton, 1995, pp. 69-90.
- Dai, Mamang. The Black Hill. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2014.
- Deloria Jr, Vine. God Is Red: A Native View of Religion. Fulcrum Publishing, 2003.
- Garrard, Greg. Ecocriticism. Routledge, 2012.
- Grayling,AC: What makes us human? httpps://www.newstatsman.com/culture/culture/2013/05.
- Rosenberg, Bruce A. (1987). The Complexity of Oral Tradition. Oral Tradition 2(1), 73-90. Retrieved from http:/journal.oraltadition.org/
- Thiong'o, Ngugi Wa. "Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature". Edited by James Currey, 1986, pp.16.

3

THE SPECTRAL AND THE SUBVERSIVE: DECONSTRUCTING PATRIARCHAL LOGICS THROUGH THE MARGINALIZED FEMININE IN TED HUGHES'S CROW AND GAUDETE

Shanavas TR, *Research Scholar, Desh Bhagat University, Punjab*

Abstract

This paper investigates the representation and construction of the marginalized feminine within the mythopoeic landscapes of Ted Hughes's Crow (1970) and Gaudete (1977). Moving beyond biographical interpretations, it contends that Hughes strategically engages with and subverts ancient mythic structures not to erase the feminine, but to critically interrogate patriarchal authority and its destructive ramifications. In Crow, female figures—from the authoritarian mother in "A Childish Prank" to the elusive, life-generating entities scattered throughout the sequence—are frequently fragmented, monstrous, or absent, reflecting a cosmos dominated by a violent, masculinized consciousness that disrupts relationality. In contrast, Gaudete presents a more explicit confrontation with patriarchal structures, exemplified by Lumb's failed creation of a female deity and the subsequent revolt of the village women who eliminate their patriarchal doubles. Through a comparative analysis of these works, this study demonstrates how Hughes foregrounds the marginalization and eventual eruption of the feminine principle to critique the very patriarchal and logocentric systems his poetry has often been perceived to endorse. Ultimately, the paper argues that the feminine, though often oppressed or spectral, functions as a destabilizing force that exposes the inherent crisis and creative barrenness of a world deprived of its generative and chaotic female essence.

Keywords: *Ted Hughes, Femininity, Patriarchy, Mythopoeia, Crow, Gaudete, Marginalization, Subversion, Literary Criticism.*

Introduction

The poetry of Ted Hughes has long been a battleground for critical debate, with his representation of women and the feminine principle often viewed through the reductive lens of his biography, particularly his marriage to Sylvia Plath. This perspective frequently casts Hughes as a poet of predatory masculinity, a myth-maker who sacrificed the feminine on the altar of a brutal, elemental vision. However, a deeper examination of his major mythopoeic works reveals a far more complex and critical project. In Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow (1970) and Gaudete (1977), Hughes does not merely replicate patriarchal archetypes; he strategically engages with and subverts them to stage a profound interrogation of patriarchal authority and its devastating consequences. Moving beyond biographical interpretations, this paper contends that Hughes strategically constructs mythopoeic landscapes where the feminine is systematically marginalized rendered monstrous, fragmented, or spectral precisely to foreground this violent act of exclusion as the root of a profound cultural and spiritual crisis. Through a comparative analysis, this study will demonstrate how Crow presents a world already in the grips of a violent, masculinized consciousness, while Gaudete dramatizes the catastrophic failure of a patriarchal attempt to co-opt the feminine and the subsequent, violent eruption of the repressed. Ultimately, in both works, the marginalized feminine functions as an indispensable, destabilizing force that exposes the inherent creative

barrenness and existential void of a world deprived of its generative, chaotic, and essential female essence.

For Hughes, myth was a living, psychological language, a "gods' theatre" where the fundamental dramas of the psyche are enacted (Sagar 47). Influenced by Robert Graves's The White Goddess, which posits a primordial Goddess as the source of creative power, Hughes's poetry diagnoses the sickness of a culture that has suppressed this force. His work becomes a "quest for a lost unity of being," a unity that necessitates a reconciliation with denied feminine energies (Scigaj 12). In Crow and Gaudete, he creates narratives that explore the pathology of a world ruled by a logocentric, patriarchal ego, demonstrating that its dominance is predicated on the violent negation of the 'other' principally embodied by the feminine.

Crow is a genesis myth for a post-holocaust world, structured around the anti-heroic consciousness of its protagonist. Crow is a creature of a broken ontology: clever, predatory, and utterly devoid of the capacity for genuine relationship. The world he inhabits is one where the traditional, life-giving feminine has been shattered, and what remains are distorted fragments reflecting a flawed creation. The sequence operates on a logic of horror, where every potential for connection or creation is inverted into an act of violence or negation. This is not a celebration of masculinity but a stark exposition of its ultimate isolation and poverty when divorced from its complementary opposite. The universe of Crow is one where the creator is a sadistic bungler, and the hero is a scavenger, a clear indictment of the cosmological model they represent.

The opening poems, "Two Legends," establish a cosmos of void and unbearable pain, devoid of a nurturing womb. This sets the stage for "A Childish Prank," a grotesque parody of the creation of sexual consciousness. Man and woman lie in a "dumb, deep, paralyzing sleep," and the problem, as Crow's god sees it, is that "the soul was too slow / He'd have to invent a new thing" (Hughes, Crow 9). The "new thing" is not love but a brutal sundering: Crow bites the worm that is man's soul in two, stuffing part of it into the woman. The feminine here is not a partner but a receptacle for a traumatized, fragmented part of the male soul, awakened to a state of lack instigated by a violent, masculine act. This foundational trauma echoes throughout the collection, ensuring that all subsequent relations are cursed. The poem establishes a paradigm where existence itself is born from an act of mutilation rather than an act of love or even coherent will, framing the entire Crow universe as fundamentally flawed from its origin.

Throughout the sequence, the potential for a healing encounter with the feminine is consistently thwarted. In "Crow's First Lesson," God's attempt to teach Crow the word "love" fails catastrophically, causing the world to convulse and the sea to "tear itself open and sink" (Hughes, Crow 11). The concept of love, and by extension the feminine as its traditional object, is anathema to this reality. The very utterance of the word functions not as a creative logos but as a destructive force, revealing the inherent incompatibility between the world's governing principles and the essence of relationality. This failure is systemic, not incidental. In "Crow Alights," the protagonist looks at a piece of the earth and sees "nothing," and in that nothing, he finds his own reflection—a perfect image of a consciousness that can only perceive its own void, incapable of engaging with an external, living other.

In "A Horrible Religious Error," Crow confronts a sphinx-like "she," a cosmic woman described with terrifying power. His response is not engagement but a pre-emptive strike: he silences her by plugging her gasp with a rock. This is a literalization of the patriarchal suppression of the feminine voice, the monstrous 'other' that must be destroyed for the masculine self to feel secure. The poem powerfully encapsulates the fear of the feminine as a riddle that must be answered, not through understanding, but through annihilation. Crow's subsequent bewilderment, sitting on her corpse "trying to work out the riddle / Of what had come over him," illustrates the profound self-alienation that results from this violent silencing.

He has destroyed the external manifestation of the 'other' but remains haunted by the internal schism the encounter provoked.

Even in "Crow's Courtship," the dynamic is one of mutual predation: "He embraced her and she stabbed him. / She embraced him and he stabbed her" (Hughes, Crow 71). This reflects the utter breakdown of relationality. The feminine is not a partner but an adversary, a mirror of Crow's own violent nature. However, these representations are not mere misogyny; they are Hughes's critical portrayal of the end result of a cosmogony built on violation. The horror of these depictions serves as the critique itself. The spectral and monstrous feminine haunts the collection as a constant, accusing reminder of what has been lost and mutilated, destabilizing the violent, masculinized ego that can neither integrate nor escape it. The absence of a coherent, life-affirming feminine presence is the central tragedy of the sequence, and Hughes ensures the reader feels the chilling vacuum of that absence on every page.

Gaudete dramatizes the process and its catastrophic failure. The poem centers on Reverend Nicholas Lumb, whose changeling double attempts to create a new, female-focused deity by seducing the women of his parish. The scheme fails, and the original Lumb returns, chastened. The narrative structure itself allows for a more novelistic exploration of the social and psychic mechanisms of patriarchy and the consequences of its disruption. Where Crow offers fragmented, lyrical screams from the heart of the crisis, Gaudete provides a diagnostic case study of the crisis unfolding within a specific, representative community.

Gaudete presents an explicit confrontation with patriarchal structures, primarily the Church of England. The changeling Lumb's project is a radical attempt to overthrow this system by awakening the repressed feminine energy within the women. He initially appears as a liberator, offering an escape from the "dead world" of patriarchal marriages, a world of "business and golf" and emotional sterility (Hughes, Gaudete 78). The early stages of his ritual depict a genuine, if chaotic, release of vital energy; the women experience a resurgence of life and power, contrasting sharply with the rigid, deathly order of their prescribed roles. Yet, Hughes avoids romanticizing this endeavor. Lumb is an elemental being, a force of nature, but devoid of human empathy. He uses the women as instruments, objectifying them in his "factory of female essences" where he reduces them to symbolic portraits, draining their individual humanity to fuel his abstract ritual (Bentley 112).

His failure to bring the clay goddess to life is the central symbol of the poem's argument. The inert prototype symbolizes the impossibility of creating an authentic feminine divinity through patriarchal, manipulative methods. The generative power of the feminine cannot be commandeered or engineered; it must be engaged with in a relationship of reciprocity and respect, something the elemental Lumb is incapable of understanding. His project, for all its apparent opposition to the established church, replicates the same logocentric impulse: to control and channel divine power for a predetermined end. He becomes a parody of a patriarch, a high priest of a new but equally manipulative dogma. This critical nuance elevates Gaudete beyond a simple allegory of feminine liberation; it is a warning about the dangers of attempting to fight a flawed system using that system's own tools of control and objectification.

The most subversive section is the climax, where the disillusioned village women, abandoned by Lumb and left with their awakened power and rage, hunt down and execute their patriarchal oppressors. This is not chaotic violence but a cold, calculated purge, a systematic dismantling of the community's patriarchal structure. This revolt is the logical consequence of the feminine energy Lumb awakened but failed to direct. It is the eruption of the repressed, Hughes's most explicit depiction of the feminine as an active, destructive force that can dismantle the system that contains it. It represents a "terrible simplification," a necessary but horrific clearing of the ground against the patriarchal ego (Bentley 125). The women's transformation from liberated individuals to a unified, murderous collective demonstrates the sheer scale of the pent-up fury that the patriarchal order generates. Their violence is not presented as a righteous victory but as a terrifying, inevitable correction, a force of nature as brutal and amoral as a landslide.

The epilogue, featuring the original Lumb's psalms, offers a stark contrast. Having been to the underworld, he no longer seeks to control divinity. His fragmented poems express a state of wounded openness and a longing for a lost, feminine-connected world. He sings not of gods or goddesses, but of a "foxglove," a "badger," a "moon-man," and a "woman I love" who is "far away" (Hughes, Gaudete 191-192). The feminine here is a distant, beloved, and essential presence whose absence defines his reality, suggesting that after the failure of both patriarchy and manipulative gynocentrism, the only possible stance is one of humility and grief. This lyrical, elegiac mode stands in sharp relief to the violent narrative, implying that the path to reconciliation is not through grand rituals or revolts, but through a quiet, personal, and deeply felt acknowledgment of loss and a yearning for reconnection with a natural, feminine-informed world.

A comparative analysis reveals an evolution in Hughes's critique while reinforcing a consistent philosophical position. Crow is a diagnosis of the diseased state itself; the feminine is already a ghost—a memory, a trauma, a monstrous apparition. Its marginalization is the foundational condition, and the critique is implicit in the sheer bleakness and relational poverty of this world. The feminine destabilizes through its haunting absence, its mangled forms a constant indictment of the world that produced them. It is a static portrait of existential crisis. Gaudete, by contrast, is a dynamic narrative of process and consequence. It shows the attempt to marginalize and co-opt the feminine and the failure of that attempt. The feminine, once awakened, becomes an active, revolutionary force. The critique is explicit in the plot, and the destabilizing force of the feminine is not a haunting but a revolution, exposing patriarchal fragility through direct confrontation. The movement from Crow to Gaudete is a movement from showing the symptoms of the disease to dramatizing its violent, febrile climax.

Both works, however, arrive at the same conclusion: a world dominated by a one-sided, patriarchal, logocentric consciousness is a creative and spiritual wasteland. Crow embodies this wasteland in its very form and content; Gaudete narrates its violent collapse. The feminine principle—as life-giver, sacred lover, or chaotic destroyer is presented as indispensable. Its denial guarantees that it will return in a distorted, destructive form. The "creative barrenness" of Hughes's mythic landscapes is the direct result of this denial. Hughes's great achievement in these works is to have used the very tools of myth and archetype, so often employed to reinforce patriarchal order, to instead dismantle that order from within.

Conclusion

The persistent critical tendency to label Ted Hughes as a poet of unchecked masculinity represents a fundamental misreading of his most ambitious and philosophically coherent works. In Crow and Gaudete, he engages in a profound and systematic critique of the very systems he was accused of endorsing. He foregrounds the marginalization of the feminine not to celebrate it, but to expose it as the root of a profound cultural and spiritual sickness. The feminine is the great destabilizer: it haunts the nightmares of Crow as a spectral reminder of a lost wholeness, and it physically dismantles the village in Gaudete as a tangible force of retribution. It is the creative chaos that the ordered, masculine ego fears and yet desperately needs for its own renewal. By giving this crisis such potent and unsettling form, Hughes establishes himself not as a champion of patriarchy but as one of its most incisive literary critics. His poetry serves as a powerful warning that a culture which persists in denying, silencing, or attempting to control the essential feminine principles of generativity, chaos, and connection does not achieve mastery, but instead condemns itself to a sterile and self-devouring existence, a world where the crow's cry is the only anthem.

Works Cited

- Bentley, Paul. The Poetry of Ted Hughes: Language, Illusion & Beyond. Longman, 1998. Gifford, Terry, and Neil Roberts. Ted Hughes: A Critical Study. Faber and Faber, 1981.
- Graves, Robert. The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth. Faber and Faber, 1948.
- Hughes, Ted. Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow. Faber and Faber, 1970. Gaudete. Faber and Faber, 1977.
- Sagar, Keith. The Art of Ted Hughes. 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, 1978. Scigaj, Leonard M. Ted Hughes. Twayne Publishers, 1991.

4

BETWEEN WOUNDS AND BECOMING: TRAUMA AND LIMINAL IDENTITY IN THE FEMALE PSYCHE

Shyma. S, *Doctoral Research Scholar, Department of English, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai-600048*
shyma_english_july2024@crescent.education
A.Catherine Anna Pushpam, *Assistant Professor (Senior Grade) and Research Supervisor, Department of English, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai-600048*
cathie.am@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper is concerned with the female trauma of characters both in Eating Wasps by Anita Nair and Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, with an emphasis on the change and division of liminality. This paper argues that female psychological trauma in women's literature is not only a disagreement but also a starting point for identity and self-realisation. Using the theories and perspectives of Cathy Caruth and the concepts of Liminality of Victor Turner and Homi Bhabha, this paper examines how the main characters of the two novels, Sreelakshmi in Eating Wasps and Ifemelu in Americanah, find their way through a psychological and cultural state of in-betweenness. While Eating Wasps examines gendered violence and racial discrimination, Americanah dwells on cultural displacement and the plight of immigrants, which culminates in an identity crisis. It focuses on the trauma of women by analysing the postcolonial concepts of diaspora by contrasting both Indian and African diasporic studies, while focusing on how liminality is achieved through being vulnerable to being empowered.

Keywords: *Trauma Theory, Liminality, Postcolonial Literature, Female Identity, Diaspora Studies, Transformation.*

Introduction

Trauma and identity have become central to the topography of the twenty-first-century text of world literature, as women authors explore the fractured lines of female subjectivity under conditions of sociopolitical and cultural stress. No longer relegated to the periphery of literary interest, trauma in women's writing today acts as both a wound and a witness, a narrative process by which repressed histories, gendered violence, and displaced selves become visible. As Cathy Caruth observes, “trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor” (4). Such a return frequently appears in literature in the form of liminal space - a middle space between identity, which is not yet determi78ned and that which is not yet dissolved, but which is always engaged in becoming.

Liminality is a state of being in-between or on the threshold of two different conditions, stages, or realities (Fuzail Kaunsar and Sulochana 78), and implies a dual nature that entails a positive as well as a negative connotation (81). In this regard, Eating Wasps by Anita Nair and Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are two potent interventions as they reorganize trauma not as a dead end but as the football

field on which their female characters transform.

Eating Wasps by Nair (2018) is a very useful text for this kind of examination and one that works well as an example in the context proposed, difficult times foster liminality within feminism and postcolonialism. The novel describes numerous women of different age groups and social classes who deal with their misunderstandings in relation to personal freedom within conformity. Using both Turner and Bhabha, we deepen our readings of these characters by understanding them as culturally in-between states that revise their identities. In quite a few respects, the novel speaks to larger changes taking place in India as women and at the same time strive for independence confronting embedded patriarchy. Eating Wasps by Nair is a sort of polyphonic tapestry of intertwined tales, focusing on Indian women who have to struggle with widowhood, aging, sexuality, and professional marginalisation in the inflexible frameworks of patriarchy and urban modernity. Instead, Americanah by Adichie is a transnational journey of Ifemelu toward the United States and Nigeria as she traces the psychic cost of othering by race and diasporic alienation while renegotiating her own identity in the face of the border. Although South Asia and West Africa have different geographical and cultural points of reference, both texts meet halfway in their interest in how trauma, when expressed through a narrative, is a crucible through which liminal identity can be generated. These novels are squarely located in the postcolonial feminist text in that they presuppose the foregrounding of generalised representations of womanhood by locating the influence of gendered trauma through the interplay of nation, class, race, and migration. Just as (Mohanty 338) warns, “Western feminist discourse often constructs 'Third World women' as a singular, homogeneous category,” thereby erasing “historical and cultural specificities”. Nair and Adichie fight against this kind of reduction and framing by imbuing their characters with localised yet globally understandable systems of power.

However, even as more and more literature has been identified as scholarly research on the subject of trauma in the writing of postcolonial women, what seems to be missing is the critical gap in a comparative analysis that helps to bridge the literary traditions of South Asia and Africa. A good deal of criticism has served these areas separately, with Adichie often being analysed in terms of African diaspora studies and Nair in terms of Indian feminist or urban fiction paradigms. Dialogues on their common areas of concern, especially the dialectic of trauma and liminality in female self-fashioning, are rarely reciprocated. This article fills that gap by interpreting Eating Wasps and Americanah as complementary accounts of what has been termed by Homi K. Bhabha as “in-betweenness,” where identity is suspended in some space, the “Third Space” of negotiation and reinvention. (37).

The main argument is that Nair and Adichie use trauma as a gateway rather than a conclusion of pain, a liminal space of precarious and powerful instability where damaged female subjectivities address erasure, reclaim their voice, and recover agency, at least temporarily. These writers restructure psychic traumas into precincts of critical consciousness and coming out using innovative narrative techniques, such as fragmented chronology, interior monologue, epistolary, and blog discourse. By doing so, they reposition trauma as a relational and narrative matter, which Judith Herman states that “recovery can take place only within the context of relationships” and “requires the survivor to reconstruct the trauma story” (175). Therefore, this study supports the idea that in Eating Wasps and Americanah, trauma is the soil not of degradation, but of birth.

Theoretical Framework: Trauma, Liminality and the Female Psyche

In modern literary studies, trauma has surpassed its clinical roots to emerge as a critical prism through which narrative form, subjectivity, and historical memory are viewed, especially in relation to gendered and postcolonial experience. It is not just anything that we can call psychological damage. Still, according to Cathy Caruth, trauma is a “radical violation of knowing” which is marked by its lateness and its inability to be immediately absorbed into conscious narrative. (4). Such a “postponement of witnessing” introduces a break in linear time and coherent identity, such that trauma is by definition

textual: it must be spoken, but it cannot be easily articulated. This narrative indeterminacy has become a zone of aesthetic innovation in women's writing, where fragmentation, silence, and repetition write the unspeakable. Judith Herman additionally stresses that trauma recovery requires the creation of the so-called "survivor narrative," the testimonial performance, which turns the passive victimhood into active witnessing (175). Therefore, trauma in literature is not merely present; it is acted out in form, voice, and perspective when based on a female psyche negotiating systemic violence and cultural silencing.

Similar to the narrative instability of trauma, the term liminality is an anthropological Rites of Passage by Victor Turner, in which individuals are 'in-between,' neither attached to specific social statuses nor roles (95). In feminist and postcolonial terms, liminality is extended beyond the ritual to refer to either the existential or social states of being in between: the migrant between countries, the widow between normative femininity, or the woman between sexual autonomy in patriarchal worlds. These marginal topics dwell somewhere in the borderlands of geography, language, and psychology, as described by Gloria Anzaldua. "The Third World grates against the First" and identities are "mestiza," hybrid, and perpetually contested (Anzaldúa 3). Similarly, Homi K. Bhabha theorizes the "Third Space" as a discursive site where cultural identity is "never fully present" but emerges through negotiation, mimicry, and difference (37). This liminal space, where old identities break and new possibilities flicker into existence, is not a site of conclusion but of continuing negotiation for women like Ifemelu in Americanah and Saroja in Eating Wasps.

Theoretical concepts of Trauma and Liminality merged together provide a significant critique of how those narratives that are shaped by loss, marginalization, and partial belonging to the world, appear in contemporary women's writing. The traumatic impact to both Americanah by Adichie and *Eating Wasps* by Nair is not a disastrous event to the characters' lives but is rather conceptualized as the **series of psychic ruptures that happen to individuals at unstable social, cultural, and gendered thresholds. These accounts show how people become stuck in the liminal phase of life for a long time - a state in which identity is caught between the past and present, belonging and estrangement, silence and articulation. These transitional state serve as what Victor Turner calls 'in-between zones' whereas according to Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, these scars resurface through fragmented memory, recurring feeling, and repeated narrative patterns. In the novel Americanah, the loss of cultural roots turns into a major emotional blow in such a way that it deeply affects Ifemelu's identity and her relocation from Nigeria to the United States triggers a series of micro-traumas—linguistic insecurity, racialization, that puts her in a constant liminal state. The psychological aspect of cultural crossing is well illustrated through her changing of accent to fit American standards and her later doing away with it. Ifemelu is in a "third space" of cultural middle ground, where the disappearance of the familiar cultural references and the need to assimilate cause emotional injuries. Her silence, depression, and ultimate blog—writing from the double perspective of cultural insider and outsider—are the ways in which Ifemelu's experience of liminality becomes the place where trauma is not only confronted but also narratively resolved. Even though she goes back to Nigeria, her cultural liminality still lingers as she is labelled Americanah and it is impossible for her to merge again, thus the migration and displacement is lasting psychological aftermath which is made evident. On the other hand, Eating Wasps stands as a delineation of gendered and bodily trauma as a variant of the Liminal experience.

The women in Nair's novel are the ones who live in the thresholds formed by patriarchal violence, societal stigma, and the silence that comes from within. Through her life as well as her death which are the events framing the narrative, Sreelakshmi represents a kind of ghostly liminality—neither alive nor completely gone—affecting not only the text but also the women who follow her. Her trauma is kept in silence as an unhealed wound and it gets triggered again in the lives of the women who suffer harassment, ridicule of their bodies, oppression in marriage, and sexual violation. Characters like Urvashi, Megha, and

Lilian are at a point of psychological liminality where they are pulled in opposite directions by the expectations of society and the wish for freedom. Their trauma is presented in repetitive forms, which is in line with Caruth's point of view on the delayed, unresolved nature of traumatic memory. Those women are in societally marginalized groups, and the same as emotional beings, they find themselves in transitional spaces: between silence and speech, victimhood and empowerment, self-negation and self-identification. Their struggle for the return of voice and personality is an example of the ways in which they negotiate and transform their trauma in the transitional spaces they occupy. Both Americanah and Eating Wasps argue that trauma is deeply connected with liminal states that touch upon both cultural and gendered dimensions. While Americanah is mainly concerned with the trauma of diasporic dislocation, racial alienation, and cultural fragmentation, Eating Wasps is about the traumas that come from patriarchal structures, bodily vulnerability, and social silencing. Most importantly, the vulnerability and agency of the female subjects cannot be explained in terms of single-axis frames. The concept of intersectionality, developed by Crenshaw, provides the necessary scaffolding for this analysis, illustrating how race, gender, class, nationality, and marital status intersect to create unique experiences of oppression and resilience. The trauma is not merely about gender or migration that Ifemelu experiences in the United States; it is highly racialised, her Blackness hyper-visible in situations, such as job interviews or the politics of her natural hair, which she chronicles in her blog posts, shredding the American racism with sharp and intimate clarity (256–75). On the other hand, Saroja in Eating Wasps, a middle-aged widow in urban India, is not only marginalised by her gender but also by her social class status, and as a widow, she is socially dead in some Hindu traditions. This can be said to be a tentative reclamation of desire and economic independence against the backdrop of a society that perceives her as “invisible, irrelevant, and undesirable” (212). Due to the complexity of these identities, a simultaneity-aware reading practice is required; as Crenshaw cautions, “the dimensions of gender and race cannot be disentangled” without ignoring the nuances of oppressed women's experiences (1245). In her analysis of gender, Judith Butler in Gender Trouble (1990) offers a conception of gender as continuously and perpetually performed, that is in a state of limbo. This helps to understand the idea of women being 'between worlds,' which Butler designates as one of the aspects of gender ambiguity. As a result, gender itself is a "gate space" which in no way is definite or fully accomplished, but on the contrary, it is always subject to change and re-negotiation. The persons, according to this model, do not have an immediate or unmediated realization of their gender or sexuality, rather they are always in a process where identity is constantly taking shape. This is of great importance when interpreting women characters in fiction of the present day, which is about the struggle of the characters for different expectations and inner conflicts, as the characters personify the very instability and fluidity that Butler talks about.

Combined, trauma theory, liminality, and intersectionality help to reveal the aesthetic ploys as well as the ethical demands of the stories by Nair and Adichie. Eating Wasps, with its fragmented form and interconnected but unconnected voices of women, reflects the fragmented existence of traumatic memory and the broken social existence of women at the edge of society. Similarly, the nonlinear chronology of Americanah and the posts on her blogs serve as narrative prostheses, or the means by which Ifemelu creates her trauma and establishes ownership of herself. This is about more than simply aesthetic choices; it is about opposing epistemic violence in a morally charged way. Focusing on female subjectivity as a state of liminal becoming, neither completely assimilated nor absolutely exiled, the two novels confront monolithic narratives of recovery or homecoming. Instead, they give identity as a dynamic contested process that is created in the interstices of wound and word, exile and return, and silence and speech. In that regard, the theoretical triangulation of trauma, liminality, and intersectionality does not simply read between the lines of these texts, but to its credit, it does give due credit to their dedication to reflect the complexity of the lives of women in the postcolonial contexts.

Traumatic Ruptures in Eating Wasps: Silence, Shame and the Body

The Eating Wasps (2018) by Anita Nair is a symphonic compilation of women's voices that, despite their different situations, share a common experience of being traumatised as a somatic and silent break. Nair reveals the concealed wounds caused by patriarchy, ageism, and economic marginalisation in modern India using fragmented narrative form, interiority, and provocative urban sceneries. Instead of keeping the trauma singular, she makes it cumulative and embodied, carving it into the body and silencing it with shame, usually projecting it onto domestic or urban space. In the examples of trauma as a catalyst for discontinuity with normative scripts in the context of facing it, the stories of Saroja, Leela, and Sreelakshmi stand out as illustrations of how precariously a liminal space of becoming can be introduced. Saroja's story is an archetype of the trauma of widowhood, the social death in most Indian societies, increased financial uncertainty, and female desire after fifty, which has become a taboo. Saroja is widowed and has been abandoned financially by her son, who lives in a "one-bedroom flat that smelled of mothballs and neglect," a physical manifestation of her psychic erasure (Nair 211). Instead of being seen as a source of pleasure, her body is seen as "a relic," "useless and invisible" (212). However, her affair with the younger Venu is an act of rebellious re-appropriation of agency. The affair is not idealised; it is full of vulnerability, secrecy, and internalised shame. When Venu tells her, "You're still a woman, Saroja," It's a message that affirms and condemns a culture that doesn't recognise the sexuality of older women(225). Her tragedy is not only her loss but also her not being allowed to desire and be desirable within her culture. The time when she leaves Venu's apartment after their last meeting, "her spine straightening as if she had shed a skin", marks the beginning of something new: not the end, but the breaking of silence as a choice (231).

Instead, the trauma of emotional abandonment in marriage, another less violent but equally corrosive type of violence, is dramatised in Leela's story. Married to a man who "looked through her as if she were glass," Leela turns out to be a ghost, in her own home, her personality is shrunk down to household needs (87). She is so invisible that even her husband does not notice her absence when she takes a moment to run away to Pondicherry. In a rented room overlooking the sea, she has a momentary sense of identity: "For the first time in years, she was not someone's wife. She was just Leela" (93). This momentary space-psychic dislocation throws light on the possibility of space withdrawal. Although she goes back to her marriage, the story still haunts her inner transformation: "Something had cracked open inside her, and she could not seal it shut again" (95). Here, Nair has used free indirect discourse to bring out the undertones of a psyche that is losing its own negation.

Sreelakshmi represents intergenerational trauma through maternal silence and creative suppression. Her mother, a failed writer, "had swallowed her words like bitter pills" and warned Sreelakshmi that "art is a luxury women cannot afford" (158). Such a taboo plagues the painting of Sreelakshmi, which turns into an outlet of silent mourning, especially following her miscarriage, a loss that she does not work out by word but through a sequence of visceral, abstract canvases "smeared with reds that looked too much like blood" (167). The studio, as her space, messy and intimate, standing assertively outside the domestic space, serves as a transitional space where trauma is worked into aesthetic expression. In contrast to Saroja or Leela, Sreelakshmi has a long-term release of her suffering, which is why artistic expression can be one of the forms of narrative witnessing in the case of the closure of direct speech.

Such thematic issues are supported by the architecture of the narration presented by Nair. The disjunctive quality of the traumatic memory is reflected in the fragmented and episodic structure of the novel, which intermingles twelve women's narratives without a continuous flow. City areas: the streets of Chennai, full of traffic, nameless apartments, and crashes to the sea, turn out to be the continuation of the female mind: the places of imprisonment and, sometimes, release. More importantly, Nair does not grant

catharsis to her characters. Her characters do not conquer trauma; they live in its aftermath with some level of strength. This is in line with Caruth's claim that trauma "is always the story of a wound that cries out" but is never fully healed (4). However, somewhere in that scream, either through Saroja's affair, Leela's lonely walk, or Sreelakshmi's strokes of the brush, Nair finds the seeds of liminal becoming. However minor, these acts of dislocation subvert the cultural taboos that have equated aging in females with desexualisation, marriage with invisibility, and motherhood with creative sacrifice. Thus, Eating Wasps turns trauma into a location of erasure into a location of reclamation, even though such a reclamation is partial, ambiguous, and violently private. Both books are a revelation of the emotional instability that comes with the living of the self in those spaces where identities are not firm but are always changing. These liminal thresholds—be they the result of migration or gendered oppression—are the mental zones where trauma gets absorbed, resonated with, and finally renegotiated. This research, by combining Trauma Theory with Liminality, illustrates how women's experiences of being diasporic and gendered intersect in the works of contemporary female writers thus providing the insight that trauma is both an individual and a cultural phenomenon which is constructed, and intensified, in the liminal states of existence.

Migratory Liminality and Racialized Trauma in Americanah

Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie follows the transnational path of Ifemelu, an exodus between Lagos and the United States, and the reversal of both as not a direct migration, but a journey of liminality between identities, belonging, and psychic dissonance. The time Ifemelu spends in America is not just an event of geographical displacement, but a long period of a threshold stage when she is neither Nigerian nor American, neither fully assimilated nor entirely alienated. According to Victor Turner, liminality refers to a state of "betwixt and between", in which the subject is in a state of the "a realm of pure possibility" and, simultaneously, in deep ambiguity(95). This ambiguity is a form of racialised trauma for Ifemelu: the accrued psychic trauma of becoming Black in a society where race is a violent social category, not a non-violent descriptive category. Since she came to Trenton, through her time in Philadelphia and Baltimore, Ifemelu faces an innumerable number of microaggressions that, together, are a form of micro-wounds. She is appalled when a white woman in a salon denies believing that Nigeria is an actual nation (Adichie 18). At a Connecticut party, she is confused for "the help" and informed that her natural hair is "unkempt" and unprofessional (282). Even though she does not absorb the sense of inadequacy, every incident disintegrates her personal identity by subjecting her to a racialised issue whose importance is judged against American standards.

Importantly, Adichie does not see this trauma as an isolated emotional tragedy but as being embedded in a system of intersectional race, class, and global power. It is even the case that the most devastating episode of Ifemelu, her desperate and humiliating experience with the tennis coach in Ardmore, is more about economic precarity than it is about gendered vulnerability (199-201). However, it is the racial aspect that adds to her alienation: in Nigeria, she was never "Black"; she was simply Ifemelu. "You can't just get up and go to Paris," Curt tells her. "I need to apply for a visa… because you have a Nigerian passport" (245). American value is based on Blackness, not intelligence or character, and her passport, not her individuality, determines her mobility. Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black serves as a narrative technique and a place of reclamation on Ifemelu's blog, drawing attention to this systemic perspective. Through irony, analysis, and community address, she is able to "reframe trauma" on her blog, turning private hurt into public witness. In posts like "Understanding America for the Non-American Black" or "Why Dark-Skinned Black Women—Both American and Non-American—Love Barack Obama", she uses her voice to reclaim her agency and deconstructs the ludicrous reasoning behind American racism (Adichie 304, 320). Instead of seeking treatment, her blog serves as a witness to her ability to "fight back

without fists" (318), transforming her shame into satire and her quiet into sovereignty.

Ifemelu's return to Nigeria is a rather ambiguous homecoming, neither a successful re-integration nor a deportation, but another threshold. She arrives in Lagos "assaulted" by its chaos: the "sun-dazed haste", the "yellow buses full of squashed limbs", the relentless commerce that "thrums too defiantly" (Adichie 460). She is an outsider in her own land, ridiculed by Ranyinudo as being an "Americanah," as he calls her, a term of affection and criticism (461). However, she is no longer an American; her blue passport no longer keeps her out of the ethical burden of having no choice. Her return is not an escape but a fight: with the approaching suicide of Dike, the ageing of her parents, and the collaboration of the Nigerian elite. Importantly, she does not return to nostalgia. Rather, she creates The Small Redemptions of Lagos, a blog that mocks the pompousness of returnees and glorifies the strength of everyday Nigerians. (505). This gesture confirms her unwillingness to romanticise either country; she states that she is allowed to love Nigeria critically, as she was used to loving America "with her eyes open" (301).

Adichie intentionally compares the migration experiences of Ifemelu and Obinze through a gendered lens. Although they both suffer the humiliation of being refused entry into their country of choice (Ifemelu is denied a visa to the U.S., and Obinze is deported from the U.K.), their traumas are divergent along the lines of race and gender. The invisibility of Obinze in England is marked by the fact that he cleans toilets under the name of a man who borrowed his name and who had to be afraid of the raids of immigration of "Blunkett"(289–90). However, his race, as a non-Black African man in Europe, gives him a kind of conditional invisibility, which, on the contrary, Ifemelu, as a Black woman in America, is never granted. Ifemelu's trauma is hyper-visible: her body is under police examination, her hair is under inspection, and her presence is doubted.

In contrast, Obinze is made to be invisible until he is criminalised. Also, the agency of Ifemelu is in narrative, her blog, her voice, whereas that of Obinze is invested in capital: the man recreates himself with real estate, becoming "Chief" in a society where wealth is seen as redemption (450). Their reunion is not only romantic but also ideological: a reconnection of opposite survival tracks.

Finally, Adichie is adamant in stating that individual trauma is not separable from global inequality. Ifemelu's story demonstrates that the race issue in America cannot be independent of the heritage of the empire; Nigerian returnees reproduce colonial structures, and even migration is defined by a privilege to passports. Her liminality is not a weakness but an advantage, from which she observes both countries with a clear, loving, and unencumbered eye. She is not going back, but moving forward with the wounds and wisdom of her becoming.

Comparative Analysis : Wounds as Thresholds of Becoming

In Eating Wasps and Americanah, Anita Nair and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie not only turn female trauma into a victimhood location but also a creative gateway of becoming one that leads to critical consciousness, self-reclamation, and provisional agency. Both authors instead make their characters not rest comfortably in passive pain. Still, traumas are rather a breakage that makes them confront the systems that hurt them- be it the choking patriarchy of urban India or the racialized division of transnational America. This rejection of victimhood is based on a collective narrative approach: the preference for interiority by first-person or closely focalised views. The interconnected narratives created by Nair are frequently in the form of free indirect speech or confession. In contrast, Adichie narrates Ifemelu's journey in the form of intimate close-third narration, imitating the rhythms of thought. The female psyche is represented and centralised in both as a place of resistance, challenge, and emergence.

More importantly, the in-between space in which these women find themselves takes different shapes but sidelines in the same direction. The space of liminality is physically terminated and socially coded in Eating Wasps: the widow of Saroja is physically restricted to a small apartment in Chennai where no desire can be spoken of; the emotions of Leela are so confidential that they are left in invisibility; the

studio of the artist Sreelakshmi is the only place where her mother does not speak to her, and so on. Their borders are domestic, urban, and corporeal, characterised by closed doorways, makeshift apartments, and age- and gender-policed bodies. In contrast, Ifemelu's transnational and migratory liminality as an 'Americanah' is her living between Lagos and Princeton, between which she does not belong at all, her identity continually reformed by the hyphenated logic of diaspora. Despite this, liminality is not a passive place or occurrence in either book; rather, it is a negotiating space fraught with grief, where old, broken selves crumble and new, exciting possibilities emerge.

In both texts, agency manifests itself via voice, but its forms are culture-specific. Her blog, "Raceteenth", which turns personal racial injury into public protest and political commentary, gives her a sense of subjectivity. As she writes, "The only reason you say that race was not an issue is because you wish it were not"—a sentence that reframes trauma as epistemological clarity (Adichie 352). Equally, Saroja in Eating Wasps addresses letters to her dead husband, not as a lament, but as an exercise of independence; her tentative affair with Venu is set up by the domestic gesture of writing her desire on paper. (Nair 218–231). Sreelakshmi's abstract paintings, which she calls "reds that looked too much like blood", serve as encrypted diaries of passed-down silence, transforming the aesthetic shape of unfathomable loss (Nair 167). Voice is not an outlet but a tactic in each instance, a means of re-entering the world according to one's own conditions.

Female interiority is understanding and relating to the most profound emotional, cognitive and even spiritual life of women. It comprehends their innermost thoughts, longings, anxieties, recollections, struggles, and images of themselves, which are covered under social roles and external expectations. Indubitably, it is the in-dwelling place that women, beyond the public world, use for their identity, agency, trauma, and subjectivity. Elaine Scarry's The Body in Pain also discusses about the female interiority through the lens of physical pain. "Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned."(Scarry 4)

In the arts of the written word, female interiority means the depiction of such inner awareness: the unsaid emotions, psychological strains, quiet struggles, and self-reflection that determine a woman's perception of herself and her standing in the world. It shows how women think, feel, and experience through their interpretative lenses of reality even when patriarchal or repressive structures are involved, which try to dominate or silence them. This female interiority is said in these two texts.

"Perhaps the fault lay with me. No man wanted me enough to put me above everything else."(Nair 243)

"When was the last time Ammi had bought herself something nice, Najma wondered. When had she ever allowed herself to want something? Desire is a luxury, she always said. Not that that desire was evil or wrong, but it could cause heartbreak"(Nair 58)

"The only reason you say that race was not an issue is because you wish it was not. … I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America." (Adichie 288)

"Sometimes she worried that she was too happy. She would sink into moodiness, and snap at Obinze, or be distant. And her joy would become a restless thing, flapping its wings inside her, as though looking for an opening to fly away". (Adichie 67)

These quotes explains about the female interiority that reflects the inner feelings of a women, her self-value, her position in the society and family and also how is she treated in a public forum. This will be a strong and powerful quote for defining female interiority in Anita Nair's Eating Wasps and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah.

The essential idea of "becoming" in both books is that it is a process that is never fully complete. The ambiguity of Saroja's defiance and Ifemelu's return to Lagos characterise both endings. Instead of

triumphing, Saroja leaves Venu "with her spine straightening"—a symbol of her decision to embrace her own identity rather than let it be erased. (Nair 231). Ifemelu returns to Nigeria not as a victorious exile but as a woman who is still bargaining loss, love, and belonging, her last reunion with Obinze with hope, but maybe not assurances (Adichie 542). Such denial of closure corresponds with the focus of the theory of trauma on belatedness and recurrence: recovery is not a linear process but a process of renegotiation with the past.

Finally, the cultural wounds are different, that is, the Indian patriarchy controlling widowhood, old age, and female desire and the systemic othering of anti-Black racism in America; nevertheless, the resistance is very similar. The two novels reveal how female trauma is intersectional: Saroja is vulnerable due to her class and marital status, and Ifemelu due to her nationality, accent, and hair politics. However, in both, the feminist opposition is expressed not in big movements but in small statements of identity: a braid of hair, a blog, a canvas painting, and a rejection of humiliation. In this way, Nair and Adichie create a universal feminist grammar of trauma - one that respects cultural particularity but still asserts a universal truth, that wounds, when come across and named, may not become a point of non-disintegration, but rather of emergence.

Conclusion

Trauma in both Eating Wasps and Americanah does not have an endpoint or erasure. Still, a liminal process, a threshold space through which fractured female selves negotiate with silence, shame, violence, systemic and in the end, make concessions in negotiating forms of self-reclamation. Anita Nair and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie do not accept the discourse of passive victimhood, but they find trauma to be a driver of critical awareness and provisional becoming. The possible revival of desire by Saroja, the silent protest of invisibility by Leela, the artistic transformation of their pain by Sreelakshmi, and the burning blogged statements of alienation by race by Ifemelu all mirror this transformative curve. Wounds become sites of witnessing and non-conclusion but are subject to long-term negotiations in both cases. This re-orientation of trauma is done in an extremely literary way. Female interiority is central to both authors, as is the first-person persistence or strong focalisation of narration, the fragmentation of the timeline, and the blending of genres: blog, letter, and the intersecting short story, thus violating the narrative conventions of linear healing or neat closure. Their aesthetic approaches reflect the same discontinuity of traumatic experience and the moral imperative of voice. Voice, be it the rude yet penetrating posts of Ifemelu in her blog or the mute letters of Saroja to a lost husband, is the tool of reintegration, partial and dangerous as it may be. These novels add value to the discourse on global trauma and decolonial feminism, in addition to their distinct stories. They demonstrate how trauma is never a single phenomenon but intersectional; in India, trauma is mediated by widowhood and urban patriarchy, whereas in the U.S., it is mediated by anti-black racism and migratory displacement, but united by a feminist backlash that disallows cultural silence. In doing so, they make justice an integral part of healing by expanding the ethics of care to include the structural. Lastly, Americanah and Eating Wasps serve as a reminder of the testimony-giving potential of literature- a space where wounded identities are not only acknowledged but also transformed. Nair and Adichie do not provide salvation in their stories, but they offer something more genuine and enduring: acknowledgement. It is in this acknowledgement that power takes hold.

Works Cited

- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. Americanah. Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.
- Anzaldua, Gloria. Borderlands / La Frontera : The New Mestiza. 4th ed., Aunt Lute Books, 1987.
- Bhabha, Homi K. The Location of Culture. Routledge, 1994.
- Caruth, Cathy. Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History. Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of

Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." University of Chicago Legal Forum, Vol. 1989, No. 1, 1989, pp. 139–67.

- Fuzail Kaunsar, Syed, and A. Sulochana. "I Had No Identity: Acculturation, Liminality, and Alienation in Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis." The International Journal of Diverse Identities, vol. 25, no. 1, 2025, pp. 77–95, https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-7866/cgp/v25i01/77-95.
- Herman, Judith. Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror. Basic Books, 1992.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." Boundary 2, vol. 12, no. 3, 1984, pp. 333–58.
- Nair, Anita. Eating Wasps. Penguin Books India, 2005.
- Scarry, Elaine. The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World. Oxford UP, 1985.
- Turner, Victor. The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure. Cornell UP, 1969.

5

PEER FEEDBACK AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS OF GEN Z: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Dr. C. L. Shilaja, *Assistant Professor, Department of English, Stella Maris College*

Abstract:

In recent years, the concept of "peer feedback" has gained significant attention in the field of tertiary education, emerging as a promising approach to enhance teaching and learning. This instructional model offers a novel alternative to traditional methods, yet there remains a limited body of research exploring its effectiveness. To address the gap, the present study investigates the impact of the peer feedback model on Gen Z, focusing on its potential to transform classroom dynamics and improve student outcomes. The study draws on the broader context of co-operative learning and peer mentoring, which have been widely adopted to foster interactive and engaging learning environments. Research has also indicated that these strategies can be effectively adapted to involve peers in assessing the written work of students with learning disabilities.

Through a series of observations and reflections, the study found that peer evaluation, both in the classroom and beyond, proved to be an effective tool for student engagement and skill improvement. Learners responded that peer feedback was a valuable experience, offering them opportunities to refine their writing and deepen their understanding of course content. Moreover, the paper highlights the necessity for the integration of peer feedback in the classroom, highlighting its role in enhancing students writing skills and collaborative learning skills for Gen Z.

Keywords: *Peer feedback, collaborative learning, Gen Z, Student-centered learning, Writing Skills.*

Introduction and Background

The necessity for effective alternative instruction arises from pervasive challenges faced by both educators and students in modern writing-intensive courses. Instructors frequently encounter situations where they are "environmentally challenged" and "not well-heeled to do everything for students including giving feedback," particularly on lengthy assignments like essays. Writing evaluation is often cited as a time-consuming and challenging area in teaching ESL, making it "extremely time intensive and effort demanding" (Trochim, 2006). In this demanding environment, peer evaluation "comes in handy," allowing teachers extra time that can be utilized to refine their writing skills instruction and focus on other teaching techniques.

Concurrently the students entering higher education in particular to those of Gen Z, present unique difficulties. They are often characterized by passive attitudes, insufficient communication skills, weak problem analysis, and lack of motivation. Their learning focus is frequently extrinsic, demonstrated by a preference to memorize facts and procedures merely to pass exams. This behavioral pattern aligns with a historical academic deficit: studies focusing on students nearing the Gen Z cohort show that only 24% of twelfth graders performed at or above a proficient writing level. Consequently, many freshmen arrive at college lacking impressive writing skills.

To bridge this gap, peer evaluation is promoted as a mechanism to shift the educational atmosphere from a traditional teacher-centered model to a student-centered, collaborative one. The process involves

students engaging collaboratively to review and evaluate drafts, offering constructive criticism and comments. The integration of peer feedback enhances students' writing skills and collaborative learning skills, effectively transforming classroom dynamics for Gen Z.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Peer evaluation—often termed peer review or peer feedback—is recognized as a pivotal method within tertiary education. Liu and Hansen (2002, p.75) define the practice as "the use of learners as sources of information" for each other, assuming the responsibilities of a formally trained teacher or editor in critiquing drafts in both written and oral formats.

The instructional efficacy of peer feedback is firmly grounded in established theoretical frameworks, primarily the collaborative learning theory and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky (1978) "stresses the importance of negotiation of meaning among learners in developing their cognitive skills and promoting social interaction". Peer interaction is theorized to help learners surpass their current developmental level to reach a "higher level that they can arrive at through peer interaction". This approach is consistent with i theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), which require learners to "negotiate meaning to facilitate second language acquisition" (Long and Porter 1985). Gass and Selinker (1994, p. 217) similarly "emphasized the importance of negotiated interaction" in language acquisition.

Peer evaluation generates substantial advantages for students, extending beyond simple grammatical correction. The process creates an authentic audience, encouraging writers "to improve their writing and know their focus and purpose of their writing" (Porto, 2001; Lockhart, 1994 in Lockhart and Ng, 1996). Furthermore, it enhances "communication ability, critical thinking skills, and creativity" (Todd & Hudson, 2007).

Learning within this model is inherently reciprocal. Students benefit not only from receiving suggestions but also, crucially, from actively giving comments. Jensen and Fischer (2005) found that students involved in the process "developed better written communication skills than their peers who only received feedback only from a teaching assistant and/or the instructor". The positive impact on learning is confirmed by Roskam (1999), who reported that "70 % of students agreed that they learnt something from peer evaluation", in his article.

Learner Characteristics and Generation Z Context

The varying needs of students necessitate the adaptation of teaching methods. Fleming's VARK model identifies four primary types of learners: Visual, Auditory, Reading/Writing, and Kinesthetic. Each student responds differently; for example, kinesthetic learners are more active during participatory learning, while reading/writing style learners retain information best through reading and writing.

Studies focusing on Generation Z, such as those by Seemiller and Grace (2017), highlight that their learning preferences differ from previous generations. Gen Z students prefer to be engaged in learning they can immediately apply to real life, process information first through observing, prefer a broader application of content rather than a novice example, favor independent learning, and importantly, view peers and instructors as valuable resources. Given these preferences, adapting instruction to match the comfortable learning style of Gen Z is necessary to maximize learning effectiveness.

Challenges in Peer Feedback

Despite the evidence supporting its benefits, the implementation of peer feedback involves complexity, and researchers have noted several significant challenges. A primary concern is that student-generated feedback is "not necessarily correct and precise" (Gardner, 2006). Peers often focus disproportionately on surface errors, such as syntactic mistakes, while neglecting more complex semantic or textual errors related to the development of ideas and content. This can result in advice that does not adequately support revision. While the quality of feedback was generally high in some studies,

approximately 40% of respondents in one study agreed that the comments they provided were biased. Furthermore, a large percentage of respondents in one study agreed that the comments received were insufficient, presenting a significant disadvantage.

Students frequently harbor skepticism regarding the validity of peer comments. The direct preference for peer feedback over teacher feedback consistently receives the least support. Students feel that the teacher is "the most knowledgeable person" and prefer the guidance of an experienced instructor. This hesitation is rooted in the traditional view that places the sole responsibility for assessment with the teacher.

Peer evaluation is also susceptible to emotional and social dynamics within the classroom. Students have reported difficulty criticizing their friends, fearing that their friends would be uncomfortable. This reluctance can lead to bias, where students tend to overestimate or underestimate their peers. Peers may feel "emotionally prejudiced against giving low grades" (Patri, 2002) and may give high marks to assist friends, ultimately struggling to make sincere and truthful judgments. Students also express concern that peers may not take their assessment responsibilities seriously or are unqualified to make suggestions.

For peer feedback to be effective, students must perceive a personal benefit and thoroughly understand the purpose of the assignments. The process can be demanding and time-consuming. Most importantly, insufficient or a complete lack of proper training is a recurrent issue. Ching (1991) cautioned that unless students are "properly trained," they may continue focusing primarily on syntactic errors. Studies consistently recommend that students be "intensively trained to enable them to participate fully in the process" (Tang and Tithecott, 1999, p. 36). Berg (1999) substantiated this, concluding that "trained peer response positively affected writing outcomes, revision strategies, and peer talk about ESL student texts" (p.240). Specialized, personalized training should utilize guidance tools like forms and checklists to address individual needs.

Description of the Study

The empirical analysis, conducted by the researcher at Stella Maris College, was specifically designed to address the limited research on peer feedback efficacy in tertiary education. The research was conducted among approximately 60 undergraduate students of final year students of the English department. The central objective was to investigate the impact of the peer feedback model on Gen Z, focusing on its capacity to transform classroom dynamics and improve student outcomes. The study utilized the principles of co-operative learning and peer mentoring, adapting these strategies to involve peers in assessing the written work of students, including those with learning disabilities.

The methodology relied on documenting the implementation through a series of observations and reflections on peer evaluation activities, encompassing work done in the classroom and beyond. The findings are detailed through student perceptions summarized across 12 figures, which collectively demonstrate the efficacy of the model across multiple domains.

The results provided strong evidence validating the study's core premise: the peer review process effectively helped increase students' writing skills (Fig. 1). This affirmed that the model delivered tangible development beyond mere engagement. The study confirmed the integration of the model within a collaborative environment, with students affirming that the process provided an invaluable opportunity to learn from each other (Fig. 2) and successfully fostered a sense of community during these online classes (Fig. 3), mitigating potential isolation.

The development of higher-order thinking was demonstrated by findings that comments received from peers caused students to be more conscious about writing skills (Fig. 4). This suggests the creation of meta-cognitive awareness, enabling independent writing refinement.

Crucially, the findings confirmed the reciprocal nature and dual benefit of the process. Students learned

most significantly from the act of writing feedback to their peers (Fig. 6), which helped them identify errors in both content and ideas and organization (Fig. 7) in the work they were reviewing. The process was beneficial for foundational skills, enabling the identification of mechanical errors such as errors in punctuation and grammar (Fig. 5). Holistic academic skill development was also observed, with the collaborative exchange of ideas fostering comfort in complex academic integrity tasks, specifically acknowledging the sources (referencing the work) (Fig. 10).

Successful implementation depended on instructional structure. Students reported that Sample templates uploaded in the Google Classroom (Fig. 8) and Peer evaluation rubrics (Fig. 9) were beneficial for facilitating the reviewing activity and error identification. High levels of acceptance and trust were evident, as students felt the evaluation and the grades given by the peer were fair (Fig. 11). The desire for sustainability was confirmed by student willingness to reuse the model, noting they liked their writing to be revised by classmates again "because I can learn more" (Fig. 12).

Observations and Reflections

The central observation derived from the research was that peer evaluation proved to be an effective tool for student engagement and skill improvement, reinforcing its positioning as a novel alternative to traditional methods in tertiary education.

Researchers observed that learners provided positive reflections, viewing peer feedback as a valuable experience that offered significant opportunities to refine their writing and deepen their understanding of course content. Observations confirmed the effectiveness of the process in fostering meta-cognitive awareness, as peer comments resulted in students becoming more conscious about writing skills. The model addressed both surface and structural issues, with benefits confirmed in identifying errors in punctuation and grammar and errors in organization.

A critical reflection pertains to the reciprocal learning achieved: observations confirmed the invaluable opportunity to learn from each other. The active engagement of writing feedback enhanced the reviewer's own writing skills and content mastery, as students learnt most from writing feedback to my peer helping in identifying errors in content and ideas. Finally, the reliance on structured pedagogical support, utilizing Sample templates uploaded in the Google Classroom and Peer evaluation rubrics, was essential for effective integration and consistent feedback. The crucial observation that students perceived the "evaluation and the grades given by the peer were fair" indicated trust in the model. This holistic positive feedback confirmed that integrating peer feedback is necessary for enhancing students' writing and collaborative learning skills for Gen Z.

Conclusion

The research overwhelmingly supports the view that peer feedback is an effective instructional model that significantly improves the writing and collaborative learning skills of students, particularly for Gen Z in tertiary education. The synthesis of findings confirms that students exposed to this model demonstrated improved writing performance, learning not only from receiving useful comments but also, and most significantly, by actively writing feedback to their peers. This reciprocal learning promotes enhanced higher-order skills such as critical thinking and motivation.

Peer feedback provides Gen Z students with a valuable, empowering, and engaging learning experience, shifting the classroom environment into a dynamic, co-operative community. The demonstrated ability of this model to improve writing skills, critical thinking, and confidence makes it a worthwhile endeavor for modern writing instruction.

However, the sustained success of the peer evaluation model necessitates addressing its intrinsic challenges. Concerns regarding the sufficiency and quality of comments, coupled with the persistent student preference for teacher feedback as the ultimate source of authority, must be mitigated. Therefore, it is essential that peer review be introduced with caution and followed by intensive and personalized

training in providing constructive feedback, utilizing structured resources such as rubrics and sample templates.

References

- Berg, E. "The Effects of Trained Peer Response on ESL Students' revision Types and Writing Quality". *Journal of Second Language Writing,* 1999,18(3). pg 215-41.
- Ching, C. L. P. "Giving Feedback on Written Work". *Guidelines* 13(2), 1991. pg 68-80
- Ferris, Dana R. "Students reactions to teacher response in multiple draft composition classrooms. " *TESOL Quarterly*, 2007. pg 33-53.
- Gardner, R. "Peer review : Narrative". Retrieved October 15, 2025, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042812057023
- Gass, Susan, and Larry Selinker. *Second Language Acquisition*. Erlbaum, 1994, pg 217.
- Jensen, L., and K. Fischer. "Teaching technical writing through student peer evaluation". *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, 2005, 35 (1), pg 95-100.
- Liu, J., and K. Hansen. "Peer response in second language writing classrooms". *Ann Arbor*. MI. University of Michigan Press, 2002, pg 75.
- Lockhart, Chris, and P. Ng. "Evaluating and Discovering During Peer Response". *RELC Journal*,1996.
- Long, M. & P. Porter. "Group work, Interlanguage talk and Second language Acquisition". *TESOL Quarterly* 1985, 19(2), pg 305–25.
- Patri, M. The influence of peer feedback on self and peer assessment of oral skills. *Language Testing*, 2002, pg109-131.
- Porto, M. Cooperative writing response groups and self evaluation. *ELT Journal*, 2001, 55(1), 38 46.
- Roskams, T." Chinese EFL students' attitudes to peer feedback and peer assessment in an extended pairwork setting. RELC Journal, 1999, pg 79-106.
- Seemiller, Corey, and Meghan Grace. Generation Z Goes to College. *Jossey-Bass*, London , 2016.
- Tang, G., and J. Tithecott. Tang, G. M. & Tithecott, J. "Peer Response in ESL Writing". *TESL Canada Journal*, 16(2) pg 20–38.
- Todd, R. W., and J. Hudson. Using graded peer evaluation to improve student's writing skills, critical thinking ability, and comprehension of material in a principles of public relations course. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning*, 2007, 4(10), 39-46.
- Trochim, W. M. "National Commission on Writing: A powerful message from State Government" Retrieved November 5, 2025, http://www.csun.edu
- 17.Vygotsky, Lev S. *Mind in Society: The development of higher psychological processes. (M. Cole. V. John-Steiner. S. Scriber. & E. Souberman. Eds. and trans). Cambridge. MA. Harvard University Press, 1975.*
- Zhang, S. Reexamining the Effective Advantage of Peer Feedback in ESL Writing Class". *Journal of Second Language Writing, 1995,* 4 (3)pg 209-222

Appendix

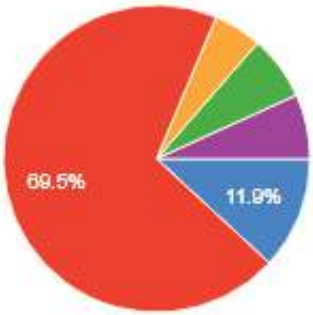


Fig.1 The peer review process helped increase my writing skills.

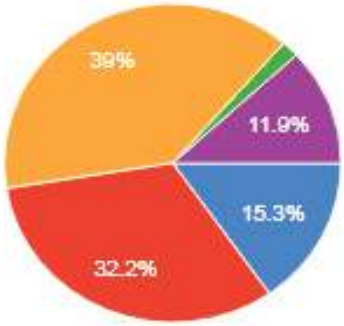


Fig.2 The peer evaluation provided an invaluable opportunity to learn from each other.

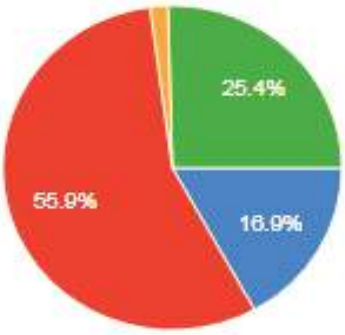


Fig.3 Peer reviewing activity helped to build a sense of community during these online classes.

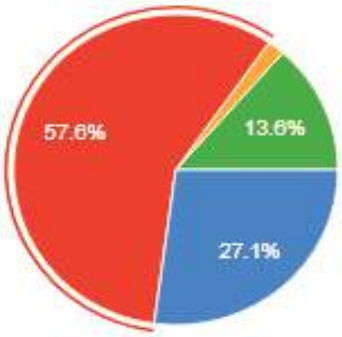


Fig.4 The comments from my peer evaluator classroom caused me to be more conscious about writing skills.

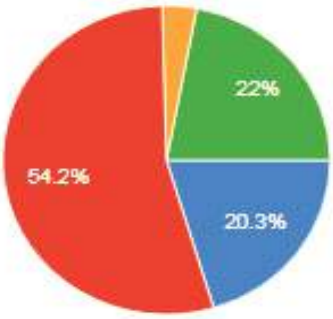


Fig 5. Comments provided by my peer reviewer on my tasks were beneficial to me for identifying errors in punctuation and grammar.

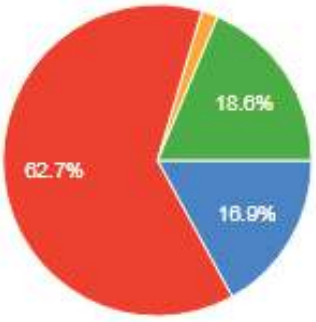


Fig.6 I learnt most from writing feedback to my peer helping in identifying errors in content and ideas.

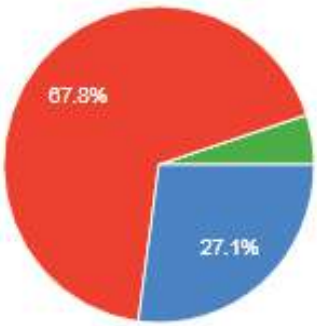


Fig 7. My reviews of my peer on her writing were helpful to me as well in identifying errors in organization.

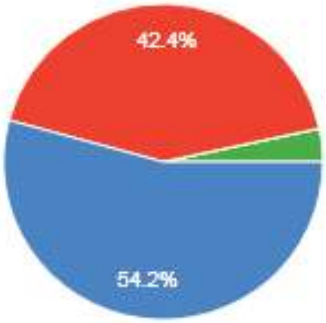


Fig. 8 Sample templates uploaded in the Google Classroom helped in the reviewing activity.

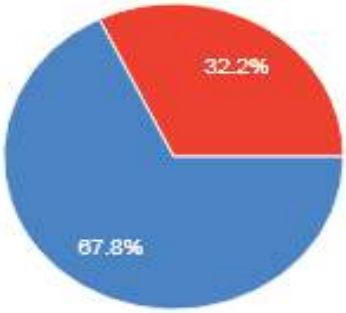


Fig. 9 Peer evaluation rubrics on tasks shared in the Google classroom were beneficial to me for identifying errors.

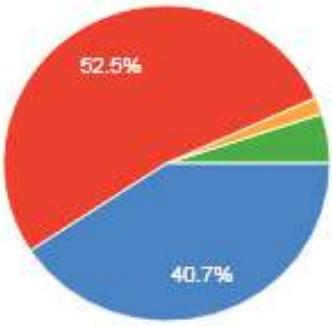


Fig. 10 Through exchange of ideas, I feel much more comfortable in acknowledging the sources (referencing the work).

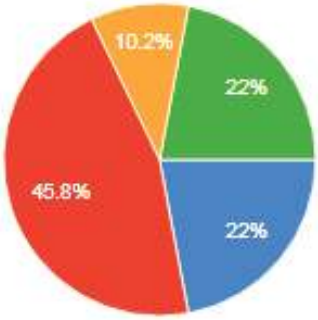


Fig 11. I think the evaluation and the grades given by the peer were fair.

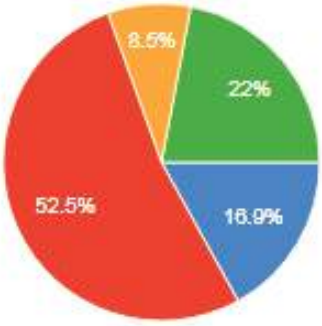
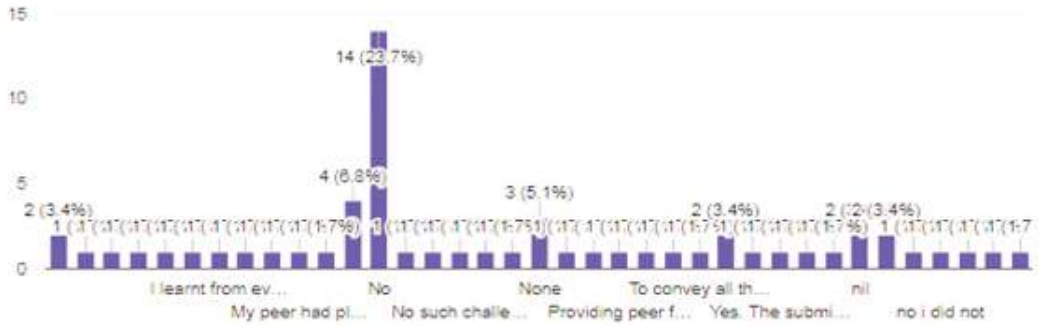


Fig. 12 I like my writing to be revised by my classmates again because I can learn more.

13. Have you had any challenges in providing Peer feedback? And if yes, please specify.



14. Name one (or more) input from the peer which helped you to polish your writing skills.

pointing out what is needed in the essay , like to enhance it .

she pointed my mistakes clearly

My peer helped me to identify the errors in my grammar, punctuations etc. There were few careless mistakes that should not have been done in a formal paper, that was cleared by the help of my peer.

I was not much aware about capitalisation and citation, so some of the inputs regarding this helped me.

Bibliography is very important

While identifying her mistakes I understood where I went wrong.

To be conscious about discourse markers and grammar mistakes.

Punctuations we don't pay attention to.

Suggestions given in each essay.

was able to rectify the mistakes I made and to be more conscious while writing.

The concept Plagerism to be avoided gas been the greatest help

She asked me to paragraph my essay , which helped in my essay looking presentable .

The way i begin my topic sentence and introduce the author's or publishing information can be a little detailed

unclear conclusion and topic sentence

I wrote punctuations grammar contractions and she helped me out

When they helped me revise my topic and see if my essay was relevant to the topic or not. This is great because some of us will be having a different idea of what to do. So it helped me improve my knowledge on the said type of writing.

I learned to look at my text throua fresh pair of eyes after my peer evaluator's corrections.

6

BODIES OF THE BLASTED LAND: TRANS-CORPOREALITY AND EMBODIED ECOLOGICAL TRAUMA IN ANN PANCAKE'S STRANGE AS THIS WEATHER HAS BEEN

Thirumagal Deepa. S, *Research Scholar, Department of English, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, Vandalur, Tamil Nadu, India*
thirumagaldeepa820@gmail.com
Dr. S. Sakthivel
Assistant Professor, Department of English, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, Vandalur, Tamil Nadu, India
Sakthivels1212@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper employs Stacy Alaimo's concept of Trans Corporeality, to understand nature of the body as permeable, porous, and in constant material exchange with its environment. This paper examines the exemplified experiences of the characters in a contemporary Appalachian narrative. The study employs close textual analysis to illustrate to how grief, trauma, memory, and ecological violence are not just social or psychological phenomena but are physically interwoven upon and which enacts through the body. Characters like Lace, Bant, Corey, Dane, Avery and others imprint the effects of the mining industry, loss of relationships, displacement, and ecological devastation which infiltrates lungs and mouths, floodwaters surge through guts, gasoline hovers in the air and clings to skin, and machines merge with flesh. The character's bodies serve as real landscape sites where human and nonhuman matter coincide and identity gets its shape by the place, and where absence (of land, of loved ones) portrays a physical void. The paper furthermore explores how emotions like jealousy, shame, anger, and longing are considered as corporeal, and how intergenerational trauma gets circulated materially across bodies and terrain. Ultimately, the paper will argue that trans corporeality provides a crucial framework to understand how ecological injustice is experienced from within, which challenges the Cartesian demarcation of body and world and which affirms the inseparability of environmental and bodily integrity in regions that is depleted by industrial capitalism.

Keywords: *Appalachian fiction, Ecological violence, Embodied trauma, Environmental injustice, Trans-corporeality.*

Introduction

Contemporary ecological studies shows that environmental violence devastates not just on landscapes but also penetrate within human bodies. Stacy Alaimo's theoretical concept of trans-corporeality explores how industrial extraction alters both terrain and flesh and marks the separation between body and world (Alaimo 2010). This study analyses Ann Pancake's novel Strange as this Weather Has Been (2007) through the concept of trans-corporeality, which argues that Pancake's representation of mountaintop removal mining in Appalachia illustrates how ecological injustice functions as bodily violence. The study undertakes close textual analysis and portrays how Pancake's narrative strategies which includes sensory immersion, corporeal focalization, and the dissolution of boundaries between

metaphor and materiality form what might be called as "trans-corporeal poetics" which embodies the demarcation of internal psychological states from external ecological conditions.

Alaimo's framework of trans-corporeality, delineated in Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self (2010), states "the movement across human corporeality and nonhuman nature, recognizing that human bodies are neither hermetically sealed nor distinct from the broader material world" (112). This framework arises from the collective studies of feminist materialism, environmental studies, and post humanist theory, which responds to limitations in both traditional environmentalism and maintains human exceptionalism, and poststructuralist theory, which tends to privilege discourse over material reality (Haraway 1991; Grosz 1994). Trans-corporeality rather emphasize on material interconnections and insists that bodies are porous, which constantly engage in exchange with environment that shape corporeal existence at cellular and systemic levels.

Pancake's novel investigates the experiences of the Ricker's family matriarch Lace, her husband Jimmy and their children Bant, Corey, Dane, and Avery as they witness the devastation of the mountain through industrial coal extraction. The narrative details multiple notion to render the physical, psychological, and social dimensions of environmental catastrophe. The study examines an unflinching scrutinization of mountaintop removal mining and its impact on the landscape and community in West Virginia. This study argues that Pancake's literary achievement lies sharply in her ability to state the impact of environmental violence as embodied experience, which makes visible the otherwise invisible processes through which ecological injustice infiltrates and reconstitutes human corporeality.

Literature Review

Von Schlichten (2017) merges ecological and theological perspectives which delves into proposed guardianship for nature. He discusses about Laudato Si' concept and repeatedly stresses the unity of creation and the inter-relatedness of all things and ecofeminist concepts. Freire (2022) examines how slow violence is represented in the novel. She discusses how the MTR slowly affects the ecosystem, and its biodiversity and causes health hazards for humans and nonhumans. She juxtaposes socioeconomic and environmental issues that have led to the consideration of Appalachian coal counties as both internal colonies and addresses them as 'sacrifice zones' (135).

(Brici 2023) illustrates the methodological intersection between cognitive literary studies and a conception of affect theory. She expands upon the "4E" cognitive model and traces the relationship of human and non-human agents within the metaphorical pattern of the novel. The present study incorporates the concept of Stacy Alaimo's Trans Corporeality to comprehend the process of how human body is vulnerable to the environment and that they are interconnected. The study depicts the trauma of the characters both physically and mentally due to the Mountaintop removal mining and exposes the indivisible nature of how the human body is linked with the environment and how the capitalistic greed paves way for the devastation of both the ecology and the human body.

Theoretical Frameworks: Trans-Corporeality and Material Ecocriticism

Alaimo's trans-corporeality emphasize upon several intellectual traditions that prove crucial to analyse Pancake's novel. Alaimo extends the scrutiny beyond social construction which considers how nonhuman nature engage in corporeal formation. Second, trans-corporeality participate with science studies, particularly Karen Barad's "agential realism," which states that matter possess agency and that human and nonhuman beings are mutually constituted through "intra-action" (Barad 2007, 33). Third, it reacts to ecological justice movements by documenting how exposure to toxic and environmental devastation creates an impact on the local communities, which results in bodily harm which is central to environmental politics (Bullard 1990; Pellow 2007).

Material ecocriticism, as proposed by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, articulates a theoretical approach which examines "the text of the world" and "the world of the text" as mutually

informing (Iovino and Oppermann 2012, 1). This concept identifies that matter carries narrative ability that bodies, landscapes, and substances narrate stories that can be read through attention to their material configurations. Iovino and Oppermann state that "matter is not a blank slate on which culture writes, but an active agent in the construction of meaning" (79). For literary analysis, this means to examine how texts represent materiality not as passive backdrop but as agentic force which shape narrative, character, and meaning (Bennett 2010). The concept of "storied matter" proves particularly relevant to analyse Pancake's novel, where polluted water, eroded mountains, and contaminated air function as narrative agents that engrave themselves onto and into human bodies. As Alaimo notes, to recognize trans-corporeality means to acknowledge that "the environment is not located somewhere out there, but is always the very substance of ourselves"(4).

Research Gap:

The earlier studies on the novel has addressed environmental justice, Appalachian resistance, and the socio-political implications of mountaintop removal, immense focus on the study of trans-corporeality and materiality remains underexamined. Current research often treats environmental degradation and bodily susceptibility as parallel rather than intra-active processes. Consequently, the depiction of penetration of the contaminated bodies, especially how human and nonhuman materialities co-constitute trauma remains largely overlooked. This study fills the gap by foregrounding embodied environmental harm as a central narrative strategy that redefines the stakes of environmental justice.

Permeable Bodies: Respiratory Incorporation and Material Infiltration

The novel depicts a site where environment and body gets merged. Characters not just inhale air, but they also they breathe the left over residue of industrial particulate matter. The pollutants from the devastated mountain penetrate the lungs and settle in the tissues of the human body. This respiratory intake signifies that bodies and environments are not separate but materially continuous (Tuana 2008).

Lace explains the presence of dust that has spread everywhere she says, "The dust gets in everything. In the bread dough. In the butter. In the cracks in your skin. You can taste it on your teeth" (Pancake 4). This passage shows how environmental contamination violates multiple bodily boundaries and enter the human body through the mouth, skin, the digestive intake of food gets tainted before consumption. The respiratory vulnerability of characters is seen most powerfully through Jimmy, who gets affected by the black lung disease, which he contracted from years of underground mining and makes him sensitive to dust accumulation in his body. Research states that coal workers black lung disease results from continuous inhalation of coal dust particles that gets accumulated in the lung tissue, which results in triggering the inflammation and fibrosis (Laney and Weissman 2014). Jimmy's deteriorated lungs serve as a recorded site for decades of exposure, "His lungs are museums. Packed with thirty years of coal. The coal is part of him now, woven into the tissue, and he can't cough it out, can't hack it up" (Pancake 87). The metaphor of lungs as "museums" indicates both preservation and loss. Jimmy's body is literally the store house of the material history of extraction, but this intake is violent rather than voluntary.

Pancake's prose rejects to metaphorize this incorporation. The coal in Jimmy's lungs is not a symbol but a substance, not depiction but material reality. His respiratory struggle throughout the novel depicts how environmental violence endures within the body even after a long span of exposure has ended. Jimmy cannot escape the consequences of the mine even after leaving it, his flesh has permanently carried its residue. This endurance challenges liberal humanist ideas of bodily autonomy and integrity, which reveals how extractive capitalism literally extracts the uprightness of working-class bodies (Scott 2010; Peeples 2011).

Water Contamination and Digestive Incorporation

Water acts as the most powerful agent of trans-corporeal exchange in Pancake's novel. Polluted water enters one's body through drinking, bathing, and cooking, which carries with it the chemical

elements as a result of blasting, heavy metals that from exposed geological strata, and bacterial contamination from unplanned waste management (Hendryx and Ahern 2008; Palmer et al. 2010). Characters as they confront the reality, change their perception from trust to suspicion as they witness their bodies are being poisoned through the most basic act of survival.

The act of drinking polluted water becomes a systemic act of landscape violence. Pancake turns this intake with a disturbing reference, "Every time she drinks water now, she thinks about what's in it. Thinks about the selenium and the iron and the manganese and the arsenic maybe traveling through her body, settling in her tissues, her organs. Building up" (Pancake 156). Lace's awareness alters the act of drinking from an act of unconscious state into a conscious intake of toxins. The phrase "building up" represents the subtle temporal erosion of toxic stagnation, where the environmental contamination functions gradually, each exposure which adds to bodily burden until threshold effects emerge (Liboiron 2021).

The novel depicts the intake of drinking water not as normal act but as carrier of material history. When Lace serves water to her grandchild, she envisions, "All that destroyed mountain flowing through her grandchild's small body. The blasted rock and the buried streams and the poisoned runoff, all of it going into that little stomach" (Pancake 167). This passage institutes trans-corporeality through its shattering of scale and boundary, the particles of the mountain enters the child's stomach, where the geological objects settle in the gastric and the wide landscape is instilled into the intimate space of a kid's digestive system. The grandchild's body turns into a site where violence is committed to both the mountains and the flesh of the human, which demonstrates what Chen calls the "animacy hierarchy" where the body is deemed more vulnerable to toxic exposure (Chen 2012).

Corporeal Affect: Grief as Material Substance

In the novel, grief is not just an emotional reaction to environmental devastation but it acts as a material condition that resides and alters bodies. Pancake indicates that grief as a somatic process where the degradation of the landscape results in physical symptoms such as tightness in the chest, heaviness in the stomach, tiredness that infuses in the muscles and bones. The grief illustrates trans-corporeality's shattering of psychological and physical records, which reveals how emotional states are indivisible from material conditions (Cvetkovich 2012).

Lace's sadness over the loss of the landscape is primarily revealed through somatic symptoms. She describes heaviness, as though her body has imbibed the burden of the destroyed mountains, "It's like there's this weight inside her chest. Not pain exactly, but a kind of heaviness that makes it hard to breathe fully. Like something pressing down from the inside" (Pancake 45). Her body imitates internally on what is being done to the landscape, as though grief functions through material alteration rather than symbolic representation.

The concept of "solastalgia," termed by Glenn Albrecht to denote "the distress that is caused by ecological change which impacts people while they are directly linked to their residing environment," is apt here (Albrecht 2005, 45). Yet Pancake's depiction surpasses even this extended vocabulary, as her characters tackle not just distress but also bodily decomposition. Lace enumerates her feeling as though she is crumbled, "Sometimes she feels like she's disappearing. Like her edges are blurring. Like she's becoming as eroded as the land" (Pancake 223). The metaphor of erosion employed to self, depicts a profound form of trans-corporeality where the body's material structure reflects the landscape structure and damage to one obviously damages the other, which Shotwell terms as "knowing otherwise" through bodily knowledge (Shotwell 2016).

Intergenerational Trauma and Biological Inheritance

The concept of intergenerational trauma has garnered attention through research on offsprings of Holocaust survivors, enslaved peoples, and Indigenous communities who were subjected to genocide and

forced assimilation (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998; DeGruy 2005). Progressively the studies identify that trauma circulation functions not only through narrative and memory but also through biological systems, specifically epigenetic changes that transform gene expression without changing DNA sequence (Yehuda and Lehrner 2018). Pancake's novel depicts that children born in ecologically devastated areas inherit more than stories; they inherit statures shaped by the ancestral exposure to toxic elements, stress, and deprivation.

Lace depicts the biological inheritance, "She thinks about what she's passed on to her children. Not just the stories or the values, but the actual physical stuff. The chemicals in her body when she was pregnant. The contaminated water she drank while nursing. All of it going into them, becoming part of them" (Pancake 304). This passage delineates trans-corporeality across generations, where the substances of Lace's body is imbibed through ecological exposure become the substances through which her children's bodies are built. Gestational and nursing alteration means that industrial pollution reaches fetuses and infants even before they have any direct contact with contaminated environments (Woodruff et al. 2011).

In a research conducted by Yehuda and Lehrner on epigenetic transmission implies that traumatic experiences can transform gene expression in ways which affect subsequent generations (243). The communities that are exposed to persistent pollution may imbibe both the polluted landscape and their bodies are shaped by parental exposure (Grandjean and Landrigan 2014). This materialization of intergenerational trauma exceeds traditional psychoanalytic models, which demands attention to how place and flesh together constitute inheritance.

Conclusion: Trans-Corporeality and Environmental Justice

The novel highlights environmental destruction as an fundamentally embodied process, which insists that environmental harm is indivisible from bodily harm. Through detailed depictions of polluted water which is infiltrated in digestive systems, coal dust embedded itself in lungs, and toxins exposed, it reshapes the developing fetuses, the novel positions human bodies as areas of industrial violence, which witnesses centuries of extraction and exploitation in Appalachian landscapes. It dissolves the nature-culture binary, it makes unsustainable idea of humans as separate from or higher in order to the natural world. Similarly, it questions the liberal humanist notions of bodily autonomy, which illustrates that Pancake's characters bodies are engulfed and are already tarnished by environmental conditions independent of their will.

Prominently, trans-corporeality frames ecological justice as undetachable from bodily justice. The adversity of Lace, Bant, and Avery demonstrates that contamination and policy concessions are not incidental results of financial progress but direct assault on the body. By evoking the details of contamination, the novel emphasis that justice must attend simultaneously to landscapes and the bodies they sustain, identifies all local residents of sacrifice zones subjects whose corporeal well-being is indivisible from environmental restoration.

Works Cited

- Alaimo, Stacy. Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self. Indiana UP, 2010.
- Albrecht, Glenn. "Solastalgia: A New Concept in Human Health and Identity." Philosophy, Activism, Nature, vol. 3, 2005, pp. 41-55.
- Barad, Karen. Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning. Duke UP, 2007.
- Bennett, Jane. Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things. Duke UP, 2010.
- Bordo, Susan. Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body. U of California P, 1993.
- Brave Heart, Maria Yellow Horse, and Lemyra M. DeBruyn. "The American Indian Holocaust:

Healing Historical Unresolved Grief." American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research, vol. 8, no. 2, 1998, pp. 56-78.

- Brici, Alexandra. 2023. “Toward a Nonhuman Narratology: Material Metaphors in AnnPancake's Strange as This Weather Has Been.” Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studiesand Theory 9 (2): 9–31. doi:10.24193/mjcst.2023.16.02.
- Bullard, Robert. Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality. Westview Press, 1990.
- Butler, Judith. Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex". Routledge, 1993.
- Chen, Mel Y. Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect. Duke UP, 2012.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. Depression: A Public Feeling. Duke UP, 2012.
- DeGruy, Joy. Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing. Uptone Press, 2005.
- Freire, Sara Villamarín. 2022. “Discursive Constructions of Waste And Slow Violence in Ann Pancake's Strange As This Weather Has Been. Revista De Estudios Norteamericanos, no. 26 (January): 131–51.doi:10.12795/ren.2022.i26.08.
- Grandjean, Philippe, and Philip J. Landrigan. "Neurobehavioural Effects of Developmental Toxicity." The Lancet Neurology, vol. 13, no. 3, 2014, pp. 330-38.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism. Indiana UP, 1994.
- Haraway, Donna J. Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature. Routledge, 1991.
- Hendryx, Michael, and Melissa M. Ahern. "Relations Between Health Indicators and Residential Proximity to Coal Mining in West Virginia." American Journal of Public Health, vol. 98, no. 4, 2008, pp. 669-71.
- Iovino, Serenella, and Serpil Oppermann. "Material Ecocriticism: Materiality, Agency, and Models of Narrativity." Ecozon@, vol. 3, no. 1, 2012, pp. 75-91.
- Laney, A. Scott, and David N. Weissman. "Respiratory Diseases Caused by Coal Mine Dust." Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, vol. 56, supplement 10, 2014, pp. S18-22.
- Liboiron, Max. Pollution Is Colonialism. Duke UP, 2021.
- Palmer, Margaret A., et al. "Mountaintop Mining Consequences." Science, vol. 327, no. 5962, 2010, pp. 148-49.
- Pancake, Ann. Strange as this Weather Has Been. Shoemaker & Hoard, 2007.
- Peeples, Jennifer. "Toxic Sublime: Imaging Contaminated Landscapes." Environmental Communication, vol. 5, no. 4, 2011, pp. 373-92.
- Pellow, David Naguib. Resisting Global Toxics: Transnational Movements for Environmental Justice. MIT Press, 2007.
- Shotwell, Alexis. Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times. U of Minnesota P, 2016.
- Tuana, Nancy. "Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina." Material Feminisms, edited by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, Indiana UP, 2008, pp. 188-213.
- Von Schlichten, David, Jr. 2017. “Strange as This Weather Has Been: Teaching Laudato Si'and Ecofeminism.” Journal of Moral Theology 6 (Special Issue 1): 159–68.
- Woodruff, Tracey J., et al. "Environmental Chemicals in Pregnant Women in the United States: NHANES 2003-2004." Environmental Health Perspectives, vol. 119, no. 6, 2011, pp. 878-85.
- Yehuda, Rachel, and Amy Lehrner. "Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma Effects: Putative Role of Epigenetic Mechanisms." World Psychiatry, vol. 17, no. 3, 2018, pp. 243-57.

7

REVIVING VOICES: INDIGENOUS STORYTELLING AND FOLKLORE IN GIRISH KARNARD'S NAGAMANDALA

Dency Jebagnanam S, *MA English (Aided), Madras Christian College, Tambaram, Chennai*

Abstract

This paper explores Girish Karnard's play Nagamandala through the lens of Indigenous Storytelling Theory, a framework grounded in the work of scholars like Linda Tuhiwasi Smith and inspired by collective traditions. Nagamandala is deeply rooted in Indian folklore, making use of oral storytelling, magical motifs, and mythic structures.

By personifying "Story" and weaving together multiple tales, the play reflects how oral narratives have always been essential to community life, the sharing of values, and even challenging traditions. Analysing the play with Indigenous Storytelling Theory lets us see how Karnard uses folk stories not just to preserve the past, but to give voice to the struggles and hopes of women, and to question authority in a subtle yet powerful way. The mic of magic with everyday problems in the play shows how myth and folklore aren't just old stories, but living traditions that shape identity and invite new perspectives. Overall, this paper argues that Nagamandala demonstrates the vitality of Indigenous storytelling, proving that these traditions are meaningful tools for social change and creative expression in today's world.

Keywords: *Indigenous storytelling, Folklore, Oral tradition, Myth, Cultural resistance.*

Introduction

Storytelling has always been a vital force in human societies, especially within Indigenous and folk traditions, where oral narratives serve as repositories of history, identity, and resistance. In India, the rich tapestry of folklore, myth, and oral tradition continues to shape communal life, offering both continuity and the possibility of transformation. Girish Karnad's play Nagamandala (1988) stands as a powerful testament to this enduring legacy, drawing deeply from South Indian folktales and weaving together magical motifs, mythic structures, and everyday struggles. The play's narrative technique, personifying "Story" and layering multiple tales, reflects the dynamic nature of oral storytelling, where the past is not merely preserved but actively reimagined.

This paper analyzes Nagamandala through the lens of Indigenous Storytelling Theory, a framework grounded in the work of scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, which emphasizes the collective, relational, and resistant qualities of storytelling. By applying this theory, the paper demonstrates how Karnad uses folk narratives not only to celebrate tradition but also to challenge authority, amplify marginalized voices, particularly those of women, and invite new perspectives on social norms. The interplay of magic and reality in Nagamandala reveals how myth and folklore are not static relics but living traditions that shape identity and foster creative resistance.

Ultimately, this paper argues that Nagamandala exemplifies the vitality of Indigenous storytelling, proving that these traditions remain meaningful tools for social change and creative expression in the contemporary world.

Literature Review

Indigenous Storytelling Theory has emerged as a crucial framework in decolonial and postcolonial

scholarship, highlighting storytelling not merely as narration but as a mode of resistance, identity formation, and knowledge-making within Indigenous and marginalized communities. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's foundational work underscores the significance of storytelling as a collective, culturally embedded practice that challenges dominant epistemologies and reclaims indigenous voices suppressed by colonial histories. Her emphasis on storytelling as both a methodology and an act of cultural survival opens new ways to interpret literary texts rooted in oral traditions.

The application of Indigenous Storytelling Theory to Indian contexts has gained momentum, linking the rich tapestry of Indian folk narratives, myths, and oral traditions with contemporary explorations of caste, gender, and power dynamics. Scholars like Arjun Appadurai and Veena Das have underscored how folklore and oral narratives in South Asia serve as dynamic texts that negotiate social hierarchies and cultural memory, rather than static relics of the past.

In literary criticism, Girish Karnad's Nagamandala has been studied extensively for its innovative dramatization of folklore and gender politics. Critics such as Ananda Lal and Rekha Pande have noted Karnad's skillful intertwining of mythic and magical realist elements, which bring alive rural Indian oral traditions in ways that interrogate patriarchy and social norms. However, much scholarship has focused either on textual analysis or gender critique without fully engaging with Indigenous Storytelling Theory's broader implications about collective memory and cultural resistance.

This paper seeks to fill that gap by situating Nagamandala explicitly within Indigenous Storytelling Theory. This approach emphasizes not only the preservation of folk narratives but also their active role in voicing the struggles and subversions of marginalized subjects, particularly women, and challenging the hegemonic status quo. By doing so, it demonstrates how Karnad's play functions as a living locus of cultural and political contestation, continuing the oral tradition's legacy of social change.

Theoretical Framework

This paper employs Indigenous Storytelling Theory as its central theoretical framework, grounded primarily in the scholarship of Linda Tuhiwai Smith and other Indigenous theorists who emphasize storytelling as a relational, embodied, and decolonial practice. Indigenous Storytelling Theory challenges Western epistemologies by positioning stories not only as cultural artifacts but as living, collective acts that sustain Indigenous governance, knowledge systems, and resistance to colonial domination. Unlike Western narrative models that often prioritize linear temporality, individual agency, and detached observation, Indigenous storytelling embraces cyclical time, interconnectedness with land and community, and multiplicity of meanings.

Central to this framework is the understanding that storytelling functions as both a method and a mode of knowledge production that is rooted in place, communal values, and lived experience. It involves layering histories, myths, and present realities to enable multiple truths to coexist, giving voice to marginalized perspectives, especially those of women and subaltern groups. The theory highlights storytelling's role in embodying Indigenous ontologies, such as holistic knowledge, reciprocity, and responsibility to the earth, which are often erased or misrepresented in dominant cultural narratives.

Applied to Girish Karnad's Nagamandala, Indigenous Storytelling Theory allows for an analysis that goes beyond textual interpretation to encompass the play's enactment of folklore as a vibrant, resistant force within Indian cultural contexts. The play's use of oral narrative forms, magical realism, and mythic symbolism can thus be understood as acts that reclaim indigenous modes of knowing and storytelling as strategies of cultural survival and political critique. This framework situates Karnad's work within traditions that not only preserve the past but actively negotiate identity, authority, and social transformation in the present.

Narrative Structure and Oral Tradition

Nagamandala uses a layered story-within-a-story structure, where a storyteller recounts the main

narrative to a group of flames. This framing device encapsulates the Indigenous storytelling tradition's communal and performative nature, emphasizing the relationship between the teller, the audience, and the story itself. It calls attention to storytelling as a living act that sustains community life, where narratives are passed down orally and evolve with each retelling. The interplay of reality and myth blurs boundaries and challenges the notion of a fixed, singular truth, illustrating how oral storytelling embraces ambiguity and multiplicity of meanings. This technique preserves the participatory essence of Indigenous narratives, ensuring stories remain vibrant, relevant, and embedded in collective memory.

Folklore and Magical Realism as Cultural Expression

The core of Nagamandala draws heavily on South Indian folklore, especially the motif of the shape-shifting cobra (Naga), which magically transforms into Rani's absent husband. This infusion of magical realism serves not only as a fantastical element but as a culturally embedded metaphor reflecting social and psychological realities. By blending the mystical with the everyday, Karnad highlights how folklore functions as a dynamic cultural expression that negotiates identity, desire, and power within the rural societal framework. Rather than being static or archaic, these myths are living traditions that frame community values and serve as vehicles of cultural continuity and critique.

Gender, Voice, and Subversion

Rani's transformation, from an oppressed, voiceless wife into a figure who gains agency and self-expression through her relationship with the Naga, forms the heart of the play's feminist undercurrent. The narrative critiques patriarchal authority by exposing the neglect and jealousy of her husband, Appanna, and by highlighting the gendered double standards concerning fidelity and autonomy. Through Indigenous Storytelling Theory, Nagamandala is read as a vessel for marginalized female voices, using folklore as a subtle yet potent form of cultural resistance. Women's stories, traditionally transmitted orally within private domestic spaces, serve here as means to challenge dominant social norms and to empower women's subjectivity and resilience.

Tradition, Authority, and Social Change

The trial by ordeal, where Rani must prove her innocence by surviving the cobra's embrace, symbolizes the complex intersection of belief systems, tradition, and justice in rural Indian communities. This ritual episode critiques entrenched social authority and patriarchal control, yet it also underscores the fluidity within traditions, showing that they are not fixed but open to reinterpretation and transformation. Appanna's eventual acceptance of Rani can be viewed as an embodiment of social change facilitated through storytelling and communal rituals. Indigenous Storytelling Theory highlights this negotiation of power within tradition, demonstrating how culturally embedded narratives can catalyze shifts in identity and social order.

Storytelling as Living Practice

Finally, the personification of “Story” as a character and the ambiguous, open-ended presence of the Naga emphasize storytelling as an ongoing, living practice that bridges past, present, and future. The play's conclusion leaves room for multiple interpretations, reinforcing the Indigenous principle that stories are never final or static but constantly renegotiated and renewed by each generation. This open narrative invites the audience and community to reimagine their realities and identities through the stories they tell and retell, affirming the enduring vitality and creative potential of oral traditions in shaping cultural consciousness.

Conclusion

Girish Karnad's Nagamandala exemplifies the power of Indigenous storytelling as both a cultural practice and a mode of social critique. Through its rich interweaving of folklore, myth, and oral narrative, the play transcends mere preservation of tradition to become a vibrant site for interrogating authority, gender dynamics, and identity in Indian society. Applying Indigenous Storytelling Theory reveals how

Karnad's dramatization gives voice to marginalized experiences, particularly those of women, while simultaneously embracing the fluid, relational nature of stories as living, communal acts.

The play's use of magical realism and mythic motifs illustrates storytelling's enduring relevance, not only as a reflection of community values but as a dynamic process of cultural resistance and transformation. By situating Nagamandala within Indigenous storytelling frameworks, this paper has demonstrated that these narratives remain vital tools for creative expression and social change, capable of renewing identities and challenging hegemonic structures.

Ultimately, Karnad's work reminds us that storytelling is an ongoing, collective practice, one that honors the past while fostering new possibilities for the future. As such, Nagamandala powerfully asserts the continued importance of Indigenous and folk traditions in contemporary cultural discourse and activism.

Works Cited

- Appadurai, Arjun. Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization. University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Das, Veena. Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary. University of California Press, 2007.
- Lal, Ananda. Theatres of India: A Concise Companion. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Pande, Rekha. “Feminist Perspectives on Indian Drama.” In Contemporary Indian Theatre: Interview with Directors, Editors and Playwrights, edited by Rustom Bharucha, 1993.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples. Zed Books, 1999.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai, et al. “Storytelling and Indigenous Research Methodology.” AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples, vol. 6, no. 2, 2010, pp. 1–13.

8

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF STUDENTS LEARNING THROUGH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) TEACHING TOOL VERSUS TRADITIONAL TEACHING METHOD

Viola Dhill Christina I, *Research Scholar, Dr M. G. R. Educational and Research Institute, Chennai – 600095.*

Dr. S. Meena Rani, *Professor, Department of English, Dr M. G. R. Educational and Research Institute, Chennai – 600095.*

Abstract

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed the educational landscape. This method offers new opportunities for personalised, adaptive, and interactive learning. This study examines how students learn with the help of Artificial Intelligence (AI) teaching tools compared to traditional classroom methods. The research focuses on engagement, motivation, conceptual understanding, effective learning, skill development, feedback, and assessment. The questionnaire was designed using the Four-point Likert scale. There are 20 closed-ended questions and 5 open-ended questions. This study investigated the impact of AI tools on enhancing independent learning, digital literacy, and problem-solving skills among students. The quantitative data were collected with the help of a Google Form, the accuracy findings are done by the central tendency (mean, median and mode), and the result is represented through the pie chart. The research findings revealed that AI tools significantly enhance self-learning, digital literacy and problem-solving abilities by providing instant feedback and quick clarification for the students. The study concludes that AI teaching tools are one of the best methods for the effective teaching and learning process, an innovative teaching method and for the student's engagement, but it is not a replacement for the traditional method of teaching. A balanced integration of technology and traditional teaching methods will help the development of both cognitive and affective learning skills for the students in the teaching learning process.

Keywords: *AI teaching tools, Traditional Teaching methods, Students learning, Skill development, educational technology.*

Introduction

The 21st century has witnessed a dramatic transformation in the field of education through the integration of technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI). With the emergence of Artificial Intelligence tutoring and learning platforms like ChatGPT, Grammarly, Duolingo, Et cetera, the traditional classroom model is being redefined. AI teaching tools offer interactive, personalised and data-driven learning experiences that can adapt to the individual learner's needs. During the pandemic, the online mode of teaching and learning emerged rapidly among the students during that time period. This mode of teaching was both useful and safe for both students and teachers. The exams were conducted online, and the assessment process was also done online. This mode of teaching is not a replacement for the traditional teaching methods; the methods and modes of teaching and learning can change according to the needs of the students and the teachers. It is a supportive method for the teaching learning process. "Artificial Intelligence (AI) integration in English language learning instruction has witnessed notable developments

in recent years" (Dr Dhanapal et al. 182). AI-based learning tools will provide personalised content according to the learners' needs, progress and preferences. They will provide instant feedback, accuracy in the assessment process and quick clarification. It also engages the students in the teaching and learning process, and students can learn beyond the classroom boundaries.

"Using artificial Intelligence (AI) to develop intelligent content, such as personalised textbooks and consciously updated learning materials, enhances the efficacy of individual educational experiences. These improvements not only highlight a significant change in the teaching of the English language but also suggest the possibility of developing a learning environment that is more focused on the needs and expectations of learners" (Dr Dhanapal et al. 183).

Traditional teaching methods continue to play a vital role in shaping the students in the aspects of learning emotional intelligence, social interaction, empathy and moral development. In many educational contexts, face-to-face instruction remains the most accessible and effective mode of teaching. Teachers not only deliver the subject knowledge but also mentor the students and help them build discipline and foster collaboration. There will always be debate between AI-based learning and Traditional teaching, therefore raises an important question. Can AI replace the human touch in education, or should it serve as a supportive tool that enhances traditional methods? In this research paper, there will be a finding for this question. This study aims to analyse how students learn through AI teaching tools versus traditional classroom teaching, focusing on engagement, motivation, conceptual understanding, effective learning, skill development, feedback and assessment.

Literature Review

There is much research on the comparison of two different teaching methods in the teaching learning process.

Changyi Li and Jiang Long Comparing AI-Assisted and Traditional Teaching in College English: Pedagogical Benefits and Learning Behaviours (2025). The study investigates the impact of integrating AI into college English teaching, focusing on its role in enhancing students' critical thinking and academic engagement. A controlled experiment compared AI-assisted instruction with traditional teaching. The findings highlight both the promise and the limitations of AI in language education, underscoring the importance of teacher facilitation and thoughtful design of human AI interaction to support deep and sustainable learning.

Amir Abdulhussein Hashim, Innovative Approaches in English Language Teaching: A Comparative Analysis of Traditional and Modern Methods (2025). This review article covers a range of ELT methodologies and their evolution from traditional approaches, contrasted with modern methods, to strengths, limitations and the place of technology within them. The paper concludes with a review of ideas on how best to synthesise innovative methods with old practices, emphasising continuous professional development, investment in technology and research into the longitudinal effects of hybrid teaching. With these factors in mind, educators will be able to accommodate the ever-changing nature of ELT and make sure learning is effective for students of diverse backgrounds.

Afreen Afshan Sheikh, A Comparative Study of AI and Traditional Methods in Teaching Grammar to English Learners (2025). The research critically analyses the effectiveness of traditional methods of teaching and artificial intelligence AI- based teaching tools for the teaching of grammar to English language learners. The data that helped to determine students' experiences and performance outcomes was gathered using questionnaires, interviews and assessments. The findings show that AI-based approaches have a huge impact on student engagement and grammar memory using quick corrections, adaptive learning routines and individual feedback.

Dr Chitra Dhanapal et al, Impact of Artificial Intelligence Versus Traditional Instruction for Language Learning: A Survey (2024). The study examined the impact of AI-based training compared to

conventional instruction approaches in the context of language acquisition. This study collected data from language learners to assess their perspectives and experiences of both traditional and AI-based training. The aim was to determine the advantages and disadvantages of AI-based training and its potential to enhance language learning outcomes. A representative sample of 72 learners will be administered the survey questionnaire as part of the research approach. The findings of this study shed light on the impact of AI-based training on language learning outcomes.

Kudaiberfen Arusa Mergenbaykyzy AI in English language teaching: bridging the gap between traditional and digital methods (2022). This theoretical article explores the changing role of AI in language learning, emphasising the advantages, difficulties, and possible uses of this technology. One of the key advantages of AI in language learning is its ability to provide personalised and adaptive learning experiences. AI-powered tools can analyse students' data to identify strengths, weaknesses and learning styles, tailoring content and pace to individual needs. In the end, the research indicates that AI can revolutionise language instruction by presenting fresh chances for teachers and learners alike.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study adopted a descriptive survey questionnaire designed through Google Form using a Five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was distributed electronically to students of various departments and from various colleges.

Participants

60 students participated in the survey; the sample included both male and female respondents from various departments and various colleges.

Instrumentation

The data collection tool was divided into seven sections; there are 20 closed-ended questions and 5 open-ended questions. Those 20 close-ended questions are categorised under five topics, such as engagement and motivation, conceptual understanding and effective learning, skill development, feedback and assessment.

Section 1: Demographic Information
Section 2: Engagement and Motivation
Section 3: Conceptual Understanding and effective learning
Section 4: Skill development
Section 5: Feedback
Section 6: Assessment
Section 7: Open-ended questions

Each question was rated on a five-point Likert Scale: Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), Strongly agree (5). And the open-ended questions, exploring

1. What are all the AI tools used in your teaching and learning process?
2. What are all the skills that you learned with the help of AI tools?
3. Which method will you prefer in the teaching learning process (AI-based teaching method or Traditional teaching method)?
4. What are all the limitations you faced in AI-based learning?
5. How does interaction with a teacher differ from interaction with an AI tool?

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using measures of central tendency, mean, median and mode to determine the central tendency and compare students' perceptions across various dimensions. Qualitative data were analysed through open-ended responses. A Graphical presentation (Pie chart) is also included to enhance the clarity of the results. This study analysed responses from 60 students who completed the

Google Form questionnaire. Responses to the 20 closed-ended questions were coded on a five-point Likert scale. For the analysis, we grouped items into five dimensions and analysed student responses for the AI-based method questionnaire versus the traditional teaching questionnaire.

Engagement and Motivation

Under this dimension, there are a total of five questions; four questions are based on the AI-based teaching method, and one question is based on the traditional teaching method. The data was analysed separately to identify the preferences of the students. The collected results show that the AI mean is 3.974, and the traditional teaching method mean is 2.933. Students strongly agreed that the AI-based teaching methods would improve engagement and motivation in the teaching and learning process.

Conceptual understanding and effective learning

Under this dimension, there are a total of four questions, one question based on the AI-based teaching and one question based on the traditional teaching method, and two questions are a comparison between the AI and traditional teaching methods. The data was analysed separately to identify the preferences of the students. The collected results show that the AI mean is 4.3, the traditional teaching method mean is 3.233, and the comparison question mean value is 4.091. Students reported slightly stronger agreement for the AI-based teaching method, for the conceptual understanding and effective understanding in the teaching learning process.

Skill Development

Under this dimension, there are a total of four questions, two based on the AI teaching method and two based on the traditional teaching method. The data was analysed separately to identify the preferences of the students. The collected results show that the AI mean is 4.133, and for the Traditional teaching methods, the mean value is 3.25. The Majority of the students preferred that the skill development take place under the AI-based teaching method.

Feedback

Under these dimensions, there are a total of three questions: two questions based on the AI teaching method and one question based on the comparison between the AI-based teaching method and the traditional teaching method. The data was analysed separately to identify the preferences of the students. The collected results show that the AI mean value is 4.075, and for the comparison question, the mean value is 4.25. Students strongly agreed that AI provides instant feedback and quick clarification compared to traditional teaching methods, and helps to monitor their progress in the teaching and learning process.

Assessment

Under this dimension, there are a total of four questions, three questions based on the AI teaching method and one question based on the comparison between the AI-based teaching method and the traditional teaching method. The data was analysed separately to identify the preferences of the students. The collected results show that the AI mean is 4.011, and the mean value for the comparison question is 4.05. Students strongly agreed that the assessment process is more accurate, consumes less time, transparent

Open-ended questions

1. What are all the AI tools used in your teaching and learning process?
2. What are all the skills that you learned with the help of AI tools
3. Which method will you prefer in the teaching learning process (AI-based teaching method or traditional teaching method)?
4. What are the limitations you faced in AI-based learning?
5. How does interaction with a teacher differ from interaction with an AI tool?

Discussion

1. What are all the AI tools used in your teaching and learning process?

Students identified a wide range of AI-powered educational tools integrated into their learning process. The most frequently mentioned tools are ChatGPT, Grammarly, Google Bard, QuilBot, and YouTube, as well as institutional tools such as Microsoft Copilot, AI translation tools and AI-based quiz generators. Among these various tools, 36.50% of the students mentioned that they use ChatGPT as a supportive tool for the teaching and learning process. A small number of students also reported dependence on AI, emphasising the need for guided usage and critical evaluation of AI-generated content. Overall, this question illustrates that AI tools, especially ChatGPT, have become integral components of modern self-regulated learning environments.

2. What are all the skills that you learned with the help of AI tools?

Students' responses highlighted the acquisition of both academic and digital literacy skills through consistent use of AI tools. 29.50% of dominant skills identified were communication, writing and language skills. Many students also mentioned programming skills, critical thinking, analytical skills, creative and presentation skills, learning and concept understanding and technical and digital skills. From the above response evident that. With the help of AI tools, students can enhance their skills in the teaching and learning process.

3. Which mentioned will you prefer in the teaching and learning process (AI-based teaching method or traditional teaching method)?

This question elicited diverse but insightful opinions. 54.80% of students expressed a preference for AI-based teaching methods, primarily due to their flexibility, interactivity, and accessibility. Learners emphasised that AI tools allow them to learn anytime, anywhere, promoting individualised and personalised feedback. A notable 19.20% of students still preferred traditional teaching methods, and 21.90% of students preferred the combination of AI and Traditional teaching methods in the teaching and learning process.

4. What are the limitations you faced in AI-based learning?

While students largely appreciated AI tools, they also reported several challenges. 24.60% of students faced issues such as a lack of network and internet dependence. The most common limitations included critical evaluation skill, misinformation and over-reliance on AI-generated content. Students mentioned that AI occasionally produced inaccurate or irrelevant answers. A limited number of students expressed difficulty in determining the authenticity of information. Even though there are a few limitations they faced by they still preferred the AI-based teaching method in the teaching and learning process.

5. How does interaction with a teacher differ from interaction with an AI tool?

Students' reflections on this question provided deep insight into the human and machine learning dynamic. They consistently described teachers as emotionally intelligent mentors who will provide motivation, encouragement, and moral support, but the AI cannot replicate this. In contrast, interaction with AI tools was described as efficient, immediate and information-oriented but emotionally neutral. While AI offers instant clarification and personalised feedback, it still lacks the relational dimension of human communication. Students feel AI is not as emotionally intelligent mentor as a teacher.

Conclusion

The responses to the questionnaire show that students strongly appreciate AI features for engagement and motivation, conceptual understanding and effective learning, skill development, feedback and assessment in the teaching learning process." It is possible that a blended model, which combines the advantages of artificial intelligence with traditional teaching methods, could be seen as a favourite approach" (Dr Chitra Dhanapal 190). The results point toward a blended pedagogical model as the most effective for future studies, therefore supporting the proposition that students prefer AI-based learning for understanding and application, whereas they value traditional teaching for motivation and interpersonal engagement. The statistical evidence and learners' perceptions collectively confirm that the

AI-based teaching method will enhance education, and it is not a replacement for the traditional teaching method.

References

- Joma, Nayef. "Traditional Strategies and AI-Integrated Strategies in Learning English among EFL Omani Students." Journal Arbitrer, vol.12, no. 3, 2025, pp. 379.
- Shao, Yuyan. "The collision between traditional methods and new learning: the difference between AI-assisted teaching and classroom teaching and its effect on students' English writing." Advances in Social Behaviour Research, vol. 16, no. 3, 2025, pp. 143.
- Rochelle, Susan and Dr Sushith. "Exploring the AI Era: Comparative Analysis of AI-Driven Educational and Traditional Teaching Methods." International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR), vol. 6, no. 4, 2024, pp. 8.
- Dhanapal, Chitra, et al. "Impact of Artificial Intelligence Versus Traditional Instruction for Language Learning: Survey." World Journal of English Language, vol. 14, no. 2, 2024, pp. 187.
- Mergenbaykyzy, Kubaibergen Arusa. "AI in English Language Teaching: Bridging the Gap between Traditional and Digital Methods." Endless Light in Science,2022, pp. 32.
- Li, Changyi, Jiang Long. "Comparing AI-Assisted and Traditional Teaching in College English: Pedagogical Benefits and Learning Behaviours." Vol. 16, no. 895,2024, pp. 1.
- Hashim, Amir Abdulhussein. "Innovative Approaches in English Language Teaching: A Comparative Analysis of Traditional and Modern Methods." South Asian Research Journal of Arts, Language and Literature, vol. 7, no. 1, 2025, pp. 2- 4.
- Sheikh, Afreen Afshan. "A Comparative Study of AI and Traditional Methods in Teaching Grammar to English Learners." CTTE Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (CJMR), vol. 2, no. 2, 2025, pp. 2.
- Chauhan, Shivani. "AI vs Traditional Teaching: A Comparative Analysis Across Key Dimensions." Bhartiyam International Journal of Education and Research, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 58- 59.

9

DISSOCIATION AND SURVIVAL: ECHOES OF TRAUMA IN ANIMAL'S PEOPLE BY INDRA SINHA

Deborah Priscilla I, *Research Scholar, Dr. M. G. R. Educational and Research Institute, Chennai – 600095.*
Dr. S. Meena Rani, *Professor, Department of English, Dr. M. G. R. Educational and Research Institute, Chennai – 600095.*

Abstract:

Trauma is a stressful event that happens in a relatively short time but can tend to have far reaching consequences and effects in life. These effects are generally long term and less desirable. One of the common effects is dissociation which can manifest in different ways like depersonalization and linguistic dissociation. This article aims to explore the far reaching tendencies of trauma in everyday life in the novel Animal's People by Indra Sinha. Although the traumatic event may be short, the fervour with which it grips the everyday lives of those who experience it is quite alarming. This article aims to bring to the forefront the sense of detachment and the third person approach that the traumatized individual might adopt to view their own life. The study focuses on the aftermath of an event that has cost them everything and has left them with nothing. The desperation and dejectedness that has been thrust upon them is not humanly possible to tolerate and yet despite being stretched to their very limits, everybody perseveres. Despite being forgotten and cast aside they pick themselves and continually strive to make things right. Their struggle to bring to light the poisonous chemicals around and the subsequent loss of time they experience from the continual stress points to the toughness the victims develop in their effort to simply move on from the traumatic event. This research paper aims to bring attention to the effects of a disastrous tragedy on the victims and the trauma that has gripped them in the wake of that devastation.

Keywords: *Dissociation, detachment, tragedy, struggle, trauma.*

Introduction:

Trauma is caused by an event that takes place on a larger scale. Trauma can also affect your memories (van der kolk and Fisler 1996). The traumatic event usually affects people differently and this paper in particular focuses on dissociation. Dissociation here refers to the detachment that affected people experience as a sort of coping mechanism to ensure survival. It can manifest in different ways and may quite possibly cause people to lose memory of language and sometimes acquired talent. For some, it can also push them to view their own life from a different lens. Those who survive a traumatic event might end up a shadow of their past selves. In a bid to survive they can sometimes unconsciously delete huge portions of their memory. The struggle of everyday life pushes them into developing some sort of a coping mechanism. In the aftermath of the traumatic event, in an effort to move on there might be a tendency to detach one's self from any previous attachment of themselves. This detachment is properly termed dissociation. While discussing the different uses that dissociation is associated with, one of the distinct ways it is described is as a defense mechanism (Cardena, 1994). Dissociation most often refers to the knack of the victim compartmentalizing their experience (van der Kolk and Fisler 1996). Victims in an effort to protect their mind and defend their sanity in the face of extreme trauma resort to shoving it into a specific

box so as to not deal with it. Dissociation in it's simplest form is the ability of an individual to mentally detach themselves from the current event or one that is too painful to relive. The specific term for the mental detachment is depersonalization. Depersonalization in particular involves the victim detaching from themselves and their surroundings while being able to maintain some sort of attachment to reality (Guralnik et al, 2000). It can manifest in different ways given how people naturally take different approaches to dealing with problems. The trauma induced dissociation while not allowing the person to deal with the problem might somehow at the same time exacerbate the pain of the individual. It contributes heavily to the continued helplessness and anguish that traumatized individuals feel. Victims of a traumatic event tend to either lose the tenacity to live or grasp onto whatever little hope they have. Victims in general might become numb to pain and as extension might take on a callous approach to life. This further enables the detachedness they might be experiencing as a result of trauma. Trauma can also sometimes affect any acquired skill or language. The mind might sometimes delete any extra processes that may require additional thoughts, time or effort. For example acquired languages require additional thought processes and in an effort to ensure survival the mind of a traumatized person might block access to that part of the brain. All of these acts are some form of dissociation with the victim basically trying to detach from certain aspects of life that might serve as a reminder of the traumatizing event. Dissociation is further enabled by the overwhelming desire of the victim to forget what happened. This desire stands in stark contrast with the necessity of articulating the traumatic event so as to better understand and deal with the shock of the event. Victims may use dissociation as a way to cope better or at least make every day bearable. However, it can have adverse effects and might produce the opposite result of what is expected.

This article focuses on the victims in the novel Animal's People by Indra Sinha. It aims to highlight the suffering and the struggle of the victims in the years that follow one of the most devastating industrial disasters. The extremely dehumanizing situation that the victims are living in puts them in a state of constant despair rendering them callous and indifferent to anything beyond their living premises. The extent of their suffering is so great they have almost come to terms with the fact that they have been ignored by the people who should have helped them. They have resigned themselves to the idea that help is not coming and are impossibly skeptical of any help that is offered.

Review of Literature:

Monalisha Mandal (2025) and Mojibur Rahman (2025) in their paper titled “Unhealed Trauma of Bhopal Gas Victims: Indra Sinha's Animal's People” point out how in the beginning trauma studies was reliant on Freud's theories on traumatic experiences and memory. They also go on to elaborate that literature has always played an important role in exposing trauma “through speech and languages”. Literary works represent the entirety of human suffering and the world they carry inside.

Carsten Spitzer et al in their article titled, “Recent developments in the theory of dissociation” talk about how Cardeña's description of dissociation which classified it into three broader categories is a valuable contribution given the lack of agreement of a proper definition. A majority of recent efforts to conceptualize dissociation rely on the first two descriptions and based off of those, it is suggested to give them a different label like “compartmentalization” and “detachment”.

Etzel Cardeña in the book titled, “Dissociation: Clinical and theoretical perspectives” under the chapter “The Domain of Dissociation” discusses how a defense mechanism refers to intentionally removing information, which are unfavourable, from memory. He argues that a dissociated mechanism is to keep the sanity of the victim intact. Although useful, it may not be intentional and could be triggered in individual situations. He however notes that Janet does not take the same approach.

Leslie E. Korn in her paper titled, “Community Trauma and Development” stresses that development that is involuntary can also result in dissociative responses. Dissociation is the interruption of normally functioning aspects of psychology. It might also occur as a sort of protective response to trauma.

She also points out how trauma is a result of overwhelming events which can include both acts of nature and human-induced disaster.

Angelica Staniloiu and Hans J. Markowitsch in their article titled "Dissociation, Memory and Narrative" explain how the conception and narration of trauma is influenced by individual experiences and personality while also including cultural influence. They also emphasize how remembering a crucial event or disconnecting from it by adopting a third person point of view would be controlled by both genetic and environmental factors.

Bessel A. van der Kolk and Rita Fisler in their article titled, "Dissociation and the Fragmentary Nature of Traumatic Memories: Overview" point out that it has been widely accepted since the late nineteenth century that memory is not dormant. They also highlight how the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual definition of PTSD (DSM IV: APA 1994) recognizes that trauma can lead to extreme ends of either memory or forgetting. It is quite probable for victims to experience either.

Discussion:

Dissociation and Survival:

Indra Sinha's Animal's People is a fictional novel inspired by the Bhopal gas tragedy of 1984. In this Sinha brings to the forefront the suffering of the people who were firsthand victims of the tragedy. The book brings to light the enduring trauma that is left in the wake of a man-made disaster. As is the case anywhere people cope the best they can. In reliving the trauma over and over, the victims dissociate. This paper deals with trauma induced dissociation. Dissociation is broadly defined as a defense mechanism (Cardeña, 1994). Dissociation in the simplest manner has come to mean detachment, which can be seen in the victims mentioned in the book.

The main protagonist is a boy who walks on all fours. All the children around him make fun of him and tease him. They call him an animal and since he is an orphan, he keeps the name. Sinha explores the aftermath of the tragedy and the struggle through Animal's eyes. The book carries an undertone of pain and endurance. The victims are subject to being sidelined and are constantly dismissed anytime they bring up an issue. In response to the major trauma and ongoing struggle, the people as a whole are defensive and skeptical. In particular issues like depersonalization and language dissociation are evident in this fiction. Sinha explores the day to day struggle of the victims through the character of the main protagonist Animal who is perhaps true to his name closer to being animalistic than human.

Depersonalization is detachment from self and surroundings and feeling automatic (Guralnik, 2000). Despite the harsh reality of walking on fours, the constant rehashing forces Animal to develop a detachment when it comes to the tragedy. He says, in a recording to a journalist, "No way was I going to tell these stories. I've repeated them so often my teeth are ground smooth by the endless passage of words" (Sinha, 2008).

Animal is referring to the incidents that unfolded in the wake of the tragedy. Owing to the interest that the media has shown toward the tragedy, he has had to rehash the incident innumerable times which has caused him to remove himself from a sense of tragedy the event would otherwise invoke.

The extent of the tragedy can be seen in another character called Ma Franci. A Nun who has taken care of Animal all his life, she spends her time going around helping the victims. However her case is peculiar in the sense she does not remember any other languages that she had learned except her mother tongue French. Ma Franci had learned Hindi and was proficient in it before the incident. Animal while explaining her curious case to Nisha points out, "her mind was wiped clean of Hindi, and of Inglis too, which she had also been able to speak à sa manière, she forgot all languages except her childhood speech of France" (Sinha, 2008).

This case of linguistic dissociation can be attributed to the trauma due to which the victim's mind rejects anything associated with before the traumatic event. This can be considered a classic case of

memory affected by trauma (van der Kolk and Fisler, 1996). The degree of dissociation is also to be noted. Ma Franci has not just forgotten the languages she has acquired. They seem like gibberish to her. As Animal says, "But there was a further twist to Ma Franci's madness, when she heard people talking…, she could no longer recognize that what they were speaking was a language" (Sinha, 2008).

The inability to remember a language that is associated with the event points to the over-reaching tendency of trauma and the way in which it winds itself in the normal lives of the victims. Another case of dissociation can be found in the book. This pertains to a man named Somraj, a famous singer of Kaufpur. He has not only lost his wife and son but also partly his voice. Mr. Somraj loses his voice partly in the sense that he is able to talk but cannot sing as a result of the incident. At first it is physical, which can be proven by, "that night took away his wife and baby son and fucked up his lungs" (Sinha, 2008). However, later even when the effects have worn off and he regains his voice there seems to be some sort of a mental block that prevents him from singing. This can be evidenced by Animal saying, "From that night on he would listen to other people's records, but never his own… Later he started teaching music, his students won prizes, to them he was like a god but he seemed to get no pleasure from it …" (Sinha, 2008)

Mr. Somraj it would seem ended up compartmentalizing given how although he could teach music, he could not bring himself to sing or listen to his music. Given how he is able to teach music, it should not be that hard for him to sing but he is unable to access that part of his mind. This action can easily be said to be the same as compartmentalization as explained by Spitzer et al. In the different ways that victims handle trauma in Animal's People by Indra Sinha, one can truly feel and experience the extent to which they expend energy into basic survival.

Conclusion:

This research brings attention to how deeply a victim of trauma can be affected. Through the characters in the book Animal's People, one is exposed to the inhuman experiences and conditions that a victim might be forced into. Indra Sinha brings out the despair that has now turned to callousness through the eyes of Animal. Sinha maximizes the effect that narration can have on a reader by this approach of narrating through the victim. This particular point of view jolts a reader out of their comfort zone and forces them to see the difficulty thrust on the victims of the tragedy. The very act of dissociating itself is a pitiful way of having to deal with trauma and having to turn to it as a last resort exposes the ongoing tragedy of a victim having to survive after having already been subjected to a greater tragedy.

References:

- Ajeesh A. K. "Surviving in the Margins: Disability, toxic embodiment, and belonging in Indra Sinha's Animal's people". Social Sciences & Humanities Open 12 (2025) 101985.
- Cardeña, E. (1994). The domain of dissociation. In S. J. Lynn & J. W. Rhue (Eds.), Dissociation: Clinical and theoretical perspectives (pp. 15-31). New York, NY, US: Guilford Press.
- Guralnik, Orna, et al. "Feeling Unreal: Cognitive Processes in Depersonalization". Am J Psychiatry 2000: 157: 103-109.
- Sinha, Indra. Animal's People. Simon & Schuster. New York, U. S. A. 2008.
- Korn, Leslie E. "Community Trauma And Development". Fourth World Journal. Volume 5, Number 1. Pages 1-9, 1997.
- Matei, Mãdãlina-Georgiana. "The Linguistic Mechanisms of Trauma Discourse". Procedia –Social and Behavioral Sciences 92 (2013) 517 – 522.
- Rickel, Jennifer. "The Poor Remain: A Posthumanist Rethinking of Literary Humanitarianism in Indra Sinha's Animal's People. Ariel: A review of International English Literature. Vol. 43, No. 1, Pages 87 – 108, 2012.

- Spitzer, Carsten et al. “Recent developments in the theory of dissociation”. World Psychiatry 5:2- June 2006, Pages 82 – 86.
- Staniloiu, Angelica and Hans J. Markwitsch. “Dissociation, Memory and Trauma Narrative”. JLT 6/1 (2012), 103 – 130.
- van der Kolk, Bessel A and Rita Fisler. “Dissociation and the Fragmentary Nature of Traumatic Memories: Overview”. British Journal of Psychotherapy. Vol. 12, No. 3, 1996, pp. 352 – 361.

10

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF DISABILITY: ANALYSING OUT OF MY MIND THROUGH COMPLEX EMBODIMENT THEORY

Breena R Frido, I, *MA English, Loyola College, Chennai*

Abstract

Out of My Mind, a novel by Sharon M. Draper, presents the remarkable story of Melody Brooks, an eleven-year-old with cerebral palsy who cannot speak or control her body, but is extremely intelligent. The novel records her everyday experiences which highlight the physical, social, and emotional challenges that children with disabilities have to endure. This paper uses Tobin Siebers' Complex Embodiment Theory to analyse how Melody's experiences of disability are shaped by both her body and the society around her. It also explains that disability is not just about physical differences but also about how society treats and views these differences. The story shows that Melody, despite possessing great ideas and understanding, is still judged solely by the limitations of her body. With the help of assistive technologies, she is able to find her way out, to speak her thoughts and to demonstrate her intelligence. She creates an identity for herself beyond her physical limitations. This paper argues that Out of My Mind speaks for the disabled embodiment, by telling a story where body and society shape identity together.

Keywords: *Disability Studies, Complex Embodiment, Cerebral Palsy, Identity, Assistive technology.*

"Disability is the most of human experiences, touching every family, crossing every boundary of race, class and gender", says Rosemarie Garland-Thomson in her book,

Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature. Disability was initially understood as a medical issue that affected only a minority. Disability studies has evolved throughout the years. The American Psychological Association explains disability based on three models: moral, medical and social. The moral model views disability as a result of sin, crime or karma. There is also an alternate view where the disability is seen as God's faith in them. In the medical model, disability is understood as a defect in the body, which requires medical assistance. The social model explains that disability is caused by societal attitudes and barriers and not by the impairment.

Literature has the power to influence the attitude of people towards the disabled.

Negative and stereotypical portrayals of disability can harm the disabled community. Portrayal of disabilities in literature should be accurate and respectful because it deals with the lives and experiences of people. Characters with special needs are considered tragic and worthless. The Disability writing should include "A Person. Not a glorified mannequin meant to give the author sensitivity points". Most books are not written from the perspective of a disabled person. They portray disabled people as happy, who do not complain, who help the protagonist to discover his life's lessons.

Sharon M Draper's Out of My Mind (2010), tells the story of an 11-year-old girl with Cerebral Palsy named Melody Brooks. She cannot talk or walk but she has an extraordinary mind and a photographic memory. Her mind is flooded with thoughts, but she is not able to express them because of her disability. Despite being intelligent, she is often underestimated by people around her including doctors, teachers and her peers. People judge her solely by her physical disability and ignore her potential. With the help of an assistive technology, she gets a voice for herself, which enables her to express her

thoughts and demonstrate her abilities. But this doesn't help her from being treated differently. Out of My Mind addresses themes such as disability, Ableism, Rejection, Identity, Human Interaction, Voice, and Agency.

Gunawan Tambunsaribu (2018), in his research talks about the character of Melody in relation to the id, ego, and superego using the psychological approach. Adlin Sharmi focused her research on physical, psychological and intellectual challenges faced by disabled people and the significance of respecting these people despite of their differences. In the research of Janatuzuroh Uslifah(2019), Melody's psychological condition is approached through psychoanalytic theory and the importance of social model in defining her life is identified. Dr. Preetha Vasan and Ann Mariya Jose (2018) focused their research paper on the new dimensions of disability and focuses particularly on the novel, Out of my Mind by Sharon M. Draper to understand the experiences of the children with disability. The research by Indri Mariska (2019) uses the concept of life instincts by Freud, the concept of self-awareness by Crisp-Turner to describe the effects of maximizing competence exhibited by Melody.

Existing research on Out of my Mind focusses on the psychology of the character and their disability experience. This research paper differs from the existing researches by examining the portrayal of assistive technology as the natural extension of the body in the novel Out of my Mind using Tobin Siebers' Theory of Complex Embodiment. This paper aims to answer the question, how Tobin Siebers' Theory of Complex Embodiment redefine assistive technology as a natural extension of the body in the novel, Out of My Mind by Sharon M. Draper.

Tobin Siebers places the Theory of Complex Embodiment between the medical model, which perceives disability as a bodily defect to cure, and the social model, which focuses on the environmental barriers. He explains how both the body and the environment shape the disability experience together. Theory of Complex Embodiment combines the bodily impairment and the social construction of disability. He introduces the 'ideology of ability' where he explains how the able-bodied people are seen as 'normal', good, and valuable, whereas being disabled is seen as bad, scary, and something that should be cured or hidden.

Tobin Siebers' Theory of Complex Embodiment shows the disability experience is affected by both society and the body. This is what the novel Out of My Mind by Sharon M. Draper presents through the life of Melody Brooks, a 11-year-old affected by Cerebral Palsy. Her disability is not just physical, it is the combined experience of both the body and the society. The societal interactions and comments affect her experience of being disabled. The society underestimates the intellect and the potential of the disabled people because of their inability to express their intelligence. According to Siebers' Ideology of Ability, ability is not fixed but rather defined by society. It means that a person is able-bodied if he can finish certain tasks, and disabled if he cannot. Societal ideals decide whether a person is considered disabled or not. The society treats Melody as less than a human because of her inability to showcase her brilliance.

Disabled people face discrimination and are often bullied by their able-bodied peers. According to Siebers' ideology of ability, being able-bodied is considered the ideal standard for human value. The society judges the people based on the standard of ableism and discriminates them if the person is different. Melody is discriminated, bullied, left out and pitied because of her disability. These social attitudes shape her identity and her social position as much her cerebral palsy. Melody says, “Kids who, for most the part, would ignore kids like me. They ask one another to play, but no one's ever asked any of us. Not that we could, anyway, but it would be nice if somebody would say Hi.” (Draper, 28) Melody is treated as a guest in her inclusion classes. “Inclusion doesn't mean I'm included in everything. I usually sit in the back of the room, going crazy because I know answers to things and can't tell anybody.” (Draper, 103). When Melody takes Medi-talker to her class, Claire says, “It just never occurred to me that Melody had thoughts in her head.” (Draper, 143). She was not treated as an individual worthy of sharing her opinions.

Her classmates, Claire and Molly bully and discriminate Melody in all the ways they can. When Molly couldn't make it to team, Claire says, “It really ought to be you up there instead of Melody” (Draper, 204) After winning the competition, all the team members and their families go to dinner together and Claire throws up. But it is Melody that everyone is bothered about. “Claire gets sick in the middle of a crowded restaurant, yet I'm the one everybody looks sideways.” (Draper, 238) She says, “I make them look weird.” (Draper, 246). An article titled, Cerebral Palsy and Bullying by Cerebral Palsy Guidance highlights that children with cerebral palsy are mostly the victims of bullying and social exclusion because of their inability to defend themselves.

The use of assistive technology has a great impact on Melody's life. Siebers explains that technologies like elevators, washing machines, escalators, chainsaws and other machines that help reduce physical labour are seen as natural extensions of the body, while the technologies that are used to make disabled people's lives easier are seen as expensive additions. For Melody, Medi-talker is an extension of her body. But since she is disabled, it can also be seen as an expensive addition or burden to the society. It makes people understand her true intellect. It helps her answer in the class, joke and also helps her speak out her thoughts. It makes her known to the world, and changes the world's view on her being disabled. Melody says, “It is the first time in my entire life that I feel like I'm part of the group.” (Draper, 142).

Medi-talker doesn't fix her disability but it changes the w ay society sees her. It helps her to defend herself and it also gains her more respect. It is a tool that helps her express her thoughts. Melody wishes to exhibit her knowledge by being a part of the Whiz Kids team.

Medi-talker helps her a lot in gaining her place in the team. Even after Melody earned her place on the team, Claire says, “She'll look odd on the TV.” With the help of her assistive device, Melody was able to stand for herself. She replied, “TV makes lots of people look funny, maybe even you, Claire.” (Draper, 195) Later in the novel, the team leaves Melody behind and travels to Washington, D.C., without providing a proper explanation to Melody. She confronts them with the help of her Medi-talker, and no one could ignore her. For the first time, it was Melody's voice that resonated powerfully while others remained silent. This marks the reversal of her earlier voicelessness and the power she found with the help of Medi-talker.

The ramp helps a person with a disability to enter the building. It doesn't fix their disability, but it helps them to be seen as an able person by society. Likewise, Medi-talker acts as a bridge between Melody's brain and the world, which can be unfair to her. This supports Siebers' idea that embodiment keeps changing, and the Medi-talker becomes Melody's natural extension, which helps her to redefine her identity and her disability.

Medi-talker transforms Melody's life, functioning as an extension of her body. It helps in breaking the ableist ideal that a person is normal only if they can voice their thoughts. Siebers' Theory of Complex Embodiment explains disability as both a physical condition and a social construct. His Ideology of Ability explains how the disabled people are treated as different or abnormal since they do not conform to the norms of being 'normal'. Society considers disabled people to be more vulnerable, weak and abnormal. There is a famous catchphrase that captures the collective idea of the society, “Better dead than Disabled.” The society's attitude toward the disabled people has a great impact on how they are perceived.

Melody is treated as different, when all she wanted was a place among her peers. She is a strong person who fought her way into the world. She refused to conform to the societal ideals. The writer, Sharon M. Draper says that she was particular about presenting Melody as a person, and not as a representative of people with disabilities. In the TEDx Talk 'Living the Life of Your Dreams with Disabilities', Rhea Grover expresses her wish to live her life fully and do really great things in her life. She says, “What I want you to understand is that even though I may move differently and speak differently, I'm no different than any 14-year-old.” She says that she has hopes and dreams, and so does every other person with disabilities.

Every one of them has potential within and are worthy of a wonderful life. Disabled people have

desires, too. They, too, have things they love, things they hate, things they fear, and hope for, just like every other person. It is essential to broaden the concept of normalcy and create space for everyone including the disabled people. They, too, are worthy of being the hero of the story.

Works Cited

- Cerebral Palsy Guidance. "Cerebral Palsy and Bullying | Cerebral Palsy Guidance." Cerebral Palsy Guidance, 30 May 2025, cerebralpalsyguidance.com/cerebral- palsy/living/bullying.
- "Disability Studies: Foundations & Key Concepts." JSTOR Daily, Apr. 2024. JSTOR, daily.jstor.org/reading-list-disability-studies.
- Draper, Sharon M. Out of My Mind. Simon and Schuster, 2025.
- Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature. Columbia UP, 1997.
- Gulya, Nikoletta, and Anikó Fehérvári. "The Impact of Literary Works Containing Characters with Disabilities on Students' Perception and Attitudes Towards People with Disabilities." International Journal of Educational Research, vol. 117, Jan. 2023, p. 102132. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2022.102132.
- Mariska, Indri & Ningsih, Kurnia. (2019). Maximizing the Competence in the Novel Out of My Mind (2010) By Sharon M. Draper. English Language and Literature. 8. 10.24036/ell.v8i1.103096.
- "Out of My Mind Themes LitCharts." LitCharts, www.litcharts.com/lit/out-of-my- mind/themes.
- Rice, and Nancy E. "Disability Studies | Description, History, Research, and Social Justice." Encyclopedia Britannica, 11 Aug. 2014, www.britannica.com/topic/disability-studies.
- Sharmi, Adlin E. "Disability Is Not an Inability- a Study of Sharon M.Draper's Out of My Mind." Think India Journal - Vichar Nyas Foundation, 24 Oct. 2019, thinkindiaquarterly.org/index.php/think-india/article/view/8839#google_vignette.
- Siebers, Tobin. "THE IDEOLOGY OF ABILITY." Disability and the Theory of Complex Embodiment—For Identity Politics in a New Register, 2012, pp. 273–74. thedigitalcommons.org/docs/siebers_complex-embodiment.pdf.
- Tambunsaribu, Gunawan. (2018). The Psychological Approach of Melody in Novel Entitled Out of My Mind by Sharon M. Draper.
- TEDx Talks. "Living the Life of Your Dreams with Disabilities | Rhea Grover | TEDxYouth@LPCI." YouTube, 2 June 2025, www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7MQD1wLrRM.
- Uslifah, Janatuzuroh. "Living in Diversity reflected in Out of my mind novel by Sharon M. Draper: a psychoanalytic study." eprints.ums.ac.id/79132/10/naskah%20publikasi.pdf.
- Vasan, Preetha, and Ann Mariya Jose. "Understanding Disability: A Study of Sharon M Draper's Out of My Mind." IRA International Journal of Education and Multidisciplinary Studies, vol. 11, no. 2, June 2018, p. 43. https://doi.org/10.21013/jems.v11.n2.p1.
- Yardley, Mercedes M. "The Importance of Presenting Disabilities in Literature." Apex Book Company, 3 Feb. 2025, www.apexbookcompany.com/a/blog/apex- magazine/post/the-importance-of-presenting-disabilities-in-literature?srsltid=AfmBOoqIcLZ6ZcPTGBpLQIjdLetka1WRmF_3qDALT- Gip5nH1sfugBR7.

11

ENCHANTED ENCOUNTERS WITH NATURE: THE MYSTICAL ECOLOGY OF BEDE GRIFFITHS IN THE GOLDEN STRING

Nambikai Kithari Anotny, *PhD Scholar (English), part time, Stella Maris College, Chennai*
nambikaikithari22@gmail.com

Abstract

This article interprets The Golden String as Bede Griffiths's foundational text of mystical ecology, proposing that his early encounters with nature constitute an enchanted mode of perception in which the natural world becomes transparent to divine presence. The research paper draws on Arran Stibbe's ecolinguistic framework, especially the categories of storying, evaluation, ideology, erasure, and reframing, to show how Griffiths's language resists mechanistic worldviews and restores the significance of the natural world as an active, vital, and sacred agent. Through close textual analysis, it demonstrates how his contemplative attentiveness transforms woods, birds, wind, and sunlight into sacramental mediators. It reveals the articulation of a relational ontology grounded in wonder, receptivity, and divine immanence. Integrating insights, the article situates Griffiths within wider discourses on enchantment, ecological consciousness, and contemplative spirituality. Griffiths's writing participates in a broader intellectual movement seeking to recover the sacredness of the natural world and heal modern alienation from creation. The study shows that Griffiths paves way for ecological, contemplative, and posthumanist movements by dissolving rigid boundaries between human and cosmos, inviting a renewed ecological ethic rooted in contemplative presence and relational awareness. Ultimately, The Golden String emerges as a transformative text that unites spirituality and ecology into a coherent mystical ecology, one that encourages humanity to rediscover its place within the living web of creation.

Keywords: *Mystical Ecology, Enchantmented Encounter, Ecolinguistics, Bede Griffiths, The Golden String.*

Introduction

In contemporary usage, the concepts of enchantment and encounter intersect to express experiences that move beyond the habitual actions and open the self to relational transformation. Within the context of mystical ecology, enchantment signifies a mode of awareness that restores vitality, presence, and reverence to nature. Jane Bennett in her book The Enchantment of Modern Life, defines enchantment as a "state of wonder" that awakens the self to the vibrancy of matter. Patrick Curry refines this insight for the ecological age, describing enchantment as "a state of existential wonder" in which the world is experienced as alive, meaningful, and responsive (Green Letters 4). He further explains that enchantment resists the modern "disenchantment of nature" by recovering attention to nature's innate quality of wonder and its capacity for deeper communion (Enchantment: Wonder in Modern Life, 152). In mystical ecology, the earth is perceived as a sacred text, alive with divinity rather than a mere resource. The experience of enchantment, therefore, is not fascination alone but an ethical and spiritual reorientation, calling humanity to see nature as an active participant capable of communicating higher truth. It is through enchantment one wonders through encounter one relates.

Martin Buber defines encounter as an "I-Thou" relation, in his seminal text, I and Thou, a

dialogical meeting in which the self recognizes the Other, human, non-human, or natural, as presence rather than object. Similarly, David Abram's phenomenology of perception in his book The Spell of the Sensuous, also describes the dialogue between human and earth as a shared language of breath, gesture, and sound. Val Plumwood, an Eco-feminist attributes ecological crisis in his book Environmental Culture, to a failure of encounter, the inability to recognize nature's agency. Arran Stibbe yet another leading ecolinguist whose work shows how the stories embedded in language shape human relationships with the more-than-human world, extends this idea to language itself, arguing that contemporary discourse erases the natural world from consciousness, while enchanted language "re-minds" humanity of kinship with the living earth. Thus, enchantment and encounter together propose a mystical-ecological framework for re-imagining language, perception, and ethics as participatory engagements within a living cosmos. It is precisely this re-enlivened vision that Bede Griffiths embodies in The Golden String (1954) where contemplative attention to nature becomes a path into the divine mystery that pervades all life. Ecologically, Griffiths' mystical vision looks forward to the principles of integral ecology articulated in Laudato Si'. Pope Francis affirms that the ecological crisis is not only environmental but also moral and spiritual, demanding a "profound interior conversion" (Laudato Si' 217). Griffiths' enchanted encounter embodies this conversion of perception. His reverent language toward the natural world performs a kind of ecolinguistic re-enchantment, countering the mechanistic and utilitarian vocabulary that dominates modern discourse (Stibbe 36). Francis's call for integral ecology in Laudato Si' further illuminates the contemporary relevance of Griffiths's mystical ecology.

Bede Griffiths's The Golden String is generally regarded as a spiritual autobiography recounting his passage from Oxford intellectualism to the contemplative life of a Christian sannyâsi in India. Griffiths' earlier works has, often been read as a prelude to his mature theological works rather than as a mystical text in its own right. Consequently, critics have focused on its psychological and theological development, overlooking its linguistic and ecological dimensions. Yet the text is rich in imagery of woods, rivers, and light, symbols through which nature emerges as a medium of divine revelation. This neglected aspect defines the interpretive gap that the present study seeks to address. Early readings by Shirley du Boulay in Beyond the Darkness, (1998) interprets The Golden String within the classical conversion-narrative framework, emphasizing spiritual crisis and monastic vocation. She claims it as a biographical account that illuminates Griffiths's inner pilgrimage and treats the natural environment merely as background. Later on by Judson Trapnell in his Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue (2001), trace his theological evolution and his synthesis of East and West but likewise neglect the living landscape that shapes his mystical perception. Thus, the autobiographical tradition depicts a man seeking God rather than a creation through which God speaks.

Several other theological critics like, Beatrice Bruteau (1994), Ursula King (2002), and Francis X. Clooney (2010) have identified as an early expression of Griffiths's unitive vision that culminates in his Christian Vedânta. They read The Golden String as experiential theology, revelation mediated through contemplation rather than doctrine. However, these analyses tend to abstract the mystical experience from its material context, reducing nature to a symbol of unity rather than acknowledging it as a participant in revelation. The incarnational depth of Griffiths's ecological sensitivity thus remains underexplored. Few critics approach The Golden String as a literary work. Donald Mitchell (1998) comments on Griffiths's lyrical style but stops short of analyzing how language itself performs an ecological theology. A number of research has been carried out on Bede Griffiths in the light of mystical narration and not on Griffiths' Christian cosmology. These scholarly works have positioned The Golden String within biographical, theological, and comparative framework treating nature as backdrop rather than sacrament. The ecological resonance of Griffiths's language, the presence of birdsong, wind, sunlight, etc., as sites of divine encounter, remains unexamined. Addressing this gap, the present study reads the text through the

ecolinguistic framework of Arran Stibbe, interpreting it as a work of mystical ecology. Through Stibbe's categories of storying, framing, evaluation, erasure, and ideology, it reveals The Golden String as a life-affirming narrative that resists anthropocentrism and envisions creation as communicative and sacramental, a transparent medium of divine reality.

This study interprets The Golden String as Bede Griffiths' experiential and linguistic theology of enchantment, articulated through a deep ecological consciousness. The analysis shows how Griffiths' language performs re-enchantment by presenting nature as sacrament, agency, and revelation. His narrative resists the mechanistic lexicon of modernity and instead advances life-affirming stories that restore participation, wonder, and relational ontology.

First and foremost Stibbe's ecolinguistics begins with identifying "the stories we live by" (2021). These stories influence what societies value, how they see nature, and how they decide to live, either supporting ecological harm or encouraging ecological flourishing. In The Golden String, Griffiths constructs what Stibbe calls an "enchanted story" is a narrative in which the human and more-than-human worlds coexist in mutual presence and communication. In the foundational passage, "I liked the solitude and silence of the woods and hills. I felt there the sense of a Presence…" (p. 21), Griffiths presents nature not as inert matter but as animated by mystery. The "Presence" manifests through "the faces of the flowers," the "movements of birds," and the "sound of running water," (p. 22) a vocabulary that linguistically assigns agency to the nonhuman world. This language directly challenges what Stibbe terms the disenchanting story of mechanistic materialism, where nature is reduced to resource or scenery. Instead, Griffiths' lexicon constructs a story of participation, where the human perceiver is drawn into communion with the living world. The choice of relational verbs, "reflected," "felt," "joined"(p. 22), situates nature as active and communicative. Griffiths' writing thus embodies what Stibbe describes as stories that recognise the living presence of the more-than-human world, stories that sustain ecological awareness by depicting nature as a partner rather than a backdrop.

Evaluation, yet another tool of Stibbe that reconstructs the notion of viewing nature. It refers to the ways language expresses approval or disapproval, positive or negative values, and what is considered desirable or undesirable in the world. Griffiths' prose is saturated with positive evaluations of the natural world, encoded through aesthetic and affective vocabulary: "sunlight falling through the leaves," "choir of nature," "pink blossom," "violets and daffodils," "kingfisher… fly into the sun" (p. 29). These evaluations cultivate what Stibbe calls life-sustaining values, beauty, harmony, presence, and wonder. They promote ecological consciousness through the emotions they evoke. When Griffiths writes, "we were joining our voices with the choir of nature in praise of the creator" (p. 145), he linguistically elevates nature from object to liturgical subject. The natural world becomes a praising community, re-evaluated as co-worshipper rather than instrument. This stands in sharp ethical contrast to his negative evaluation of modern urban existence: "the ugliness of the modern city… the mind became separated from its roots in feeling and instinct" (p. 32). Here, ugliness signifies ecological and spiritual pathology; beauty signifies harmony and moral health. This dual evaluation reinforces Stibbe's ecological principle that positive discourses of connection help cultivate environmental care, while negative evaluations of alienation alert us to destructive cultural patterns.

According to Stibbe, ideologies are the "deep stories" that justify particular ways of relating to nature, either supporting ecological harm or promoting ecological care and sustainability. His ideological analysis examines how belief systems are embedded within language. Griffiths' narrative challenges the ideology of anthropocentrism that under-girds modern ecological destructiveness. His declaration, "I was no longer the centre of my life and therefore I could see God in everything,"(p.102) expresses a radical decentring of the human ego. The linguistic shift from self-centred agency toward divine and ecological agency aligns with Stibbe's eco-transformative ideologies, which dissolve the boundary between human

and world. Griffiths' statement, "It was not I who had been seeking God, but God who had been seeking me," (p.102), reframes agency, making the divine initiator and the human recipient. This resonates with Stibbe's notion that life-affirming stories frequently redistribute agency beyond the human subject, correcting the domination implicit in anthropocentric grammar. Furthermore, Griffiths' cosmology, "the whole universe is a sacrament… each created thing… is of infinite value and significance" (p.184), rejects dualistic ideologies that separate matter from spirit. He reframes creation not as raw material but as sacred sign. Stibbe would identify this as a life-affirming ideology, countering the instrumental ideologies that measure value by economic utility. Griffiths' sacramental metaphors, light, harmony, revelation, represent what Stibbe calls, stories of the living earth, narratives essential for ecological renewal.

One of Stibbe's most powerful tools is erasure, the study of what is absent or silenced in discourse. In the words of Stibbe, "Erasure is patterns of linguistic features which fail to represent a particular area of life at all, or which background or distort it" (p.17). Modern industrial discourse routinely erases nonhuman agency, rendering nature as object, data, or commodity. Griffiths' writing performs the opposite, it restores what has been silenced. In the Prologue, when Griffiths hears the birds as if for the first time, "I wondered whether they sang like this all the year round and I had never noticed it,"(p.1) he acknowledges his own guilt in ecological erasure. This moment of astonished awareness is what Stibbe calls re-minding, a linguistic recovery of what has been forgotten or ignored. Griffiths' reaction, "I felt inclined to kneel on the ground… as though standing in the presence of an angel", (p. 2) assigns spiritual agency to the bird. The lark is no longer erased; it becomes sacramental messenger, mediating the divine. Similarly, his description of the almond tree blooming, the "procession of spring flowers," and the "kingfisher fly into the sun" (p. 29) restores the visibility, dignity, and wonder of nonhuman life. These richly detailed observations counteract modernity's discursive habit of reducing nature to background or resource. Through attentive language, Griffiths participates in the recovery of what Stibbe calls, the forgotten conversation with the Earth.

Reframing is one of the essential tools that involves replacing harmful cognitive frames with ones that support ecological flourishing. Griffiths reframes several key spiritual concepts, obedience, humility, suffering, and self-knowledge, in ecological terms, where the sense of self is merging in the life of cosmos, a shift in perception from individualism to interrelatedness. "The whole life of Christ could be regarded as one long act of obedience to the will of the Father" (p. 130) reframes obedience not as passive submission but as alignment with cosmic order. This can be considered as ecological humility, where acknowledging one's place within a larger relational field. His metaphor of spiritual life as "a man climbing a mountain… whose vision of the peak is veiled in mist" (p. 63) further reinstate the notion of interconnectedness. Nature becomes the mirror of interior states, reminding the reader that inner transformation and ecological awareness are inseparable. Griffiths also reframes suffering through ecological temporality: "We see our life… in relation to eternity… part of a whole, (p. 127) elements in a universal harmony." Stibbe would identify this as a replacement of stories of isolated individuality with stories of interbeing. It offers a cognitive frame in which human life is inserted into the wider symphony of creation.

Conclusion

The exploration of The Golden String as an enchanted encounter with nature reveals the deeper ecological and spiritual vision that underlies Bede Griffiths' mystical worldview. The text becomes a contemplative testimony to Bede Griffiths mystical ecology, a vision in which creation is experienced as sacrament and the divine presence radiates through all forms of life. By interpreting Griffiths' encounter with nature as enchanted, this study analyses interconnectedness between nature and divine to heal the modern alienation between humanity and creation. In his contemplative descriptions, the natural world ceases to be an object of use and becomes a community of presence. Philosophically, this mystical ecology also resonates with posthumanist thought, which seeks to decenter the human and affirm the relationality

of all existence. Yet Griffiths goes further as he grounds interbeing not in abstraction but in divine communion. In this way, the enchanted encounter becomes both an ecological ethic and a contemplative practice, a way of rediscovering ourselves as part of the living web of creation. Ultimately, Griffiths' mystical ecology offers a path toward spiritual and ecological renewal. It invites humanity to behold creation not as a resource to exploit but as a revelation to receive, where every encounter with nature becomes an act of worship and wonder, a reawakening to the divine presence shimmering at the heart of the world.

Referecnes:

- Abram, David. The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World. Vintage, 1996.
- Bennett, Jane. The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics. Princeton UP, 2001.
- Bruteau, Beatrice. Christianity Meets Buddhism and Hinduism. Fortress, 1994.
- Buber, Martin. I and Thou. Translated by Ronald Gregor Smith, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958.
- Clooney, Francis X. "Experience and Theology in Bede Griffiths." Studies in Interreligious Dialogue, vol. 20, no. 1, 2010, pp. 5–18.
- Curry, Patrick. Enchantment: Wonder in Modern Life. Routledge, 2019.
- —. "The Experience of Enchantment and the Sense of Wonder." Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism, vol. 25, no. 3, 2021, pp. 1–15. Taylor & Francis Online, https://doi.org/10.1080/14688417.2021.1928530.
- du Boulay, Shirley. Beyond the Darkness: A Biography of Bede Griffiths. Doubleday, 1998.
- Francis. Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home. Vatican Press, 2015.
- Griffiths, Bede. The Golden String. Vijay Printers, 2003.
- King, Ursula. "The Cosmic Christ in the Thought of Bede Griffiths." The Way, vol. 42, no. 1, 2002, pp. 35–48.
- Mitchell, Donald W. "The Holistic Vision of Bede Griffiths." Studies in Formative Spirituality, vol. 19, no. 3, 1998, pp. 295–310.
- Nicholl, Donald. Holiness. Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981.
- Plumwood, Val. Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason. Routledge, 2002.
- Rayner, Christopher, and Jean-Marie Clément. Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue. SLG Press, 2006.
- Stibbe, Arran. Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology and the Stories We Live By. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2021.
- Tansey, John S. "A Christian Vedanta: Bede Griffiths and the Hindu–Christian Encounter." PhD dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1982.
- "Bede Griffiths." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, n.d., en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bede_Griffiths. Accessed 17 Nov. 2025.

12

ECHOES OF THE UNHEARD: READING SATHAR THROUGH TRAUMA, AFFECTIVE WITNESSING AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN PAAVA KADHAIGAL

Mrs. M. Devimanju, *Research Scholar, Department of English, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, Vandalur, Chennai-48.*
devimanju_eng_july25@crescent.education
Dr. N. Suguna, *Assistant Professor, Department of English, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, Vandalur, Chennai-48.*
suguna@crescent.education

Abstract:

This paper examines the character Sathar from Sudha Kongara's Paava Kadhaigal (Netflix, 2020) through the lenses of trauma, memory and affect theory. The episode Thangam from Paava Kadhaigal focuses on Sathar, a transgender woman's struggles and suffering, amidst love and faith in a conservative Tamil Muslim community in a 1980s rural village, Kaadampalayam. Sathar's quiet suffering, endurance and tragic end reveal more than just her individual pain; they expose a deeper collective wound shaped by social shame, rigid notions of honour and the exclusion of those who do not conform. Applying the theories of Cathy Caruth, Judith Herman and Marianne Hirsch, this paper analyses how Paava Kadhaigal portrays trauma through unspoken gestures, silences and recurring moments that echo emotional repression. The narrative compels viewers to be an ethical witness to the trauma and suffering of Sathar, inviting them to acknowledge and share the pain that society chooses to ignore. Rather than treating sin as a matter of personal guilt, this paper argues that Paava Kadhaigal frames it as the community's failure to embrace compassion and difference. By placing Sathar's story within discussions of queer identity and South Asian cultural memory, this study places trauma theory beyond its usual Western, clinical focus and acknowledges how pain and resilience are remembered in regional, queer and affective ways. The film becomes a quiet request for empathy, transforming pain into remembrance and offering dignity to those who have been silenced.

Keywords: *Trauma Studies, Unspoken Trauma, Cultural Memory, Affective Witnessing, Queer Identity, South Asian Cinema, Transgender Representation, Ethical Remembering, Paava Kadhaigal.*

Objective:

To examine how Sathar's character in Thangam represents trauma as both personal and collective experience, and also acts as a witness, by applying trauma theory by Caruth and Herman, and postmemory theory by Hirsch to expand trauma studies within a South Asian, queer framework.

Introduction:

How many times should a character like Sathar suffer and eventually die for people to notice her plight and hold accountability for the sins committed by society? This question may seem rhetorical, but it is not. It is an accusation of society that refused to accept her and let her suffer throughout her entire life, until hooligans brutally murdered her. Thangam was produced as part of the Tamil anthology, Paava Kadhaigal (Tales of Sin), in 2020 through Netflix, an online streaming platform. It was directed by Sudha Kongara, and the story was set in 1981 rural South India. After watching the film, the audience wept for

Sathar's tragic demise thirty-nine years after her actual death, offering their empathy to a cinematic ghost, while real transgender people continue to suffer and are forgotten. The audience is the collective witness to Sathar's trauma, and through them, the director Kongara depicts the politics of transgender representation in Tamil cinema. The trauma of Sathar and her murdered body becomes an archive and witness simultaneously, accusing society of ignoring her plight and turning a deaf ear to her cries of agony. By applying Marianne Hirsch's postmemory theory, Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman's trauma theory to Sathar's trauma, it is analysed that her trauma, affective witnessing and collective memory reveal how the violence implied on the transgender lot is represented as a remedy, acknowledgement and awareness. Sathar's personal trauma is the reflection of thousands of transgender people's trauma, which goes unnoticed because of the negligence of society. This study aims to expand trauma studies beyond the usual heteronormative framework to include the struggles faced by transgender people while attempting to gain normalcy, love and respect.

Literature Review:

Cathy Caruth, one of the leading voices in the field of trauma studies, through her book Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History (1996), describes that trauma is an event that cannot be fully grasped at the time of its happening, but returns later through dreams, silence and repetition to haunt an individual. For her, trauma is the story of an untold wound that cries out for help. It is a paradoxical condition in which a wound or a suffering that cannot be spoken, continues to insist on being heard. This theory can be applied to Sathar's trauma and sufferings in Paava Kadhaigal, where her pain is expressed through absence and quiet endurance. Her trauma resists closure, reappearing and haunting the community that failed to acknowledge her.

Judith Herman's book Trauma and Recovery (1992) describes the experience of trauma as both personal and political. Herman states that trauma is not only related to an individual's psychological condition, but also to society, making it a violation of human connection and moral responsibility. Her model of recovery from trauma has three conditions. They are safety, remembrance and reconnection. It highlights that healing is only possible when the community as a whole acknowledges the individual's pain and suffering. In Thangam, the absence of this acknowledgement is the major cause for Sathar's suffering. It shows that tragic things can happen when society denies safety and empathy to marginalised people. Her death is the society's collective failure to recognise her life as a normal human's and honour her efforts to mingle with people.

Postmemory by Marianne Hirsch in her book Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory (1997) demonstrates how memory and trauma are transmitted to others who did not directly experience or be a part of it. This concept was first applied to holocaust studies to imply that future generations inherit the trauma faced by the past ones. It is now being applied to other genres to analyse how an individual's trauma can be transmitted to their future heirs or others in general, in understanding the trauma faced by them. This film becomes an act of postmemorial witnessing in transmitting the pain of Sathar, who was silenced by honour, religion and gender norms to the contemporary audience and society in general. This film turns her private pain into shared ethical awareness.

A recent scholarly study on Paava Kadhaigal sheds light on society's failure to treat everyone equally. This study by Parvathi states that honour killing is still happening in South India by analysing the four different films in this anthology. It is done to protect pride, culture and family legacy. This paper analyses how these tales of sin depict different types of honour crimes by reading the characters individually.

A few other studies have also discussed about the rise of queer narratives in digital media and OTT platforms, bringing into light the development media has gained in expressing suppressed voices of marginalised genders. A few other papers have discussed how trans identity is portrayed in contemporary

cinema, mainly to jest the audience. The character, feelings and emotions of trans people are often overshadowed by being represented as a comic character that provides relief to the audience. Many other papers have discussed various transgender films like Taali, Margarita with a Straw, and Super Deluxe, but have failed to consider Thangam from Paava Kadhaigal.

Trauma theory has been extensively applied in Western literature and films, but there remains a significant gap when we are talking about South Asian cinema. It is even less while representing queer trauma and moral violence. Even though previous studies have analysed trans trauma in a heteronormative society, in this film, it has failed to see how individual trauma can become a collective one and act as an ethical witness to help shape society. This study aims to fill that gap by reading Sathar's trauma as society's collective failure to acknowledge her worth and her body as an ethical witness to the ignorance and hatred thrown at her by the community.

Analysis and Discussion:

Thangam, directed by the famous director Sudha Kongara, is one of the short films in the Tamil original anthology Paava Kadhaigal. This film focuses on a Muslim transgender woman named Sathar (played by Kalidas Jayaram), living in a rural Tamil village in Coimbatore in 1981. The suffering she faces in a heteronormative, patriarchal society for acceptance, the unconditional love she has for her friend Saravanan and the struggles she faces to save money to get a gender transformative surgery are portrayed with brilliance in the film. She wants to live a life with dignity and respect in a society that considers her a bad omen and stereotypes her. Through her tragic death, the director makes one point clear: even in death, she does not gain the respect and peace that she deserved. The audience becomes the witness to the trauma she faced in the name of culture.

Sathar's Body as a Site of Trauma:

Sathar's body is a witness to the trauma she went through when she begged for help from a society that refused to even hear what she was going through. Her life in itself is an archive of emotions. Even her parents, who should have protected her from harm, disrespected her feelings and refused to help her. Her mother wanted her dead for the sake of family honour and her sisters' lives. People in her village consider it an ill omen to see her while going out or even being touched by her. They refuse to see her as a woman, calling her a man and constantly demeaning her. By applying Herman's idea of “social betrayal”, it is studied that the constant mockery, rejection and violence she faces are not just from physical harm, but also betrayal from those who were meant to protect her. She was abandoned by the entire village because she helped her childhood love elope with her sister. Nobody understands that she buried her own love for him and put his happiness before hers. She was considered a shame and was made to live in exclusion, which paved the way for her death.

The Language of Memory in Silence:

Sathar does not always express the pain and shame she is forced to carry in a patriarchal society. She holds up silence as a guard in front of her to protect herself from harm and abuse. Even when her childhood love expresses his love for her sister, she does not express herself. In places like these, the film uses quiet spaces, pauses and non-verbal imagery to explain the depth of her emotions. By applying Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, it can be seen that Sathar's trauma does not express itself; it is beyond ordinary human understanding. The silence used to express her pain, the repetition of scenes like her suppressing her love for Saravanan and her constant fear of the dark and the monsters that lurk in the darkness are cinematic expressions of unclaimed experience that she never got to experience. The expression of Sathar's pain and people's memory of her, are only fragmented in the story. The only thing constant in her life is her love for Saravanan. The fragmented narrative is like Caruth's 'belated understanding', where the audience and the people of her village alike understand her pain only after her death.

The Ethics of Affective Witnessing:

By applying Marianne Hirsch's postmemory theory, it is noted that the film transmits Sathar's trauma and memory to the audience, who are an ethical witness to her pain and suffering. They inherit not only her emotional burden, but also the emotional trauma and burden of thousands of transgender people like her. The anthology transforms Sathar's private trauma into a shared experience, engaging the audience ethically in becoming a spectator as well as a testimony to her suffering. The audience carries over her buried or suppressed memory to understand and empathise with her pain. The lighting, sound, close-ups and emotional design of the film all align with her plight and function as triggers and invite empathy, rather than pity. The society as a whole becomes the postmemorial carrier of her memory, which haunts them and turns them into human beings with empathy and respect for transgender people.

Conclusion:

The anthology Paava Kadhaigal discusses various ways in which the human mind commits sin, with respect to caste, culture, gender and sex. The four directors of the films have individually delivered excellent films, critiquing society for its age-old beliefs and superstitions. The film Thangam redefines sin as a collective failure of the moral society to acknowledge an individual's genuine feelings and emotions. Herman's idea of trauma as a social wound suits well in this case. The only mistake that Sathar made was being born in a society that condemns anything that is not normal and wearing her heart on her sleeves, which led to people criticising her for her gender nonconformity. Her only sin was to love Saravanan and being kind to others, but the real sin lies in the cruelty of people who refused to accept or help her. This study highlights how her trauma is not only hers, but also that of society. The audience and people of her village are the ethical witnesses to the pain she suffered, and her body becomes a memory and evidence of the brutalities she endured while coping with her broken heart. This study also expands trauma studies beyond its usual treatment of Western contexts, bringing in South Asian queer framework, to analyse how queer people undergo unspoken trauma in the hands of an ignorant, disrespectful society. By watching Sathar's story, the audience understands that pain not only becomes remembrance but also an ethical witness that calls for the acknowledgement of collective trauma and unhealed wounds.

References:

- Sadasivan, Shyama, and Anjali Gera Roy. "Remembering partition in diaspora films." Partition and the South Asian Diaspora. Routledge 52-73.
- Kumar, P. H. "Ruptured nations, collective memory and religious violence: Mapping a secularist ethics in post-Partition South Asian literature and film." (2004): 0136-0136.
- Osella, Caroline, and Filippo Osella. Men and masculinities in South India. Anthem Press, 2006.
- Chakraborty, Kaustav, ed. De-stereotyping Indian Body and Desire. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014.
- Vijayan, P. K. "Outline for an exploration of Hindutva masculinities." Translating Desire: The Politics of Gender and Culture in India 82 (2002).
- Jain, K. (2001). Muscularity and its ramifications: Mimetic male bodies in Indian mass culture. South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies, 24(sup001), 197–224. https://doi.org/10.1080/00856400108723444
- Rana, Shivani, and Anupriya Roy Srivastava. "Unveiling Trauma in the Life Narrative of Transgender: A Study of Manobi Bandhopadhyay's A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi." New Literaria 5.2 (2024): 122-128.
- Joseph, Reshma Merlin. "“I Know What I am But You Stereotype Me”: Truth and Constructed Truth About The Third Sex." Editor's Note (2019): 90.
- Das, Amrita, and K. Sreena. "Love and affection beyond the binary: an analysis of selected

contemporary transgender films." ShodhKosh: J Vis Perform Arts 4.1SE (2023): 126-136.

- Raveendran, Kiran, and Dhishna Pannikot. "Exploring Third Gender Politics in Indian Cinema: A Comparative Study of Chitrangada and Naanu Avanalla... Avalu." Journal of Arts, Culture, Philosophy, Religion, Language and Literature e-ISSN: 2457-0346, Volume-3, Issue-4, May-August, 2019; pp. 312-314
- Dhiman, Dr Bharat. "Diversity of Indian regional content on OTT platforms: a critical review." Available at SSRN 4417599 (2023).
- Subasini, S. Lekha, and A. Vanitha. "The South Indian Myth and Folklore in Transgenderism: A Review with the Lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's Carnivalesque."
- Radstone, Susannah, Walker, Janet, & Shenker, Noah. “Trauma Theory”. obo in Cinema and Media Studies, 2013. https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199791286/obo-9780199791286-0147.xml
- Brand, R. “Witnessing Trauma on Film. In: Frosh, P., Pinchevski, A. (eds) Media Witnessing.” Palgrave Macmillan, London. 2009. pp. 198-225. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230235762_10
- Veena, S.P., Nagaraj, P, Dr. “Anamnesis of Violence into Social Memory and Cultural Functioning in Paava Kadhaigal Anthology” Research Gate. May 2024.
- Salim, Maryam. “Thangam: The Depiction of Trans Trauma in a Heteronormative Society”, International Journal Of English and Studies (IJOES), Volume-4, Issue-10, Oct 2022. DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2022.4.10.12
- Hirsh, Marriane. Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory. Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Caruth, Cathy. Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Herman, Judith. Trauma and Recovery. Basic Books, 2015.

13

THE WEIGHT OF REMEMBERING: LATE-LIFE TRAUMA AND EMOTIONAL TEXTURE IN FICTION

Vivilia D., *Research Scholar, Department of English, Faculty of Science and Humanities, SRMIST.*
vd0750@srmist.edu.in, 9360156475
Dr. Vennila V., *Assistant Professor, Faculty of Science and Humanities, SRMIST.*
vennilav@srmist.edu.in, 9789407876

Abstract

This paper explores the entanglement of trauma, memory, and affect in the representation of old age through the lens of Elizabeth Strout's Olive Kitteridge (2008), a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel-in-stories that foregrounds the emotional and psychological landscapes of aging. The study interrogates how late-life trauma—both cumulative and acute—is encoded in narrative form and affective texture, particularly through the protagonist's fragmented recollections, silences, and embodied responses. The analysis is further informed by literary gerontology, especially Kathleen Woodward's insights into aging and subjectivity, to contextualize the socio-cultural scripts that frame elderly characters' emotional expression and narrative agency.

Methodologically, the paper employs close reading and affective textual analysis, attending to narrative gaps, tonal shifts, and sensory detail to trace how trauma is both represented and resisted. Ultimately, the paper argues that Olive Kitteridge destabilizes conventional portrayals of aging by foregrounding the affective residues of trauma and the nonlinear temporality of memory, offering a nuanced portrait of elderhood as a site of emotional complexity and narrative power.

Keywords: *Memory and Narrative, Literary Gerontology, Aging and Identity, Late-Life Fiction, Grief, and Resilience.*

Introduction

Olive Kitteridge (2008) by Elizabeth Strout is a singular work of fiction whose complex narrative structure and nuanced character development offer an impressive analysis of aging. The emotional texture ingrained in the aging mind is shown by this paper's examination of the novel's depictions of late-life trauma, memory, and affective experiences. Trauma appears as more than just incidents; it is a multifaceted emotional legacy that shapes the protagonist's present by impacting her relationships, sense of self, and perception of time. The research uses literary gerontology, specifically Kathleen Woodward's ideas on aging and subjectivity, to situate Olive's embodied silences and fragmented memories as narrative locations where trauma negotiates visibility and invisibility. According to the study, Olive Kitteridge presents a complex, psychologically rich picture of elderhood characterized by grief, resiliency, and relational complexity, upending long-standing cultural scripts of aging that frequently exclude or categorize the old.

Literature Review

Understanding trauma and memory in fiction necessitates engaging with the emotional and psychological residues that shape narrative identities. Trauma is often approached not as a singular event but as an enduring impact that fractures and redirects memory and subjectivity. As Ernest Hemingway

insightfully posits, “The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places,” (249) highlighting how traumatic experiences leave lasting marks that reshape personal strength and vulnerability. Recent trauma theory emphasizes the embodied and nonlinear nature of traumatic memory, which resists neat temporal ordering and verbal articulation. This is particularly relevant to late-life trauma, where memories surface as fragmented sensory episodes and silences rather than coherent stories. William Faulkner's words, “The past is never dead. It's not even past,” (85) eloquently capture this continuous presence of prior trauma within the elder self, complicating typical life narratives.

Resilience in the face of trauma is explored through the lens of affect and embodiment, often revealing a tension between unavoidable pain and the choice to suffer. Haruki Murakami's reflection, “Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional,” (vii) resonates with this understanding by outlining emotional endurance as a complex process that transcends the mere experience of pain. Furthermore, trauma's emotional weight and the eventual possibility of letting go are crucial to elder narratives. Toni Morrison's assertion, “You wanna fly, you got to give up the thing that weighs you down,” (179) serves as a metaphor for the painful yet necessary relinquishing of traumatic burdens, underscoring themes of release and resilience in aging literature. The integration of literary gerontology and trauma studies opens new avenues for comprehending how aging individuals represent and negotiate trauma, memory, and affect, disrupting reductive cultural scripts and expanding the emotional texture of elderhood.

Theoretical Framework

This paper employs a literary gerontological lens informed by Kathleen Woodward's notion that aging subjects negotiate cultural scripts through narrative. Aging is a constant re-negotiation of selfhood influenced by memory and emotion rather than just a decrease. This is enhanced by trauma theory, which emphasizes the embodied character of trauma reactions and the nonlinear temporality of traumatized memory. The methodological approach focuses on narrative gaps, tonal shifts, sensory details, and silences through attentive reading and affective textual analysis. This demonstrates how memory and trauma are portrayed as sociocultural and psychological phenomena.

Methodology

Affective textual analysis places emphasis on the narrative's emotional textures, such as the moods, silences, and physical reactions that convey trauma beyond words, but close reading enables attentive attention to textual subtleties. This dual approach is crucial for expressing the liminal zone that elder trauma occupies, because social norms surrounding aging and emotional expression frequently mediate representation.

Analysis

Fragmented Recollections and Nonlinear Temporality

The episodic format of the novel captures the fragmented temporal nature of trauma. Rather than occurring as chronological flashbacks, Olive's memories come to life as sensory triggers and reflective periods. Through limited speech and scene description, a deeper sense of grief associated with her late husband Henry is subtly revealed in the story "Pharmacy," highlighting the latency of trauma and Olive's fragmented inner world. This narrative fragmentation parallels trauma theory's concept that traumatic memory eludes conventional storytelling and instead recurs in disjointed episodes. Olive's memory resists neat closure, reflecting the nonlinear time of trauma and aging.

Silences and Embodied Responses

Olive's trauma is often shown not through words but via body language and silence. Her times of physical distress or defensive bluntness, which indicate emotive states that are mainly unsaid, are frequently signs of her emotional suffering. Due to societal expectations of stoicism in aging, older characters like Olive may repress their vulnerability, as these embodied responses highlight the social constraints surrounding late-life tragedy. For instance, Olive's icy response to her son is a protective

mechanism that betrays more serious hurt. Strout is able to portray trauma as an unseen, lived thread influencing Olive's relationships and self-perception because of these emotionally charged silences.

Socio-Cultural Scripts and Emotional Agency

Using Woodward's framework, Olive negotiates the tension between pervasive cultural scripts of decline and invisibility in old age and her own complex emotional interiority. Moments of fierce protectiveness toward her son and candid self-reflection reveal Olive's narrative agency. She refuses easy victimization, embodying resilience and emotional depth. This tension is central to the novel's critique of stereotypical elderhood, showing how aging individuals enact complex subjectivities shaped by but not fully constrained by social discourses on aging.

The Weight of Grief and Resilience

Grief permeates Olive's life, but the novel also illuminates resilience. Olive's encounters with various characters reveal shared vulnerability and strength derived from life's layered experiences. The story “Security” epitomizes this balance, illustrating how Olive's guarded exterior masks an underlying capacity for empathy and emotional connection. Strout's narrative thus portrays elderhood as an emotionally rich site where trauma and resilience coexist, pushing beyond reductive narratives of decline.

Discussion

Olive Kitteridge challenges dominant cultural narratives around aging by presenting trauma and memory as complex, affect-laden phenomena central to elder identity. The novel's narrative strategies—nonlinear time, fragmented memory, silences, and embodied affect—reveal the ways elder trauma is lived and represented. This destabilization of conventional portrayals offers a powerful counter-narrative to simplistic depictions of aging. Elderhood emerges as a phase rich with narrative power and emotional depth, validating the experiences of resilience and grief that shape late-life subjectivity.

Further Critical Reflections on Emotional Texture and Reader Engagement

Elizabeth Strout's Olive Kitteridge not only articulates late-life trauma through narrative form and character psychology but also actively engages readers in a challenging process of empathy and understanding. Research in cognitive stylistics highlights how Strout's shifting focalizations and fragmented narrative structure invite readers into a dynamic "mind-modeling" experience, compelling them to continuously reassess Olive's character and motivations as new layers are revealed (Harrison & Giovanelli, 428–446).

This dynamic engagement reflects the emotional texture of the novel: readers encounter Olive as simultaneously “prickly,” vulnerable, complex, and at times alienating. The narrative's refusal to offer tidy resolutions or consistently sympathetic perspectives deepens the affective response, embodying the ambivalence inherent in late-life trauma and aging. In this way, Olive Kitteridge embodies the painful complexity of elderhood rather than smoothing over its contradictions or emotional struggles.

Furthermore, the novel's evocation of place — the small coastal town of Crosby — functions as more than setting; it is integral to the emotional fabric and memory-work in the text. The rhythms of the town, its communal histories, and daily life resonate with Olive's personal memories and emotional states, situating trauma and resilience within a shared socio-cultural space. This intricate weaving of place and character deepens the reader's experience of the protagonist's interiority and the affective weight of remembering (Harrison & Giovanelli, 428–446).

Finally, Olive Kitteridge's narrative strategy subverts common literary and cultural representations of old age as decline or irrelevance. Instead, it asserts the elder's story as one imbued with narrative power and emotional complexity, insisting that late-life trauma—though often invisible or silenced—shapes identity in profound and ongoing ways. By making readers grapple with Olive's difficult personality and painful history, Strout cultivates a deeper recognition of elderhood's nuanced human reality, extending empathy beyond stereotypes.

Subverting Cultural Narratives of Aging

Olive Kitteridge by Elizabeth Strout questions popular conceptions of aging as a state of decline or invisibility. Olive's multifaceted personality challenges the notion that older people are weak or unimportant by displaying emotional depth, resiliency, and paradoxes. Without romanticizing or discounting age, the novel and its adaptation portray aging realistically, emphasizing both loss and strength. Olive's story highlights elderly women's strong subjectivity and narrative power, challenging conventional norms that minimize them. This transgression broadens our understanding of late-life suffering and identity while criticizing ageism.

Resilience Amid Grief: A Dynamic Portrayal

Elizabeth Strout depicts resilience in Olive Kitteridge as a multifaceted, continuous process influenced by suffering, sorrow, and hope rather than as a straightforward way to get over sadness. This dynamic tension is embodied in Olive's character, whose caustic and sometimes harsh attitude conceals tenderness and a strong longing for connection. Olive has moments of tenderness and elegance that show her determination in the face of loss, loneliness, and strained relationships. Olive is a really relevant and persona because of her portrayal, which highlights that perseverance in later age entails accepting harsh realities, facing setbacks, and still deciding to go after life's opportunities.

Trauma as Embodied Experience

Olive Kitteridge's trauma is profoundly embodied; it shows up not just in her thoughts but also in her bodily responses and actions, which indicate her psychological anguish. Her father's death and other unresolved sadness are the fundamental causes of her trauma, which has a lasting impact on her relationships and life. Anxiety at the airport and emotional estrangement from her son are only two examples of how memories and encounters can cause Olive to feel panicked, confused, and physically uncomfortable. These reactions demonstrate how trauma is deeply embedded in her personality, frequently manifested as defensive clarity, mood swings, or silences. These embodied symptoms are used by Elizabeth Strout to illustrate the multi-layered, concealed character of trauma in old age and its long-term effects on the body and mind. Olive's trauma is constantly reactivated and not entirely healed, which shapes both her vulnerabilities and resilience.

Implications for Aging and Identity Studies

Olive Kitteridge has significant implications for identity and aging studies. The novel presents aging as a complicated interaction of memory, trauma, resilience, and emotional depth, challenging stereotyped and reductionist ideas of elderhood. It highlights how identity in late life is influenced by social, psychological, and cultural variables, emphasizing the subjective experience of aging beyond biological decline. According to gerontological viewpoints, aging is not a permanent stage but rather a socially constructed and fluctuating process. Strout's nuanced portrayal of Olive highlights the marginalization and obscurity that older people-particularly older women-frequently experience and advocates for a more comprehensive understanding of their emotional complexity and narrative agency. A reconsideration of how society perceives and values elder identities is called for by the novel's sophisticated examination, which adds to current academic discussions on ageism, gendered aging, and the politics of representation in literature and the media.

This focus on aging and identity makes Olive Kitteridge a rich text for both literary analysis and interdisciplinary aging studies, deepening insights into the lived experience of late life.

Conclusion

This research paper demonstrates how Elizabeth Strout's Olive Kitteridge intricately weaves late-life trauma, memory, and emotional complexity into its narrative, challenging prevailing cultural assumptions about aging. Through episodic fragmentation, embodied silences, and nonlinear temporality, the novel not only represents the enduring impact of trauma on elder identity but also highlights the

coexistence of grief and resilience, reframing elderhood as a site of profound narrative power and psychological depth. By integrating literary gerontology and trauma theory, this study underscores how Olive Kitteridge foregrounds the nuanced subjectivity of aging individuals, resisting reductive stereotypes and emphasizing emotional agency amidst societal scripts of invisibility and decline. Ultimately, Strout's work enriches both literary and aging studies by urging a reconsideration of elder identity that honors the complexities of memory, trauma, and resilience, advocating for greater empathy and recognition of the emotional texture shaping late life.

References

- Chaofan, M. "Twilight Tide: Narrative of Aging in Olive Kitteridge." International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences, vol. 10, no. 5, 2025, pp. 44–49, https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.105.9.
- Faulkner, William. Requiem for a Nun. Random House, 1951.
- Harrison, Clare, and Maria Giovanelli. "'Traits Don't Change, States of Mind Do': Tracking Olive in Olive Kitteridge by Elizabeth Strout." English Studies, vol. 103, no. 3, 2022, pp. 428–446, https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838x.2022.2033514.
- Hemingway, Ernest. A Farewell to Arms. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929.
- Letort, David. "Age and Gender in the Miniseries Adaptation of Elizabeth Strout's Olive Kitteridge." Adaptation, vol. 9, no. 1, 2015, pp. 86–97, https://doi.org/10.1093/adaptation/apv022.
- Minghui, Qian. "Strout's Insight into the Times: Trauma and Recovery in Olive Kitteridge." International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences, vol. 8, no. 4, 2023, pp. 166–174, https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.84.27.
- Morrison, Toni. Song of Solomon. Vintage Books, 2004.
- Murakami, Haruki. What I Talk About When I Talk About Running. Translated by Philip Gabriel, Alfred A. Knopf, 2008.
- Šesniæ,Jelena. "The Past and Present of Age and Ageing in The Country of the Pointed Firs and Olive Kitteridge." Anafora, vol. 6, no. 2, 2019, pp. 443–468, https://doi.org/10.29162/anafora.v6i2.8.
- Strout, Elizabeth. Olive Kitteridge. Random House, 2008. https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/174654/olive-kitteridge-by-elizabeth-strout/.
- Woodward, Kathleen, et al. "Telling Stories." Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities, University of California, 1997, https://townsendcenter.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/publications/OP09_Telling_Stories.pdf.

14

LANDSCAPE AND RITUALS IN CILAPPATIKARAM: A STUDY OF TAMIL TINAI CULTURE

Indumathi S, *Assistant Professor, Department of English, Madras Christian College, Chennai Tamil Nadu, India*

Abstract

Rituals are primal and persistent practices of communal life, spanning from cradle to grave. It reflects the indigenous knowledge on the feral world and the ecosystem. The primordial Tamil social order grounds on the tinai landscapes, Kurinci (mountains), Mullai (forests or pastoral land), Marutam (agricultural plains or wet lands), Neytal (the littoral tracts), and Paalai (arid or parched land). Tinai is not mere a description of landscapes but a social convention and social order of early Tamil society. This research paper delves into the intricate relationship of landscape and ritual in the Tamil epic Cilappatikaram, through the lens of Tinai culture. A tinai poetic framework conjugates topography, flora, fauna, and people with a fervent fervour. The ecological zones are not merely physical spaces but deeply embedded in ritual, ethical, emotional existence of people. The research paper indagates tinai landscapes in literary, ecological and anthropological dimensions and integration of characters and their transitions through rituals, as Kannagi's transformation from a grieving wife to a deity. Cilappatikaram, a magnum opus imparts the modern western ecological consciousness, biocentric values and place-based ecocritical thoughts through the indigenous tinai poetic form. The diligent reading of Cilappatikaram with tinai framework aids to understand the symbiotic relationship of nature, culture, and ethics of Tamil land.

Key Words: *Tinai Poetics, Ritual, Culture, Landscapes, and Indigenous approach.*

Introduction

The primary meaning of tinai is earth- a specific place on earth. It further denotes landscape, flora and fauna of the land, land surrounded by a home and homestead, people and their food, occupation, music and deity. In specific, tinai enunciates naturo cultural features of the people and the land they dwell. In the primordial tribal era the five tinaikal are the five cultural repository of Tamil land. P.T.Srinivasa Ieyenggar, exponent in tinai theory believes that five tinai cultures have evolved from five tinaikal. Tinai is a physiographic region or micro eco zone, five varieties of terrain namely kurinci (mountainous land), mullai (scrub land), marutam (riverine land), neytal (littoral land), paalai (arid land). These habitable regions conceived by corresponding indigenous societies. Tinai is a mere poetic convention and not as a relevant social order in anarchic society. As tinai society is no more prevalent and it lost its ground in sociological convention (valakku) and now it is known through art and poetic form (ceyyul). Tinai, an ancient social order of Tamil people and land. It continued to be the bedrock of Tamils until the new order of caste forced in to the society. Tinai social order had its roots in the cultural and rituals of everyday existence of early Tamil people. Rituals are a byproduct of human civilization; tinai life is rooted in the landscape- it reflects the custom, beliefs, practices that connects to the everyday sustenance of people. Among these, Cilappatikaram stands out as an epitome of classical Tamil epic poetry with the vivid pictorial presentation of landscape and life based on the tinai values. In the words of R. Parthasarathy “The Cilappatikaram is one of the literary masterpieces of the world: it is to the Tamils what the Iliad is to the

Greeks-the story of their civilization." (2) Cilappatikaram narrates the story of an anklet, anklet is in metonymic relation with Kannaki and functions as an extension of her personality and it is one of the insignia of the goddess pattini. The story begins with the wedding celebration of Kovalan and Kannaki in Pukar, the capital city of Cola kingdom. Their travel to Maturai, the Pantiya capital to recoup the wealth with pair of kannaki's anklets. It ends with Kannaki's journey alone to vanci, Ceral capital after losing Kovalan and kannaki's apotheosis into the goddess. Ilanko Atikal uses landscape as a symbol of kannaki's transformation from an ordinary mortal to a divinity. Landscape is one of the prominent and resonant symbols in Cilappatikaram to reflect the inner and outer world and as well the emotional, psychological and spiritual state of the characters.

Theoritcal Background

Home and space outside the home are part of the system called tinai which includes land and all that land sustains. Tolkappiyam, classical Tamil grammatical and poetic treaties asserts that the entire world surface is divisible into four types of land is rooted in the specific eco-cultural matrix with the discrete topographies. Tinai theory states that the particular land area is associated with the specific naturo-cultural feature and along with the primary action of that indigenous group. In literary text tinai is not mere a backdrop but a persona. In Cilappatikaram tinai stands as a symbol and metaphor in the development of the characters and signifies the graph of journey of Kannaki across the Tamil ecological space. Through the narration of Kannaki and her apotheosis, it presents the clear topographical picture of Tamil land through their journey from Pukar to vanci. If the land is discussed it must be considered along with the flora, fauna, people, deity, music, festivals and rituals.

Tinai Convention In Cilappatikaram

The basic poetic convention of early Tamil literature is categorized in to akam and puram, which presents the private and public life of Tamil people. In Cilappatikaram, The Book of Pukar exerts the akam convention, picturizing love life Kovalan, Kannaki and Matavi. Book of Maturai employs the significance of the myth of Kannaki's apotheosis. Book of vanci asserts the puram tradition, focusing on war, valor, and public life. It is the geography of the mind and imagination, that Ilanko Atikal explores. Kannaki's life begins at Pukar in the littoral land and her travel to Maturai, Pantiya kingdom through mullai, marutam, paalai that is riverine land, scrub land and arid land respectively and ends on a mountain-top Neduvel kunram in Vanci, Ceral country. Land symbolizes the emotion of the characters and their psychological journey. Ilanko Atikal describes Pukar as a riverine plain and as a port city. In akam poetry the predominant primary action of marutam tinai is sulking and for neytal tinai is waiting. As The Book of Pukar delineates the akam life of the characters, Along with this, it is densely packed with pictorial presentation of the place, people, their festivals, business and richness of the city Pukar. Narration starts with the grand wedding ceremony of Kannaki and Kovalan and very soon Kovalan repudiates Kannaki's love and starts his new life with Matavi, courtesan. In akam poetic convention it has become a vital reason for his separation with Kannaki. Kannaki's anxious wait for her husband's return is a central theme of the story in Book of Pukar. Ilanko Atikal consciously uses four tinai except kurinci in The Book of Pukar with the strong erotic themes to aid the events of the narratives and for the structural unity. Kovalan leaves his wife for the courtesan Matavi and squanders his wealth on her. Devasted Kannaki's patience wait reflects the central theme of mullai tinai that is patient endurance during the time of separation. Separation and sulking of marutam tinai applies to both Kannaki and Matavi though in a different context. Both Kovalan and Matavi suspect each other of infidelity; this employs the infidelity and sulking of marutam tinai. Matavi and Kovanlan's happy life comes to an end with love songs of seaside grove during Indira festival. Kovalan thought: "I sang the song of the seaside grove. A hypocrite, she put together a pack of lies, and sang with someone else in mind" (81). The anxiety caused by the separation is the primary theme of neytal tinai. Both Kannaki and Matavi experience the phase of separation and anxiety in different context. Paalai asserts the temporary

separation from one's family for various reasons like to fetch fortune, education and elopement. After Kannaki's twelve long years of wait, Kovalan returns to her with a regret and his decision to begin a new life with Kannaki in a new place. Kannaki and Kovalan's decision leave Pukar for Maturai by unbeknownst to their parents; kith and kin is a reflection of paalai tinai.

The Book of Maturai has a less scope to explore neither the akam nor puram poetic convention rather it is the kernel of the epic centers on the divine justice and deification of Kannaki. In The Book of Maturai, canto 11 details about the Kovalan and Kannaki's expedition to a new land with hope and aspiration to begin a new life. They start their tough journey through a Bleak forest separating the Cola and Pantiya kingdoms and huge pastoral land that spreads across the river Kaviri. They are joined by Kavunti, a Jaina ascetic, with who they travel to Uraiyur. Ilanko Atikal enunciates the conventions of heroic poetry, puram in The Book of Vanci. It functions outside the matrix of familial relationship and explores the relationship between human and the world around him. Along with the puram, motifs of kurinci tinai occur in The Book of Vanci, Kannaki twice separated from Kovalan- temporarily in Pukar and permanently in Maturai. The primary action of Kurinji tinai is union, Kannaki is eventually reunited with him in heaven. Mountain symbolizes the union of heaven and earth. The spiritual ascent of Kannaki with Kovalan happened in Neduvel kunram in Vanci. Cera King Cenkuttuvan asserts this place as a scared to build a monument temple and to erect a memorial stone (Nadukal) to Kannaki, thus institutionalized the pattini cult.

Rituals As Extension Of Tinai Values

From the primordial time rituals of the particular society asserts the cultural identity of the place which encompasses the native knowledge, legends, folk lore, agriculture, tutelary deity, music, food, ethical and moral values of the land and people. In cankam era rituals are the repository of tinai values with the social customs, collective practices that corresponds the environment and community life. The Book of Pukar presents the vivid description of Indra festival and its cultural practices and belief system of the cankam era in marutam and neytal land. Indra festival is the festival of rain and abundance begins with first offering to the guardian deity with sacrifice pulses, sesame balls, boiled rice with suet, and wine at the altar of the deity. Warriors and valiant men reach at the altar to sacrifice themselves for well being of king. There are five guardian spirits of five squares of city to guard the warehouse, to cure the blind and deaf, a third deity is in the form of a shinning pillar to cure the snake poison or of black magic on devotee, fourth deity is to punish the immoral women, scandalmongers and disloyal courtiers. The last deity is a statue of justice in feminine form would just shed tears at the time of kings scepter bends. At all the five temples sacrifices are made to appease the deities. In The Book of Maturai, some of the important rituals connected to the mullai tinai are the song and dance of hunters and the round dance of herdswomen. Kannaki and Kovalan after their tiresome journey reached the village of Maravans and rested at the temple of Aiyai and therefore witnessed the conscientious prayers and rituals practiced by marava community. Here again a reference to human sacrifice, Eyinans offered their own heads to korravai to seek success. This is one of the important rituals of Eyinans, who involve in dacoity against travelers especially in the forested areas. Ilanko has given elaborate description of a young virgin girl from marava community dressed up like Aiyai and she is referred as calini, a priestess and eventually possessed by the Goddess. She was taken to shrine of Ananku, a guardian spirit of forest and springs. In canto 17, the round dance of herdswomen illustrates the music, dance, deity, cultural belief and moral values of herdswomen of Mullai tinai. Kovalan leaves Kannaki at the care of herdswomen in search fortune by selling one of the anklets of Kannaki. This performance is a symbolically represents the ill omen that befell Kovalan. It functions the narrative interlude within the text. This section filled with seed elements of mullai tinai ranges from deity, occupation, music, musical note. Matari, herdswoman instructs her daughter to structure the round dance in both clockwise and anti-clock wise with the seven musical note Sa, Ri, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni and the position of young girls whom take the

names of the seven musical notes. In The Book of Vanci, canto 24, The round dance of the Hill dwellers (kuravai kuthu) yet another instant of the ritual of kurinci tinai. Kannaki's curse burnt the Maturai city after which she walked for 14 long days and reached the Neduvel kunram in Vanci. One of the kurava women as she scares the sparrows from cornfields identifies Kannaki under the Kino tree with one breast. Kino tree is the prominent tree in kurinci land and the important activity of kurava women is to guard the fields from birds and animals. When they learnt the story of Kannaki, kuravas couldn't wait for king to dedicate her a memorial stone. They declared Kannaki as their tribal deity. Later Cera king assigned huge army to capture northern parts of India and brought a huge stone from Himalayas to dedicate idol for Kannaki and starts the new pathini cult. The ritual tradition of the cult is therefore the cardinal section of the epic. The erecting a memorial stone for the hero after his death on a heroic act is the primal tinai practice. Building a memorial stone to woman and her deification is unnatural which made the mortal woman and grieved wife to a deity. Tevanti, Kannaki's friend from Pukar is made as priestess of the temple. Again this is a common practice in early Tamil society having a priestess in the shrine of goddess and female deities. Till now, Kannaki is worshipped under many different names like Kannaki Amman, Mangala Devi, Atturukal Amman. In Srilanka, she is worshipped as Kannaki Amman with ritual song (Kannaki amman kullurchi patal) The song of the cooling of the Goddess Kannaki. She is Kali-Bhagavati inn Kotunkolur , Kerala. Bhagavathy Amman in Nellicherry, Kerala. Chellathamman in Maturai, Kannaki legend is part of collective consciousness of Maturai. Early Tamil society has a familial relationship with human, nature and supernature, it ensures the temporal continuity and tinai communal life.

Conclusion

Cilappatikaram is a paradigm of Tamil tinai society and it recapitulates five tinai in to moral ritual terrain with its own indigeneity. Landscape is not a mere backdrop of the story and circumstance but it is an active persona which reinforces the importance of communitarian living along with the natural world around. The native elements comprise the entire taxonomy of interdependence of human and nature. The journey of Kannaki and Kovalan across the five tinai traces the topographical features of Tamil land and people sustenance with the nature with the cultural and ritual identity. The Cilappatikaram is thus a syncretic work that corresponds various elements from various terrains. Tinai culture is a landscape reinforced by ritual and nature fostering an integrated and communal life.

References

- Ilango Adigal. Cilappatikaram. Translated by R. S. Pillai, Tamil University, Thanjavur, 1989.
- Ilango Adigal. The Cilappatikaram: The Tale of an Anklet. Translated by R. Parthasarathy, Penguin Books, 1993.
- Rangarajan, S. Ecocriticism: Big Ideas and Practical Strategies. Edited by Scott Slovic, Orient BlackSwan, 2018.
- Thangappa, M. L., translator. Love Stands Alone: Selections from Tamil Sangam Poetry. Edited by A. R. Venkatachalapathy, Penguin Books, 2010.
- Dasan, Nirmal. "Tamil Sangam Poetry." Angelfire, https://www.angelfire.com/nd/nirmaldasan/ts.html. 2025.

15

FROM WOUNDS TO WISDOM: RETHINKING POWER THROUGH VULNERABILITY THEORY IN ALICE WALKER'S THE COLOR PURPLE

R. Shanthini, *Research Scholar, Department of English, Vels Institute of Science, Technology & Advanced Studies (VISTAS), Chennai, India.*
shanthinibaskar91@gmail.com
Dr. H. Kalaivani, *Assistant Professor, Department of English, Vels Institute of Science, Technology & Advanced Studies (VISTAS), Chennai, India.*

Abstract:

In The Color Purple by Alice Walker, the character of Shug Avery undermines traditional depictions of power through her personification of a type of strength grounded in emotional vulnerability, personal autonomy, and spiritual resistance. From the vantage point of vulnerability theory—most notably as voiced by thinkers such as Judith Butler and Brené Brown—this article re-examines Shug as a seductive, autonomous woman. Rather, she becomes a innovative figure of emotional intelligence and healing. Shug's difficulty, her vulnerability to pain, and her intimate connections with other women, particularly Celie, enable us to recognize power not as domination but as a potential for feeling deeply, healing, and renovation. This reading situates Shug Avery as a literary character who covers power through the knowledge accrued from wounds, making a strong argument for vulnerability as a feminist ethic in African American literature.

Introduction

Alice Walker's The Color Purple is a pain-soaked novel but one that booms with the unremarkable promise of change. Composed in 1982, this epistolary novel follows the life of Celie, an African American woman during the early 20th-century American South, as she fights to regain her voice after suffering years of abuse, silence, and spiritual expulsion. Among the cast of characters that revolve around Celie's presence, it is Shug Avery—singer, nomad, campaigner—who turns out to be the source of light. Usually read as a figure for sexual freedom or artistic freedom, Shug is much more than a tempting figure of revolt. She's a woman frightened by her own wounds—isolated from her kin, floating through a world that both hungers for and sanctions her liberty—yet she's unwilling to apologize for being unapologetically open, loving, and emotionally generous.

This essay rethinks Shug Avery in terms of vulnerability theory, an emergent area of research in feminist and queer theory that reconsiders vulnerability as a sign not of weakness but of the human condition and of possible sites of resistance. Scholars like Judith Butler, Brené Brown, and Jack Halberstam have all suggested that vulnerability, when seen and embraced, has the ability to upend rigid power structures and create space for intimacy, empathy, and collective power. Shug, here, is not only strong merely because she refuses to fit; she is strong because she will feel, will love, and will live unencumbered by armor. Her weakness is not a defect to be overcome, but the very reason for her powerful influence on the people around her—most specifically Celie, whose path towards selfhood starts through Shug's extreme example.

Focusing on Shug Avery, this essay seeks to demonstrate how The Color Purple confronts dominant conceptions of power and strength, especially in Black women's lives. Shug's narrative provides

a model of wisdom that develops not despite suffering, but because of it—a wisdom that demurs that love, gentleness, and emotional openness are themselves acts of resistance.

Vulnerability Theory and Feminist Thought

Vulnerability, under the rubric of modern feminist theory, has been given a powerful alteration. What had previously been documented as a status to be defied—an icon of passivity, powerlessness, or domination—has more and more emerged as a window through which one might re-vision strength, agency, and relational power. Scholars like Judith Butler and Brené Brown have contributed to setting vulnerability not as a lack of power, but as an opportunity for greater connection, authenticity, and resistance against dehumanizing systems.

Judith Butler, in Precarious Life (2004), contends that our exposure to each other—our susceptibility to harm, loss, and dependence—is not merely a personal issue, but a political one. For Butler, to recognize vulnerability is to identify common humanity and the ethical obligation that stems from our interdependence. Vulnerability becomes then a power that can counteract systems of domination and prohibiting, not through resistance alone, but through relational responsibility. In a quite different register, but one of equal insight, Brené Brown has made it mainstream to understand that vulnerability is the origin of courage, creativity, and deep human connection. Vulnerability in her writing is not weakness; it is the risk we are willing to take when we are fully present as ourselves, vulnerable and open.

In feminist and queer theory, vulnerability has become an important instrument in reframing power in terms of something other than dominance and submission. Jack Halberstam, in The Queer Art of Failure (2011), extends this line of argument by claiming that taking on "failure" and fragility can in itself be a queer refusal to be successful by the terms of oppressive, normative definitions. In this framework, vulnerability can become a form of subversion—a refusal to harden oneself in the face of a world that demands resilience as a prerequisite for survival.

Within the politics of vulnerability, African American feminist theory especially deepens meaning. Authors such as bell hooks and Audre Lorde have long maintained that the emotional realms of Black women are arenas both of pain and of resistance. hooks, writing in Sisters of the Yam, describes healing as an act of political insurrection: "Love is an action, a participatory emotion." Vulnerability in this way becomes not merely personal—it is historic, generational, and collective.

When viewed through this lens, Shug Avery becomes a radically underappreciated figure of power. She doesn't fit the classic feminist role of the "strong Black woman" who bears everyone's load without shattering. Rather, she shatters—frequently, on display and emotionally—and is still intact. Her vulnerability to desire, her spiritual sensitivity, and her skill at creating emotional intimacy all render her a character deeply attuned to the strength that is released through emotional openness. Shug does not armor herself against suffering; she turns it into music, movement, and relationship. In the process, she exemplifies a type of feminist power that is less controlling and more coherent—wholeness of self based on speaking the truth and caring for each other.

ShugAvery: The Women, The Wound, The Wisdom

To know Shug Avery is to pass the surface of her bold presence and proceed to the inner workings of her emotional life. She is a woman not easily defined—at once deeply spiritual and sensual, worldly and wise, fiercely independent and connected. In so many ways, Shug is the opposite of what Celie is when The Color Purple begins—free, outspoken, unapologetically herself. But Shug's freedom is not free, and it is in her wounds that her true power lies.

From the beginning, Shug is presented not through her own voice, but by others' version of her. She is the scandalous preacher's daughter singer, the preacher's fallen child, the female who "ain't good enough" for refined society. Her body, music, sexuality—are all presented as both threatening and seductive. But Walker doesn't place Shug as a flat rebel character; rather, Shug emerges as someone

profoundly human, formed by rejection, isolation, and the ongoing conflict between needing others and needing to be free. Her alienation from her family, especially her father, who insists on disowning her as long as she plays the "devil's music," is an early trauma that informs her understanding of self. Shug bears the pain of not being wanted, of being desired and rejected at once—a doubleness that resonates with how Black women bodies and voices have long been commodified and regulated. And yet, instead of hardening back, Shug develops a sort of emotional vulnerability that becomes the source of her strength. She sings her hurt. She loves with abandon, sometimes destructively. She goes back to people who have hurt her, not as a sign of weakness, but with the insistence that love can still get its work done.

Her relationship with Celie is the strongest demonstration of this emotional intelligence. Shug does not save Celie in the classic way—she doesn't impose her freedom on her—but instead gives Celie space to view herself differently. Shug listens. She touches Celie gently. She speaks with certainty about her beauty, her body, her voice. These actions seem minute, but in a universe in which Celie has been told she's useless, they're nothing short of revolutionary. Shug's strength is in that she's capable of beholding the divine within what everyone else throws away—and of assisting everyone else to perceive it also. But Shug is not untouchable. Her jealousy, her difficulties with commitment, her illness—all remind us of a woman in progress, rather than a perfected feminist symbol. And this is where Walker's genius tracks: she presents us with a female protagonist who is wise without being perfect, strong without being unbreakable. Shug educates us, not because she has no wounds, but because she has learned to live with them, and even to love through them.

Thus, Shug is a woman who redefines power as having the capacity to feel deeply and not be overcome, to love and not be lost, to move through life with tenderness and fire. Her scars are not erased but are incorporated into the music that she sings—raw, sacred, and unforgetting.

The Power of Intimacy and Emotional Vulnerability

In a world where power too frequently is defined as control, Shug Avery offers a very different model one of closeness, of honesty, and of the courage to be emotionally present. Her most powerful moments in The Color Purple are not those in which she asserts control or grabs attention, but those in which she is prepared to be known—flawed, vulnerable, and human., and real. Shug's power is her ability to risk emotional vulnerability, and in so doing, she is a healer, not just for herself, but for those around her.

Her friendship with Celie is the most obvious space of this change. In one of the most personal and turning moments of the novel, Shug informs Celie that she is beautiful. To a woman who has been instructed her entire life that she is ugly, unseen, and unlovable, Shug's compliment is less than a compliment—it is an intervention into the internalized self-loathing that has controlled her life. This is a moment of emotional openness—Shug looking at Celie and saying so out loud.

It's not power over; it's power with.

But intimacy for Shug is not always simple. Her romantic affairs, particularly with men such as Albert, expose her conflicted dance with freedom and commitment. She wants connection but refuses to be bound by it. This conflict doesn't weaken her power—it makes her human. Shug is not a saint of vulnerability; she is a woman working through the messiness of love, desire, and identity. And still, in being willing to stay enthusiastically available—willing, even when it hurts—she shows a type of strength that is uncommon.

Shug's most revolutionary act of emotional leadership may be the manner in which she fosters the spiritual development of Celie. Shug brings Celie to a sense of God that is not patriarchal or punitive, but in the world, in beauty, in pleasure, and in nature. This is an incredibly vulnerable act, one that breaks with religious conformity and allows Celie the chance to believe that God could be as big and accepting as the love she finds with Shug. Through subtle dialogue and shared silences, Shug induces Celie to envision a divine being that is not distant, but interior. In these moments, Shug's affective transparency is a form of

ministry—grounded not in doctrine, but in radical empathy.

What Shug exemplifies, therefore, is a power rooted in emotional courage—being able to be fragile in an unforgiving world, to touch without grasping, and to stay in space for others' hurt without being destroyed by it. She shows that power does not lie in armor, but in authenticity. And this is the sort of power—vulnerable, open, deeply loving—that heals not only individuals, but the systems and stories that trap them.

Remapping Power with Shug

In The Color Purple, the arrival of Shug Avery reverses what was traditionally expected, standing on its head the common perception of power, particularly in terms of patriarchal norms. While traditional power models are based on dominance, control, and dismantling others, Shug presents an entirely different model—a model of proximity, revelation, and respect. Her power is not one of asserting dominance but of creating spaces for connection and expansion, for the women in her world.

At the start of the novel, power is defined by men like Mister, whose patriarchal authority over Celie is based on physical violence, emotional control, and rigid gender roles .Mister is the sort of male-controlled male authority that has directed Celie's existence, in which she has learned that her value lies in submission. But Shug is a power that reverses this hierarchy completely. She is imaginative in ways Mister can never be: sexually enlightened, mentally autonomous, and unapologetically herself. And yet, in this freedom, Shug never attempts to control others. Rather, she stands before Celie as a mirror, reflecting to her the strength of her own gentleness and validation.

In so many ways, Shug's relationship with Mister is the epitome of the difference between various types of power. While Mister tries to dominate and manipulate Shug, she will not be bound by his idea of what a woman should be. She resists his dominance not through explicit aggression, but by exercising her own autonomy in the smallest, most intimate ways: she departs when she must, loves whom she will, and tells her own truth without fear of retaliation. In contrast to Mister, Shug's power is relational, not coercive. She does not intend to control but to work alongside—she takes on the position of spiritual and emotional leader of Celie's life, though not through manipulation, but rather through compassion and understanding.

Shug's strength also defies the conventionally gendered expectations of women during her era. While women are usually supposed to be passive, self-denying, and supportive of men, Shug turns these expectations on their head. She is a woman who occupies space, who refuses to shrink herself to meet anyone else's standards. She represents what it is to be most fully embodied in one's own self, unapologetic about vulnerability or about moving beyond the scripted expectations of womanhood. By doing so, Shug makes it possible for Celie—and the reader to imagine an alternative: that power need not involve domination or submission, but a fierce commitment to one's own truth.

Further, Shug's demonstration of emotional vulnerability as a type of strength also refigures the notion of success. She educates Celie that in order to be "successful" one is not necessarily accumulating wealth or prestige, but rather taking back the sense of self-value and agency. Triumph for Shug is to live as a person is in her true self, unattached to compromise or fear. Emotional strength as that of Shug is something on which Celie models herself when she learns to look for what she deserves to have as herself without asking approval from such systems of oppression like Mister or society.

In Shug's world, power is not a zero-sum game where one has to lose so that another can gain. Instead, it is a communal, fluid thing that thrives on connection and respect. In her, Walker challenges the notion that power must always be classified or competitive. Shug's definition of power is one of reciprocity—she educates Celie and others that real strength is not found in monitoring others, but in the acknowledgment of interdependence that makes us all human.

Further, Shug's protest of emotional vulnerability as a type of strength also refigures the notion of success. She educates Celie that in order to be "successful" one is not necessarily gathering wealth or

prestige, but rather taking back the sense of self-value and agency. Success for Shug is living in accordance with one's true nature, unrestrained by compromise or fear. Her expressive strength becomes an example for Celie, who discovers that she, too, can pursue a life worthy of her own wishes and restrictions without first obtaining approval from oppressive institutions like Mister or society.

In Shug's universe, power is not a zero-sum game in which one must lose for another to win. Rather, it is a shared, fluid state that survives on connection and mutual respect. Through her, Walker defies the idea that power always has to be hierarchical or competitive. Shug's definition of power is one of reciprocity—she educates Celie and others that real strength is not found in controlling others, but in the acknowledgment of interdependence that makes us all human.

Conclusion

In Alice Walker's The Color Purple, Shug Avery does not only present herself as a sign of sexual freedom or artistic autonomy, but as a deep redefinition of power itself. Shug's character, seen through the eyes of vulnerability theory, presents a fundamental pattern of strength—not based on dominance, control, or repression of feeling, but in the ability to be open, to love, and to heal. She is a woman whose injuries become the site itself of her wisdom, whose emotional vulnerability is her most radical act.

Shug's strength is not that she can influence others, but that she can connect, can mother, and can live in a way that defies the oppressive agreements of her era. Her love affair with Celie is at the center of this change because Shug imparts to her that real power is not used to control, but rather earned through strong expressive influences and the receipt of herself. In a world where vulnerability is measured weakness, Shug's life teaches us that it is actually the fountainhead of real strength—the kind of strength that heals people and groups. By centering Shug Avery, this essay has attempted to complicate the conventional meanings of power in the context of The Color Purple. Through her vulnerability, Shug redefines power not as something exercised, but as something that is shared—a power that unites, heals, and elevates. Her legacy reminds us that wisdom, healing, and love are the real bases of power—wisdom that is birthed out of wounds and love that is unafraid in its vulnerability.

In the end, Shug Avery presents us with an image of power that refuses to be contained within traditional boundaries. She teaches us that to be weak is not to be vulnerable, but to be truly human. In her actions, we learn not only the unflattering critique of patriarchal structures of power, but a strong case for an alternative form of strength—one based on relationship, empathy, and the most radical act of all: living the truth.

References:

- Walker, Alice. The Color Purple. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982.
- Butler, Judith. Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence. Verso, 2004.
- Brown, Brené. Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead. Gotham Books, 2012.
- Halberstam, Jack. The Queer Art of Failure. Duke University Press, 2011.
- hooks, bell. Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery. South End Press, 1993.
- Lorde, Audre. Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches. Crossing Press, 1984.
- Carby, Hazel V. Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist. Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Gilyard, Keith. Alice Walker: The Color Purple, a Critical Companion. Greenwood Press, 2000.
- Smith, Valerie. Notable Black Women: A Feminist Literary Criticism of African-American Women Writers. University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
- Yancy, George. Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race. Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.

16

MARXISM AND DISABILITY IN MIRACLE IN CELL NO.7 AND BARFI!

Shreeja Shreekumar Pillai, *Research Scholar, VISTAS*
Dr. K. Viji, *Research Supervisor, VISTAS*

Abstract

The paper tries to examine the connection between Marxism and Disability by decoding the power structure and the burdened societal norms between in the two movies: the Korean drama Miracle in Cell No. 7 (2013) and the Indian comedy-drama Barfi! (2012). The paper tries to interpret how the basic concepts of base structure(the disabled individuals) and the superstructure (those holding ultimate power) to illustrate the demoralizing effects of the power relations in the lives of the disabled ones. The paper uses the World Health Organization's interpretation of disability as an "umbrella term" covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions, reflecting an interaction between a person's body and their society. Karl Marx's critique of the capitalist system is utilized to show how wealth accumulation at one pole corresponds with the accumulation of misery, agony of toil slavery, ignorance, brutality, and mental degradation, at the opposite pole, encompassing the struggles of the working class and, by extension, the disabled. In Barfi!, the deaf and mute Barfi and the autistic Jhilmil are initially subjugated by society's norms (the bourgeois community, represented by the Inspector and Shruti's adherence to societal expectations), but ultimately defy the power structure to create a world defined by their love, rejecting the rules imposed by the elite.In Miracle in Cell No. 7, the mentally impaired Lee Yong-gu is wrongfully convicted and threatened by the Commissioner (the power structure) into falsely confessing to a crime. Though he is executed, his daughter and fellow prisoners later fight the authority to prove his innocence, ultimately delivering justice and exposing the heinous crime of the officials. Both movies, despite their differences in language and genre, convey the same message: the power structure consistently attempts to dethrone the individuals who just tried to live their lives. The disabled are presented as part of the proletariat—the unheard ones—whose struggle for identity and happy life is constantly suppressed by the elite. The films demonstrate how love and resilience, rather than power, enable these protagonists to create their own fulfilling worlds, highlighting the connection between Marxism and disability.

Keywords: *Marxism, Disability, Base, Superstructure, Capitalism, Power structure.*

Marxism and disability have been intrinsically correlated in this paper by bringing out the different disability in two different language based movies. We have always seen how power and stability always have a complete access to the world. Poverty, hunger, disillusionment, savage life and illiteracy have no role in the current scenario. Those who have utmost power can do whatever they can with the help of the proletariat. A kind of structure always maintains the world. Given the note of stability the so called callus state can become a vegetative state. If liability is with the strong hands how come a human with dysfunctional abnormality live in this situation. This paper tries to show the how two different people living in completely different areas dethrone the power structure and emerge as the one among the other. It intends to give a clear cut picture of two disabled persons from Korea and India through the movies Miracle in Cell No. 7 and Barfi!. The World Health Organization has interpreted disability as:

Disabilities are an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. Impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations. Thus disability is a complex phenomenon, reflecting an interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives. (Isj 2011)

Disabled people were given the tag of sympathy and empathy so that they don't ever feel they are mere aliens. But has the system been able to evoke them differently or just as an ordinary genre is still a question. Karl Marx points out a relationship between disability and capitalism. People whether have or haven't disability doesn't bother the elite class or the one who have the ultimate power. Disability doesn't always seem what it actually represents it can merely be anything to do with the kind of structure that can't be seen. Marxist has seen society through the mutual amalgamation of base and superstructure. The base structure here is the disabled people and the superstructures are those who have the power. Karl Marx opines capital system as: within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productiveness of labour are brought about at the cost of the individual labourer; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of, the producers; they mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into a hated toil; they estrange from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they distort the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his life-time into working-time, and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the Juggernaut of capital. But all methods for the production of surplus-value are at the same time methods of accumulation; and every extension of accumulation becomes again a means for the development of those methods. It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the labourer be his payment high or low, must grow worse. The law, finally, that always equilibrates the relative surplus population, or industrial reserve army, to the extent and energy of accumulation, this law rivets the labourer to capital more firmly than the wedges of Vulcan did Prometheus to the rock. It establishes an accumulation of misery, corresponding with accumulation of capital. Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, i.e., on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital.(Marx et al.)

Barfi!, a 2012 Indian comedy drama Hindi film directed by Anurag Basu introduces a scene where we see a board that had the name Muskaan that meant smile. A well maintained simple plot that shows how two differently able persons find a place for themselves in-between all the commotion that's going on with busy doers. Murphy Johnson or commonly known as Barfi is deaf and mute young man by birth. He is raised by his single father who is a chauffeur in Darjeeling. Barfi is known as a trouble maker and is always chased by a local police officer (indication of the bourgeois community) for his mischievous pranks. He is deeply smitten by Shruti Ghosh who visits Darjeeling and she too reciprocates her love but as destiny conquers she is subjugated by her mother's wish and ultimately married off to a guy of the so called society that thinks that the man is able rather than disabled and would look after her well. The dialogue communicated by Shruti to her friend that “Khamoshi bhi pyaar ki zubaani hoti hai” (Even silence is language of love) (Basu, 2012) becomes quite ironic here. When Barfi's father becomes ill he is unable to treat him and decided to rob a bank that shows how poverty makes man take the cruelest of decision. But as his plan fails he decides to kidnap the daughter of his father's employer and his childhood autistic friend Jhilmil who is the heiress to her grandfather's fortune. Jhilmil's parents are ashamed of her disability which in turn shows how the community reflects upon the disabled people. Though she is rich she is in the same

path as Barfi is. Barfi and Jhilmil now connect like they have known each other for ages. They try to imitate every possible way of the bourgeois community and indulge in every aspect to live as a man and woman. There is a scene where Jhilmil prepares food and Barfi after coming from his workplace eating together with Jhilmil where Jhilmil fanning Barfi while he eat his food. But as the society incorporates a woman should do every household duty towards a man but when Jhilmil is sleeping it is Barfi who takes care of her. Another scene shows how Barfi test the love of Jhilmil. At the middle of the night Barfi wakes up Jhilmil and brings her up near a lamppost (Fig 1) which is already half gashed by him. When the lamppost falls accurately in front of them Jhilmil holds Barfi instead of running away that shows no matter whatever may come she is not going to leave him. Shruti who sees Barfi after long years is happy to see his new life and retreats on her failed marriage (again a miscommunication on the norms of the societal rule and regulations). She gets them married and Barfi and Jhilmil no matter what are the rules and regulations of the society compile to their heart rather than brain. They have now made a world of their own where not power but love is what is meant for each other.

There have been several arguments that some instances of the movie Barfi! shows that Jhilmil doesn't way to act as a autistic person. Dr Rubina Lal, Vice-President, Autism Society of India, Bangalore, argues:

When Barfi goes away after dropping Jhilmil at the home of an old servant (with whom she is attached), Jhilmil leaves that servant and goes running after him. A person with autism doesn't leave anyone they are really attached to. And if they are newly attached to someone, they can't express that feeling of attachment. They may throw tantrums but they will not go running after them, calling their name. Another instance is when Jhilmil goes missing. She calls home and tells her family her whereabouts, which is impossible. Moreover, in the entire film Barfi hardly uses sign language and when he does, it is incorrect. I agree the movie is about disabled people enjoying life instead of living in a dark world, but they could have taken one minute out of the three hours or so to give a bit of facts. (Jain)

Another person form the film fraternity has another objection in the showcasing of disability in films. Anita Vasuvala, Vice-Chairperson, opined that:

A film makes people aware that a particular disability exists. If a disability is portrayed properly in a film, then it is definitely helpful. However, if it is shown wrongly, then it gives rise to even more misconceptions. I wouldn't say that filmmakers should stay away from portraying them when they haven't done proper research on it, though. It also depends on how wrong the portrayal ends up being—whether it is totally wrong or a just a little wrong. But when a filmmaker wants to portray a disability, why take half-measures? They should do their research. (Jain)

While Barfi! provided a glimpse of subtle winning moments of disability Miracle in Cell no. 7 provided another range of direction. Miracle in Cell No. 7 is a South Korean comedy drama film directed by Lee Hwan-kyung in the year 2013. The film deals with a mentally challenged man wrongfully imprisoned for the murder of the Commissioner's daughter. The opening scene of the movie shows how his daughter now a lawyer fights in the court to get her father acquitted. The movie then goes into a flashback where Lee Yong-gu, a mentally impaired man lives happily with his six-year old daughter Ye-seung. He accidentally gets into a scuffle with the Commissioner when his daughter also wanted the Sailor Moon bag that the Commissioner's daughter just bought. Next day when he gets his salary he wishes to buy the bag for his daughter and the Commissioner's daughter tells him she knows where exactly he can get that bag. While following her to the store, the girl get accidently slipped into the ice and dies by external bleeding. Lee Yong-gu unaware of what happened to her gives her CPR and a nearby lady thinks he is actually trying to rape the girl. Lee Yong-gu is taken into police custody for murder of the girl. The accusation of power is easily shown on how a man unaware of what is happening around him just wishes to go home and see his daughter. His prisoner friends who are in cell no. 7 and the jail warden then slowly come to understand that

he is innocent and falsely accused. They with help of other prisoners try to bring his daughter and reconcile them. Again a hearing is held in the court for proving Lee Yong-gu's innocence. But before the hearing the Commissioner comes to meet him and beats him so badly that he threatens him to murder Ye-seung if he doesn't confess his crimes. Lee Yong-gu unaware of what is happening sacrifices his life and pleads guilty which gives him the death sentence. These are the exact scenes where the power structure demoralisation is shown. Nothing can done but just be watched when the someone who is just filled with kindness is now waiting for his death. His death sentence exactly coincides with his daughter's birthday and no one could stop him from getting away from the death wire. Now after years Ye-seung with the help of the other prisoners and the jail warden has come to the court to prove that her father was a great man. He couldn't cope up with the insecurities of the outside society. He was just preoccupied in giving his daughter the best things. Her father had never done a crime and he could never do a crime. The court gets to know of the heinous crime of the officials and how a false person was hanged for the crime he didn't do. Lee gets acquitted and Ye-seung visits the Cell No.7 and reminisces the moments and their hot air balloon escape that failed that day. The scene (fig 2) where Ye-seung plays with her dad reminds every adult of his childhood that no matter how your dad is he is ultimately your protector. Ye-seung knows her dad is mentally impaired but never ever has tried to get disappointed about this. They always sing and dance on the Sailor Moon's theme song and enjoy life to the fullest.

A literary analysis of both the movies using disability and Marxist ideology was to ensure that how events get deployed with the knowledge of the individual. The superstructure or the power that is vested upon whom is actually determined by the base structure. But sometimes the power structure becomes so powerful that it intends to forget who has allowed it to show that explicit power. Ideology gives every individual to set a world that they tend to design but unfortunately these ideologies are designed by the ruling power. Disability always doesn't tend to mean those who are handicapped; it also means the general audience who have grown mentally handicapped. Many critics still argue on how come people get disabled if they are provided with all the amenities but not freedom. When factory discipline was compared with the people's ability to function the result was:

Factory discipline, time keeping and production norms broke with the slower, more self-determined and flexible work pattern into which many disabled people had been integrated. As work became more rationalised, requiring precise mechanical movements of the body, repeated in quicker succession, impaired persons—the deaf or blind, and those with mobility difficulties, were seen as—and without job accommodations to meet their impairments, were—less “fit” to do the tasks required of factory workers, and were increasingly excluded from paid employment. [The Industrial Revolution] removed crippled people from social intercourse and transformed them into disabled people. (Isj 2011)

The relationship between Marxism and disability still raises many questions of individuality. Every person goes in search for his identity or is surviving to find his or her identity in the society. To find a living is easy but to survive in the society where the power gets changed at the nick of time is somewhat difficult. The difference in opinion between the bourgeois and proletariat would go on for ages. The proletariat doesn't always need to be a well survived man or woman; it can be anyone who comes under the umbrella term. To give it a more critical side and a better perception the below article would be sufficient:

Marx drew a relationship between physical disability and capitalism, pointing for example to “the victims of industry, whose number increases with the growth of dangerous machinery, of mines, chemical works, etc.”But disability is more generally present in Marx as a trope, a metaphor for the effects of capitalism, particularly of the division of labor. Manufacture “converts the worker into a crippled monstrosity by furthering his particular skill as in a forcing-house, through the suppression of a whole world of productive drives and inclinations.” This use of disability as metaphorical vehicle for the effects of the capitalist division of labor characterizes an ethical thread in Marxist thought, even among thinkers whose political

horizon is decidedly elsewhere: it is a running theme in Adorno's Minima Moralia, beginning with the subtitle "Reflections from Damaged Life"; one hears overtones of it in Jameson's description of the "epistemologically crippling" experience of our first-world "view from the top"; even Lukács does not manage to escape the trope entirely when he wanders near Marx's own description of industrial work. But the metaphor of modernity — particularly modernity under the aspect of specialization or segmentation — as disability is also part of the inheritance of German Idealism. In the sixth letter of Schiller's On the Aesthetic Education of Man, the emerging division of labor turns out to be the source of our "mutilated nature" and therefore of Schiller's entire problematic: "we see not only individuals, but whole classes of men, developing but one part of their potentialities while of the rest, as in stunted growths, only vestigial traces remain." This metaphor, then, doesn't necessarily belong specifically to Marxism, and we should probably treat it with skepticism wherever we find it. Even if Marx himself inherits this trope from classical German philosophy, his more substantial inheritance, the dialectical method, points unequivocally to the primordial disunity of the subject and offers no comforting appeal to normative wholeness and health. Certainly there are colder and more useful Marxist analyses of segmentation than such an appeal; the fact that three of them might be placed under the headings Lukács, Adorno, and Jameson might be an index of the vestigial nature of the disability trope itself within Marxism. However difficult it may be to avoid, its imputed other — the ideal of the fully developed personality — is not a particularly political horizon. (Brown and Quayson)

Whenever we think of ideologies we separate them into different categories. Here Barfi was first desperate at the loss of Shruti but he managed to get out it like the society has taught him. He rekindles his love with Jhilmil by make her go through the test system provided by the society but ultimately loses in front of her. Lee Yong-gu also tries every way so that he fits into the society. He imitates the so called bourgeois quality by going after the Sailor moon bag that is labelled as branded and eventually gifts his daughter that same bag to his love towards her. But for his daughter he has top sacrifice so that his daughter could live peacefully in this society where power decides what happens with their lives. A clear representation of the power scenarios can be seen from table 1 that gives a more defined version of how power defines the same.

Table 1: Representation of Class, Disability and Narrative Resolution in Contemporary Cinema

Movie	**Proletariat**	**Bourgeois**	**Disability Representation**	**Genre**	**Final State**
Barfi! (2012)	Barfi and Jhilmil	The Inspector, Shruti, and mainstream society	Deaf-mute; autism spectrum	Comedy-drama	Constructs an autonomous world and wins acceptance from a society that offered them no guidance
Miracle in Cell No. 7 (2013)	Lee Yong-gu, Ye-seung, and fellow inmates	The Commissioner, prison authorities, state apparatus	Intellectual disability	Comedy-drama	Daughter and fellow prisoners mobilize to secure posthumous justice for an innocent man condemned by corrupt authority

Both the movies showed how the power and the bourgeois community tried to dethrone the individuals who just tried to live their lives. Both movies are from different genres and different languages but they convey the same message. The silences of both the movies speak to the fullest of what it propounds. The connection between Marxism and disability gets revealed in both movies. In Marxism the proletariat doesn't always means the suffered ones; it also tries to propound the hearings of the unheard ones. Disabled or differently able persons are the ones whose voices are unheard or just neglected. Disabled people are also the part of the society. They too can fight back just like others. What makes them different is that they only think to live happily without any regret or greediness. They want to live in the present and make a better future. Whether it is Barfi or Lee, they just wanted to live just like other human beings but the so called elite or where the power the rested doesn't allowed them to do so. Barfi, a deaf and mute guy tried to accept the very culture of the society regardless of his physical disability. He tried to adjust to every loophole that suited him the best. He wouldn't mind to see his way whether by hook or crook he does his job wisely as that is what society taught him. Whereas as Lee Yong-gu a mentally impaired man doesn't actually know what he wants from the world. He is just happy with his life. His daughter is his actual protector who looks after him like a small baby. As Jhilmil finds a connection in Barfi, here Lee is in support of his daughter. No matter how much they tried to imitate the society, they just couldn't come under the so-called rules made by the one who is at utmost power. They clanged together into the world of their own and dreamed of what they wished to see and create. Finally Barfi and Jhilmil get united in peace and Ye-seung proves to the world that her father was her gift from God. Thus the sweet Barfi tried to create a wonderful Miracle unknown to the world.

References

- Barfi!. Created by Anurag Basu, UTV Motion Picture, 2012.
- 7beonbangui Seonmul (Miracle in Cell NO.7). Created by Lee Hwan-kung, Next Entertainment World, 2013.
- Jain, Jayana. “Bit of Barfi, Sip of Margarita: Disability and Sexuality in Hindi Films - Jayana Jain, 2018.” SAGE Journals, journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2455632718778394.
- Brown, Nicholas, and Ato Quayson. “Review of Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation : Mediations : Journal of the Marxist Literary Group.” Mediations, www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/marxism-and-disability.
- Isj. “Marxism and Disability.” International Socialism, 4 Jan. 2011, isj.org.uk/marxism-and-disability/.
- Marx, Karl, et al. Capital : a Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production. Allen & Unwin, 1946. “Barfi: Bollywood Dialogues By Hindi Movies.” Filmy Quotes, www.filmyquotes.com/movies/248.

17

INDIGENOUS ECOLOGY: FIKRET BERKES'S TEK FRAMEWORK IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S THE BOOK OF THE HUNTER

Iniya R, *Research Scholar, Department of English, B. S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science & Technology, Chennai.*
Dr. N. Suguna, *Assistant Professor, Department of English, B. S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science & Technology, Chennai.*

Abstract

Shabars are the indigenous people who live at the lap of nature. Mahasweta Devi, in her novel The Book of the Hunter, discusses their lifestyle, knowledge, and their connection to their natural environment. They are hunters, but they hunt only to lead their lives. They have a deep understanding of nature. They live by coexisting with nature and become a part of the forest ecosystem. They have shared their traditional knowledge with a limited people, and also orally. But they choose the right person to lead their community in a sustainable life.

This paper examines the novel through Fikret Berkes's theory of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). This theory states that indigenous wisdom is a "knowledge-practice-belief complex". Through this lens, the study analyses the novel's characters such as Tejota Shabar, Kalya Shabar, Phuli Shabar and Ganesh. Indigenous and local people have phenomenological knowledge about nature. Tejota, head of the Shabars, represents the Shabar tribe's sacred bond with the goddess Abhaychandi. She views the forest not merely as a place to live but as a mother, God, healer, and provider. Phuli and Kalya Shabar embody Berkes's TEK principles through their harmonious relationship with the forest. Ganesh is not a Shabar, but he is a man whose life completely depends on nature. He has a profound knowledge of plants, birds, and seasons. Ganesh's ecological knowledge mirrors Berkes's concept of adaptive management, where people learn through observation, ritual, and response from the environment.

Methodologically, this study employs a qualitative approach by close reading of the text with the "Traditional Ecological Knowledge" theory. Devi's writing shows that tribal people live by values of respect, sharing, and harmony with nature, not by greed for money or exploitation. By applying Berkes's traditional ecological theory to Mahaswetha Devi's The Book of the Hunter, this study highlights how indigenous people possess a rich knowledge of their environment, which aligns with sustainable development.

Keywords: *Adaptive Management; Indigenous Ecologies; Ecocriticism; Mahasweta Devi; The Book of the Hunter; Traditional Ecological Knowledge.*

Fikret Berkes, Turkish-Canadian ecologist and professor at the University of Manitoba's Natural Resources Institute. Some of his famous works on Traditional ecology are Rediscovery of traditional ecological knowledge as adaptive management, Evolution of co-management: Role of knowledge generation, bridging organisations and social learning, Navigating social-ecological systems: building resilience for complexity and change and Sacred Ecology. He won the Sustainability Science Award of the Ecological Society of America for his third edition of Sacred Ecology in 2014.

In Sacred Ecology, he discussed Indigenous and rural people's ecological knowledge by

emphasising traditional ecological knowledge in practice, adaptive Management, challenges faced by Indigenous communities and how their lifestyle develops sustainable practices. Mahaswetha Devi's The Book of the Hunter embodies all these concepts and becomes ideal for incorporating the TEK framework. This study connects the Non-fiction of Berkes' Sacred Ecology with the fictional work of Mahaswetha Devi's The Book of the Hunter. Traditional Ecological Knowledge is practical, experience-based knowledge about the environment. Berkes defined Traditional Ecological Knowledge as "a cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment" (Berkes 8).

The Book of the Hunter shows a forest-dependent tribal community whose beliefs, rituals, social institutions and resource-use practices interlink human life with the forest goddess, with rules and mobility and sustainability. This mirrors the theoretical framework of Fikret Berkes's Sacred Ecology, which emphasises the knowledge-practice-belief complex, the relational and sacred nature of ecosystems, the local governance of resources, and the value of indigenous ecological knowledge.

In the novel, Mahaswetha Devi presents a dual narrative of shabars and Brahminical society through the stories of Kalya Shabar, Phuli Shabar and Mukunda. Tejota, Mother of Kalya Shabar, is the head of the Shabar community and the one who has direct contact with God Abhayachandi. For them, God is not distant or invisible to human eyes; God is with them and guides them. They see the forest as sacred and have deep respect for the woods and land.

In her paper "Nurturing Sylvan Children in Mahasweta Devi's The Book of the Hunter," Kala explores how Devi juxtaposes the lives of Brahmins and Shabars. Also, she analyses how urbanisation impacts Shabars' lifestyle. Kala begins her paper by referring to Vijayaraghavan's observation on India's environmental movement, which swings between elitism and populism. She places Mahasweta Devi among the populists. Because Devi not only writes about indigenous life but also actively fights for their rights. She notes that the novel, The Book of the Hunter, combines history, folklore, and fiction to tell the story of the Lodha Shabars. The novel traces their identity, their deep dependence on the forest, and the destruction they face because of town dwellers. She concludes by asking, "Should not one plant atleast a tree and learn to imbibe the sense of oneness that the tribals share with the forest and thus keep going a green environment for posterity?" (Kala 45)

Madhumita Kundu, in her paper, "Exploring Deep Ecology in Mahasweta Devi's The Book of the Hunter: An Eco-Critical Analysis", examines the novel through 'Deep Ecology' of Arne Naess. This theory states that all living beings have their own intrinsic value in nature and people should not judge anything based on the utility purpose they get from them. Also emphasises the interconnectedness of all living beings. She mentions that Devi's novel portrays the Shabar tribe's harmonious relationship with nature and their deep respect for ecological balance. She shows that the expansion of towns into the forest symbolically represents the beginning of ecological decay. She concludes that the novel is a warning against ecological destruction.

Both S. J. Kala and Madhumita Kundu show that Mahasweta Devi's novel, The Book of the Hunter, reflects what Fikret Berkes describes as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), the understanding, practices, and beliefs developed by local communities through close contact with nature. The Shabar's lifestyle clearly shows this kind of knowledge. Madhumita Kundu points out that Devi's characters live by the moral rule of "live and let live". This expresses a deep ecological balance. This agrees with Berkes's idea that TEK combines skills, such as sustainable hunting and resource use, with spiritual respect for the environment.

Ganesh is an elderly peasant who knows the natural world through his practical experience. "The sun, the rain, the sky, the earth, ants, birds, paddy, tubers, pumpkins, squashes and egg-plants—was there

anything he didn't know about?" (Devi 6). These lines show his ecological understanding of the land. He is not a Shabar but a man who learns nature through observation and communication. This represents Berkes' idea of local ecological observation. He reads the signs of nature, which shows adaptive ecological knowledge, as Berkes mentioned in Sacred Ecology.

He also explains the purpose of every living thing: "The soil itself nurtures all these little plants, animals, birds, and bugs. Each one of them has its own function" (Devi 7). This shows the TEK belief that all species have a specific role in maintaining ecological balance. Berkes calls this as the holistic worldview, which is the sense that humans, animals, and plants are interdependent members of one ecosystem.

Ganesh treats animals as sacred beings. "He would scrub and wash the cows… saying, These mother goddesses suffer when insects light on their bodies" (Devi 12). This line reveals spiritual ecology. As Berkes explains, a belief system helps in the sustainable use of nature by reinforcing the idea of reciprocity between people and the environment. Ganesh points out the North Star and says, "If you can recognise this one star, you'll never lose your way as long as you live" (Devi 63). They use nature as a guide to stay on track of their way. Knowing how to find direction by the north star represents adaptive learning. Berkes calls this 'Adaptive Management'.

Tejota, the head of Shabars, used plants as medicines. "Tejota knew cures for every ailment-fevers, cuts from thorns, the body's heaviness during the rains, scorpion bites. She supplied medicinal plants to the king's physician" (Devi 41). "There's nothing that old woman doesn't know. When the king's elephant went mad, she took one look and said… A nail…had got stuck in the sole of its foot. Tejota pulled it out and put medicine bark on it" (Devi 55). These scenes illustrate how an indigenous woman serves as the guardian of ecological wisdom. Danko Shabar, father of Tejota, searched for a rare medicinal plant from the forest that gives him long life. This shows how they are aware of the medicinal herbs and their uses.

In Traditional ecological knowledge, Berkes mentioned that knowledge is transmitted orally and maintained through cultural practices and rituals. Devi, in her novel, portrayed the same. Danko Shabar gave the knowledge to Tejota Shabar. The knowledge is ecological and followed through practice, which is transmitted orally. When Megha Shabar, husband of Tejota, killed a doe by knowingly or unknowingly took away his chance to get the traditional knowledge from Danko Shabar. This demonstrates the morals and ethics followed by Shabars. They followed a set of rules to preserve the ecosystem.

Shabars live a simple, self-sufficient life that depends directly on the forest. "They sell meat, feathers, skins, wood, honey, incense, fruits, kul, roots and bark. They buy nothing except for rice, cloth, salt, pepper and oil. They're always happy" (Devi 58, 59). This shows that the Shabars collect and use what nature provides them, but they take only what is necessary for them to lead their lives. They do not waste or overuse the resources they get from the forest. They sell a few forest products for essential goods, but most of what they need comes from their natural surroundings. This way of living reflects what Fikret Berkes calls subsistence sustainability.

Shabars are hunters, but they don't kill any animals because of their greed for money and luxurious lifestyle. They have rules to avoid the needless and huge killing of animals. They don't even do agriculture as they feel that tilling the land is an injustice. They don't have a stable place. They keep on shifting their place, which helps the land to renew itself. All these show adaptation and sustainability, as mentioned by Berkes.

When Kaliya beats his wife Phuli, Tejota asks him to learn from animals. She asked, "Do the tigers and deer thrash their females mercilessly like you?... There is no needless killing, violence or destruction" (Devi 100,101). The forest represents a moral and ecological order. Every creature takes only what it needs. Traditional ecological knowledge says nature is a model that teaches balance. Tejota scolds and questions Kalya, which shows that the Shabars learn ethics from observing ecological harmony.

Tejota asks, “The forest itself is our mother… She gives us everything, keeps us alive-doesn't that make her our mother?” (Devi 73). This shows that they see the forest as mother, not as resources. For the Shabars, happiness does not come from money. It comes from a harmonious relationship with nature. Their lifestyle shows the key principles of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) such as respect for all living beings, sustainability, and taking only what is needed to survive. Interdependency, knowing that the forest provides for them, and in return, they protect it. Shabars are “always happy” (Devi 59), not because they own or have much, but because they live in peace with the forest and respect its limits.

All these examples from Devi's novel mirror Berkes's idea of “knowledge-practice-belief complex”. Knowledge here in the novel is the Shabars' observation and understanding of the land through their lived experience. 'Practice' is that they apply this ecological knowledge in daily life activities like hunting, and treating diseases using medicinal herbs. 'Belief' is their rituals and respect for the goddess Abhaychandi, and their spiritual, moral and ethical connection to the forest. All these show the balance between human life with nature.

Danko predicts ecological and cultural degeneration. He said, “After these grand trees expire, the new ones will not be as tall. By and all, all the trees that are left will be short, dwarfish ones” (Devi 103, 104). Symbolically, the 'short trees' reflect the shrinking moral and spiritual nature of future generations. This is a warning about environmental decline and loss of indigenous wisdom under modernisation. So, there is a need to preserve Traditional Ecological Knowledge. People have to learn from the wisdom of indigenous communities, who have a better understanding of nature.

By interpreting the novel, The Book of the Hunter, through Berkes' Traditional ecological knowledge, this study reveals how literature can act as an archive of traditional knowledge. Mahaswetha Devi's portrayal of Ganesh and Shabars presents them as guardians of ecological wisdom. Both fiction and Non-fiction teach us that true sustainability comes from having a real connection with nature rather than living separately or above the ecosystem.

The novel and the framework suggest that our modern ecological crisis may be partly due to the loss of such relational, place-based, ritualised human-nature knowledge. Berkes argues that sustainable management can learn from TEK, and that scientists and policy-makers should engage with Indigenous knowledge systems. The novel affirms that the way the Shabar live is one such system, deeply relational, tuned to the forest, adaptive and respectful. In an era of climate change, biodiversity loss, and deforestation, such ideas are valuable.

Works Cited

- Anil, Greeshma. “A Search for Honour The Book of the Hunt.” Scribd, www.scribd.com/document/714642553/A-Search-for-Honour-the-Book-of-the-Hunt.
- B. Sangavi, et al. “Socio-cultural Identity of Shabars in the Novel the Book of the Hunter.” Language in India, edited by T. Vembu M.A., M.Phil., B.Ed., (Ph.D), journal-article, Feb. 2018, pp. 153–56.
- Berkes, Fikret. Sacred Ecology. Routledge, New York, 2018.
- Chauhan, Ruchika. “Mahasweta Devi's Tribals the Sons of Soil in the Book of the Hunter.” Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal, vol. 7, journal-article, Nov. 2016.
- Des Jardins, and Joseph R. “Biocentrism | Environmental Ethics, Animal Rights and Conservation.” Encyclopedia Britannica, 17 Dec. 2013, www.britannica.com/topic/biocentrism.
- Kala, S. J, “View of Nurturing Sylvan Children in Mahasweta Devi's The Book of the Hunter.” TJELLS | The Journal for English Language and Literary Studies, vol. 2, no. 1, Feb. 2012, pp. 6–6. tjells.com, https://tjells.com/brbs/index.php/tjells/article/view/68.
- Kundu, Madhumita. “Exploring Deep Ecology in Mahasweta Devi's 'The Book of the Hunter': An Eco-Critical Analysis.” New Literaria, vol. 6, no. 2, July 2025, pp. 81–87.

https://doi.org/10.48189/nl.2025.v06i2.010.

- Pal, Payel. "Witnessing Tribal Life and the Environment: An Ecological Re-reading of the Select Narratives of Mahasweta Devi." Journal of Narrative and Language Studies, May 2023, https://doi.org/10.59045/nalans.2023.19.
- Rai, Suresh Chand, and Prabuddh Kumar Mishra. "Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management: A Conceptual Framework." Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management: A Conceptual Framework, 2022, pp. 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-16840-6_1
- Sengupta, Mandira and Sagaree Sengupta, trans. The Book of the Hunter By Mahasweta Devi. New Delhi : Seagull Books Pvt. Ltd., 2021. Print.
- Shivani, J. Jeya, and A. Chandra Bose. "Tribal Culture in Mahasweta Devi's The Book of the Hunter." Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities, vol. 12, no. S3-Apr, Apr. 2025, pp. 50–52. https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v12is3-apr.9051.
- V. Balamurugan, and R. Sankari. "Knowing the Unknown World of Tribes: A Critical Study of Mahasweta Devi's The Book of the Hunter." Language in India, edited by S. Arunraj and P. Viduthalai, vol. 18, no. 3, journal-article, Feb. 2018.
- Venkateswarlu, Banavath. "A Critical Study of Mahasweta Devi's Writings From an Ecofeminist and Socioeconomic Perspectives." International Journal of Novel Research and Development, vol. 7, no. 9, Sept. 2022, pp. 1375–76.

18

LAND, MEMORY, AND DISPOSSESSION: CULTURAL CONTINUITY IN ALEXIS WRIGHT'S PLAINS OF PROMISE

Sudhakar. N, *Research Scholar, Department of English, B. S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology.*

Dr. Muthathamizhi Selvi S.I, *Assistant Professor, Department of English, B. S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology.*

Abstract

Plains of promise by Alexis Wright provides a deep analysis of how land, memory and dispossession intersect in the formation of Aboriginal identity and cultural survival in modern Australia. In this paper, the analysis will focus on how the story by Wright challenges the colonial erasure by reminding the readers of the indigenous ontologies whose concept of land is more than merely a physical space, but rather a dynamic memory of ancestors, spiritual attachment, and identity. The work shows the brutal disturbances caused by colonialism through the fragmented journeys of heroine Alice to mission communities, government institutions and contentious spaces as well as confirming the unchanged presence of Aboriginal epistemologies. With the help of postcolonial and indigenous literary theories, this study explores the lyrical and nonlinear narration used by Wright to engage in the process of decolonization as a way of regaining narrative sovereignty. The displacement and bureaucratic control in the novel is overcome by recurrent motives of returning, perseverance, and attachment to nation and cultural continuity in the novel that cultural continuity persists despite expropriations of the structure. Also, the text challenges Western epistemologies in its preference of cycle temporality and dream logic as well as community memory over linear historical accounts. This paper holds that the plains of promise is more than something that is a testament to past pain but rather a statement of how people will always be linked to the places and the memories themselves. In so doing, Wright not only criticized the Australian colonial history, but also advocated the sovereignty and existence of the Aboriginal communities. Finally, the book sees storytelling as a way of reclaiming culture and this provides a strong vision of resistance with a sense of belonging, remembrance and the continued meaning of the country.

Keywords: *Indigenous Identity, Cultural Continuity, Ancestral Memory, Decolonizing Narrative, Aboriginal Sovereignty, Trauma and Survival, Narrative Resistance.*

Introduction: The Unyielding Ground of Story

Plains of Promise by Alexis Wright (1997) is a revolutionary text in the history of Australian literature, a screamer and a poem in verse, an indictment of colonial violence and a heartfelt affirmation of who Aboriginals were. The novel goes beyond the mere victimhood narrative to express an elaborate and lasting Indigenous truthfulness, one to which land, memory and dispossession are fundamentally constitutive. The reclaiming narrative is a radical political/cultural act in any national context in which the doctrine of terra nullius, the legal fiction that the land was in no one's possession, sanctioned wholesale theft. Such an act is the exact purpose of Wright novel: a premeditated and refined narrative reclamation project that questions the principles of colonial historiography.

This paper will also argue that Plains of promise is a literary apparatus of claiming cultural

continuity in the face of the unyielding dispossession. It does this by placing Indigenous ontologies in the centre, in which Country is not a passive background, but a living actively, sentient, and mnemonic force. The physical and psychological displacement which has been administered by means of missions, government policies and the institutional racism is counteracted with a counter-narrative which lies in the persistence of the ancestral and communal memory and the necessity to reestablish connection with the land. The novel tracks the geography of colonial trauma through the disjointed journey its protagonist, Ivy Koopundi, and her daughter Alice undertake, at the same time tracing a course toward healing which is willfully connected to Country.

Through non-linear narrative structure that integrates Dreaming logic and cyclical time, Wright does a de-colonizing of the very form of novel as well. This artistic decision is not only aesthetic one, but a philosophical position that denies the western linear progress and historical amnesia. The past in the Plains of Promise is not dead but alive and is constantly telling and defining the present moment. These themes will be explored in this paper in a number of key ways: first, by discussing the Indigenous ontology of land as a memory and identity-holding repository; second, by looking at what happens through the mechanisms of displacement and how this is psychologically reflected; third, by looking at the way Wright uses narrative technique as a form of decolonizing praxis; and, lastly, the ultimate vision of cultural continuity and resilience contained within the power of story.

Land as Sentient Archive: An Indigenous Ontology

The basic philosophical difference with the Western ideas about land is the core of Plains of Promise. To the colonial settler state, land is an asset, something that has to be surveyed, divided, owned and exploited. It is inert, a commodity. Wright breaks down this perception in a systematic manner that introduces the land or Country as a living, spiritual and historical archive. Cultural continuity is anchored on this Indigenous ontology and is resisted through it.

Nation as a Memorandum Landscape.

According to Aboriginal worldview, each aspect of the landscape each hill, river, rock formation, and plain has a meaning, story, and law. These characteristics are physical expressions of what the traditional creatures did in the Dreaming. Land therefore serves as a large interlocking mnemonic system by itself. Knowing the land is knowing the stories, the laws and the place in the cosmic order. This is a great contrast to the colonial perception. The project in the novel, like in the case of mission forced upon the land, is an alien form of organization that tries to impose on the Indigenous geographies with its own. But the land is not to be quieted. It contains the recollections of what occurred there: the murders, the rituals, the lives, and the deaths. Even the plain of promise in itself is a powerful symbol of this duality. The colonialist interpretation of the word would bring to mind barren fertile land that would be developed and civilized a beacon of prosperity to the invaders. To the Aboriginal characters, though, these very plains are a promised land in an entirely different sense: it is the ancestral, sacred home to which they have been severed, a spiritual fulfilment and identity and whose promise will depend on their capability to remain connected to it. The land does not forget the people even in a situation when they are forcefully denied access to it.

Spiritual Kinship and Identity.

Wright demonstrates that identity is not an isolated process of Aboriginal people, but is relational and grounded on geography. The identity is constructed between one and his/her Country, kinship, and Dreaming. The ethnic dislocation, thus, does not necessarily consist of physical displacement but spiritual and psychological mutilation. This can be seen in the personality of Ivy, the mother of Alice whose forcible displacement on her traditional lands together with the imprisonment in the mission causes her to experience the deepest existential crisis. Her bond to Country is broken and with it, her identity and her capability of operating in the devastating world of the mission. The result of this ontological severance is

her despair and eventual mental breakdown.

The nature of Mary who is an older generation, holding on to knowledge, is a shepherd of this type of relationship. She carries the tales of the land and the past ancestry as a living link between the pre-colonial past and the broken present. Her efforts to impart this knowledge, however piecemeal, to younger generations such as Alice, are an indication of the process of trying to hold on to cultural continuity against the imminent waves of coercive assimilation and erasing.

Machinery of Dispossession: Missions, Bureaucracy and Fragmentation.

Wright is a careful record keeper of the many tools of colonial domination that were created to dehumanize Aboriginal ties to land, culture and grouping. Dispossession in Plains of promise is not merely a one-time historical phenomenon but a continuous process that is carried out physically, psychologically as well as bureaucratically. The Prison as Confinement Area. One of the major colonizing loci is the mission setting. It serves as a kind of a carceral institution, where the Aboriginal people are concentrated, monitored, and civilized in accordance with the Christian and Western standards. The major means by which the mission destroyed country is its physical distance to the traditional Country. The colonizers literally severed the people off their spiritual and cultural life by taking them away off the lands of their ancestors.

The mission as carceral space:

The mission life is marked by a strict, forced order which tries to eliminate Indigenous languages, customs and social patterns. The Christian hymns and the Superintendent are symbols of this forced assimilation which requires conformity and penalizes deviation. The trauma that is encountered in the mission is intergenerational. The pain that Ivy went through is directly transferred to her daughter, Alice, who is born into this atmosphere of dominance and helplessness. The further cycle of displacement is prolonged as Alice is taken through different government institutions as she is a ward of the state. Her life is very much like a journey of fragmented movements, just like the broken history that has been enforced on her people. She lacks grounding, an outcome of the bureaucratic apparatus directing Aboriginal lives with files, policies and institutional care that further disconnects her off any sense of grounded identity. Bureaucratism and Erasure of Narratives. Along with the physical violence of the mission, Wright comments on the subtle violence of bureaucracy. The fact that the state has been managing Aboriginal people using child removal (redressing Stolen Generations) and institutionalization policies is a type of narrative erasure. The identity of Alice is turned into a file in the case and official documentation; her personal past is mediated and regulated by the state apparatus. It is a kind of colonial practice to blank out the Indigenous stories by their own administrative narratives and construct the meaning of Aboriginality in terms of pathology and problem.

These institutions as represented in the novel demonstrate the way in which dispossession works in the contemporary world. No longer is it a question of armed struggle over territory, but the power of the movement, identity and memory by legal and administrative means. The contested spaces that Alice crosses are not merely physically challenged spaces, but also metaphorically, they are the spaces being fought over by legal and cultural opposition of land rights and sovereignty. Narrative as Decolonizing Praxis: Form, Time, and Memory. The act of letter resistance Wright gives in Plains of promise is arguably the strongest, through her controlled and strategic narrative form. She disregards the traditional Western novel, its linear narrative, its psychological realism, and its individual hero to establish a narrative form that embodies Indigenous knowledge and knowability.

Time (nonlinearity) and Cyclical Time.

The plot of the novel is not direct. It passes seamlessly through the past and present, the dream-time and the historical time, and the perceptions of various characters. This nonlinearity is a direct confrontation of the Western historical account, which tends to make colonialism an inevitable process of savage to

civilized, which is safely buried in the past. The narrative structure presented by Wright demands that the past is not past. The trauma of the mission, the violence of the dispossession and the wisdom of the ancestors are all immediate and pressing realities to the characters. It is indicative of a cyclic notion of time, typical of most Indigenous societies, in which the Dreaming is an ever-present reality of a continuous, engaging process that interrelates with the prosaic world. Through the arrangement of her novel, Wright ends by stating that the healing and cultural resurgence does not rest in the past, but in re-considering the effects and influences of the past, and in drawing strength through the continuity of the ancestors. Dream Logic and Community voice. The story is riddled with dream scenes and visions and a logic that does not conform to Western rationalism. The ghostly appearance of the ancestral serpent, the metaphysical relationships among the characters, and the omnipresent feeling of a spiritual world, which is communicating with the material one, are all part of the story. It is not a presentation of superstition or fantasy, but an essential and important way of perception. The novel favors Indigenous epistemology. Moreover, although Alice is a main character, narrative voice tends to be extended and become collective.

Narratives are presented in many perspectives, as Indigenous identity and memory is collectively imposed.

Each of the characters does not have the whole truth but the truth is the mosaic of the collective experience and memory. This decentralizes the heroic individualistic story of the Western literature and makes the community the protagonist of the story of its own survival. What ails thy tale Words, sir, Alter it, and it is his tale! Narrative sovereignty is a term that is used to describe the right of Indigenous people to control their narratives, to create stories about their own reality, and to shape their own identities. Plains of Promise is an ambitious narrative sovereignty. Wright seizes the narrative of Aboriginal people and does not allow it to be limited to the colonial trauma only. Although she is unsparing in her description of the atrocities of dispossession, she is also creating a story of great cultural resilience, spiritual wisdom and continuity to Country. Wright decolonizes the storytelling process by narrating it, using her own language and rhythms, cosmological thought, and narrative patterns, as well as the linguistic traditions of her people. She proves that the shape of the story is politically just as important as its content. To narrate an Aboriginal story in a Western literary genre would imply surrendering to the instruments of the colonizer. Rather, she remakes the novel to have an Indigenous purpose.

The Cultural Continuity: Resilience, Return, and Reclamation.

However, despite the disproportionate themes of the trauma and loss, Plains of Promise turns out to be a novel of resilience, of the unconquerable desire to continue the culture. Cultural continuity is not offered as a continuous, utopian tradition but rather a tense, tenacious experience which is expressed through memory, returning and storytelling processes. Memory as a Revolutionary Means. Memory becomes the main place of resistance in a physical dispossession scenario. The memories possessed by characters such as Mary, and the memories that are partially reconstructed by Alice, are rebellions against the colonial erasure. Knowing the stories, the songs, the name of places, the ways of the ancestors is keeping Country alive in oneself, even when they are physically out of touch with it. This internalized Country is turned into a source of strength and a guide. The journey of Alice, although fragmented, is essentially a memory quest, her personal fragmented memories, as well as the memories of her mother and community, which she inherits. Her identity seeking is a searching of a narrative that can come to make sense of her past and find direction in a future. This is a painful experience of recalling because it requires dealing with trauma, but also the healing process and re-identification with a sense of self. The Imperative of Return A profound and repetitive urge to go back to Country breaks through the novel. This is not simply a dream but a religious and cultural need. The assumption that the land is calling its people back is a strong theme in the story. The chance to come back, however incomplete or hard, is the hope of recovering and cultural rejuvenation. Return in Plains of Promise is not going back to a very romantic past. Wright is too

subtle an author to do that. Rather, turnaround is depicted as a complicated procedure of re-interaction. It entails recognition of the injuries that have been caused to the land and people, hearing what stories land has to say, and restoring back a relationship with the land. It is in this reconnecting that other characters such as Alice are able to start the healing process of dispossession and create a place-based identity.

Storytelling as Cultural Recovery.

Finally, the novel assumes that storytelling is the most crucial process of ensuring cultural continuity. The narration of the history of Ivy and Alice, of the mission and the plains is a reclaiming process. Wright performs a page ceremony of healing by speaking the silences of official history and expressing the pain and the strength of her people. The novel lacks a happy and well-tied end. The injury is too serious, the harm too vast. Nevertheless, it concludes with the feeling of possibility, with the continuation of the fight and with the perpetual strength of the bond to Country. The plains promise is finally realized not in a recidivation to a pre-colonial utopia but in the tenacious, unrelenting movement of memory, narration and identification. The culture persists due to the fact that the stories are being told in the forms and ways that are authentic to the people who live them.

Conclusion:

A New Covenant. The Plains of promise by Alexis Wright is a unique piece of writing that goes beyond the historical scenario of the time and talks about universal problems of belonging, loss and survival. The radical formal innovation, its lack of mercy in depicting the matter of dispossession, enabled the novel to become an essential part of postcolonial and world literature. It shows that the Indigenous rights struggle is actually the struggle of narrative sovereignty, the power to create one own reality, to remain and exercise a continuous cultural identity despite overwhelming odds. This is the incredible success of the novel, the possibility of keeping two truths in tension: the traumatic reality of colonial destruction that was still ongoing and the continuous reality of Aboriginal cultural survival, its strength. It demonstrates that these are not opposing but are the characteristics of modern life of the Indigenous people. The land, scarred with the conflict, is still a living memory. The displaced and traumatized people are still directed by the stories and the spirit of their Country. Ultimately, the plains of promise is not merely the physical place but a condition or a potential or a possibility that is achieved through the long-term relationships between human beings, their recollections and the territory. Creating a story so spiritually rich as it is politically powerful, Alexis Wright does not simply criticize the past, but also takes an active part in the establishment of a future in which aboriginal identity, resting upon the solid surface of a story, can be not only preserved but even thrived. The promise which Wright so forcefully asserts remains.

Bibliography

- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures. Routledge, 2002.
- Dodson, Michael. "The End in the Beginning: Re(de)finding Aboriginality." Australian Aboriginal Studies, 1994, No. 1.
- Heiss, Anita, and Peter Minter, eds. Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature. Allen & Unwin, 2008.
- Moreton-Robinson, Aileen. The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty. University of Minnesota Press, 2015.
- Ravenscroft, Alison. The Postcolonial Eye: White Australian Desire and the Visual Field of Race. Ashgate, 2012.
- Rose, Deborah Bird. Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness. Australian Heritage Commission, 1996.
- Wright, Alexis. Plains of Promise. University of Queensland Press, 1997.
- Wright, Alexis. "Politics of Writing." Southerly, vol. 62, no. 2, 2002, pp. 10–20.

19

ECO-CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON AMITAV GHOSH'S THE HUNGRY TIDE

S. Peerani, *Assistant Professor of English, Jamal Mohamed College, Trichy, & Ph.D., Part-Time Research Scholar, B.S. Abdur Rahaman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai.*
Dr. N. Sheik Hameed, *Assistant Professor of English, B.S. Abdur Rahaman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai.*

Abstract:

Amitav Ghosh's novel The Hungry Tide takes place in the iconic Sundarbans and explores various human-nature relationships while also highlighting the pervasive ecological problems. An eco-critical analysis of the book is presented, emphasizing the complicated connections between animals, people and the environment. The Sundarbans, a region where tides control life, are depicted by Ghosh in a powerful way that can be used to discuss ecological balance, cultural survival, and environmental ethics. The story's examination of the connections between human decisions, history, and the environment is assisted by characters such as Piya and Kanai, which suggests a close relationship between nature and civilization. Ghosh's depiction of man-eating tigers and the stunning yet deadly beauty of mangroves persuades readers to understand the serious consequences of ecological imbalances. Through his intricate network of stories, he encourages a culture of coexistence rather than dominance and stresses how important it is to respect ecological limits. The purpose of this article is to provide a deeper understanding of the intricate interaction between humans and their environment, while also examining Ghosh's prophetic warning about environmental degradation. Essentially, The Hungry Tide is both a narrative and a detailed ecological lecture.

Keywords: *The Hungry Tide, Ecological Treatise, Ecological Concerns, Amitav Ghosh.*

Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide' explores the complicated lives of people living in the Sundarbans, a wild and sprawling cluster of islands in the Bay of Bengal. The story isn't just about people pursuing their dreams. The fight against nature's raw power, the messy connections between different species, and the tough environmental problems they face every day is brought to life by Ghosh. The interaction between humans and the world around them is truly felt. Ecocriticism is a term that comes from the Greek words 'oikos' (meaning house or environment) and 'kritikos' (meaning someone who judges or discerns). Eco-criticism is basically examining books and culture to observe how characters cope with their worlds and how they fit or do not fit into their surroundings. However, environmental literature is a bit distinct. This section of the discussion elucidates the definition of eco-criticism and tracks the evolution of environmental literature, illustrating the connection between these two concepts.

Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide explores the complex lives of those who live in the Sundarbans, a vast, sprawling group of islands in the Bay of Bengal. The story is not solely about people pursuing their dreams. Ghosh takes you right into their battle with nature's powerful force, the messy connections between different species, and the tough environmental problems they face every day. It's easy to feel the tension between humans and the world around them.

Eco-criticism is derived from the Greek word 'oikos' (which means house or environment) and 'kritikos' (which means someone who judges or discerns). Eco-criticism is a method of studying books and

culture to examine how characters cope with their worlds and how they fit into their surroundings. However, there is a slight variation in environmental literature. This section of the discussion outlines the meaning of eco-criticism and tracks the evolution of environmental writing, demonstrating the link between these two concepts.

People and the world around them engage in a raw and often dangerous struggle that the book explores. Tigers and tides are more than just background noise; they are real threats, and the fear they generate is pervasive. Despite this, there's more going on than just terror. The inhabitants of this locale have a respect for the land and understand the necessary balance to remain alive. It's not solely about keeping yourself alive, either. Tradition, belief, and history are all connected to the bond between humans and nature here.

Their sales revenue has gone up significantly. You see this through the main characters, Piya, who is obsessed with dolphins and thinks like a scientist, and Fokir. The mangroves are home to those who have instinctive and inherited knowledge, and Kanai is in the middle, torn between being an outsider and his family roots in the Sundarbans. Each person has a unique connection to this wild place, and when they come together, they demonstrate how culture and nature are entwined in this place.

Bon Bibi, the deities that people believe in to keep them safe from tigers, is also a part of the story. Ghosh uses this legend to illustrate how local myths and beliefs are formed from the environment and then shape how people act and survive. Nature and culture are always in dialogue.

The Sundarbans are not restricted to being a beautiful and dangerous wilderness. They are also a meeting spot for political battles, economic struggles, and ecological crises. The book doesn't shy away from challenging topics like communities being expelled, outsiders attempting to acquire property, and all the tangled issues associated with conservation.

The fragility of the ecosystem and the cracks in local society are both highlighted by Ghosh. The cyclone at the end not only concludes the story, but also underscores the unpredictability and brutality of life when faced with natural forces. Stories like this are crucial at a time when the world is dealing with climate disasters and rising sea levels. Through Ghosh's writing, we can gain a clear perspective on these problems by mixing storytelling with a sharp ecological perspective.

It contributes to our conversation about how people and nature can coexist and reminds us of the dangers in threatened areas around the world. Focusing on the Sundarbans, the novel makes this unique spot a stand-in for endangered ecosystems worldwide. Ghosh's eco-consciousness can only be fully understood through careful reading. It is necessary to examine his language, imagery, and the way he sets scenes and creates dialogue. His close analysis demonstrates how he brings the Sundarbans to life and demonstrates how much is connected to the way people and nature interact. Researchers analysed the book's patterns and themes using a method called thematic coding, a qualitative approach that involves hands-on work. Qualitative research software was employed to categorize the chapters by recurring themes, such as environmentalist ideology, human-nature connections, and cultural ecological views. By tracking how often certain environmental themes showed up and how much space they took in the story, the team could really see which ecological concerns mattered most in the narrative, and how the story's cultural context brought them to life. The Hungry Tide by Amitav Ghosh is a vivid portrayal of how people and their environment depend on each other. Life in the Sundarbans is not only about people and nature living side by side, but also a complex balancing act, a constant struggle to survive. The tension does not divide people and nature; it demonstrates how deeply the community's fate is tied to the land and water around them. How frequently this theme is mentioned indicates its centrality to the story and to the book's overall message on the environment. Ghosh doesn't hesitate to portray the Sundarbans as both stunning and perilous. The landscape continues to change. Storms, tides, and natural disasters are all a part of everyday life. The ecosystem's vulnerability is impossible to ignore due to the tension of beauty and fear.

The catastrophes indicate bigger issues, such as climate change and its global consequences. The Sundarbans' wildlife, including tigers and river dolphins, is captured in Ghosh's descriptions, showcasing its wild complexity. Not only does he list the species, but he also illustrates how they all depend on each other and how their world is a complex web. Through these details, Ghosh presents a story that encompasses more than just survival. He examines how different species interact and how even the most ferocious animals are a part of a greater harmony. The Sundarbans are not the only setting for 'The Hungry Tide,' which is also a powerful look at how people and nature shape each other, particularly in such a delicate place. Ghosh weaves stories of resilience, culture, and the environment, refusing to treat nature as just a backdrop. Nature is a living entity that constantly changes and influences the people who live near it. Ghosh's writing is heavily influenced by environmental commentary when you break down its themes. Looking ahead, there's plenty of room to expand the conversation. Perhaps by studying other South Asian writers who tackle ecology and culture, or by comparing "The Hungry Tide" with Ghosh's other novels. Literature has the ability to encourage people to care, comprehend, and act when it comes to the natural world.

References

- Buell, Lawrence. The Environmental Imagination. Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Ghosh, Amitav. The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable. University of Chicago Press, 2016.
- Guha, Ramachandra. How Much Should a Person Consume? Environmentalism in India 4. and the United States. University of California Press, 2006.
- Heise, Ursula K. Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global. Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Mukherjee, Upamanyu Pablo. Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- DeLoughrey, Elizabeth M., and George B. Handley, editors. Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Nixon, Rob. Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor. Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Ghosh, Bishnu Priya. Global Icons: Apertures to the Popular. Duke University Press, 2011.

20

TRANSFORMING TRAUMA INTO TESTIMONY: LANGUAGE AND HEALING IN VIKTOR FRANKL'S MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING

Rency Gabriella S, *MA English (Aided), Madras Christian College, Tambaram, Chennai*

Abstract

Viktor Frankl's Man's Search for Meaning stands as both an autobiographical testimony and a philosophical literary exploration of human endurance amid the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust. This paper situates Frankl's text under the theme Literature, Culture, and Movements, while intersecting with Language, Society, and Pedagogy, to examine how narrative and language become instruments of psychological survival and moral restoration. Moving beyond its status as a memoir, the study argues that Frankl's work functions as a literary and linguistic act of resilience that transforms trauma into testimony and despair into dialogue. Through a close reading of his use of language and narrative structure, the paper analyzes how Frankl articulates dehumanization and loss of identity while simultaneously reconstructing meaning through Logotherapy. Concepts such as "the last of the human freedoms," "the will to meaning," and "suffering with a purpose" are interpreted as linguistic and narrative strategies that reframe pain into purpose, enabling recovery and self redefinition. The analysis further explores how Frankl's text bridges literature and psychology by employing affective language that transforms individual trauma into a collective narrative of human dignity. Ultimately, this paper demonstrates that Man's Search for Meaning exemplifies the healing power of words, where literary narrative and therapeutic discourse converge to offer a timeless framework for understanding identity, resilience, and the restoration of meaning in the aftermath of atrocity.

Keywords: *Viktor Frankl, Trauma Narrative, Logotherapy, Holocaust Literature, Meaning Making.*

Introduction

"Picture yourself on your deathbed looking back on your life—what do you hope to see?" This is one of the reflective exercises Viktor Frankl proposes in Man's Search for Meaning, a book born from one of history's darkest moments. Frankl's meditation on meaning emerges from his imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps, where he witnessed the depths of human despair and the extraordinary power of the human spirit to endure. His memoir is not only a record of trauma but also a testimony of transcendence—a chronicle of how suffering, when given meaning, can become a source of spiritual freedom.

The narrative unfolds in two distinct parts. The first presents Frankl's personal experiences in Auschwitz and other camps, vividly portraying the psychological phases of shock, apathy, and depersonalization. The second part introduces logotherapy, his existential school of psychotherapy grounded in the "will to meaning." Through this fusion of lived horror and intellectual inquiry, Frankl redefines the human condition—not as a passive victim of fate but as an active interpreter of existence.

In this context, Man's Search for Meaning stands as both a literary and philosophical response to trauma. It shows how narrative and language serve as acts of resistance against dehumanization. By transforming his personal pain into universal wisdom, Frankl reveals that the essence of being human lies not in avoiding suffering but in responding to it with purpose.

Review of Literature

Scholarly engagement with Frankl's Man's Search for Meaning has spanned multiple disciplines—psychology, literature, philosophy, and theology—each emphasizing the text's fusion of personal narrative and existential theory. Early readings by Harold Kushner (2006) highlight Frankl's moral optimism, calling his work "a manual for survival" that restores faith in humanity's inner freedom. Paul Tillich (1957) situates Frankl's ideas within existential theology, noting that meaning emerges through courage in the face of absurdity.

Within trauma studies, theorists like Cathy Caruth (1996) and Dominick LaCapra (2001) emphasize that trauma must be narrativized for healing to occur. Caruth defines trauma as "the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness, cannot be entirely grasped" (Caruth 4). Frankl's text embodies this paradox: he recounts suffering not to relive pain but to transform it into shared understanding.

Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy deepens this conversation. In Time and Narrative (1984), Ricoeur argues that narrative reorders time, allowing individuals to reconfigure fragmented memory into coherent identity. This process aligns with Frankl's logotherapeutic approach, where storytelling becomes a way to reclaim agency from trauma.

Further, Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman in Testimony: Crises of Witnessing (1992) assert that testimony transforms private anguish into collective memory. Frankl's memoir functions in this way—his voice not only bears witness to the Holocaust but also educates future generations about endurance, ethics, and faith.

Modern readings by Richard Zaner (2004) and Stephen McDonald (2015) highlight Frankl's linguistic style: the restraint, simplicity, and moral sincerity of his prose. These features, they argue, universalize suffering and enable empathy. Thus, Man's Search for Meaning occupies a unique literary space: it is at once historical documentation, psychological analysis, and a moral treatise on the ethics of remembrance.

Methodology

This paper adopts an interdisciplinary hermeneutic approach, combining literary analysis with psychological and philosophical frameworks. The primary theoretical foundations include:

- Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy, which centers on the "will to meaning" as the primary human motivation.
- Paul Ricoeur's narrative identity theory, which interprets storytelling as a process of ethical self-reconstruction.
- Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, which elucidates how narrating pain allows re experiencing trauma within a framework of comprehension.

A textual analysis method is applied to Man's Search for Meaning, focusing on language, symbolism, tone, and narrative structure. The study also incorporates comparative references to trauma theorists to show how Frankl's work bridges personal and collective healing. This methodology treats the text as both a literary narrative and a psychological document, allowing the analysis to address how literary form contributes to therapeutic function.

Witnessing the Unspeakable: The Holocaust and Testimonial Narrative

Frankl's text belongs to the genre of testimonial literature, where language bears witness to atrocities that often defy articulation. Within the concentration camps, everything human— dignity, family, hope—was stripped away. Yet, as Frankl observed, the one thing that could not be taken was the freedom to choose one's attitude. This insight became his cornerstone for survival and later, his philosophy.

He describes the initial phase of camp life as one of profound psychological shock. Prisoners were disoriented, clinging to false hopes of release. Humor, he notes, became a fragile coping mechanism - "a weapon in the fight for self-preservation." Gradually, apathy replaced anguish. This emotional numbing, he argues, was not moral weakness but a shield, a form of psychic anesthesia that made survival possible.

Even liberation did not instantly restore humanity; many survivors experienced "depersonalization," a haunting detachment from reality.

Yet amidst this desolation, Frankl discerned a paradox: those who managed to find meaning in their suffering—through love, faith, memory, or hope—were more likely to survive. The prisoners who envisioned a future goal or spiritual task often endured longer than those who succumbed to despair. Frankl himself survived by imagining his future lectures about the psychology of the camps. In this sense, Man's Search for Meaning is both a personal survival story and a collective moral testimony. It transforms the Holocaust from an event of annihilation into a testament of the soul's endurance.

Language as Healing: Logotherapy and the Power of Meaning-Making

Frankl's logotherapy, meaning "healing through meaning," rests upon a radical idea: that the primary human drive is not pleasure (as Freud believed) nor power (as Adler asserted), but the will to meaning. This existential approach insists that life is always meaningful, even in suffering, and that every person is responsible for actualizing that meaning. Frankl outlines three primary paths to finding meaning:

1. Through creative work or deeds—contributing something of value to the world.
2. Through experiences of love and beauty—connecting deeply with others or the natural world.
3. Through the attitude adopted toward unavoidable suffering - transforming tragedy into triumph by changing one's perspective.

The third path—finding meaning in suffering—is the most difficult and yet the most profound. Frankl argues that "suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning." He does not glorify pain but reveals it as a potential site for transformation. His famous assertion, "He who has a why to live can bear almost any how," borrowed from Nietzsche, encapsulates this belief.

Logotherapy thus becomes more than a psychological method; it is a philosophy of freedom. Even in the camps, Frankl maintained that the one freedom no one could remove was the freedom to choose one's response. This interior liberty, he suggests, is the ultimate form of human dignity. In this way, Man's Search for Meaning bridges psychology and ethics, showing that survival is not merely physical but spiritual.

Five Lessons of Logotherapy: Transforming Trauma into Life Principles

1. Everything Can Be Taken Except One Thing: The Freedom to Choose One's Attitude Frankl teaches that while external freedom may be stripped away, internal freedom remains. This principle is illustrated through countless examples—both from his camp experience and from ordinary life. The difference between despair and resilience lies not in circumstance but in perception. Frankl's insight echoes Eleanor Roosevelt's dictum, "No one can make you Gabriella 7 feel inferior without your permission." The Stoic philosophy of Marcus Aurelius parallels this truth: "If you are distressed by anything external, it is not due to the thing itself, but to your estimate of it." The freedom to choose one's reaction thus becomes the ultimate victory of spirit over circumstance.

2. We Are Not Seeking a Life of Peace, but a Life of Purposeful Struggle.

Contrary to the modern dream of comfort, Frankl argues that humans are not meant for a frictionless life. Meaning arises from struggle, from striving toward goals greater than oneself. A life devoid of challenge leads not to peace but to emptiness. Frankl's own purposeful struggle was to endure so that he could later share his insights with the world. Happiness is not found in the absence of hardship but in commitment to something meaningful. As Frankl writes, "What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal."

3. Almost All Fear Is Unimportant.

Fear, Frankl reveals, is often magnified by anticipation. After liberation, survivors realized that many of their pre-war anxieties—status, failure, opinion—were trivial compared to the sheer will to live. Frankl calls this "anticipatory anxiety," a fear that creates its own fulfillment. His therapeutic method of paradoxical intention—encouraging patients to face or even exaggerate their fears—helps dissolve their

grip.

4. Gratitude for Small Moments and Simple Joys.

Frankl's reverence for sunsets, laughter, and fleeting beauty illustrates his belief that even in despair, life offers fragments of grace. In the camps, prisoners would run to the window to glimpse a radiant sunset—the one freedom the guards could not take. These moments became acts of resistance, affirmations of life's worth. Modern psychology echoes this wisdom: gratitude and mindfulness enhance well-being. By focusing on the present, we escape the tyranny of regret and anxiety. Frankl's laughter therapy demonstrates how humor could be an act of defiance and healing. Laughter, he notes, "is another of the soul's weapons in the fight for self-preservation."

5. He Who Has a 'Why' to Live Can Bear Almost Any 'How.

This final lesson encapsulates Frankl's central thesis. The prisoners who survived were those who had a "why"—a loved one to return to, a duty to fulfill, or a vision to achieve. Frankl's own "why" was the determination to write his book and to ensure that suffering was not in vain. Purpose transforms pain into perseverance. Even small acts of kindness in the camps— sharing bread, offering comfort—were expressions of meaning. In modern life, this principle remains vital: meaning does not eliminate suffering, but it redeems it.

The Convergence of Literature, Philosophy, and Psychology

Man's Search for Meaning defies classification—it is memoir, psychology, and moral philosophy intertwined. Frankl's language bridges the gap between testimony and theory, embodying both scientific precision and poetic humanity. His writing transforms trauma into a narrative of moral clarity.

Literarily, his work functions as a meditation on memory and affect—a text that invites both individual healing and collective responsibility. Frankl's restrained style avoids sensationalism, instead presenting pain with moral seriousness and aesthetic simplicity. This literary voice universalizes trauma: the details of his suffering become symbols of larger human struggles. Philosophically, Frankl positions meaning at the heart of ethical life. By integrating logotherapy with existentialism, he suggests that meaning is not discovered passively but constructed actively through choice and responsibility.

Language, Testimony, and Collective Memory

Frankl's narrative moves beyond personal recovery; it constructs a shared ethical framework for memory. By writing as both survivor and therapist, he becomes a mediator between history and healing. His words foster empathy, inviting readers to bear witness to trauma and draw moral lessons for their own lives.

Storytelling itself emerges as a form of testimony and justice. Each retelling preserves the memory of those lost and affirms the dignity of those who suffered. The collective dimension of Frankl's text—the bridge between individual narrative and cultural remembrance—aligns with the work of trauma theorists such as Paul Ricoeur and Dori Laub, who emphasize the necessity of "witnessing" in response to atrocity. Memory and testimony are not only means of personal survival; they are acts of reconstruction that restore humanity itself—reminding present and future generations of both the darkness and the light within history.

Conclusion

Viktor Frankl's Man's Search for Meaning is not merely a memoir of survival; it is a literary act of redemption. Through language, he reclaims his humanity and invites readers to rediscover theirs. His words prove that storytelling can heal—that trauma, when given voice, becomes testimony.

By transforming personal suffering into collective wisdom, Frankl demonstrates that language is not only a tool for communication but also for moral reconstruction. His narrative bridges the gap between literature and psychology, showing that meaning - making is both a linguistic and existential act.

In the final analysis, Man's Search for Meaning stands as a timeless affirmation of human dignity. It

teaches that even in the face of inhumanity, one can choose love over hatred, purpose over despair, and memory over oblivion. Frankl's journey from trauma to testimony reminds us that literature, when written in truth and compassion, can heal not only the self but the soul of humanity itself.

Works Cited

- Caruth, Cathy. Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Felman, Shoshana, and Dori Laub. Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History. Routledge, 1992.
- Frankl, Viktor E. Man's Search for Meaning. Beacon Press, 2006.
- LaCapra, Dominick. Writing History, Writing Trauma. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.
- McDonald, Stephen. “Viktor Frankl and the Language of Resilience.” Journal of Humanistic Psychology, vol. 55, no. 3, 2015, pp. 245–258.
- Ricoeur, Paul. Time and Narrative. Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Tillich, Paul. The Courage to Be. Yale University Press, 1957.
- Zaner, Richard. “The Ethics of the Witness: Frankl's Logotherapy and Responsibility.” Philosophy Today, vol. 48, no. 2, 2004, pp. 127–137.

21

UNDERSTANDING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION (SLA) THROUGH DYNAMIC LEARNING STRATEGIES

Sushma S K, *Research Scholar, St. John's College, Palayamkottai. Tirunelveli.*
sushmakali27@gmail.com
Dr. A. Rathina Prabhu, *Assistant Professor, St. John's College, Palayamkottai.*

Abstract

Learning a second language can be a herculean task for beginners and involves many hardships. To learn a language effortlessly, various methods and theories are required. The research tries to explore theoretical insights and pedagogical practices that enable the learners to improve their ability of learning a language. The objective of the research is to develop the learner's language proficiency and competency using immersive strategies. Learning a second language cannot be categorized under a single term, and it has a vast exposure in the fields of psychological perspective and sociocultural domains. The research also deals with the theories, learning strategies, and concepts put forward by different authors. Together with the learning strategies, Chamot also stated that four different strategies, namely cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, social strategies, and affective strategies, are also taken into consideration. Theories including Behaviorism, Innatism, and Krashen's Monitor Model, have also been discussed. Furthermore, the strategies include Scaffolding, Task-based learning, Multiliteracies theory, and Lexical approach. In addition, Methodology and Methodological tools are also included. The findings of the research establish consequential insights for learners, teachers, educators, and curriculum designers as tools to implement second language acquisition in various learning contexts. The theories and techniques help the learner to enhance the second language. The paper also examines various theoretical insights and empirical research also discussed. As a solution to the research, the obstacles faced by second language learners have been rectified, and multiple strategies paved the way for an effective learning environment. The future of the study deals with further investigation of the evidence-based pedagogical practices for second language acquisition.

Key Words: *English Language Teaching (ELT), Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Task-Based Learning (TBL), Behaviorism, Innatism, Multiliteracies Theory, Lexical Approach.*

Introduction

Language acquisition can be defined as, “Language acquisition is very similar to the process children use in acquiring first and second languages. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language—natural communication—in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding” (Krashen 4). Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is often referred to as the process of learning or acquiring a language other than the native or first language. Second Language Acquisition is commonly termed as,

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) refers both to the study of individuals and groups who are learning a language subsequent to learning their first one as young children, and to the process of learning that language. The additional language is called a second language (L2), even though it may actually be the third, fourth, or tenth to be acquired. It is also commonly called as target language (TL) (Saville-Troike 2).

The learning process involves many strategies as well as pedagogical practices. Learning a language can be compared to driving a car for better understanding. For instance, if a person wants to drive a car, actual practice is required to master driving skills. In case a person gets only instructions for driving a car instead of practice. The ultimate goal of driving cannot be achieved. Similarly, a lot of practices have to be initiated for learning a language. Effective practice, consistency, and interaction are required to attain proficiency in learning a new language.

Objectives

The study explores how the second language enhances English language teaching effectiveness. The research aims to evaluate how second language acquisition theories and pedagogical strategies help to improve the learning practices in English language classrooms. The main focus is on how learners acquire a second language and exposure to second language learning principles of curriculum design.

To examine how the learner develops communicative competence and language proficiency. The main purpose of the research is to elucidate how the learner builds their ability to communicate confidently in a second language without any hardships. Furthermore, a multifaceted strategy and theoretical domains create effective language learning circumstances. This learning environment enables the learners to acquire Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing(LSRW) skills.

Theoretical insights and Pedagogical practices

Learn a language cannot be categorized under a single roof. It primarily deals with psychological perspectives or socio-cultural domains. In other words, Learning a second language is defined as,

Language acquisition is a psychological process in which learners store and organize the language input they have learned actively engage, as well as process in which learners store and organize the language input they have learned and put it into effect, according to language acquisition principles. Language learning can only be completed in the presence of favorable language environment as well as language input (Joshi and Advani 17).

Language learning consists of miscellaneous theoretical and pedagogical practices, including Instructional materials and audiovisual aids. The concept of practising pedagogical practices is quietly associated with Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis: “Language learners should be exposed to language input that is just beyond their current level of comprehension – often referred to as 'i+1'” (Ye 1). Moreover, if a learner engages in learning a simple sentence and a new exposure to another sentence is also introduced. For instance, the sentence 'Yakshi reads a book' was first introduced to the learner. After that, A step forward input'+1' was given to the learner as, 'Yakshi has been reading a book for so long'. Through these learning circumstances, the language proficiency of the learners has been enhanced. Vocabulary can be learned effortlessly by learners through authentic, real-life examples. Instead of memorisation, language acquisition happens subconsciously.

Learning a language can also be done through social interaction. If we observe a child with a sibling tend to speak faster when compared with other children. Consequently, interaction takes place. Lev Vygotsky is popularly known for his socio-cultural theory, “Vygotsky is very important in second language learning because he introduced the concept of language learning in social interaction. His socio-cultural theory basically lays emphasis on the role which is played by social, cultural and historical artefacts in the child's mental development” (Rahmatirad 24). Learning with social interaction is more effective than learning in isolation.

Richards and Rodgers quoted Chamot's language learning strategies, namely “cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, social strategies, and affective strategies” (335). Metacognitive strategies affirm that, “control their language learning by planning what they will do, checking on progress, and then evaluating their performance on a given task” (Cohen 682). Metacognitive strategies deal with learner's evaluation of their own learning process. The ability of the learner is analysed through various techniques

such as focused attention and self-management. To monitor the performance during language tasks and also learning outcomes is compared with the completed or target goals. In the subsequent stage of language learning, cognitive strategies are widely recognised as,

Cognitive strategies involve the manipulation or transformation of the material to be learned, such as resourcing, repetition, grouping, deduction, imagery, auditory representation, key word method, elaboration, transfer, inferencing, note taking, summarizing, recombination and translation. And Social/affective strategies mainly involve the learner in communicative interaction with another person, for example, when collaborating with peers in problem-solving exercises. (Liu 101).

The aforementioned quotation on social or affective strategies emphasises that language learning can enhance the communicative proficiency of the learners, and also discussing with peers helps them to solve problems.

Language learning happens through tasks in task-based language teaching. Task plays a prominent role in language acquisition. The learners are engaged in the completion of the task. The task-based syllabus is designed to enhance the level of learners. This modified syllabus in task-based language teaching promotes the cognitive development of learners. Tasks are associated with creative skills, critical thinking, and concentration. It is essential to understand that there is some connection between the mind and utterance. The brain folding controls the utterance of the speech. So, the major part of learning a language is stimulating the brain's strings. This process can be acquired through metacognition. Metacognition was first put forward by John Flavell in his work Metamemory, Thinking about Thinking or Learning to Learn. According to Flavell, metacognitive strategies are regarded as the "construction manager." These strategies are designed to plan, obtain resources, organize, coordinate, monitor, and evaluate the process of learner second language acquisition. Metacognitive strategies enable learners to attain cognitive processes with the help of tasks. Through this process, the learners get well-versed in the target language.

Task-based language teaching enhances the communication skills of learners through tasks. The concept of the task should be clarified to understand task-based language teaching. A task is "an activity or action which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding language, i.e. as a response. For example, drawing a map while listening to a tape, and listening to an instruction and performing a command, may be referred to as tasks" (Richard, et.al 289). Learning a language is an organic process in task-based language teaching. The learning process in TBLT is assigned through numerous tasks. Examples of such tasks are: listening to tapes, drawing a map, and writing a letter. Through these tasks, the learner acquires the second language. The external factors in TBLT do not force learners to stay in the process of learning.

Scaffolding in language learning refers to, refers to instructional techniques used to extend understanding of learners and promote their independence in the learning process. Yildiz and Celik quoted Walqui's definition of scaffolding as "Scaffolding is an effective teaching and learning strategy in language learning as it engages learners in collaborative activities. It should be noted that interaction is the primary means by which learning takes place"(150). Therefore, Scaffolding plays a pivotal role in learning language.

Interlanguage was popularised by Larry Selinker. Interlanguage is associated with learning a language that acts as a bridge between the native language and the new language. Interlanguage is also defined as "Interlanguage is a common phenomenon in second language (L2) learning. It refers to the knowledge system which is formed in a certain period in learners' second language or foreign language learning process. It is a transitional language system, which is changing and adjusting constantly with increase of learners' second language knowledge" (Guo 8). As it constructs how learners internalise the language and it does not contain any systematic rules.

The Lexical Approach is defined as, "The Lexical Approach holds that chunks are the central

feature of naturalistic use. From the perspective of language production, there are advantages in constructing utterances from ready-made chunks rather than from single lexical items"(Richards and Rodgers 217). The Lexical approach in second language acquisition rejects traditional grammar and gives importance to prefabricated phrases or Lexical Chunks. The learning of Chunks can be done through noticing, cognitive processing, comparison, and wide exposure.

Multiliteracies Theory in Second Language Acquisition promotes multimodal meaning-making, especially Visual, Auditory, Gestural, and Spatial, and it rejects the notion of traditional print literacy. It also firmly believes that there is more meaning apart from the written text. Multiliteracies in second language learning,

Multiliteracies pedagogy encourages learners to take an active role in their own language learning by seeking out opportunities to use the language they are learning in as many different contexts as possible. In addition, multiliteracies pedagogy also recognises the importance of using diverse media as they can provide learners with additional opportunities for learning (Carraro 248).

Multiliteracies enable the learner to actively participate and provide multifaceted opportunities for learners. Thus, these are the theoretical insights and pedagogical perspectives in second language acquisition.

Methodological Tools

i)Performance-based tools

Assessment-based Language proficiency tools enable learners to achieve language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. The pronunciation, vocabulary, and reading practices are also included. Tasks with structured context, such as comprehension, picture-based descriptions, role play, dialogue writing, completion of sentences and a road map. The facilitator also handles evaluations and diagnostic tests to analyse the progress of the learners.

ii) Digital tools in second language acquisition

Digital tools in Language Teaching, "…easily available, these tools cover a broad spectrum of platforms, technologies, and applications. By utilizing technological breakthroughs to build immersive, engaging, and effective learning environments, digital tools are adaptable enough to meet the demands of a wide range of learners" (Ram 11). Digital tools engage learners in an effective learning environment. Language Learning applications include Babbel, Duolingo, and Memrise. These application helps learners in language acquisition. Online websites and digital platforms, including Edmodo, Busuu, Rosetta Stone, Socrative, and FluentU, promote language learning. Consequently, Storybird, Google Docs, and Flip improve reading and writing Skills. Padlet, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet and Zoom Meet help in online discussions. Game-based learning applications: Kahoot, MidSnacks, Quizzizz, Quizlet, and Poll Everywhere engage learners in interactive language learning.

iii) Instructional materials

Instructional materials can probably be defined as, "The importance of instructional materials in teaching and learning cannot be underestimated. A lot has been written to show the indispensable role of materials in curricular implementation. Instructional materials make learning more interesting, practical, realistic and appealing" (Ajoke 40). Instructional charts, newsletters, posters, flash cards, slides, film Strips, flipcharts, worksheets and graphic materials are the instructional aids used in language learning.

Conclusion

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) represents a multifaceted approach to learning language and explores the dynamic field of how people learn a second language. The research tries to elucidate the concept of SLA with various theories and strategies.

Works Cited

- Ajoke, Alabere Rabiat. "The Importance of Instructional Materials in Teaching English as a Second Language." International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention, vol. 6, no. 9, Sept. 2017, pp. 36–44.
- Carraro, Katia. "Multiliteracies and Self-Directed Language Learning in an Academic Setting." European Journal of Language Policy, vol. 15, no. 2, 2023, pp. 245–272. Liverpool University Press. Author-accepted manuscript. https://doi.org/10.3828/ejlp.2023.13.
- Cohen, Andrew D. "Second Language Learner Strategies." Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning, edited by Eli Hinkel, vol. 2, Routledge, 2011, pp. 681–698.
- Guo, Qiaolan. "Interlanguage and Its Implications to Second Language Teaching and Learning." Pacific International Journal, vol. 5, no. 4, 2022, pp. 8–14. Research Culture and Life Science Society (RCLSS), https://doi.org/10.55014/pij.v5i4.223.
- Joshi, Jagdish, and Priya Advani. "Second Language Acquisition: An Analytical Study of Prevailing Desideratum of English Language." Towards Excellence: An Indexed, Refereed & Peer Reviewed Journal of Higher Education, vol. 14, no. 2, 2024, pp. 15–25.
- Krashen, Stephen D. Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning. University of Southern California, 1981. First Internet Edition, Dec. 2002, www.sdkrashen.com/SL_Acquisition_and_Learning/index.html.
- Liu, Jing. "Language Learning Strategies and Its Training Model." International Education Studies, vol. 3, no. 3, Aug. 2010, pp. 100–104. Canadian Center of Science and Education (CCSE), www.ccsenet.org/ies.
- Rahmatirad, Mahbobeh. "A Review of Socio-Cultural Theory." SIASAT Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Studies, vol. 5, no. 3, July 2020, pp. 23–31. https://doi.org/10.33258/siasat.v5i3.66.
- Ram, Yad. "The Role of Digital Tools in Language Learning and Acquisition." Universal Research Reports, vol. 12, no. 2, Apr.–June 2025, pp. 1–10. Shodh Sagar, https://doi.org/10.36676/urr.v12.i2.1501.
- Richards, Jack, John Platt, and Heidi Weber. Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics. Longman, 1985.
- Richards, Jack C., and Theodore S. Rodgers. Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. 3rd ed., Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Saville-Troike, Muriel. Introducing Second Language Acquisition. 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Ye, Lu. "Innovative Pedagogical Strategies in Second Language Acquisition." SHS Web of Conferences, vol. 183, 2024, article 03013. ICPAHD 2023, The University of Sheffield, UK. EDP Sciences, https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202418303013.
- Yildiz, Yunus, and Bunyamin Celik. "The Use of Scaffolding Techniques in Language Learning: Extending the Level of Understanding." International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies, vol. 7, no. 3, Sept. 2020, pp. 148–157. https://doi.org/10.23918/ijsses.v7i3p148.

22

MONEY, MORALITY, AND MEMORY: LITERARY PERSPECTIVES ON COLLECTIVE GUILT IN DÜRRENMATT'S THE VISIT

Dev Kumar Choudhary, *PhD Research Scholar, Banaras Hindu Univesrity, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh*
devraj7886@gmail.com

Abstract:

This essay examines The Visit by Friedrich Dürrenmatt as a profound literary analysis of how the intersections of memory, morality, and money shape collective guilt. The play, which is set in the impoverished town of Güllen, illustrates how economic hardship weakens social morals and exposes the brittleness of justice when it is exposed to the distorting influence of wealth. A moral collapse that implicates not just individuals but the entire community is triggered by Claire Zachanassian's conditional offer of huge money in exchange for the murder of her ex-lover Alfred Ill. The townspeople's slow descent into greed and self-justification serves as an example of the dynamics of collective guilt, in which every individual shares responsibility for the upcoming tragedy and contributes to it. Dürrenmatt criticizes post-war European society's attempt to balance historical complicity with the allure of material prosperity by pointing to this collective moral collapse. The conflict between retribution and legal morality is also revealed as the play challenges the flexibility of justice, turning it from an ideal into a transactional negotiation.

This paper argues that Dürrenmatt captures the normalized moral blindness and shared accountability present in societies burdened by historic trauma, drawing on theoretical insights from Karl Jaspers' discourse on collective guilt and Hannah Arendt's concept of the banality of evil. The piece also examines how memory, both cultural and personal, can be distorted to ignore, excuse, or cover up moral failings.

The Visit proves to be an essential literary examination of how societies either face or avoid the consequences of guilt, rendering it a timeless reflection on justice, the human condition, and the ethical costs of economic survival.

Keyword: *Money, Moral collapse, Memory, Guilt, Justice, Revenge.*

1. Introduction:

A classic of post-war European drama, Friedrich Dürrenmatt's The Visit (Der Besuch der alten Dame, 1956) reveals the moral weakness of contemporary society under the influence of economic temptation. The play, which is set in the poverty-stricken town of Güllen, depicts how moral integrity fails in the face of material wealth. Claire Zachanassian, a wealthy woman who returns to her hometown, which is now in miserable and penniless condition with an unconditional offer, serves as Dürrenmatt's metaphor for this moral test that is a huge sum of money in return for the life of Alfred Ill, her ex-lover. The Visit serves as a profound reflection on guilt, justice, and the economics of conscience in addition to being a story of revenge.

In this work the relationship between money, morality, and memory forms an important foundation to understand how collective guilt emerges and operates in modern societies. This drama tries to present this dynamic with disturbing clarity that the ruined town of Güllen is at risk of moral collapse due to

economic pressure. Money is turned into a moral catalyst by Claire Zachanassian's offer of enormous wealth, revealing the community's readiness to compromise its moral values in order to obtain material advantage. The bitter truth that economic temptation undermines moral conviction and renders justice "a matter of calculation rather than conscience" is revealed by the slow transition from collective shock to collective justification. At first the townspeople rejected the offers but because of need of money they accepted the offer on and hence that "justice becomes negotiable when poverty turns morality into luxury" in this sense.

Philosophical thoughts on collective guilt during the post war era are strongly resonant with this moral instability. In the work The Question of German Guilt, Karl Jaspers makes a distinction between personal and collective responsibility, contending that "guilt arises wherever individuals become part of a community that consents to injustice." His point of view emphasizes how collective participation and passive acceptance, rather than overt cruelty, can lead to the moral degradation of entire societies. This change is exemplified by the residents of Güllen, who gradually progress toward a crime that is accepted by all rather than committing a single, catastrophic act of evil. Their cooperation reminds the theory of "banality of evil" by Hannah Arendt which holds that moral failure arises when common people give up their judgment in favour of convenience, conformity, and self-interest rather than from fanaticism. She further clarifies how ordinary people, through moral indifference and bureaucratic obedience, become instruments of systemic wrongdoing.

Memory, which plays a vital role in this work, further complicate the moral landscape. Dürrenmatt demonstrates how the community selectively manipulates its memory of the past, especially its prior injustice toward Claire, in order to defend current behaviour. Instead of serving as an ethical object, memory is used to justify here the wrongdoing. Cultural memory theorists persist that "societies often reshape their recollections to maintain internal coherence, enabling them to neutralize their own participation in historical wrongdoing" The townspeople of Güllen realise and reframe their earlier injustice with Claire as regrettable error but from the distant eyes. Therefor they are absolving themselves of accountability and creating the mental space required to perpetrate a new injustice. Their memory manipulation becomes a component of the system that both creates and hides collective guilt.

Thus, The Visit offers an effective model for comprehending how societies justify ethical collapse through the convergence of money, morality, and memory. Memory provides the means by which societies rewrite their ethical narratives to hide complicity, money reveals the fragility of moral principles, and morality demonstrates its vulnerability to gradual distortion. The play by Dürrenmatt demonstrates how collective guilt develops over time as a result of shared motivations, shared defenses, and shared forgetfulness rather than from isolated incidents. Because of this interaction, the play becomes a timeless meditation on the moral consequences of economic survival and the ways in which societies deal with collective wrongdoing.

2. Literature Review:

The convergence of memory, morality, and money in the drama offers an important framework for comprehending how societies justify moral collapse. This review of the literature summarizes important academic viewpoints that show how these three components function both separately and in concert within Dürrenmatt's moral world.

2.1. Wealth, Economic Necessity, and the Moral Cost of Survival:

Money is the primary driver of moral collapse in The Visit, as critics have emphasised. According to Dürrenmatt, Güllen is a town in dire economic need, which encourages corruption among its residents. According to Northcott arguments the arrival of Claire Zachnassian symbolises "the intervention of capital into a morally degraded society, revealing the price at which justice can be bought" . This is consistent with more general post-war criticisms of capitalism, which emphasized economic recovery

over moral obligation. After World war II the situation was very miserable. Entire Europe was suffering from economic crisis. At that time urgent need of economic reconstruction was required. At the same time moral assessment was also required after World War-II. Critics, philosophers, and authors throughout Europe expressed concern that societies were putting material recovery and economic success ahead of facing their moral failings, especially their cooperation, silence, or complicity in wartime atrocities.

The townspeople's change from adamantly rejecting Claire's proposal to subtly accepting it is frequently interpreted as Dürrenmatt's critique of market morality and the notion that morality is reshaped by economic desperation. Ritchie Robertson's analysis highlights how "material necessity becomes the justification for collective wrongdoing," suggesting that the townspeople "do not perceive themselves as immoral, but merely as pragmatic" . Their gradual shift illustrates how money converts communal ethics from principled resistance into profitable acquiescence.

Claire, who reveals the commodification of justice, is also framed by some academics as an example of capitalist retribution. According to Dürrenmatt's own thoughts on theater, contemporary society runs the risk of turning into a place where "justice is measured not by truth but by economic value". Interpretations of the play that place it in the context of post-war Europe's economic concerns revolve around this critique.

2.2. Moral Values and the Ethics of Community Accountability:

The breakdown of morality in the face of economic temptation has sparked a lot of academic interest. The philosophical frameworks of Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, whose writings on guilt and ethical responsibility influenced post-war discourse, are heavily referenced in this discussion.

A crucial basis for interpreting the townspeople's complicity is provided by Jaspers' theory of collective guilt. He contends that people share guilt "when they participate in or silently tolerate injustice committed by their community" , a notion that exactly corresponds to Güllen's ethical collapse. According to scholars like Hans Hiebel and Mark Roche, who have applied Jaspers' distinctions to Dürrenmatt's play, the moral decline of the townspeople serves as an example of the transition from personal accountability to a collective moral failure that is justified by survival.

This moral analysis is further enhanced by Arendt's concept of the banality of evil. She contends that evil frequently results from "ordinary people acting without critical reflection, conforming to collective pressures and bureaucratic norms" rather than from fanaticism. Critics draw attention to the similarities between Arendt's philosophy and the actions of Güllen's residents, pointing out that routine acceptance, civic cohesion, and social conformity, rather than hatred, led to their eventual decision to kill Alfred Ill.

The play's gradual moral decay has also been emphasized by literary scholars. Dürrenmatt arranges the play in such a way that moral decay seems normal, even logical, reflecting the ways in which societies justify injustice. According Richard Pine, "the citizens of Güllen commit no single decisive evil but rather participate in a cumulative process of justification," thereby enacting the very mechanisms through which collective guilt forms.

2.3. Memory and Historical Trauma:

Cultural memory theorists like Aleida Assmann, Jan Assmann, and Maurice Halbwachs have paid close attention to how memory shapes collective guilt. Their observations have been crucial in helping us comprehend how Güllen suppresses and reconstructs its history in order to maintain social cohesiveness.

Halbwachs argues that collective memory is "a social construction aligned with present needs" is particularly relevant to The Visit. Critics point out that the townspeople reinterpret their past mistreatment of Claire in ways that minimize their responsibility. This selective remembering aligns with Assmann's argument that societies often "transform uncomfortable pasts into morally tolerable narratives" enabling them to evade accountability.

Claire's return functions as a memory trigger, forcefully reintroducing a repressed past that destabilizes the town's collective identity. Scholars such as Bettina Mathes argue that this reactivated memory exposes "the ethical void at the center of Güllen's self-image" forcing the townspeople to confront a history they have actively suppressed. The townspeople use the recovered memory to defend their current wrongdoing rather than to stop it, which leads to a deeper moral distortion rather than a moral reckoning.

Memory thus becomes a mechanism for moral rationalization. Paul Ricoeur's concept of abused memory—memory selectively shaped to serve present interests, provides a powerful lens for understanding how Güllen converts guilt into justification. Through this lens, the townspeople's reinterpretation of Claire's suffering demonstrates how societies weaponize memory to sustain unethical decisions while maintaining an illusion of moral integrity.

2.4. Intersections of economy, ethics, and memory in the formation of collective guilt:

In Dürrenmatt's critique of collective guilt, an increasing amount of integrative scholarship contends that memory, morality, and money function as interdependent forces. According to academics like Reinhold Grimm and Ulrich Weisstein, the play's moral strength comes from the convergence of all three themes rather than from any one of them alone. Economic temptation erodes moral conviction, memory supplies the narrative devices required to maintain complicity, and moral reasoning becomes malleable enough to excuse injustice.

With its struggle to balance economic ambitions with the unresolved ethical burden of recent history, Güllen is positioned as an allegory for the post-war European conscience in this triadic analysis. Criticisms of societies that normalized moral compromise for the sake of reconstruction and prosperity are echoed in Dürrenmatt's portrayal of communal rationalization.

According to these studies, collective guilt is a social process that is created through shared incentives, shared interpretations, and shared silences rather than an emotional reaction. The Visit is becoming more widely acknowledged in the literature as a dramatic model for studying how communities create, change, and hide guilt in the face of historical responsibility and economic opportunity.

3. Historical Background:

When this play was written the post-war Europe had entered in the period of rapid economic growth which was known as Wirtschaftswunder in Germany and Austria. The living standard was increasing, there was industry revival, new markets across the globe was also increasing. But many writers like Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Karl Jaspers and Hannah Arendt warned that this economic optimism allowed societies to avoid dealing with their moral failures under fascism. So in the Drama we can see that the town is economically ruined and due to offer of Claire the town morally got down and killed Alfred Ill. This reflects the criticism that moral blindness can result from capitalist prosperity, where economic calculation takes the place of moral responsibility.

Dürrenmatt's moral philosophy is fundamentally grounded in the post war European setting in which he wrote. Collective guilt, an awareness of complicity in systemic injustice that no one person could bear alone, haunted Europe in the wake of World War II. The actions of the townspeople, who at first find Claire's demand shocking, eventually convince themselves of its necessity, serve as Dürrenmatt's instrument for this moral decay. Through the work Problems of Theatre Dürrenmatt warns that "the world can turn into a marketplace where even human life becomes a commodity" is exemplified by their changing moral compass. This shift is a reflection of post-war societies' historical struggle to balance moral responsibility with economic reconstruction, especially in countries that participated in wartime atrocities. Therefore, Güllen turns into a theatrical microcosm of Europe's own moral reckoning, demonstrating how the need of survival can silence the voice of conscience.

4. Methodology:

This study examines how The Visit dramatizes the interaction of money, morality, and memory in creating collective guilt using a qualitative, interpretive methodology based on textual analysis. Character dynamics, symbolic motifs, and Dürrenmatt's narrative techniques are the main subjects of primary analysis. Theoretical frameworks from Aleida Assmann on cultural memory, Hannah Arendt on the banality of evil, and Karl Jaspers on collective guilt all support this. While comparative scholarship elucidates how economic pressure and moral rationalization shape collective complicity, a contextual-historical approach places the play within post-war critiques of capitalism. When combined, these techniques expose the moral processes that underlie collective guilt.

5. Conclusion:

Dürrenmatt's The Visit examines how memory, morality, and money come together to reveal the ways in which societies create and defend collective guilt. By placing the poor town of Güllen in the larger framework of post-war Europe, the play illustrates how economic hardship reshapes morality, enabling material survival to take precedence over moral obligation. Claire Zachanassia's wealth serves as the impetus for turning justice into a commodity, exemplifying the post-war philosophers' criticism that the need for moral reflection was frequently eclipsed by the capitalist revival. Their changing moral landscape as the villagers justify their slide into complicity is reminiscent of Hannah Arendt's idea of the banality of evil and Karl Jaspers's idea of shared guilt, in which common people participate in wrongdoing out of self-interest and conformity.

Simultaneously, the community's memory manipulation demonstrates how societies selectively recall the past in order to justify current behaviour, thereby repressing responsibility. When taken as a whole, these factors show that collective guilt results from a slow moral decline bolstered by cultural forgetting, ethical rationalization, and economic pressure rather than from isolated incidents. In the end, The Visit is a potent metaphor for the moral brittleness of societies, challenging readers to consider the moral consequences of wealth and historical revisionism.

Bibliography:

- Dürrenmatt, Friedrich: The Visit, trans. Patrick Bowles, Grove Press, New York, 1962.
- Jaspers, Kar: The Question of German Guilt, trans. E. B. Ashton, Capricorn Books, New York, 1961.
- Assmann, Aleida: Cultural Memory and Western Civilization-Art of Memory, Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- J. Northcott, Kenneth: Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Twayne Publishers, New York, 1973.
- Robertson, Ritchie: German Realism of the Nineteenth Century, Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Arendt, Hannah: Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil, Viking Press, New York, 1963.
- Pine, Richard: The Disappointed Bridge: Ireland and the Post-Colonial World,: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle, 2014.
- Halbwachs, Maurice: On Collective Memory, trans. Lewis Coser, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992.
- Mathes, Bettina: Revenge, Memory, and Gender in Dürrenmatt's The Visit, German Studies Review 23, no. 3 2000.
- Dürrenmatt, Friedrich: Problems of the Theatre, Arche Verlag, Zurich, 1955.

23

THE REFUSAL TO FLOURISH: PERFORMATIVE OPT-OUT AS THE ULTIMATE CRITIQUE OF PINK FEMINISM IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

Ms. Aparna. P, *Research Scholar, Department of English, B. S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology.*
Dr. Muththamizh Selvi S.I, *Assistant Professor, Department of English, B. S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology.*

Abstract:

The thesis of this paper is that modern novels by Ottessa Moshfegh, Halle Butler, and Ling Ma go beyond the easy dismissal of some form of Pink Feminism or Girlboss Culture to present its most crushing logical end of the performative opt-out. It argues that neoliberal feminism tends to be a new kind of exploitative labor when it conceptualizes the empowerment discourse of individual success, continuous self-optimization and aesthetic consumption. As it will be shown in the paper, the protagonists of those novels, being aware of this trap, enter in a radical disengagement that is drug-induced hibernation, depressive inaction and catatonic repetition, as the only possible way of protest. Such tactical retreat announces the ineptitude of individualistic answers to systemic issues, and it seems to act as an indication that in the presence of uncontrolled demand of performative empowerment, pathological refusal is a logical, but tragic, result.

Keywords: *Pink Feminism, Girlboss Culture, Exploitative Labor, Self-Optimization, Pathological Refusal, Systemic Critique.*

Introduction:

A great paradox has been created in the world of the 21 st century feminism. On the one hand, it has succeeded to establish a cultural visibility like never before in the feminist discourse; corporate logos is bathed in the colors of the suffrage movement, bestseller lists boast of the secrets of becoming a leader in a corporate, and a language of empowerment pervades advertisements, media, and self-help. However, along with the mainstreaming is an atmosphere of general psychic alienation, burnout and a mute crisis of meaning in the very women who were meant to be the beneficiaries of this new order. The prospect of having it all has turned bad to the draining nature of having to do everything. The thesis presented in this paper is that this paradox is the direct result of a particular, hegemonic form of feminism which has become the dominant trend of the popular imagination: what critics have described as Pink Feminism, or Lean-In Feminism, Girlboss Feminism or Neoliberal Feminism. Fundamentally, Pink Feminism is a feminist thought in a depoliticized and market-friendly form. It cleverly turns the emphasis of the collective action and of the systemic reform to the individual accomplishment and personal accountability in the present frameworks of the capitalistic patriarchy. In this context, empowerment is not quantified by political freedom, breaking down patriarchal standards but by the rise in the career ladder, the power of the consumer, and a personal brand of attainable success. It is a type of feminism that does not demand that women should change the world, but find a way to work within it better: to lean in to boardrooms, not to demolish them. The issue, however, is that this feminism as a collaborative political endeavor turned into a collection of individual imperative, thus generating the new form of labor, which is insidious. They now

not only have to manage a career and a home but also perform excellence and act positively self-optimally in order to live up to the image of the so-called empowered ideal. This essay argues that the new generation of modern literary works does not simply satirize this process but explores the final psychological and existential outcome of this process the so-called Performative Opt-Out. In harsh terms of hibernation, depressionally immobilizing paralysis, and catatonically performative repetition, kindred writers such as Ottessa Moshfegh, Halle Butler, and Ling Ma present the most sensible, though drastic, answer to the unbearable pressures of performative empowerment: radical disengagement. According to their novels, when the quest to live a life that is feminist is turned into a mere exploitative work, the only real action of resistance can be the refusal to even be involved. In such a way, the dismal nothingness of the essence of a feminism that has been captured by capitalism is exposed through this literary movement, as it shows that its logical response is not liberation, but destruction.

To further this argument, this paper will first outline the particular labor that Pink Feminism is requesting, defining the system in which the protagonists will want to be out of. It will subsequently give a close reading of the "Performative Opt-Out" in three major texts, namely that of Moshfegh in My Year of Rest and Relaxation, Butler in The New Me and Ma in Severance. Lastly, it will address the philosophical and political implications of such a change in mode of active rebellion to passive collapse and contend that these narratives are a key diagnostic of the spiritual malaise of contemporary feminism. New Labor of the Self: Pink Feminism as Identity Work. One must have the system the one is rejecting before he can grasp the radicalism of the "opt-out. This corpus of novels starts by carefully tracing out how Pink Feminism operates not as a way towards liberation, but as a system of coercion, a system of identity work, a ruthless, unpaid, and psychologically depleting type of labour, which requires the enactment of a successful, market-friendly, feminine self.

The Mandate of the "Girlboss"

The main character of the play is the so-called Girlboss, who is an image that combines the feminist rhetoric with hyper-individualism of an American Dream. According to the words of such theorists as Catherine Rottenberg, neoliberal feminism is more and more focused on the individual woman by holding her accountable to her well-being and self-care (2018, p. 10). The new labor is driven by this responsibilization. It is no longer sufficient to be successful, but one must achieve that success in a manner that is personalized, attractive and publicly decipherable as an act of empowerment. My Year of Rest and Relaxation by Ottessa Moshfegh creates this opposition by the contrast between her unsnamed narrator and her best friend, Reva. The character of Reva represents the Pink Feminist subject, who is in a loop of performative work. She has a good, yet not satisfying, career in a top-notch gallery, lives in constant unsuccessful dieting, and maintains a toxic relationship, all the while playing a game of delighted competence and striving to rise to the top. Her existence is a staged act of having-it-all, an act so wearying that it spills out on a regular basis into frightened, secretive bouts of weeping. Reva is a symbol of the human price of this compulsion: life full of great insecurity and fear disguised by the insane chase of the next step up the ladder that nowhere meaningful. The narrator views this in a detached, clinical manner as he does not perceive empowerment but some sort of voluntary enslavement to the outside confirmation.

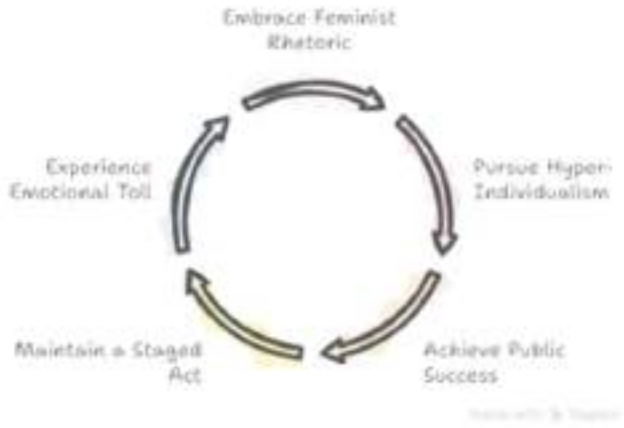


Figure 1: The Girlboss Cycle

Consumerism as a Fake Street toward Empowerment.

Pink Feminism is closely tied to the consumer culture, and Sarah Banet-Weiser discusses this phenomenon in Empowered, in which she theorizes that popular feminism is going to become a brand, and self-branding a feminist gesture (2018). Empowerment is invariably directed at the consumption level, whether it is the idea of the so-called feminist t-shirts and the beauty goods or the concept of self-care as a commodity that can be bought. This "pink-washing forms a vacuum cycle in which the political desire is funnelled into market dealings providing the semblance of action but again bolstering the very economic system which in many cases is the root cause of structural inequality.

To further this point, this paper will first outline the specific labor which Pink Feminism requires, creating the system, which the protagonists are looking to avoid. It will then also carry out an in-depth analysis of the "Performative Opt-Out" in three main texts, namely Moshfeghs My Year of Rest and Relaxation, Butler The New Me, and Severance by Ma. And lastly, it shall address philosophical and political consequences of this change of active rebellion to passive collapse in that such stories are an important diagnostic tool in the spiritual sickness of contemporary feminism. The empty center of this is brilliantly parodied in Ling Ma Severance by its protagonist Candace, whose job is the pre-apocalyptic one. She is employed in a made-up organization that produces nostalgic, artisanal Bibles. Her work represents the ideal of meaningless aestheticized production of late capitalism, the production of luxury objects that imitate and fake meaning and tradition. The so-called Shen Fever which ultimately destroys mankind is an effective allegory of this specific cycle; the fevered people blindly repeat most of their most prosaic habits, they turn into mere machines of the beings they once were as consumers and producers. The apocalypse is not a pause of capitalism in the vision of Ma, but its parodic, ultimate fulfillment to him, the world in which the performance of labor has persisted long after any aim or consciousness has left it.

The Psychological Burden and the Internalization of Failure.

The identity work of Pink Feminism is the most detestable part with its internalization of failure. In positing success as an issue of personal grit, strategy and attitude, it implicitly posits failure as a flaw of the individual. Once the systemic obstacles the gender pay gap, the absence of affordable childcare, institutionalized sexism are removed out of the story, the struggling woman will only have herself to fault. This is an immense psychological weight, the seed of shame, inadequacy, and self-loathing. It is the unstoppable interworld of Millie, the main character of The New Me by Halle Butler, who is in a dead-end temp position, and who knows the script of making a happy successful life, the new me of the title, permanently employed, living in a clean stylish apartment, and leading a butchy social life. However, she is not able to play this script at all. Her personal monologue is a flood of worry, condemnation and smoldering anger, turned more towards herself than the frivolity of corporate culture that she can hardly

stand. She does not act like this due to laziness, but because she is frozen by the realization of the fruitlessness of the promised route, and that the work to take it is dismantling the soul. Butler does not view the depression of Millie as a medicalized space in a vacuum, but a rational, just about rational, reaction to an unrealistic set of demands. The effort involved in struggling to be the new me is so exhausting that it abolishes all chances of living itself. These novels precondition the radical action of their main heroes by the time they define this elaborate criticism of Pink Feminism as the constructive system of identity work. Once empowerment is as alienating as any kind of conventional labor, the only choice remaining is to go off the stage. This is the genesis of the Performative Opt-Out.

Case Studies in Refusal:

The Anatomy of the Performative Opt-Out. The former act of this literary critique, the act of diagnosis of the so-called disease of Pink Feminist labor, is the former; the latter act is the act of the drastic cure that the protagonists of this literary work have tried to follow. The "Performative Opt-Out: is not a concerted movement but a axis of withdrawals, between the systematically planned withdrawal and the withdrawal induced by the system. Moshfegh, Butler, and Ma use hibernation, the paralysis of depression, and the allegorical catatonia to interact with the violent and rational denial of a system that requires everything and can give nothing of spiritual or existential importance.

Figure2: The Cycle of Performative Opt-out

Strategic Strike: Privileged Hibernation in my Year of Rest and Relaxation.

The most conscientious and self-conscious kind of Opt-Out is the one of which the protagonist of Ottessa Moshfegh is the true bearer. Being a beautiful, young, Columbia-educated woman with a handsome inheritance to live off in the Upper East Side, she has all the very capital (financial, social, and aesthetic) that Pink Feminism tells women to use to their advantage. She resists to employ that capital in ascendancy, but in destruction. Her hibernation of a year on drugs is a well-planned and financed strike. It is not a passive type of depression, but an active project. She identifies the monstrously inept Tuttle, a parody of the medical-industrial complex, in order to be able legally to fly out of consciousness. She has a purpose: I wanted to clean up my life. I desired to be wiped out, a clean sheet. Clean in this context implies something not subject to the exhaustive performance of the selfhood which she is obliged to do. She is opposed to male gaze, professional hustle and the social niceties that form the world of Reva. Her sleep is the extreme denial of the need to be a productive, desirable and socially functioning subject. It is a violent and privileged escape out of a reality which she finds unbearably performative. The novel assumes that the woman who already possesses everything that the system has to offer has only one remaining act of agency to engage in, that of trying to destroy the self that the system has made.

The Paralyzed Precarity:

Systemic Collapse in The New Me Should Moshfegh have his narrator develop a top-down strike, Halle Butler portrays a bottom-up collapse through Millie. Opt-Out is the answer of Precarity Class which is Millie. She has no economic safety net to maneuver a strategic exit, her detachment is not a decision but a state, the logical outcome of being a cog which cannot and, on a deeper level, does not want to be incorporated into the machine. The expression of Millie in her Opt-Out is the all-pervading and exhausting depression. She is not attempting to sleep a year she merely cannot do the elementary tasks of self-care and agendas that would enable her to be the new me. Her place of residence is dirty, her temporary job is a nightmare of menial chores, and her social life is fumbling and pointless. What Butler has managed to achieve is to make this not about laziness, but rather a kind of systemic critique through the writing on the body and mind. It is the protest of the soul of Millie. Even the last pages, when she envisions the cycle re-playing with another, more promising temp are a masterpiece of pessimistic irony: The new me will be one who does things. She'll be proactive. She'll be the one who's looking. I can be her. I can be that person. I can try." The emphasis on the word I can is reinforced by its reverse- she cannot since it is the struggle to fill the gap between her life and the marketed dream that is the cause of her distress. The stagnation of the subject, the performance of empowerment of which is cognitively and emotionally unavailable, is her Opt-Out.

The Allegorical Catatonia:

Mimetic Refusal in Severance. In Severance by Ling Ma, the Performative Opt-Out is taken to a higher level, that of the civilizational, through the genre of the apocalyptic fiction where the author develops a powerful allegory. Shen Fever is a plague that does not make zombies in the classical sense of this term, but automatons who blindly follow their most routine, pre-apocalyptic ways - resetting the table, exercising, working in factories. It is the final hollowing-out of the neoliberal subject, the actualization of a catatonia that Moshfegh and Butler subjects of their characters approach psychologically. The fevered are not making the choice; it has been made by them through a system which has deprived them of all that is internal in them, and left them only with the outward semblance of habit. The main character Candace Chen does not live to survive by fierce individualism, but by a mimetic strategy: she is used to going to work and meeting her production quotas long after the society has fallen apart, and ultimately, she is used to living a passive, routine-based life of the fevered themselves. The final Performative Opt-Out is her major choice towards the end of the novel she might permit herself to be infected and be part of the family of the fevered in the mall. It is a deliberate decision to give up her heavy burden individual conscious and its concomitants of anxiety (memory, choice, trauma) in favor of the joyful, vacuous repetition of ritual. In a world where life has been degraded to production, consumption, the only way out of the overwhelming burden of meaning, Ma implies, is to become a machine, to cut off the linkage between action and purpose completely.

To Lean in or Lying Down: The Politics of Passive Refusal.

The "Performative Opt-Out" is a considerable advance towards the literary language of protest. It is the abandonment of the model of the active, vocal rebel who challenges the system standing on a platform of moral clarity, and the promotion of the character that falls within the system, on whose refusal is not written on a placard but on her lifeless body. It is not a simple political and philosophical change that this transformation of leaning in to lying down has. These novels are the cries of a generation that finds any outlet of protestation to be impotent or unrealistic. Pink Feminism and the late capitalism system is too diffuse, too lodged in the very fabric of the self, language, and desire, to be attacked head-on. As in Sally Rooney Conversations with Friends, the characters are able to theoretically dismantle capitalism and patriarchy at dinner, but it would be impossible to practice the effects of the power dynamic in their thought in a real-life situation, simply because they have to start asking their own questions. With the system having absorbed the language of criticism, the only kind of protest that is truly authentic in this

environment is the pre-linguistic, pre-political refusal. What is striking about this passive resistance, just like the I would prefer not to of Bartleby the Scrivener, is its inexplicability and its negativity. It does not suggest a new world order; it merely disapproves the existing one. The protagonist behind My Year of Rest and Relaxation is transformed into a blank in an over-consumerist world. Her non-presence is not what the world is like, but it is the insanity of a Reva that fills one with an insane, anxious activity that makes her appear ridiculous by comparison. These main characters compel the reader to pose the question: what sort of system would cause pathological withdrawal to appear a rational, or even desirable decision? Their debacle is not the fix, but down to the death of a diagnosis, displaying the malady of a culture that has pathologized the failure to survive on its own repressive conditions.

Conclusion

The literary trend of the so-called Performative Opt-Out is one of the points of departure in the cultural discourse of feminism and capitalism. Ottessa Moshfegh, Halle Butler, and Ling Ma have outgrown the task of satirizing the conventions of Pink Feminism to express their most destructive psychological and existential consequence. They show that as soon as empowerment is redefined as a personal commandment to incessant self-optimization within an inflexible capitalist system, it stops to be liberating and transforms into another type of soul crushing work. The paralyzed depression, the strategic hibernation, and the allegoric catatonia that are illustrated in these novels are not nihilistic dead ends. Instead they are rational, extreme, and logical reactions of the subjects who see the accomplishment of empowerment as spiritually bankrupt. The final criticism is the Performative Opt-Out since it is a refusal to operate within the terms of the system. It shows that the oath of bending forward can bring, inexorably, to the frantic necessity of falling asleep. These stories do not give the quick and simple solutions or the recipes of a feminism that is more successful. Instead, they are a much-needed, shared scream into the interior, a powerful wakeup call to the future of a viable, life-affirming feminism, not with more mandates, but with attention to those who, for reasons we desperately need to know, have opted out.

Reference:

- Butler, Halle. *The New Me*. Penguin Books, 2019.
- Ma, Ling. *Severance*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.
- Moshfegh, Ottessa. *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*. Penguin Press, 2018.
- Rooney, Sally. *Conversations with Friends*. Hogarth, 2017.
- Banet-Weiser, Sarah. *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*. Duke University Press, 2018.
- Fraser, Nancy. "Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis." *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*, Verso Books, 2013, pp. 209–226.
- Rottenberg, Catherine. *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*. Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Tolentino, Jia. "The Story of a Generation in Seven Scams." *Trick Mirror: Reflections on Self-Delusion*, Random House, 2019, pp. 185–211.
- Gill, Rosalind, and Shani Orgad. "The Amazing Bounce-Backable Woman: Resilience and the Psychological Turn in Neoliberalism." *Sociological Research Online*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2018, pp. 477-495.
- McRobbie, Angela. "Beyond the 'F'-Word: Feminism, Capitalism and the Moral Policing of the Contemporary Woman." *Feminist Theory*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2018, pp. 3-24.
- Duffy, Brooke Erin. *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender, Social Media, and Aspirational Work*. Yale University Press, 2017. (Chapters 1 & 5 are particularly useful as article-length arguments).
- Banet-Weiser, Sarah, and Laura Portwood-Stacer. "The Traffic in Feminism: An Introduction to the

Commentary and Criticism on 'Popular Feminism'." *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 17, no. 5, 2017, pp. 884-888.

- Rottenberg, Catherine. "Neoliberal Feminism and the Future of Human Capital." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2017, pp. 329-348.
- Scharff, Christina. "The Psychic Life of Neoliberalism: Mapping the Contours of Entrepreneurial Subjectivity." *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 33, no. 6, 2016, pp. 107-122.
- Littler, Jo. "Meritocracy as Plutocracy: The Marketising of 'Equality' Under Neoliberalism." *New Formations*, vol. 80-81, 2013, pp. 52-72.

24

HUMAN AND AI NARRATIVES: QUANTIFYING READER EMOTIONAL RESPONSES IN THE DIGITAL ERA

K. Rita, *Department of English, Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies, Pallavaram, Chennai, India.*
Dr. P. Santhosh, *Department of English, Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies, Pallavaram, Chennai, India.*

Abstract:

In this age where artificial intelligence is not just analysing texts but also generating narratives, the boundaries between human creativity and machine authorship have become increasingly blurred. This paper carefully examines how readers emotionally respond to human-written and AI-generated texts. The study focuses on two contrasting works, "Life 3.0: Being Human in the Age of Artificial Intelligence" by Max Tegmark, which is a philosophical exploration of humanity's future with AI, and "Through the Eyes of Code", an AI-generated narrative that reflects the machine's attempt to mimic human perception and emotion. Drawing on Reader Response Theory, the research investigates the nature and intensity of readers emotional engagement with an excerpt from each text. The study measures emotions such as empathy, curiosity, and unease using a mixed-methods design that combines quantitative surveys and qualitative reflections. It analyses how readers attribute meaning and authenticity to different forms of authorship. The findings are expected to reveal not only how emotional resonance differs between human and AI narratives but also how digital environments reshape our notions of authorship, emotion, and literary value. Ultimately, the paper seeks to understand whether readers connect more deeply with human intentionality or with the emergent emotional patterns produced by artificial intelligence, highlighting the evolving relationship between technology, literature, and the human mind in the digital age.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Human Authorship, Reader Response Theory, Emotional Engagement, Digital Literature.*

Introduction:

In this twenty-first century, the way we write, read and experience stories has undergone a great transformation. AI is now a creator, churning out narratives that are virtually indistinguishable from human imagination. The exponential growth of digital storytelling has, however, raised pertinent questions, such as: can AI evoke the same emotional resonance as human authors and what happens when it is possible to distinguish one voice from another.

According to Reader Response Theory, people emotionally respond, and often, people's feelings are linked to the author as a person. This thesis zeroes in on and probes at the question of how far AI-generated texts can be thought out, yet may also look at the kinds of emotions they trigger, how readers decipher meaning and sympathy towards the perceived author and uses the examples of Max Tegmark's Life 3.0: Being Human in the Age of Artificial Intelligence and the AI-generated narrative Through the Eyes of Code as a yardstick for measuring emotional sincerity in the digital age. Combining a combination of empirical study and subjective reactions, this investigation gives us a deeper understanding of the human reaction to reading both kinds of authors.

Review of Literature:

Wolfgang Iser's 1974 work *The Implied Reader* shows us that it's an interplay between the words on the page and our imagination that generates a unique, beautiful experience. Stanley Fish's idea of "interpretive communities" is also in line with this thinking. He says that meaning is made by the people who are reading, not just by the author. Coming hotfooting into the scene of AI-generated narratives, these theories take on a brand-new level of complexity. The people behind the AI don't have human consciousness, yet they still give us something to get emotionally invested in.

Roland Barthes' 1967 essay "The Death of the Author" basically turned the whole idea of who gets to say what a piece of writing means on its head, saying that it's up to the readers, not the creators. Well-known scholar N. Katherine Hayles has also looked at the space between bodies and code, and argued that digital texts have completely changed how we think about ourselves as people and as narrative agents.

Well-known research has shown that digital literature mediates our emotional experiences, and Hayles and Ryan wrote in 2015 that digital stories invite readers to take the reins and make their own way through the story. Hammond and Brooke's 2020 study of AI-generated poetry and fiction found that these tend to be more intellectually interesting than emotionally stirring.

One thing we've noted, however, is that traditional literary analysis hasn't really dug into how people feel when reading AI-generated texts. The purpose of this study is to fill that gap, by counting and analyzing the emotional responses of readers to AI-written narratives.

Research Objectives:

1. To compare the emotional responses of readers to human-written and AI-generated narratives, exploring the dimensions of empathy, curiosity, unease, admiration, and detachment.
2. To investigate how readers perceptions of authorship (human vs. AI) influence their emotional engagement with narratives and their attribution of meaning and authenticity.

Research Questions:

1. How do readers emotional responses differ when reading human-written vs AI-generated narratives and what factors contribute to these differences?
2. What extent do readers perceptions of authorship (human vs. AI) shape their emotional engagement with narratives and how does this impact their understanding of emotional authenticity in digital literature?

Methodology:

This research adapts a mixed-methodology that integrates quantitative and qualitative tools to capture both measurable emotional patterns and subjective reader experiences.

Sample and Materials:

Fifty postgraduate students of English literature were chosen for this study and each participant was given two short excerpts:

1. Excerpt A: This was taken from Max Tegmark's *Life 3.0*, discussing the ethical dimensions of artificial consciousness.
2. Excerpt B: This was taken from *Through the Eyes of Code*, an AI-generated narrative depicting an algorithm's reflections on human emotions.

Procedure:

After they read each excerpt, participants were given a Likert-scale based questionnaire measuring five emotional parameters, they were: empathy, curiosity, unease, admiration, and detachment. Their responses were then recorded on a five-point scale ranging from "very low" to "very high."

Participants were also asked to write a brief qualitative reflection describing how both the texts made them feel and what aspects they found believable or artificial, and also they were asked whether they sensed a difference in writer identity.

Data Analysis:

This study used statistical summaries to quantify aspects of our survey data. This allowed us to clearly identify and present the dominant emotional trends that we found in the data. We were able to visualise the emotional percentages and make our findings clearer with the use of a comparative table and pie charts. But we also wanted to make our findings visual and emotional, which is where the thematic coding of our qualitative data comes in. We employed qualitative responses to clearly show emotional authenticity trends we detected.

Analysis and Findings:

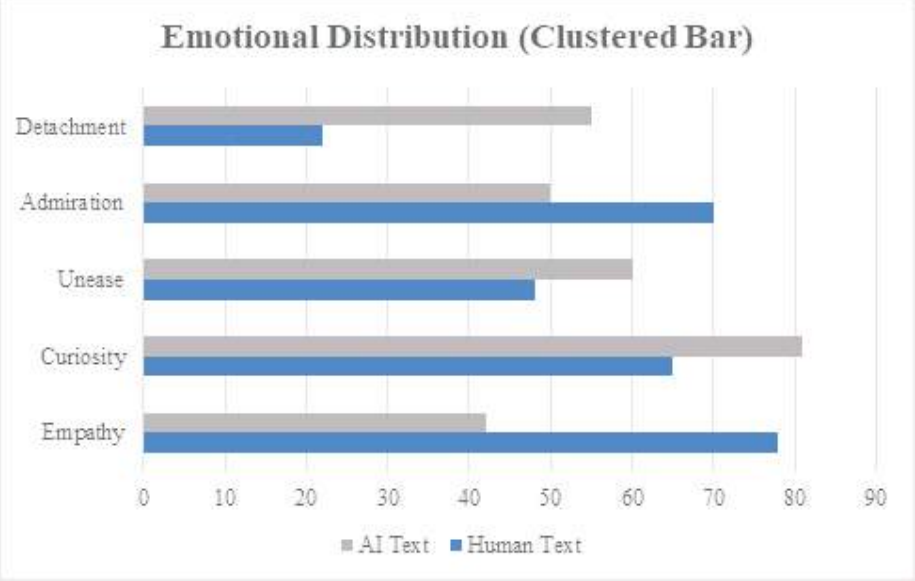
The analysis demonstrated that emotional involvement differs significantly between human and AI-written texts. Up until the very last test, readers had been regularly reporting more empathy and emotional truth based on reading the human write-up, while curiosity dominated their reactions to the machine-written one.

Table 1: Comparative Emotional Response (n = 50)

Emotion Type	Human Text (*Life 3.0*)	AI Text (*Through the Eyes of Code*)
Empathy	78%	42%
Curiosity	65%	81%
Unease	48%	60%
Admiration	70%	50%
Detachment	22%	55%

As shown above, empathy and admiration were stronger for the human text, while curiosity and unease were more pronounced for the AI text. Detachment, representing emotional distance, was significantly higher for the AI narrative.

Figure 1: Emotional Distribution (Clustered Bar)



The clustered bar chart in Figure 1 visually compares the intensity of five measured emotional responses: empathy, curiosity, unease, admiration, and detachment, across the human-written text "Life 3.0" and the AI-generated text "Through the Eyes of Code".

The visualization clearly illustrates that the human text elicited a stronger emotional connection, with high scores in empathy (78%) and admiration (70%). In contrast, the AI text's dominant responses were intellectual and speculative, reflected in significantly higher scores for curiosity (81%) and unease (60%).

Qualitative Insights:

Several participants described *Life 3.0* as "thought-provoking but emotionally grounded," citing the author's tone and philosophical reflection as contributing to authenticity. One participant wrote, "I could sense a human hesitation behind the argument, a moral weight that machines can't imitate."

In contrast, *Through the Eyes of Code* was frequently praised for its creativity but described as "detached," "too polished," or "mechanically profound." A few participants, however, expressed fascination with its "cold objectivity," suggesting that emotional connection may not always rely on human warmth but on intellectual intrigue.

Interpretation:

The results align with Iser's idea that the reading process involves a constant oscillation between engagement and detachment. While AI texts provide structured coherence, they often lack the affective gaps that invite imaginative filling. Human writing, by contrast, embraces ambiguity allowing readers to co-create emotion through empathy and moral resonance.

Discussion:

The results demonstrate a clear distinction between emotional simulation and actual emotional experience. The AI stories are coherent and they're linguistically rich, but they model empathy as pattern recognition not life. It goes without saying that, on a visceral level, readers sense this lack of emotional source. The lower scores in empathy and higher score of detachment for AI text imply that the perception of emotional authenticity might be dependent on perceived human intent.

But it would be simplistic to assume that AI can't convey writing that resonates with readers. The high level of curiosity and unease suggests that readers are approaching AI texts from an intellectual position, attempting to decode their structure, purpose, and limits. This is reminiscent of Barthes's "writerly text" wherein meaning is generated by the reader, not controlled by the author.

Interestingly, a few participants expressed admiration for the AI's linguistic precision, suggesting that readers are beginning to attribute creative agency to machines. Such perceptions hint at an evolving literary ecosystem where emotional connection is no longer defined solely by human presence but by aesthetic experience.

In digital environments, the very act of reading becomes a negotiation between human emotion and algorithmic structure. Readers of AI narratives might not feel the same warmth, but they experience a new form of wonder, an emotional curiosity about the machine's mind. This transition reflects what Hayles calls the "posthuman condition," where boundaries between organic and synthetic cognition fade.

Conclusion:

This study concludes that emotional engagement with narratives is not just about linguistic style or coherence but about perceived intentionality. Human-authored texts continue to evoke deeper empathy and moral reflection, while AI-generated texts stimulate intellectual curiosity and speculative imagination in participants.

Reader Response Theory proves particularly relevant in decoding this phenomenon, as it foregrounds the reader's role in constructing emotion. The findings also suggest that digital literature invites new forms of emotional literacy, where readers learn to interpret not only characters and themes but the presence or absence of human authorship itself.

The emotional contract between author and reader gets rewritten when AI becomes a co-creator in literature. The challenge for future writers and machines will be to bridge emotional authenticity with

algorithmic precision and to create a new narrative space where empathy and code coexist.

References:

- Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath, Hill and Wang, 1977.
- Fish, Stanley. *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Harvard UP, 1980.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*. U of Notre Dame P, 2008.
- Hayles, N. Katherine, and Marie-Laure Ryan. *Narrative Theory, Literature, and New Media*. Routledge, 2015.
- Hammond, Adam, and Collin Brooke. "Algorithmic Authorship and Affective Response." *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2020.
- Iser, Wolfgang. *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1974.
- Tegmark, Max. *Life 3.0: Being Human in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*. Penguin, 2017.
- *Through the Eyes of Code*. Generated by OpenAI Language Model, 2024.

25

DISSENTING THE COLONIAL DANCE: EPISTEMIC DISOBEDIENCE IN HANSDA SOWVENDRA SHEKHAR'S *THE ADIVASI WILL NOT DANCE*

Pavithra Mahendran, *Research Scholar, Department of English, SDNB Vaishnav College for Women (Autonomous)*
Dr. K. Kanthimathi, *Associate Professor, Department of English, SDNB Vaishnav College for Women (Autonomous), Chromepet.*

Abstract

Adivasis constitute about 8.6% of India's total population and are among the most dispossessed communities in India. Contrary to India's political decolonization after independence, Adivasi communities and voices continue to endure systemic marginalization that mirror colonial rationality. Post-independent development models often garbed under the discourse of modernization and national interest are extractive, and aggressively acquisitive.

This paper aims to read the titular story from the collection The Adivasi Will Not Dance (2015) by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar in the light of Decoloniality, Epistemic disobedience, and Border thinking by Anibal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo respectively. The titular story is set against the backdrop of mining-induced expulsion and exile in Jharkhand. Though the story focuses on the Santhal tribe, it is more of a critique on the condition of Adivasis all over India. Mangal Murmu, the story's central character and voice is an Adivasi musician who refuses to perform for the President of India at a coal mine inauguration. This act of refusal and defiance leads to physical violence meted out to him. The story also encapsulates decolonial resistance, epistemic disobedience, and border thinking as a medium for indigenous agency.

Keywords: *Epistemic disobedience, Border thinking, Decoloniality, Decolonial resistance, Santhal, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar.*

Introduction:

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar is a Santhal doctor and writer who primarily writes in English and translates Santhali work from Hindi to English. The titular story from his short story collection *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015), focuses on Mangal Murmu, a sixty-year-old Santhal musician from Jharkhand. Mangal is famous for his knowledge of old Santhali songs and skill in playing the *tiriyo* (a traditional Santhali musical instrument). Mangal has a music troupe who have for many decades danced and sung in weddings, harvest festivals, and political events, thereby offering their art as both cultural representation and livelihood.

The story's opening is both ironic and painfully honest. The President of India is visiting Jharkhand to inaugurate a coal mining project that will apparently bring uninterrupted power supply to several towns and villages in and around the State. Mangal and his troupe are called to perform in front of the dignitaries as a filtered demonstration of 'tribal art' for national and modern display. However, this performance belies the hypocrisy and irony of the context – the very same government that has invited the Adivasis to perform has also usurped their land, displaced them, and polluted their environment. Thus, Mangal exasperated, angry, and disillusioned refuses to perform – this denial forms the crux of the story. The story is narrated by Mangal in a non-linear, non-dramatic manner that is both realistic and situated in Adivasi worldview.

Though Mangal is arrested at the end of the story, he remains morally resolute that justifies his dissent against Adivasi epistemic and cultural erasure.

Contemporary Adivasi writings often deal with themes like identity, land, and the conflict between indigenous and modern worldview. Many Adivasi writers also write and publish in Adivasi languages like Santhali, Munda, Kharia, and Ho as an act to reclaim narrative autonomy, thus resisting assimilation into mainstream literature that often privilege either English or other dominant regional languages. In this context, stories like the *Adivasi Will Not Dance* reflect and critique state sponsored social and political exclusion. Such stories also highlight the fact that Adivasi identities are forged by the intersection between dispossession, resource extraction, and hegemony of the State.

Decoloniality, Epistemic disobedience, and Border thinking are interdependent theories that contest prevailing Western patterns of knowledge and power. These concepts aim to disassemble the colonial matrix of power by fostering indigenous epistemology and ontology. They intend to question the colonial hegemony that construct postcolonial epistemologies and ontologies. A few key theorists in the above areas are Anibal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Ramón Grosfoguel, Maria Lugones, and others. Decolonial literature and study is deliberately multidisciplinary borrowing from eclectic fields like sociology, law, education, humanities, culture studies etc. Canonical and non-Canonical Eurocentric texts are read and analyzed to expose the inherent colonial power structures at play.

The methodology used is qualitative analysis. The titular story The Adivasi Will Not Dance is analyzed using the concepts of Decoloniality, Epistemic disobedience, and Border thinking to reveal colonial worldviews that shape and control postcolonial India.

Decoloniality, Epistemic Disobedience, and Border Thinking as Dissent:

Anibal Quijano a Peruvian sociologist in his seminal essay *Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America* (2000) argues that though colonialism has formally ended, the rationale behind colonial dominance continues to mould the modern world. Colonialism as an imperial enterprise has ended but the epistemological and political justification for coloniality continues to persist. Quijano refers to this lingering pattern of control as the *coloniality of power*. Colonialism has metamorphosized into global capitalism which strives to validate colonial hierarchies of race, knowledge, and labour.

Quijano explains *Coloniality of Power* as an enduring structure of dominance over labour, resources, authority, and knowledge (Quijano 536-537). Coloniality is constructed upon racial categorization and Eurocentric stratification. According to Quijano, coloniality disguises itself as modern capitalism which is dependent upon the continual oppression and profiteering of formerly colonized peoples.

Quijano's essay also discusses a key term in decoloniality which is Eurocentrism, an ideology that standardizes and universalizes European consciousness and worldview. Eurocentrism affirms Europe as the center of rationality, modernity, and progress and thereby negates and devalues indigenous and non-Western epistemologies. Quijano refers to this as *epistemic violence* (Quijano 536-537) and explains how Western academia (sciences, humanities) produce and delineate 'truth.' Indigenous worldview is frequently muted and subdued as 'savage,' thus knowledge becomes a hegemonic implement. Quijano asserts that modernity is co-dependent on coloniality and that advancement and growth are inseverable from colonial oppression.

A solution that Quijano offers is *Decoloniality* which he describes as a way of dissociating from Eurocentric epistemologies of progress and development. This can be achieved through realigning and reinstating indigenous knowledge and culture.

In the story, *Coloniality of Power* is explicated through the liaison between the Sate and Corporate that replicates colonial subjugation through mining and displacement. Mangal Murmu describes how most of their farming lands have been usurped by the government to set up coal mines that has led to the Adivasis

being dispossessed of their traditional land. The *Coloniality of Power* in practice has resulted in the Adivasis becoming migrant and bonded labrourers. Mangal's daughter Mugli and her family also become displaced in the story due to the same extractive capitalist policy of the State.

The story critiques postcolonial India's modernity through Mangal Murmu's character. The author shows how *Coloniality of Power* is entrenched in Eurocentric discourse that justifies the appropriation of Adivasi land as state property. Mangal Murmu bemoans the fact that while non-Adivasis have benefitted from India's decolonization, the Adivasis and their children continue to be labelled as primitive and backward. While majority of India's children go to schools, Adivasi children are left starving and diseased. This oppression has resulted in the cultural and epistemic erasure of Adivasi worldview which is emphatically brought out by the author. The story also illustrates how Adivasi displacement and expulsion is condoned through discourses of progress and development.

In the story, Decolonial Resistance is achieved through Mangal Murmu's refusal to dance and perform for the dignitaries present. The central conflict of the story is the opposing worldviews of State and the Adivasis. While the Adivasis view nature and land as life, the State views them merely as resource for 'advancement.' The story is not just a work of art, rather it is a political act aimed to critique dominant worldview that undermines and oppresses the Adivasis. Mangal's refusal to dance is an emblematic dissent against continuous oppression. Mangal redeems the lost integrity of the Adivasis as against State sponsored erasure through his denial to dance.

The story at this point achieves *Decoloniality* as through Mangal's character, the author exposes and unsettles the myth of nonsectarian progress that the authorities aim to present. A celebration of advancement turns into a revelation of the duplicity of a nation that desires the Adivasi as entertainment, while simultaneously working to destroy the same Adivasi existence.

The story is also a critique on the *Epistemic violence* dispensed at the Adivasis. The dominant State decides and seizes control of how Adivasi culture should be portrayed. Thus, dance in the story becomes a political metaphor for coercive obedience. Mangal and his troupe have no choice but to perform as it brings them some money and food. They are thus deprived of the agency to choose their own representation. Mangal recounts how the Adivasis have danced willingly on many occasions like harvest festivals and weddings – here dance becomes a celebration of their culture. This is contrasted with their impending performance before the President of India and other dignitaries which translates into political deference. Finally, Mangal's act of refusing to dance becomes rebellion and dissent.

The story can also be viewed through the lens of Epistemic disobedience and border thinking – two central terms discussed by Walter D. Mignolo, an Argentinian semiotician in his 2011 essay *Epistemic disobedience and the decolonial option: a manifesto.* Mignolo defines Epistemic disobedience as the rejection of Western epistemologies (Mignolo). According to Mignolo, it is a significant and crucial way to dissociate from Eurocentric modes of knowledge and encapsulates respecting and recognizing indigenous, minoritarian, and local epistemologies. Border thinking refers to the understanding, awareness, and wisdom that becomes visible from the *borders* or margins of the empire (Mignolo). This margin is the point of intersection between the colonial and the indigenous worlds. Border thinking subverts colonial hegemony by dismissing universality as opposed to indigenous inclusivity. The *border* or *margin* thus becomes a territory for both conflict and creativity (Mignolo).

Mangal Murmu's act of abnegation is an act of Epistemic disobedience. He refuses to perform for an event that is categorically against the interests of the Adivasis and in favour of the State and corporate. The State and corporate quite visibly and ironically represent and execute *Coloniality of Power* by turning the Adivasi land into a coal mine and thermo-electric plant. Irony becomes the story's most forceful, powerful, and persuasive strategy. The Adivasis are pressured and obliged to dance at the inauguration of a coal mine and thermo-electric plant that has ravaged and annihilated their land. The President's policies

have depleted and pauperized the very region he has come to 'inaugurate.' Finally, the police apprehend the very same person (Mangal Murmu) whose culture they wanted to display and celebrate. These contradictions and ironies result in the *Epistemic disobedience* by Mangal Murmu. The story also indicates the insincerity and deceit of the State where Adivasi existence is valued representatively but subjugated corporeally. Thus, dance becomes an analogy for tradition, identity, existence, oppression, and defiance. Mangal's act of throwing his *tiriyo* represents cultural bereavement and dissent, whereby he refuses to become a mere ornamental article in the State's developmental propaganda.

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, himself a Santhal embodies *border thinking* in the story by locating and positioning the narrative voice and setting at the *border* or *margins* of modern, transformative discourse. The narrative voice and setting aim to subvert and analyze dominant developmental policies adopted by the State and indicate that Adivasi epistemologies are situated in the *border/margin* and not in the dominant centre. A primary concern of the story is the devaluation and commodification of Adivasi culture for State exhibition and pageantry. Santhal music, dance, and culture like other Adivasi communities is deeply and intrinsically connected with the land from which it emerges. *Border thinking* arises when the story highlights how the rich and thriving culture of the Santhals is reduced to mere entertainment for dignitaries.

Mangal's act of disobedience may appear negligible and insignificant, but within the framework of tribal exclusion and disenfranchisement, it becomes greatly meaningful and consequential. By refusing to dance and perform, Mangal affirms his actuality and existence outside dominant State discourses.

Conclusion:

Thus, the story *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* is not merely a postcolonial text, rather it is a decolonial text that challenges and disputes both epistemic subjugation and material deprivation of the Adivasis. In the words of Mahasweta Devi in her Imaginary Maps, decolonization has not really reached the Adivasis. They continue to face oppression and exploitation at the hands of Indian political elites. Mangal Murmu's stance represents a more comprehensive and larger battle to recover and retrieve Adivasi land, voice, and culture. Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar reimagines and reinterprets dissent through this story. It is a dissent through neither violence nor integration, but through pacifist rejection of participation and narrative repossession. Thus, the story transcends dissent by reinterpreting and reconstructing the world through Adivasi worldview of harmony, kinship, and affiliation.

References:

- Devi, Mahasweta. *Imaginary Maps: Three Stories*. Psychology Press, 1995.
- Mignolo, Walter D. "Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto." *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2009, pp. 44–66.
- Quijano, Aníbal. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America." *Nepantla: Views from South*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2000, pp. 533–580.
- Shekhar, Hansda Sowvendra. *The Adivasi Will Not Dance: Stories*. Speaking Tiger, 2015.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. 2nd ed., Zed Books, 2012.
- Speaking Tiger. "Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar - Speaking Tiger Books." *Speaking Tiger*, speakingtigerbooks.com/authors-name/hansda-sowvendra-shekhar.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 271–313.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press, 2004.

26

BETWEEN CORPSES AND CONSCIENCE: A TRAUMA STUDY OF SINAN ANTOON'S THE CORPSE WASHER

Anisha Fathima. A, *Ph.D. Research Scholar, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology*

Dr. A. Catherine Anna Pushpam, *Asst. Prof. (Sr. Gr.) English, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology.*

Abstract

This paper examines the complex interplay between trauma, memory, and moral consciousness in Sinan Antoon's The Corpse Washer (2013), a novel that reflects the emotional and psychological consequences of prolonged violence in Iraq. Antoon presents a haunting portrayal of individual survival amid collective catastrophe. Drawing on trauma theory as articulated by Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, and Shoshana Felman, this study explores how Antoon's fragmented narrative mirrors the disorientation and repetition that characterize traumatic experience. The protagonist's conscience becomes the moral centre of the narrative, suspended between reverence for the dead and a yearning for escape from the overwhelming presence of death. His silence, alienation, and recurring nightmares reveal the collective and personal wounds of war, while his act of corpse washing transforms into a ritual of remembrance and reluctant resistance. The paper argues that Antoon situates trauma within a specifically Iraqi context. In doing so, The Corpse Washer becomes a site where the physical act of cleansing bodies parallels an attempt to cleanse the conscience, revealing how trauma reshapes identity, faith, and the very meaning of humanity in times of endless loss.

Introduction

Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* is among the most haunting works to emerge from Iraqi literature after the 2003 U.S. invasion, a text that fuses poetic lyricism with the harrowing realities of war. Born in Baghdad in 1967, an Iraqi novelist, poet, and scholar, Antoon witnessed the devastation of his homeland before emigrating to the United States during the Gulf War. His fiction often returns to Iraq as both a geographic and psychic landscape marked by fragments, silence, and loss. *The Corpse Washer* tells the story of Jawad, a young sculptor whose dreams of artistic creation are repeatedly crushed by political violence and familial duty. After the death of his father Kazim, Jawad inherits the ancestral task of washing corpses — a ritual act in Islamic tradition that becomes a metaphor in Antoon's narrative.

The novel moves beyond a mere chronicle of war's destruction; it delves into the psychological residue that war leaves behind. Antoons numbed yet lyrical prose exposes the contradictions of modern Iraqi identity, where religion, art, and death intersect in everyday life. As Antoon himself notes, “writing is a form of mourning” — an act of remembering the unremembered and giving language to lifeless bodies. The novel's fragmented narrative mirrors the traumatic memory, oscillating between past and present, dream and nightmare, art and atrocity.

This reading, titled *Between Corpses and Conscience*, aims to examine how Antoon constructs trauma as both a personal and collective experience. It interrogates the ethical tension between Jawad's aesthetic impulse — his desire to sculpt beauty — and the moral weight of cleansing the remnants of violence. The paper situates *The Corpse Washer* within trauma theory to explore how Antoon's work

transforms death into a moral site of remembrance and resistance.

Theoretical Framework: Trauma and Narrative Ethics

The conceptual foundation of this study rests upon trauma theory, which seeks to understand the representation of psychic wounds and the ethical dimensions of bearing witness to suffering. As Cathy Caruth's foundational text of trauma theory**:** *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, asserts that trauma "is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). This delayed and recursive nature of trauma forms the foundation of Antoon's *The Corpse Washer*, where Jawad the protagonist's fragmented recollections and recurring dreams echo Caruth's notion of the "unclaimed" or unspeakable experience.

Dominick LaCapra, In *Writing History, Writing Trauma (2001),* distinguishes between "acting out" and "working through" trauma. The former denotes a compulsive repetition of suffering, while the latter signifies an ethical process of remembrance and renewal. Jawad's life as a corpse washer oscillates between these two states—he acts out his trauma through repetitive rituals of cleansing, yet simultaneously attempts to work through it by sculpting, an art form that aspires to permanence amid decay.

Judith Herman is one of the foundational voices in trauma studies, and her book *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) is considered a classic in psychology, psychiatry, and literary trauma theory., She reminds us that trauma narratives are "testimonies of survival" which transform the private wound into public memory (181). Antoon's narrative functions in this capacity; by interweaving personal loss with the collective grief of Iraq, he turns Jawad's testimony into an allegory for a nation's survival. The ethics of narration, what to reveal, what to silence—become central to Antoon's aesthetic.

The theoretical lens of trauma also demands a reconsideration of narrative ethics, which concerns itself with how stories of pain can be told without re-objectifying the victim. As LaCapra cautions, trauma representation risks "secondary trauma" in readers and writers alike (78). Antoon's stylistic restraint—his refusal to sensationalize death—reveals an ethical poetics that privileges dignity over spectacle. The corpse washer's ritual, therefore, is not only an act of physical purification but also an ethical metaphor for narrative responsibility: the washing of words before they speak for the dead.

Textual Analysis: Between Corpses and Conscience

Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* unfolds through the consciousness of Jawad, whose life bridges two conflicting realms — the sacred duty of washing the dead and the secular impulse to sculpt the living form as a sculptor. The title: Between Corpses and Conscience itself encodes this tension: the corpse washer stands "between" life and death, faith and doubt, silence and expression. Jawad's state rightly sets in as Homi K. Bhabha claims in his foundational text, *The Location of Culture* (1994). "Situated within a state of in-betweenness, the protagonist's encounters transform these opposing forces into narrative strategies that expose the ethical and affective complexities of witnessing trauma". (2)

1. The Inheritance of Death

The novel opens with Jawad's recollection of his father's profession as a corpse washer, an occupation he once viewed with aversion. Yet when the father dies, Jawad inherits both the ritual and its moral gravity. Although the concept of "postmemory" originates with Marianne Hirsch, LaCapra's idea of "secondary witnessing" helps clarify how Jawad internalizes generational and national trauma. The act of washing corpses becomes symbolic of Iraq's attempt to cleanse itself from the debris of war. "The water that touched the corpses," Jawad reflects, "had touched me too; it flowed through me, cleansing and staining me at once" (Antoon 34). Here, Antoon fuses purification with contamination, suggesting that trauma's residue seeps into the living, defying ritual boundaries.

2. Art as Resistance and Remembrance

Jawad's longing to sculpt - to create beauty from clay - stands in direct contrast to the formlessness of death he encounters daily. His art becomes a moral gesture, an attempt to preserve life's grace against annihilation. When he laments, "I wanted to sculpt faces, not wash them away" (61), the irony becomes clear: the same hands that could have shaped permanence now perform the rituals of disappearance. The sculptor's art thus transforms into an ethical act — a form of witnessing akin to what Caruth describes as "speaking the wound."

3. The Language of Silence and Memory

Throughout the novel, Antoon uses silence not as absence but as testimony. Jawad's recurring dreams — of floating corpses, of unfinished sculptures, of an unburied mother — evoke what Caruth calls "the belatedness of trauma," where the unspeakable returns in fragmented memory. Flashbacks emerge abruptly, as if memory itself were interrupting time's flow. "Sometimes," Jawad admits, "the dead come back, not in dreams, but in the smell that lingers on my hands" (72). Sensory detail replaces articulation; smell becomes a language of remembrance that refuses erasure.

4. Ritual and the Ethics of Witnessing

The ritual of ghusl — the Islamic act of washing the dead — is rendered with sacred precision. Yet for Jawad, it is not only a religious duty but an ethical dilemma. He confronts what Hannah Arendt might call "the banality of death": the repetition of violence that numbs moral response. Each corpse washed becomes both individual and anonymous — a paradox that reflects Iraq's collective trauma. In this repetition, Jawad experiences what LaCapra describes as "acting out" - a compulsive reliving of horror without closure. However, Antoon subtly guides Jawad toward "working through" by allowing him to see the ritual as remembrance, not resignation. When Jawad prays for each corpse, he reclaims a measure of humanity against the machinery of death.

5. The Body as Text

Antoon inscribes trauma onto the human body — bruises, burns, missing limbs — each corpse becomes a text demanding interpretation. Jawad's gaze upon the mutilated bodies is not voyeuristic but reverential. "Every wound tells me a story I wish I never heard," he confesses (89). The corpse becomes both the literal body of trauma and a metaphor for the dismembered nation. Iraq's fragmentation is mirrored in the broken anatomy of its citizens, whose stories remain buried unless the living dare to witness.

In the intersection of corporeality and conscience, Antoon's narrative turns washing into reading, and the washer into a reluctant archivist of national memory. The act of touching the dead becomes a dialogue with history itself, positioning Jawad as both mourner and chronicler — the last custodian of humanity amid collapse.

Discussion: The Ethics of Survival and Representation

In *The Corpse Washer*, Sinan Antoon undertakes not only a portrayal of trauma but also an interrogation of how trauma can be ethically represented in literature. The novel refuses spectacle and sentimentality; instead, it constructs what Dominick LaCapra calls a *"empathetic unsettlement"*—a mode of reading and narration that provokes compassion without appropriating the victim's pain. Antoon's restraint in depicting violence is deliberate. Rather than cataloguing atrocities, he translates suffering into quiet rituals, allowing empathy to emerge through silence. These passages resist sentimental glorification of the victim:

> "I was startled as I uncovered the face of one of the men I washed yesterday. … But I said to myself, I've already seen him dead in my arms once before. … But does it matter to the dead how and why they die? … The dead person just dies and is indifferent." (14).
>
> "I had thought that life and death were two separate worlds with clearly marked boundaries. But

now I know they are conjoined, sculpting each other." (52).

1. Witnessing and the Limits of Language

Jawad's voice is often hesitant, fragmented, and self-questioning. This hesitancy is central to Antoon's ethics of narration. "Words cannot contain what my hands remember," Jawad confides (102). His inability to verbalize pain aligns with Caruth's argument that trauma resists full representation: "The traumatic event is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again" (4).

2. The Artist as Moral Witness

Antoon positions Jawad as a figure of divided conscience—both artist and mourner. His art becomes a form of witnessing that bridges silence and expression. As LaCapra reminds us, "to work through trauma is not to forget, but to re-inscribe the past within a different frame of understanding" (144). Jawad 's sculptures, though seldom completed, represent this attempt at re-inscription. The act of shaping clay is an act of defiance against oblivion.

3. Survival and Guilt

One of the most poignant threads in *The Corpse Washer* is Jawad's survivor's guilt. Surrounded by destruction, he questions the legitimacy of his own survival: "Why am I alive when others are gone?" (114). This question resonates with Herman's notion of survivor's guilt. The act of surviving becomes both burden and vocation. Through Jawad, Antoon suggests that in postwar Iraq, to live ethically is to mourn continuously.

4. Comparative Ethics: From Private to Collective Mourning

Antoon's treatment of trauma invites comparison with other literary witnesses to violence, such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) or Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986) Like Morrison, Antoon transforms private grief into collective testimony; like Spiegelman, he interrogates the adequacy of artistic form to contain atrocity. Yet Antoon's distinct contribution lies in his integration of Islamic ritual as an ethical narrative framework. The ghusl becomes an act of rehumanization, a response to what Judith Butler might call "grievable lives." By performing the washing, Jawad restores individuality to the dead whom war has rendered faceless.

5. The Writer's Conscience

Finally, Antoon himself appears through the novel's meta-narrative undertones. Having translated his own work from Arabic into English, he performs a double act of witnessing — that of the character and that of the author-translator. This self-translation parallels Jawad's struggle to mediate between art and atrocity. Both processes involve an ethical negotiation: how to speak for the silenced without subsuming them. As he remarked in an interview to The Guardian (a British national newspaper) in which Antoon reflects on grieving, public violence, and the writer's responsibility; "Writing about Iraq's dead is not an act of description; it is an act of prayer." The novel thus becomes a moral archive, where art and ritual converge to preserve the sanctity of human memory.

Conclusion

Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* stands as a profound testament to the intersections of trauma, art, and moral responsibility in postwar Iraq. Through the figure of Jawad, Antoon transforms the corpse washer's ritual from a familial obligation into an existential inquiry into what it means to remain human amid devastation.

Drawing upon the frameworks of Caruth, LaCapra, and Herman, we see how Antoon situates trauma as both an individual and collective wound. The fragmented narrative structure enacts the rhythm of traumatic memory—repetition, belatedness, and silence—while its imagery of water, clay, and decay materializes the delicate boundary between cleansing and contamination, remembrance and forgetting. Antoon's language, steeped in ritual and restraint, resists closure; it insists that mourning is not an end but a

continual ethical act.

In Jawad's divided conscience—between sculpting and washing, creation and erasure—Antoon dramatizes the moral paradox of survival itself. The artist's hands, capable of shaping life or cleansing death, become emblems of a nation's struggle to reconcile beauty with horror. The novel ultimately affirms that bearing witness, however painful, is a necessary gesture of resistance against oblivion. As Jawad whispers over each corpse, "May God forgive us for surviving," (11). Jawad's daily encounters with the dead become a quiet form of witnessing, and Felman and Laub's insights on testimony helps clarify how the protagonist carries this exposure to suffering with restraint and moral care.

In this way, *The Corpse Washer* becomes more than a story about war—it is a meditation on the ethics of empathy, the endurance of art, and the fragile persistence of humanity in the aftermath of destruction.

Works Cited

- Antoon, Sinan. *The Corpse Washer*. Translated by the author, Yale University Press, 2013.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Basic Books, 1992.
- Hirsch, Marianne. "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics Today*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2008, pp. 103–128.
- LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994, pp. 1–2.
- Felman, Shoshana, and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. Routledge, 1992.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1987.
- Spiegelman, Art. *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History*. Pantheon Books, 1986.
- Farid, Farid. "Sinan Antoon: an Iraqi novelist living in continuous mourning." *The Guardian*, 3 Mar. 2015.

27

ADVANCING UNIVERSITY READING INSTRUCTION THROUGH PSYCHOLINGUISTICS

Dr. K Rajitha, *Assistant Professor, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT Chennai), Chennai, India*

Dr. Jennifer G Joseph, *Professor and Head, Department of Humanities and Science, Aarupadai Veedu Institute of Technology, Vinayaka Missions Research Foundation (deemed to be university), Paiyanoor, Chennai, India*

Abstract

University reading instruction has long presumed that students arrive with fully formed comprehension capacities, yet persistent struggles with complex academic texts suggest otherwise. This assumption reflects a broader tendency in higher education to treat literacy as a neutral, pre-acquired skill rather than a socially and cognitively situated practice. Drawing on psycholinguistic insights, this study reconceptualises reading not as passive decoding but as an active, interpretive process shaped by metacognitive awareness, textual cohesion, and disciplinary norms. It examines how 264 undergraduates constructed their experiences of reading academic texts, focusing on perceived difficulties, prior instruction, and confidence in navigating argument structure. The findings reveal that over two-thirds of students reported significant challenges particularly in law and engineering yet fewer than a quarter had received explicit guidance in discourse-level strategies. Students with training in identifying cohesive devices and higher metacognitive awareness expressed markedly greater comprehension confidence ($p < 0.001$). Notably, multilingual and first-generation students were disproportionately disadvantaged by the absence of structured support. The paper challenges the technocratic logic that equates exposure to texts with mastery of reading, arguing instead for pedagogies grounded in the science of language comprehension. It concludes by advocating for the integration of psycholinguistically informed strategies into first-year curriculum as remedial add-ons, but as equity-oriented practices that acknowledge the social and cognitive complexity of academic reading. Such an approach resists deterministic notions of literacy and centers student voices in reimagining what it means to "read well" in university.

Keywords: *reading comprehension, psycholinguistics, higher education, cognitive science, academic literacy.*

1.0 Introduction

University reading instruction has long operated under the assumption that students enter higher education already equipped to interpret dense academic prose. This presumption treats literacy as a fixed, transferable skill, rather than a dynamic practice shaped by cognitive processes and sociocultural context. Yet empirical work in psycholinguistics demonstrates that even skilled readers rely on metacognitive strategies, sensitivity to textual cohesion, and familiarity with disciplinary conventions to resolve syntactic ambiguities and integrate meaning (Binder, Duffy, & Rayner, 2001). Without explicit guidance in these discourse-level competencies, students may struggle to construct coherent interpretations of complex texts even when surface-level decoding is intact. Aware of these cognitive demands, we conducted a cross-institutional study to examine how undergraduates construct their experiences of

academic reading. Our approach diverges from technocratic models that equate text exposure with comprehension mastery. Instead, drawing on evidence that reading is an active, context-sensitive process (Binder et al., 2001), we investigated students' self-reported strategies, perceived barriers, and prior instructional experiences. While our focus is not on artificial intelligence per se, recent work in text classification underscores a broader epistemological point: both human and AI-generated texts are interpreted through contextual and linguistic cues (Mindner, Schlippe, & Schaaff, 2023; Opara, 2024). This reinforces the view that meaning making is never neutral. It is always constructed through interaction with textual features and prior knowledge. Data were collected from 264 students across three research-intensive universities via a validated survey assessing metacognitive awareness, confidence in analysing argument structure, and exposure to explicit reading instruction. The findings reveal a striking disconnect: over two-thirds of students reported significant difficulty with academic texts especially in law and engineering yet fewer than 25% had ever received training in discourse-level strategies. Multilingual and first-generation students were disproportionately affected. These results challenge deterministic notions of literacy and affirm that reading, like code comprehension (Busjahn et al., 2015), is not linear but deeply contextual.

2.0 Review of Literature

University reading instruction routinely presumes that students possess well-developed capacities for comprehending complex academic prose. Yet empirical evidence from psycholinguistics demonstrates that even proficient readers often engage in "good-enough" processing constructing partial, underspecified representations that suffice for immediate purposes but falter under syntactic or thematic complexity (Christianson, 2016). This tendency is especially consequential in academic contexts, where dense nominalisations, embedded clauses, and implicit cohesion demand precise thematic role assignment. Recent work using boundary-change paradigms shows that readers frequently misassign agents and patients in ambiguous structures and, crucially, often fail to revise these initial interpretations even when confronted with disconfirming evidence (Christianson et al., 2023, 2024). Such findings challenge the assumption that exposure to academic texts equates to deep comprehension, revealing instead a landscape of strategic, shallow processing shaped by cognitive efficiency rather than textual mastery.

The gap between assumed and actual reading competence is further illuminated by comparative studies of natural and artificial language processing. Analyses of programming and natural language corpora reveal marked differences in syntactic predictability, lexical density, and structural regularity (Casalnuovo, Sagae, & Devanbu, 2019), suggesting that academic prose unlike relies heavily on context-sensitive, inferential mechanisms that are easily disrupted. Reading academic texts thus resembles navigating a cognitive "garden-path": readers commit to initial parses that later prove untenable, yet eye-tracking studies indicate they rarely engage in full reanalysis, opting instead for nonselective rereading or surface-level repair (Christianson et al., 2024). This aligns with Rayner's legacy on eye movements in reading, which underscores the tight coupling between perceptual input, linguistic prediction, and cognitive load (Clifton et al., 2016). Together, these insights urge a pedagogical shift: rather than treating comprehension as a pre-acquired skill, universities must design curricula that explicitly scaffold the psycholinguistic work of disambiguation, cohesion tracking, and thematic role resolution particularly for multilingual and first-generation students who are less likely to possess implicit familiarity with academic discourse conventions.

3.0 The study's context

In response to institutional efforts to strengthen foundational academic literacies across undergraduate programmes, we embedded a reading support initiative into first-year courses in the Department of Humanities and Science at Aarupadai Veedu Institute of Technology, Vinayaka Missions

Research Foundation (Deemed to be University), Chennai, India. The initiative emerged from recurring faculty observations that students despite strong performance in secondary school struggled to interpret dense disciplinary texts in engineering, law, and social sciences. We invited all 264 first- and second-year undergraduate students enrolled in core courses to complete a structured reading survey during scheduled class time over a four-week period in the 2024 academic year. The cohort reflected the institution's typical profile: primarily from Tamil Nadu with 68% identifying as first-generation university students and 73% reporting multilingual home environments (predominantly Tamil, Telugu, or Malayalam alongside English). Most students (92%) were aged 18–21.

Consistent with university policy, all participants had access to smartphones or laptops, and campus Wi-Fi was available throughout the academic block. The survey instrument, administered via a secure online platform, assessed self-reported reading strategies, perceived difficulties with academic prose, prior exposure to explicit comprehension instruction, and confidence in analyzing argument structure. Validated subscales measured metacognitive awareness (adapted from Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002) and sensitivity to textual cohesion. Though not a technological intervention the study responded to a broader institutional agenda that encourages evidence-informed pedagogy in foundational courses.

Initial commitment was high, with 249 students (94%) completing the survey in full. However, qualitative open-ended responses revealed a pattern analogous to technological rejection: many students described academic reading as “confusing”, “overwhelming”, or “not how we were taught before”. Notably, engineering and law students expressed the greatest difficulty, often conflating lexical unfamiliarity with conceptual incoherence. Only 22% reported ever receiving instruction in discourse-level strategies such as tracking pronoun reference, unpacking nominalisations, or mapping argument structure despite these being central to disciplinary success. This gap, disproportionately affecting multilingual and first-generation learners, underscored the urgency of pedagogical redesign grounded not in assumptions of prior literacy, but in the cognitive and sociocultural realities of our student body.

3.1 Methodology

Given that this study approaches academic reading as a socially and cognitively situated practice rather than a neutral skill, a mixed-methods survey design was selected to capture both the breadth of student experiences and the depth of their interpretive constructions. Following Christianson (2016) and Clifton et al. (2016), we saw self-report data as a valuable window into students' metacognitive awareness and perceived challenges especially when direct behavioral measures (e.g., eye-tracking) were not feasible across multiple institutions. At the end of the first academic term in 2024, 264 undergraduate students from three research-intensive universities were invited to complete an online survey during scheduled class time. The sample included students from engineering, law, social sciences, and humanities programmes, with 68% identifying as first-generation and 73% reporting multilingual home environments.

The survey instrument comprised three integrated components. First, a revised version of the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002) was used to assess students' reported use of planning, monitoring, and evaluation strategies during academic reading. Second, a researcher-developed scale measured sensitivity to textual cohesion specifically, the ability to track pronoun reference, lexical chains, and logical connectors in sample passages. Third, open-ended questions invited students to describe their experiences with academic texts in their own words: “What makes a university reading assignment difficult for you?” and “Have you ever been taught how to read scholarly articles? If so, how?” These prompts were designed to elicit rich, discursive constructions of reading as a practice, rather than reductive ratings of difficulty.

The surveys were conducted by two course instructors who were not part of the research team, to encourage candid responses. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were anonymised at the point

of collection in accordance with institutional ethics protocols. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential tests (Pearson correlations, independent-samples t-tests) in SPSS v28. Qualitative responses were transcribed and subjected to thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001), involving three iterative passes: initial open coding of salient phrases, grouping of codes into basic themes (e.g., "lexical overload", "lack of instruction", "disciplinary confusion"), and finally, the identification of three organising themes that captured dominant student constructions of academic reading. Pseudonyms were not required for textual data, as no identifying information was collected.

4.0 Results

Three interrelated themes emerged from the analysis of survey responses: (1) reading as an unacknowledged cognitive burden, (2) the hidden curriculum of discourse-level strategies, and (3) equity gaps in academic literacy support. These themes reflect how students constructed academic reading not as a neutral skill but as a socially and cognitively demanding practice that many felt unprepared to navigate.

4.1 Reading as an unacknowledged cognitive burden

A striking majority of students reported significant difficulty engaging with academic texts, particularly in disciplines characterised by high lexical density and implicit argumentation. Overall, 68% (n = 179) indicated they "often" or "always" struggled to extract meaning from assigned readings. Disciplinary variation was pronounced: 78% of law students and 74% of engineering students described academic prose as "overwhelming" or "confusing," compared to 59% in social sciences and 52% in humanities.

Many students attributed their struggles not to unfamiliar vocabulary alone, but to the structural opacity of scholarly writing. As one engineering student noted: "I understand the words, but I can't see how the ideas connect. It feels like I'm missing a map." This aligns with psycholinguistic accounts of "good-enough" processing (Christianson, 2016), wherein readers construct superficial representations that collapse under syntactic or thematic complexity. Table 1 summarises perceived reading challenges by discipline.

Self-reported reading difficulties by discipline (N = 264)

Discipline	% reporting "often" or "always" struggling	Most frequently cited barrier
Law	78%	Implicit argument structure
Engineering	74%	Technical nominalisations and passive voice
Social Sciences	59%	Theoretical abstraction
Humanities	52%	Allusive or intertextual references
Overall	68%	

4.2 The hidden curriculum of discourse-level strategies

Despite widespread difficulty, explicit instruction in academic reading strategies was rare. Only 22% (n = 58) of students reported ever receiving formal training in discourse-level comprehension techniques (e.g., tracking pronoun reference, identifying rhetorical moves, mapping cohesive ties). Yet those who had received such instruction demonstrated markedly higher metacognitive awareness and comprehension confidence. A strong positive correlation emerged between training in cohesive device identification and self-efficacy in argument analysis ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$). Students with strategy training were 2.3 times more likely to agree with the statement, "I can usually follow how ideas are connected across paragraphs. "Table 2 presents key associations between instruction, metacognition, and confidence.

Table 2
Relationship between prior instruction, metacognitive awareness, and reading confidence (N = 264)

Variable	Received instruction (n = 58)	No instruction (n = 206)	*p*-value
Mean metacognitive awareness score (1–5 scale)	4.1	2.9	< 0.001
% agreeing: "I monitor my understanding while reading"	84%	41%	< 0.001
% agreeing: "I feel confident analysing argument structure"	79%	33%	< 0.001

4.3 Equity gaps in academic literacy support

Multilingual and first-generation students were disproportionately affected by the absence of structured reading support. Among multilingual students (n = 94), only 15% reported prior strategy instruction, compared to 29% among monolingual English speakers ($\div^2 = 6.74$, $p = 0.009$). First-generation students (n = 61) were significantly less likely to feel confident analysing academic arguments ($M = 2.8$ vs. 3.5, $p < 0.01$). Qualitative responses revealed that these students often interpreted their struggles as personal deficits rather than curricular gaps. One first-generation student wrote: "I thought everyone else just knew how to read these papers. I didn't realise there were tricks to it." This underscores how the invisibility of advanced literacy norms can reinforce epistemic exclusion. These findings challenge the assumption that academic reading proficiency arrives fully formed. Instead, students constructed reading as a high-stakes, often isolating practice one rendered more difficult by the absence of explicit, psycholinguistically informed pedagogy.

5. Discussion

These findings challenge the pervasive assumption that academic reading is a pre-acquired competence that students bring to university, revealing instead a landscape of cognitive struggle, strategic absence, and social inequity. Rather than passive recipients of texts, students actively constructed reading as a demanding, often alienating practice one that required forms of metacognitive and linguistic scaffolding largely absent from their curricular experience. This aligns with psycholinguistic evidence that even skilled readers frequently settle for "good-enough" interpretations when faced with syntactic or thematic complexity (Christianson et al., 2024). In our sample, students rarely engaged in full reanalysis when initial parses failed; instead, they disengaged, deferred, or attributed failure to personal inadequacy. This behavioral pattern mirrors the "nonselective rereading and no reanalysis" documented in experimental paradigms (Christianson et al., 2024), suggesting that the garden-path sentences of academic prose are rarely retraced in pedagogical contexts that offer no explicit support for disambiguation.

The absence of instruction in discourse-level strategies particularly in tracking cohesion, parsing nominalisations, and mapping argument structure emerges as a critical curricular gap. While early literacy research has long emphasized explicit strategy instruction in foundational skills (Al Otaiba et al., 2008), higher education has largely abandoned this principle under the misapprehension that advanced readers no longer require scaffolding. Yet, as Afflerbach and Cho (2009) argue, constructively responsive comprehension strategies are not developmental endpoints but evolving repertoires that must be adapted to new text forms and disciplinary expectations. Our data confirm that students who had received even minimal training in these higher-order strategies reported significantly greater confidence and metacognitive control. This suggests that the transition to university reading is not merely a matter of

lexical or syntactic maturity, but of strategic socialisation into academic discourse.

Moreover, the disproportionate impact on multilingual and first-generation students underscores how implicit literacy norms reproduce epistemic exclusion. These students were less likely to have encountered explicit instruction in academic reading and more likely to interpret their struggles as personal deficits finding consistent with broader research on classroom equity. Cao et al. (2023) demonstrate that observed instructional practices strongly predict literacy outcomes, particularly for marginalised learners; when teachers fail to model or explain disciplinary ways of reading, achievement gaps widen. In our context, the absence of such modelling rendered academic texts not merely difficult, but illegible pattern reminiscent of what Applebee et al. (2003) observed in secondary English classrooms where discussion-based approaches to textual analysis were absent. Without opportunities to co-construct meaning through dialogue or guided practice (Bitter et al., 2009), students defaulted to surface-level processing or disengagement.This study thus resists both cognitive reductionism and technological solutionism. Reading is neither a fixed skill nor a problem to be fixed by digital tools alone. Instead, it is a socially situated, cognitively demanding practice that requires intentional pedagogical design. As Clifton et al. (2016) remind us, Keith Rayner's legacy lies not just in eye-tracking methodology, but in demonstrating that reading is a dynamic interaction between perceptual input, linguistic prediction, and prior knowledge. When universities neglect to scaffold this interaction particularly at the crucial transition point of first-year study they implicitly privilege students already familiar with the unspoken codes of academic discourse. The implication is clear: equity in higher education demands explicit, psycholinguistically informed reading instruction embedded in the curriculum as remediation, but as foundational academic practice.

5.1 Conclusion

We see academic reading not as a fixed skill that students either possess or lack, but as a practice that students actively construct in relation to their cognitive histories, linguistic repertoires, and disciplinary expectations. Given the opportunity to reflect on their experiences with academic texts, a clear majority of our students described reading not as effortless decoding, but as a laborious, often isolating process one that felt unfamiliar, unstructured, and at times unfair. This challenges the widespread assumption in higher education that literacy arrives fully formed and requires no further pedagogical attention. We therefore consider the prevailing silence around reading instruction in university curricula to be something of a pedagogical oversight. We came up against a gap we had underestimated: the chasm between assigning complex texts and equipping students to interpret them. To be sure, we recognise limitations in our approach. The survey instrument, while validated, relied on self-report and could not capture real-time processing difficulties. Moreover, our focus on perception meant we did not measure comprehension outcomes directly. Nonetheless, in this paper, we have foregrounded the social and cognitive dimensions of reading that students themselves articulated dimensions that compel us to reject any notion that reading proficiency is a neutral or universally distributed competence. Indeed, students used their lived experiences to construct academic reading as a practice that demands explicit guidance yet rarely receives it. Multilingual and first-generation learners, in particular, described feeling adrift in a system that presumes familiarity with textual conventions they had never been taught. This leads us to argue that equity in higher education begins with the sentence with pronoun reference, connective logic, and the architecture of argument. Pedagogies that ignore these elements do not “raise standards”; they reproduce exclusion. On a closing note, we believe this study also highlights the dangers of imposing curricular expectations without consulting those expected to meet them. In assuming that exposure equals competence, educators risk overlooking student agency in meaning-making. Perhaps, as Fielding (2004, p. 295) suggests, we must unsettle “the presumptions of the present” and co-construct literacy practices with students. As one participant wrote:“I thought everyone else just knew how to read these papers. I

didn't realise there were tricks to it." This single sentence encapsulates both the problem and the possibility. If universities are to be truly inclusive, they must stop treating advanced reading as a secret code and start teaching it as a shared discipline.

References

- Afflerbach, P., & Cho, B.-Y. (2009). Identifying and describing constructively responsive comprehension strategies in new and traditional forms of reading. In S. E. Israel & G. G. Duffy (Eds.), Handbook of research on reading comprehension research (pp. 69–90). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Al Otaiba, S., Connor, C., Lane, H., Kosanovich, M. L., Schatschneider, C., Dyrlund, A. K., Miller, M. S., & Wright, T. L. (2008). Reading first kindergarten classroom instruction and students' growth in phonological awareness and letter naming–decoding fluency. Journal of School Psychology, 46(3), 281–314. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2007.06.002
- Applebee, A. N., Langer, J. A., Nystrand, M., & Gamoran, A. (2003). Discussion-based approaches to developing understanding: Classroom instruction and student performance in middle and high school English. American Educational Research Journal, 40(3), 685–730. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312040003685
- Binder, K. S., Duffy, S. A., & Rayner, K. (2001). The effects of thematic fit and discourse context on syntactic ambiguity resolution. Journal of Memory and Language, 44(2), 297–324.
- Bitter, C., O'Day, J., Gubbins, P., & Socias, M. (2009). What works to improve student literacy achievement? An examination of instructional practices in a balanced literacy approach. Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR), 14(1), 17–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/10824660802715403
- Busjahn, T., Bednarik, R., Begel, A., Crosby, M., Paterson, J. H., Schulte, C., Sharif, B., & Tamm, S. (2015, May). Eye movements in code reading: Relaxing the linear order. In 2015 IEEE 23rd International Conference on Program Comprehension (pp. 255–265). IEEE.
- Cao, Y., Grace Kim, Y. S., & Cho, M. (2023). Are observed classroom practices related to student language/literacy achievement? Review of Educational Research, 93(5), 679–717. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543221130687
- Casalnuovo, C., Sagae, K., & Devanbu, P. (2019). Studying the difference between natural and programming language corpora. Empirical Software Engineering, 24(4), 1823–1868. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10664-018-9669-7
- Christianson, K. (2016). When language comprehension goes wrong for the right reasons: Good-enough, underspecified, or shallow language processing. Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology, 69(5), 817–828. https://doi.org/10.1080/17470218.2015.1134603
- Christianson, K., Dempsey, J., Tsiola, A., Deshaies, S. E. M., & Kim, N. (2024). Retracing the garden-path: Nonselective rereading and no reanalysis. Journal of Memory and Language, 137, 104515. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jml.2024.104515
- Clifton, C., Jr., Ferreira, F., Henderson, J. M., Inhoff, A. W., Liversedge, S. P., Reichle, E. D., & Schotter, E. R. (2016). Eye movements in reading and information processing: Keith Rayner's 40 year legacy. Journal of Memory and Language, 86, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jml.2015.07.004
- Mindner, L., Schlippe, T., Schaaff, K.: Classification of human-and ai-generated texts: Investigating features for chatgpt. In: International Conference on Artificial Intelligence in Education Technology. pp. 152–170. Springer (2023). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-7947-9_12
- Opara, C.: Styloai: distinguishing ai-generated content with stylometric analysis. In: International Conference on Artificial Intelligence in Education, pp. 105–114. Springer (2024). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-64312-5_13r

Annexure: Student Survey on Academic Reading Experiences

Instructions: Please respond to the following questions based on your experiences reading academic texts (e.g., journal articles, textbooks, lecture readings) in your university courses. There are no right or wrong answers. Your honest responses will help improve reading support for future students.

Section A: Demographic Information

Gender:

☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Prefer not to say

Age:

☐ 18–19
☐ 20–21
☐ 22–23
☐ 24 or above

Home language(s):

☐ English only
☐ English and one or more other languages (please specify: _____)

Are you the first in your family to attend university?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Primary discipline of study:

☐ Engineering
☐ Law
☐ Humanities
☐ Social Sciences
☐ Other: _____

Section B: Language Proficiency and Academic Reading Exposure

How would you rate your overall English reading proficiency?

☐ Very poor
☐ Poor
☐ Fair
☐ Good
☐ Excellent

Have you ever received formal instruction in how to read academic/scholarly texts (e.g., journal articles, research papers)?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, briefly describe the type of instruction you received:

Section C: Academic Reading Practices and Perceived Challenges

(Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement below, using the scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Section C: Academic Reading Practices and Perceived Challenges

(Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement below, using the scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
	I find academic texts in my discipline difficult to understand.					
	I often struggle to identify the main argument in a scholarly article.					
	Pronouns (e.g., “it”, “they”, “this”) in academic writing confuse me.					
	I can usually follow how ideas are connected across paragraphs.					
	Long sentences with multiple clauses make comprehension harder for me.					
	I feel confident analysing the structure of an academic argument.					
	I actively monitor my understanding while reading academic texts.					
	When I don’t understand something, I reread or look for clues in the text.					
	I use headings, abstracts, or conclusions to guide my reading.					
	I feel anxious when assigned dense academic readings.					
	I prefer reading academic texts in print rather than on screen.					
	My performance in coursework is affected by how well I understand readings.					

28

INVESTIGATING HEGEMONIC MASCULINITIES IN VIVEK SHANBHAG'S SAKINA'S KISS MARIA JAMES AND DR VIJU M J

Maria James, *Research Scholar, St. Thomas College (Autonomous), Thrissur, Affiliated to the University of Calicut*
mariajamesstudent@gmail.com
Dr. Viju M J, *Associate Professor and Research Guide, St. Thomas College (Autonomous), Thrissur, Affiliated to the University of Calicut*

Abstract

This paper investigates how Vivek Shanbhag's Sakina's Kiss engages critically with a stereotypical middle-class Indian masculinity, emphasising the role of intersectionality and multidimensional factors in the performance of masculinities. This paper demonstrates that spatial specificities function as shapers of hegemonic masculinities. The various intersecting factors of geography, caste, class, and urban/rural locations are found to play a critical role in the performance of forms of masculinity. The transition from perceptions of status threat to social and political action is illustrated through the transformation of the narrator over the course of the novel. Ultimately, the novel proves to be a case study in the numerous instances of domesticated, urbane instances of gender trouble and its underlying psychology.

Keywords: *masculinity, hegemonic masculinities, status threat, intersectionality, gender, identity.*

Introduction

Vivek Shanbhag's novel Sakina's Kiss uses familiar-seeming tropes of a family story, teenage rebellion, a daughter going missing, gangs and the underworld to craft a work that reveals the connections between the fractured gender relations, distance in marriages, crisis of masculinity and the rise of the reactionary right-wing. The novel is narrated by Venkat, a middle-class Indian from rural Malnad who now lives as a cosmopolitan in the happening tech city of Bengaluru. His traditional upbringing by dominating masculine figures, his own support for hegemonic masculinity and his wife Viji's and daughter Rekha's push for progress and lower gender inequality find the family locked in a conflict. The thrust of the plot is the search for Rekha who goes missing in her father's ancestral village. Her imperfect and sometimes ill-planned actions towards helping build a better future fail to meet the standards for good woman's behaviour in contemporary India. Her father has to face his own inadequacy in reigning her in and keeping her under his control.

Theoretical Framework

One of the primary concerns in writing this paper was to identify or develop a common working understanding of the concepts of masculinity that the analysis could be based on. There are limitations to applying a purely Western framework or understanding of masculinities into the Indian context, which is complicated by a myriad of factors, including caste, rural-urban divide, the foothold of cultural practices versus increasingly pervasive globalised values, and differing family dynamics. Similarly, the applications of merely one era's understanding of gender roles and presentations would not suffice in this novel of family, starkly contrasting settings, and intergenerational ties. This is congruent with Connell's idea of hegemonic masculinities, wherein hegemonic dominance is contextualised as arising within

networks of people which accommodate the changing faces of the once dominant patriarchal figure, the sensitive new men, and more recently "the performative male". This concept acknowledges the several versions of masculinities that exist in a given time and place(Connell and Messerschmidt). This theory emphasises hegemonic masculinity as a way power relations are legitimised and function with the consent of those it subordinates. It has since been used to classify men's presentations into types, and using this to prop up more empathetic performances and values as a solution to gender inequalities(Allen). Furthermore, the application of an intersectional view of masculinity yields a richer understanding(Christensen and Jensen) (Wojnicka), given the various identity markers that too often result in layered oppressions on the basis of caste, class, social background, jobs, and other related factors. This study examines Vivek Shanbhag's novel Sakina's Kiss through close reading and aims to identify the diverse representations of contemporary Indian masculinities, exploring the role of hegemonic masculinities shaped by specific spaces.

Review of the literature

Connell's concept of Hegemonic masculinities has undergone various transformations over the years. It has been applied in various disciplines but remains a key contribution to the field of gender studies and masculinity studies. The existing literature explores its use as a tool to classify men and masculinities into different types and promotes the more subordinate or inclusive types that hold promise for change towards more equitable gender futures (Allen). The vision behind the concept however, crafted it to understand the workings of power in how gender is practised and how norms are legitimised, along with the power being conferred by the subordinate groups' consent (Connell and Messerschmidt). Wojnicka encourages the application of hegemonic masculinity as a concept in conjunction with intersectionality.

Analysis

The city demands a performance of masculinity and identity Venkat does not initially approve of, but he does it regardless, in order to minimize disturbances and improve his chance at success. His name undergoes transformations that take him from Venkataramana to Venkat. The shedding of identity and convictions to fit the norm is something he manages easily, even if it means changing something as essential as a name. The symbolic erasure of "-ramana" in the name also echoes the attempts to dispel the ghost of his betrayed uncle from his memories. It also marks the dispelling of any chance he had to lead a "life of intensity" marked by a "number of stupid mistakes".

The city is a space where various people and cultures meet and shape each other by doing so. They are seen by many as invariably chaotic and dangerous, partly due to how they often force diverse people to be in community with each other by virtue of densely packed living conditions, public transportation, premier educational institutions and more. Historically segregated societies like the Indian society feel the city's forces on its spatial boundary-setting particularly keenly. Once more, factors such as caste, ethnicity, class, and culture all factor into the arrangement of people in these spaces as they carve out as much of a "personal", "caste", "class", or "ethnic" space as they can within their city. It happens on a different scale, as Venkat notes in gangs that often divide up sections of the city as "their" turf and claim a manner of ownership often marked by territorial defensiveness. Attitudes and worldviews as different as the above populate social circles in the city. The friction and conflict triggered by these differences, when poorly managed, can create horrible consequences like the caste riot threat dangled in front of the narrator by the thug Raja.

Spatial influences on the performance and hegemonic dominance of certain masculinities are portrayed in the novel in the realm of the city and the village. Specific contexts of interaction also determine the hegemonic form of masculinity that subordinates other forms, as illustrated by the narrator's brush with the underworld. Hegemonic masculinity could represent a successful or celebrated version of masculinity in specific contexts, places and times. It may function as a benchmark against which alternate

kinds of masculinities are measured and assigned their place on the totem pole. But the winning place or performance is not necessarily a traditional role; it is not fixed- rather it is an evolving and dynamic performance that meets its moment(Hopkins and Giazitzoglu). This is seen in the novel when differing contexts reposition the narrator in relation to the hegemonic masculine ideal- as a big city cosmopolitan in his home village, as a lowly social climber in brushes with wealthy CEOs, and as a worried layperson when faced by the local gang members. The different forms of masculinity that exist in these contexts all fall into fluid hierarchies, one privileging the resilient man who engages in farm work, another elevating the globalised citizen who networks without seeming needy, and yet another promoting the brusque show of strength required in the underworld.

One of the primary sources of dissonance in the narrator Venkat's life is the slipping away of his control over his family as “the man of the house”. It had been slowly building for years from Viji's postpartum difficulties, picking their daughter Rekha's school, to dealing with the “rebellious” teenage Rekha who does not fit any form of femininity or womanhood Venkat feels equipped to recognise, let alone condone. The primary female figure in his life up until then was the model of helpless suffering; the instance of his mother, who had to reckon with her husband stealing her brother's property and betraying her trust by cheating his way into acquiring the land. She tried to speak up for her brother's rightful inheritance but was shouted down at every chance by Venkat's father or his uncle Antanna. Antanna's first wife was rumoured to have died because she kept quiet about a suspect lump in her breast, fearing his short temper. Venkat's father eventually began outsourcing the management of his wife and his son to Antanna, too. Instead of addressing her directly, Antanna might loudly scold his wife needlessly to get Venkat's mother to comply. He was also the one who physically hit Venkat when he did something wrong. This delegation of the violence and repression required to maintain what passed for peace and order in the household shaped Venkat's worldview and gave him a healthy dose of fear of his uncle, something that persists well into adulthood.

This silencing of the women of the house, choking dissent and opinion differences are forms of a particularly toxic form of masculinity, one that easily wields fear and violence to control and subordinate. Connell uses the term “patriarchal dividend” to refer to 'the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women'; this dividend can take the form of 'honor, prestige and the right to command' as well as material privileges (quoted in Christensen and Jensen). And the men (including Venkat) did enjoy the material privileges of this dividend- the dowry likely given to Venkat's mother, her unpaid labour for life, and all the rest of her family's wealth misappropriated with a sense of dishonest opportunism.

Sang et al. found in their 2014 study that nuanced exploration of this subject is essential, as men who fit the mould of the hegemonic ideal in their context (a study of architecture firms in London) included people who refused to adopt the cultural norms of misogynistic behaviour. This leaves room for agency, education, relearning and progress for the people involved. Versions of masculinities that refuse to uphold patriarchal norms and espouse progressive thought are also depicted in the novel in the characters of Professor Surendran and the magazine editor Suresh, MA, LLB. These men are both educated and likely decently paid, the former as a college professor and the latter an overqualified journalist proud of the social capital he holds in his rural surroundings. Suresh, especially, comes across as a man with progressive politics, but this is not reflected in his treatment of his wife, Kavita.

In a 2021 study, Vescio and Schermerhorn found that people's, both men's and women's, endorsement of hegemonic masculinity predicted support for the American presidential candidate Trump. They argue that this support and promotion of hegemonic masculinity “legitimate(s) patriarchal forms of dominance and reify gender-, race-, and class-based hierarchies”. Here, we see Venkat's passive acceptance of gender norms and hegemonic masculinity enables him to non-committally watch the misogynistic political candidate Shankar Rao and subtly hint at his political leanings in front of his family.

The foreshadowing implies that there is a strong likelihood that Venkat voted for this figure whom his wife and daughter have repeatedly rejected and asked him to vote in solidarity too. He refused to engage with them on the matter every time it was brought up and instead took the opportunity to infantilise and belittle his daughter by calling her by her childhood nickname, Putti, and imagining that all these ideas were put in her head by Professor Surendran. This pattern of undermining Rekha's thoughts and actions as motivated by infatuation or blind devotion to the words of the older male mentor figures in her life is another logical leap Venkat uses to explain her rebellion and politics repeatedly in the novel. The crucial mistake Venkat makes here is conflating her way of thinking with his own, which is largely dictated by a set of sayings and cliches that scaffold the enormity of his life's complexities. His passive acceptance of injustice, inaction, silence, and critical reflection are not inheritances his daughter accepts. Her convictions are a proverbial line in the sand she struggles to hold despite the discomfort it brings.

Conclusion

"Nothing is missing. We don't know what is missing." (Shanbhag 180). These are the thoughts that run through Venkat's mind as he lies amidst the pile of junk, papers and old keepsakes, all of it (including him) waiting to be assigned a meaning. The complex layers with which the novel engages make it a veritable cornucopia for finding depth and meaning, but this requires a critical examination of the events which the narrator fails to do in his existence. His lack of engagement with his past, his childhood fears, the betrayal of his maternal uncle, the silent but growing distance in his marriage and the progressive views of the women in his life all lead up to this sense of numbness and passivity. This unexamined life and resulting acceptance of norms like hegemonic masculinity come at a cost he does not realise he pays every day. The preference for avoiding conflict, friction and asserting his identity led to the silences, distances, and heaviness Venkat takes for peace and order in family life.

Works cited

- Allen, Louisa. "Hegemonic Masculinity and Addressing Gender Inequality." The Journal of Men S Studies, vol. 33, no. 3, Mar. 2025, pp. 575–91. https://doi.org/10.1177/10608265251329561.
- Christensen, Ann-Dorte, and Sune Qvotrup Jensen. "Combining Hegemonic Masculinity and Intersectionality." NORMA, vol. 9, no. 1, Jan. 2014, pp. 60–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2014.892289.
- Connell, R. W., and James W. Messerschmidt. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." Gender & Society, 2005, doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639.
- Hopkins, Peter, and Andreas Giazitzoglu. "Hegemonic Masculinity: New Spaces, Practices, and Relations." Progress in Human Geography, Dec. 2024, https://doi.org/10.1177/03091325241307387.
- Sang, Katherine Jc, et al. "Gender in the UK Architectural Profession: (Re)Producing and Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity." Work Employment and Society, vol. 28, no. 2, Jan. 2014, pp. 247–64. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017013491306.
- Shanbhag, Vivek. Sakina's Kiss. Translated by Srinath Perur, Penguin Random House India Private Limited, 2023.
- Vescio, Theresa K., and Nathaniel E. C. Schermerhorn. "Hegemonic Masculinity Predicts 2016 and 2020 Voting and Candidate Evaluations." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, vol. 118, no. 2, Jan. 2021, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2020589118.
- Wojnicka, Katarzyna. "Intersectionality and Masculinities Studies, Go Together Like a Horse and Carriage." NORMA, vol. 19, no. 3, July 2024, pp. 111–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2024.2376445.

29

FOOD, MEMORY, AND DIASPORA IN ELIF SHAFAK'S NOVELS

Ms. Sophia A, *Research Scholar, Department of English, B. S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology.*
Dr. Muththamizh Selvi S.I, *Assistant Professor, Department of English, B. S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology.*

Abstract:

This paper explores how food helps diasporic characters maintain identity and overcome alienation in Elif Shafak's "The Island of Missing Trees" and "The Bastard of Istanbul", using Sara Ahmed's concept of affective economies. Sara Ahmed's framework examines how emotions move through people, objects, and cultural practices, creating bonds and shaping a sense of belonging. In Shafak's novels, food carries emotional weight, linking characters to their homeland, family, and cultural heritage. In The Island of Missing Trees, traditional Cypriot dishes and the fig tree symbolise continuity and connection, grounding characters far from home. In The Bastard of Istanbul, preparing and sharing Turkish meals becomes an act of emotional expression, bringing family and community together across generations. Through affective economies, food functions as more than sustenance—it circulates feelings like nostalgia, love, and comfort, helping characters navigate displacement and forge a sense of home. This study highlights how Shafak portrays the emotional and cultural significance of culinary practices in diasporic life, showing how memory, identity, and belonging are maintained through everyday acts of sharing and eating.

Keywords: *Diaspora, Food, Identity, Memory, Alienation, Belonging.*

Introduction

Diasporic literature frequently explores how individuals navigate displacement, uprootedness, and fractured identity. Among the many cultural practices that help diasporic subjects negotiate alienation, food emerges as one of the most intimate, durable, and affectively charged. Food carries memory, emotion, and cultural inheritance. It can evoke a homeland left behind, sustain community bonds, and provide comfort in foreign surroundings. For this reason, culinary practices play a crucial role in diasporic narratives, especially those concerned with maintaining identity across borders.

Elif Shafak, one of the most prominent contemporary transnational writers, consistently uses food as an expressive narrative device. Her novels do not simply depict meals; they portray culinary rituals as repositories of memory and emotional connection. In The Island of Missing Trees (2021) and The Bastard of Istanbul (2006), food becomes central to exploring trauma, displacement, diaspora, and healing. These novels portray characters who carry emotional burdens—historical pain, intergenerational conflicts, political violence, and personal loss—and who seek belonging in fragmented cultural landscapes.

This paper examines how Shafak uses food as an affective medium through which memory circulates, identity forms, and belonging is negotiated. The theoretical framework guiding this analysis is Sara Ahmed's concept of "affective economies," which posits that emotions are not internal or private but move between subjects, objects, and cultural practices. When applied to Shafak's fiction, affective economies reveal how food becomes a site where emotions—nostalgia, longing, grief, love—accumulate

and travel.

Through a close textual analysis of The Island of Missing Trees and The Bastard of Istanbul, the paper argues that food functions as a stabilising force for diasporic characters, enabling them to reconnect with cultural roots and overcome alienation. Food is not merely sustenance but a dynamic cultural archive. It embodies histories of migration, trauma, and resilience. Shafak's novels ultimately show that in diasporic life, home can be tasted even when it cannot be returned to.

Literature Review

The intersection of food, memory, and diaspora has received increasing attention within cultural and literary studies. Scholars such as Avtar Brah, Salman Rushdie, and Stuart Hall emphasise that diasporic identity is fluid, layered, and often constructed through everyday cultural practices. Food, in particular, has been identified as a key medium through which diasporic subjects negotiate their sense of belonging.

Brah's concept of "diasporic space" suggests that home is not solely geographic but emotional and imaginative. Food plays a central role in creating this space, as it evokes sensory memories tied to the homeland. Similarly, Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory highlights how memories of homeland or trauma are transmitted to the next generation through cultural rituals—including culinary practices. This becomes especially relevant in The Island of Missing Trees, where generational trauma is encoded into food traditions and natural symbols like the fig tree.

Literary critics examining food in diasporic texts argue that culinary traditions function as sites of cultural continuity, especially for characters who live between worlds. Works like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Mistress of Spices, Jhumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies, and Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club illustrate how food mediates identity, belonging, and cultural heritage. In these narratives, food becomes a symbolic language through which characters express emotions they cannot articulate directly.

In scholarship on Elif Shafak specifically, critics have noted her skill in blending magical realism, memory work, and cultural hybridity. Studies on The Bastard of Istanbul often emphasise the novel's use of food to explore Armenian–Turkish historical tensions and intergenerational trauma. The Island of Missing Trees has attracted attention for its ecological metaphors and its representation of divided identity in a politically fractured Cyprus.

However, there is limited scholarship that brings Sara Ahmed's theory of affective economies into conversation with Shafak's culinary symbolism. This paper fills that gap by analysing how food operates as an affective object that circulates emotions across characters, communities, and generations. Through Ahmed's framework, we can understand food in Shafak's novels as a vehicle through which emotional connections are forged, producing belonging in the diasporic condition.

Theoretical Framework: Sara Ahmed's Affective Economies

Sara Ahmed's theory of affective economies provides a compelling lens for examining the emotional resonance of food in Shafak's novels. Ahmed proposes that emotions do not reside inside individuals but circulate between people, objects, and practices. Emotions "stick" to certain cultural objects, shaping how individuals relate to them. These emotional attachments form communal identities and define who belongs and who does not.

In affective economies:

Objects (like food) absorb and transmit emotions such as nostalgia, fear, or comfort.

Emotions move between people and shape social bonds.

Memory and history circulate through affective attachments, influencing present identity.

Belonging is produced through shared emotional investments, not just geographic or biological ties.

Applying this framework to food reveals how culinary objects can become emotionally charged. A dish is not merely material; it becomes a repository of cultural memory and personal longing. When

diasporic characters prepare or share traditional foods, they engage in an affective practice that keeps cultural identity alive.

In Shafak's novels, food becomes:

A symbol of home and continuity

A medium through which trauma is expressed and healed

A tool for rebuilding family bonds

A method of reclaiming identity in foreign spaces

Affective economies help explain how these emotional meanings accumulate. The mobility of food mirrors the mobility of diasporic people: as characters travel, their culinary traditions carry fragmented histories and emotional worlds with them. Thus, food becomes a portable homeland.

Food, Memory, and Emotional Continuity in The Island of Missing Trees

In The Island of Missing Trees, food becomes a powerful emotional connector that sustains identity across displacement. The characters' migration from Cyprus to London creates a geographical rupture, yet culinary practices act as emotional anchors that help them preserve a sense of home. Traditional Cypriot dishes—kolokotes, hellim, souvla, mahalepi—carry the flavours of the island, allowing Kostas and Defne to recreate lost spaces through taste and scent. These foods carry emotional residues of the homeland, demonstrating Sara Ahmed's concept of affective economies: emotions stick to cultural objects and travel with them across borders.

The fig tree Is the novel's strongest symbol of emotional and cultural continuity. Transplanted from Cyprus to London, it embodies the diasporic condition of being uprooted yet surviving in foreign soil. The tree functions as a living emotional archive, absorbing memories of war, love, loss, and resilience. Through it, Ada receives inherited emotional memory—postmemory—despite never having visited Cyprus. The fig tree allows emotions to circulate between generations, symbolising how food and nature can preserve identity even when history and trauma are left unspoken.

Culinary rituals in the novel also serve as quiet acts of resistance against assimilation. In a city where diasporic individuals often feel invisible, cooking traditional food becomes a reaffirmation of identity. The kitchen becomes a space where cultural belonging is reconstructed through everyday acts of preparing and sharing meals. Thus, food provides characters with a stable emotional ground, countering alienation in their diasporic surroundings.

Food, Intergenerational Healing, and Cultural Dialogue in The Bastard of Istanbul

In The Bastard of Istanbul, food assumes a more social and intergenerational role. The Kazancý family kitchen acts as a feminine archive of memory, where stories, emotions, and heritage are stored and transmitted. Cooking becomes a language through which the women express affection, anger, grief, and resilience. Dishes like aþure, dolma, and pilaf carry centuries of cultural history, revealing the layered, hybrid identity of Istanbul itself. As Ahmed's theory suggests, emotions attach themselves to these dishes, allowing them to become carriers of cultural memory.

Armanoush's arrival from the Armenian-American diaspora intensifies the emotional significance of food. Her experiences in Istanbul highlight the shared culinary traditions between Armenians and Turks, even amid painful historical fractures. When she eats meals prepared by the Kazancýwomen, emotions of recognition, sorrow, and belonging circulate between them. Food becomes a medium through which historical tensions soften and human connections grow. The act of cooking together enables dialogue where language and politics fail.

Aºure, the symbolic dish containing multiple ingredients, represents cultural coexistence and the possibility of reconciliation. Preparing it becomes an act of healing, acknowledging the past while imagining a future of shared identity. Through such rituals, Shafak shows that food can help characters overcome inherited trauma, rebuild intergenerational bonds, and create new forms of belonging in the

diaspora.

Culinary Spaces as Sites of Healing, Negotiation, and Reconciliation

Another crucial dimension of food in Elif Shafak's diasporic narratives lies in its ability to create spaces of healing, where emotional wounds caused by displacement, political conflict, and intergenerational trauma are negotiated and softened. In both The Island of Missing Trees and The Bastard of Istanbul, culinary spaces—kitchens, dining tables, restaurants, and even symbolic spaces like the fig tree's memory—function as intimate zones where characters confront their fractured histories and begin to repair broken relationships.

In The Island of Missing Trees, the fig tree becomes not only a symbol of homeland but also a witness to the wounds of Cyprus's divided past. The tree "remembers" the violence of 1974, the trauma of separation, and the forbidden love between Kostas and Defne. When Ada and Kostas care for the fig tree in London, the space around it becomes a site of emotional recovery. Ada, struggling with grief over her mother's death and feeling disconnected from her Cypriot identity, finds the tree functioning as a quiet mediator—a source of comfort that bridges her emotional distance from her father. Food-related memories shared by Kostas around the tree—stories of Cypriot pastries, festive meals disrupted by conflict, or the flavours of childhood—become therapeutic narratives that reconnect father and daughter. The affective economy here operates through shared stories and sensory recollections, transforming the tree and the memories it embodies into a site where emotional wounds are acknowledged and slowly healed.

Similarly, in The Bastard of Istanbul, the kitchen in the Kazancýhousehold becomes the emotional centre of the home—chaotic, lively, and filled with voices that reflect the complexities of female relationships in a multi-generational family. Asya, Armanoush, and the Kazancý women often gather around cooking activities that simultaneously reveal tensions and create opportunities for understanding. When Armanoush visits Istanbul seeking answers about her Armenian identity, the act of cooking and eating together forms the first bridge between her and the Kazancý family. Although they belong to communities shaped by historical conflict, food becomes neutral ground—a shared cultural experience that allows for emotional negotiation.

This process is evident when Armanoush tastes dishes such as dolma, mücver, and pilaki—foods that are shared across Turkish and Armenian cultures despite political hostility. These culinary overlaps challenge rigid national identities and open a space for empathy. Over meals, Armanoush and the Kazancý women exchange stories about family, trauma, silence, and survival. The affective economy flows through these interactions: emotions such as guilt, empathy, curiosity, and sorrow circulate around the dishes they prepare and consume. Shafak uses these moments to illustrate how food mediates difficult conversations—about genocide, memory, and inherited pain—without forcing characters into direct confrontation.

Furthermore, food in Shafak's novels also becomes a medium through which female characters reclaim agency. Men in the narratives often remain silent, burdened, or emotionally withdrawn, while women articulate pain, share memories, and build emotional networks through cooking. The kitchen is not domesticated confinement but an empowering space where identity is shaped and healed. In The Bastard of Istanbul, the Kazancý women resist patriarchal structures through their culinary authority, turning everyday cooking into a form of cultural preservation and emotional resilience. Their dishes carry the flavours of generational memory, acting as a counter-narrative to historical erasure.

Another layer to Shafak's use of culinary spaces is the idea of "negotiating hybridity." In diasporic settings, characters often inhabit hybrid identities that are questioned or misunderstood. Food becomes a symbolic language that helps them negotiate these in-between positions. Kostas and Ada, for instance, blend Cypriot traditions with their life in London. Their meals reflect both longing for home and adaptation to a new cultural environment. Through these practices, they stabilise their hybrid identities, transforming

alienation into belonging. The fig tree, transplanted into London soil, mirrors this process—rooted in one world yet surviving in another.

Armanoush also embodies hybridity as an Armenian-American navigating Turkish spaces. Her experience of tasting familiar dishes in Istanbul produces complex emotions—comfort, recognition, confusion, and sorrow. Food thus becomes the medium through which she negotiates her dual identity. The affective economy here shows that emotions are not fixed within individuals but circulate through foods and cultural memories, shaping how characters understand themselves and others.

Finally, culinary spaces in Shafak's works underscore her broader message that reconciliation—whether personal, cultural, or political—often begins in small, intimate acts. Sharing a meal, preparing a dish from childhood, tasting something that evokes a forgotten past—all these moments help characters move toward healing. They do not erase trauma but create openings for dialogue, empathy, and mutual recognition.

Ultimately, Shafak portrays food as a powerful agent of emotional transformation. By situating her characters within culinary spaces where memories, traumas, and affections intermingle, she demonstrates how food becomes a quiet yet potent force capable of mending fractured identities, reconnecting displaced individuals, and fostering reconciliation across even the most painful historical divides.

Conclusion

Elif Shafak's The Island of Missing Trees and The Bastard of Istanbul present rich portrayals of diasporic experience, where food becomes essential to navigating identity, memory, and belonging. Using Sara Ahmed's theory of affective economies, this paper has shown that food operates not merely as nourishment but as an affective object that circulates emotion, preserves heritage, and connects individuals to the past.

In The Island of Missing Trees, the fig tree and traditional dishes embody the pain and resilience of displacement, guiding characters toward understanding and healing. In The Bastard of Istanbul, intergenerational cooking rituals create emotional bonds across cultural divides, demonstrating how food can soften historical trauma and foster shared belonging.

Ultimately, Shafak's novels reveal that in diasporic life, home is not solely a physical place—it is an affective space created through memory, cultural practice, and emotional connection. Food becomes a language of belonging, a bridge between generations, and a means of overcoming alienation. Through the everyday acts of tasting, cooking, and sharing meals, Shafak's characters rediscover themselves and rebuild the emotional worlds that displacement has fractured.

Citations

- Shafak, Elif. The Island of Missing Trees. Penguin Books, 2021.
- Shafak, Elif. The Bastard of Istanbul. Viking, 2006.
- Ahmed, Sara. “Affective Economies.” Social Text, vol. 22, no. 2, 2004, pp. 117–139.
- Ahmed, Sara. The Cultural Politics of Emotion. Routledge, 2004.
- Brah, Avtar. Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities. Routledge, 1996.
- Boym, Svetlana. The Future of Nostalgia. Basic Books, 2001.
- Sutton, David E. Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory. Berg, 2001.
- Holtzman, Jon D. “Food and Memory.” Annual Review of Anthropology, vol. 35, 2006, pp. 361–378.

30

STORIES OF PAIN AND SURVIVAL: UNVEILING TRAUMA AND MEMORY IN BENYAMIN'S FICTION

Ms. B. Rashma, *Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of English, Jamal Mohamed College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India*
rashmalit96@gmail.com

Abstract

Benyamin's work usually unfolds as a map of exile, dislocation and the unhealed scars of memory. His stories and plots are frequently set in the global context of migration which reveals the profound psychological rifts that people who are torn between emotional alienation and economic ambition. This paper explores the interwoven dynamics of trauma, memory and affect in Benyamin's novels focusing particularly on Goat Days (2012) and Jasmine Days(2014). Through a detailed literary analysis (close reading), this study investigates how trauma is depicted not just as an individual affliction but also as a collective symptom of a globalized society which treats people and their labor as commodities/products, valuing profit over humanity.

In Goat Days, the protagonist's trap or captivity in a desert farm becomes an allegorical space (symbolic setting) where physical suffering transforms into existential trauma. The inability to articulate pain and the fragmentation of narrative structure mirror the broken soul of the migrant subject. On the other hand the novel, Jasmine Days captures the unstable affective atmosphere of revolution and diaspora, where memory becomes both a burden and a mode of resistance. Benyamin employs fluctuating perspectives in his stories particularly on the narrator's viewpoint and moving back and forward in time to show how memory continually revises and re-traumatizes lived experience.

This paper argues that Benyamin uses emotion and sensory experience to make readers truly feel the pain of his characters by employing techniques like silence, repetition and confusion. His writing goes beyond traditional storytelling by turning trauma into an emotional experience that creates empathy instead of mere pity. Drawing on the ideas of trauma scholars like Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra, and Affect theorists such as Sara Ahmed, this study places Benyamin's works within the larger field of postcolonial trauma writing. It suggests that in Benyamin's novels, memory becomes a way to survive and shared emotional experience turns individual pain into collective awareness. This shows Benyamin is not just telling the stories of migrants he acts as a deep observer of human suffering and resilience in the face of displacement.

Keywords: *Trauma, memory, survival, Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Affect theory, existential trauma, displacement, migrant.*

Benny Daniel, widely recognized by his pseudonym Benyamin, stands as a distinguished Indian author and creator of short fiction, working predominantly in Malayalam literature. Born in Kulanada, Kerala in 1971, he relocated to Bahrain in 1992 and resided there for more than twenty years before returning to India in 2013. His literary works draw extensively from his migrant experiences, offering compassionate depictions of immigrant communities facing socio-political disturbance and cultural estrangement. Benyamin achieved literary recognition through his novel Goat Days (2008) translated into

English in 2012, which chronicles the devastating experience of an Indian worker imprisoned in Saudi Arabia. This novel brought Benyamin to the limelight by earning multiple accolades including the Abu Dhabi Sakthi Award and Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award. His notable work Jasmine Days (2014) examines intricate themes of identity, psychological wounds, and belonging during the Arab Spring movements in a Middle Eastern setting.

His narrative craft is recognized for its compelling fusion of trauma, collective memory, and affective depth establishing his novels as essential works in contemporary postcolonial and displacement literature. This scholarly examination concentrates on trauma (psychological wounds), memory (remembrance) and affect (emotional response) in Benyamin's Goat Days and Jasmine Days, incorporating theoretical frameworks from trauma researchers Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra, alongside affect scholar Sara Ahmed, to analyze how Benyamin positions personal and communal anguish within postcolonial stories of displacement and endurance.

Goat Days documents the frightening journey of Najeeb, a young man from Kerala, who journeys to Saudi Arabia seeking better opportunities but becomes an abused migrant worker forced to tend goats in the wilderness. Following his abduction upon arrival, Najeeb endures years of bodily and mental anguish. He faces deprivation of essential necessities including food, water, and shelter, while his fundamental dignity remains stripped away. Through careful examination of the narrative, readers recognize that the main character experiences continuous isolation and abuse from his supervisor (Arbab). Najeeb's sense of identity becomes blurred in the vast desert landscape due to absence of human companionship, he forms a desperate bond with the goats. He merges with the animals and eventually begins identifying with them, demonstrating the serious psychological consequences of extended trauma and dehumanization.

The narrative presents numerous instances of bodily and mental anguish within the Kafala system that enslaves migrant laborers. Initially in the story, following his arrival, Najeeb faces forced separation from his friend, locked up, and handed over to a merciless sponsor (Arbab) who subjects him to harsh treatment. Among the most vivid representations of anguish appears during Najeeb's physical pain and powerlessness under the arbab's control:

I went crying to the arbab's tent several times. I begged him to take me to any hospital. But the arbab didn't pay any attention. As dawn broke, he came to my cot with a vessel and asked me to hurry up and milk the goats. I showed him my hand. I got a smack on my head as a reply. (Benyamin, Goat Days 120)

Najeeb's suffering encompasses not merely physical pain but also mental anguish, as he faces denial of basic kindness and medical assistance amplifying his trauma.

Najeeb's initial meeting with his Arbab includes violence and threats. He faces beatings, food deprivation and compulsion to wear dirty clothing while experiencing isolation in the desert among animals. He endures severe loneliness, lacking human interaction, where the environment and terrain (the expansive, unforgiving desert) blow up his trauma and estrangement. A pivotal traumatic event occurs when Najeeb tries to flee but faces capture and gunfire, strengthening his powerlessness and the sponsor's oppressive dominance. The story additionally depicts the psychological torment of captive existence, demonstrated through Najeeb's connection with the goats under his care, showing profound emotional impact and dissolution of human identity.

In Jasmine Days, trauma appears through continuous violence and political disorder that disrupts Sameera's life and other migrants' lives, creating loss and anxiety. A moving passage captures this anguish: “Now you know the pain of losing someone beloved. So, can you imagine the fate of a woman who lost three of the most loved men in her life?”(Benyamin, Jasmine Days).This emphasizes the individual price of collective trauma.

The trauma (psychological wounds) extend into remembrance, where Najeeb continuously thinks of home and family while struggling with the impossibility of returning, demonstrating emotional states of

longing and desperation as both sustaining and harmful forces. In Sumesi prison where migrant workers face imprisonment after escaping abusive employers, Najeeb paradoxically discovers temporary psychological comfort among others sharing similar traumatic experiences while also encountering additional humiliations and mistreatment.

Najeeb's recollections of home and family operate as an intricate collection of pain, hope, and identity. Sitting on a sandy hill,

memories of homeland awakened in me. All my suppressed thoughts stirred and erupted like a volcano. I must escape from here. I must go home. I must reach my ummah. I must see my Sainu. I must see my Nabeel. I must see my land. I must see my dusty roads. I must see my river. I must see my canoe. I must see my rain. I must see my earth. (Benyamin,Goat Days 146)

These remembrances maintain Najeeb's determination to survive while also emphasizing the deep emotional loss and isolation he faces. His observations on freedom and home provide emotional stability and resilience despite the terrible desert experience, demonstrating how remembrance functions both as trauma's echo and as motivation for persistence and hope.

Memory in the Jasmine Days appears as both strength and sadness, with Sameera contemplating, it's best to be alone when you are sad. She wanted to be herself and feel her strength slowly seeping back into her demonstrating how remembrance can foster resilience amid loss.

In Goat Days, affect appears as a profound, unprocessed feeling that flows throughout the narrative, helping readers comprehend Najeeb's internal experience. His sensations of despair, terror and isolation remain very powerful, mirroring the trauma he faces. For instance, when he experiences beatings or starvation, he feels powerless and frightened. These sensations become so overwhelming they nearly control his physical being. His longing for home and family creates deep anguish but also provides him strength to continue. The narrative demonstrates how pain and suffering transform someone's emotions, making him feel shattered, while still maintaining hope. His relationship with the goats, which become his sole companions, shows his desire for connection and affection in an environment where he receives animal treatment. The novel conveys how terror, longing, despair, alongside tinge of moments of hope constitute the experience of confronting trauma and attempting survival.

Affect emerges in Sameera's mixed feelings of isolation, fear, hope and the painful sense of displacement expressed in the passage, “You know how it is when you arrive in a new place and feel like you don't belong there? That hesitation to reckon with a new geography.” (Benyamin, Jasmine Days) These aspects combine as political turmoil influences Sameera's identity, emotions and memories forming a compelling narrative of trauma experienced through personal and communal pain and emotional response as they lived through the emotional fabric of displacement and resistance.

Examining Benyamin's Goat Days and Jasmine Days through the perspectives of trauma researchers Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra, combined with affect scholar Sara Ahmed, places these novels clearly within postcolonial trauma writing. Caruth's concept of trauma as an "unprocessed experience" that defies immediate comprehension appears in Goat Days, where Najeeb's extreme captivity and suffering creates broken and disturbing memories, beyond straightforward storytelling yet significantly influencing his identity. LaCapra's separation between "acting out" and "working through" trauma becomes apparent as Najeeb moves between reliving his traumatic history and pursuing psychological healing, showing the moral and narrative challenges of presenting trauma. In Jasmine Days, Sameera's experience with political violence and social breakdown reflects these trauma patterns, showing not only personal suffering but shared memory and historical disruption characteristic of postcolonial settings.

Sara Ahmed's affect theory expands this comprehension by emphasizing how feelings move socially, forming migrant identities amid hostility and disorder. In both novels, emotional response

becomes physical fear, isolation and desire which is felt individually by characters but also collectively among diaspora communities. Ahmed's emphasis on how emotional systems create belonging and exclusion assists in analyzing how Goat Days and Jasmine Days portray emotional experiences of the migrants as spaces where trauma becomes lived emotionally, memory remains filled with desire and loss, and identity faces continuous negotiation. These theoretical approaches together examine Benyamin's narrative techniques, showing how trauma, memory, and affect express the diaspora condition within oppressive socio-political circumstances, making his works essential contributions to postcolonial trauma literature.

Thus Benyamin's Goat Days and Jasmine Days offer compelling and emotional perspectives on migrants' struggles with trauma, loss and displacement. Through Najeeb's harsh imprisonment and isolation in Goat Days , and Sameera's experience through political turmoil and identity struggle in Jasmine Days, these novels demonstrate how trauma profoundly impacts memory and emotions, forming personal and collective identities. Through application of theories from Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, and Sara Ahmed, this analysis demonstrates how Benyamin's works both chronicle individual suffering and examine wider social and emotional experiences of migration and postcolonial circumstances. These novels emerge as significant contributions to postcolonial trauma literature, showing the intricate ways trauma, memory and affect connect in migrant experiences and how literature can express the voiceless and displaced with compassion and critical understanding.

References:

- Abrams, M.H and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. A Handbook of Literary Terms. New Delhi:
- Cengage Learning India, 2009.
- Benyamin, Goat Days. Trans, Joseph Koyippally, India: Penguin, 2012.
- Benyamin. Jasmine Days. Translated by Shahnaz Habib, Juggernaut Books, 2018. ISBN 9789353450748.
- Farook, Rameez. “Identity Crisis and Trauma of Displacement: A Reading of Benyamin's Goat Days.” Academia.edu, 31 Dec. 2021, www.academia.edu/103235071/IDENTITY_CRISIS_AND_TRAUMA_OF_DISPLACEMENT_A_READING_OF_BENYAMINS_GOAT_DAYS. Accessed 11 Nov. 2025.
- Paliath, Shreeja. “Benyamin's 'Jasmine Days' Is About Gulf Indians, Migrants And The Walls They Face In Saudi Arabia.” HuffPost India, 9 Jan. 2019, www.huffpost.com/archive/in/entry/benyamin-jasmine-days-gulf-indians-migrants-books-saudi-arabia_in_5c36f8ace4b0c469d76afffc. Accessed 10 Nov. 2025.

31

TRAUMA NARRATIVES: THE STORIES OF GUILT, BETRAYAL, AND SUFFERING IN THE NOVELS OF KHALED HOSSEINI

Ms. H. Nazeela Begam, *Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of English, Jamal Mohamed College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India*
nazeelabegam@gmail.com

Abstract

Khaled Hosseini's fiction elaborately deals with the individual and collective traumatic lives of the Afghan society. This paper examines the narratives of guilt, betrayal, and suffering in The Kite Runner (2003), A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007), and And the Mountains Echoed (2013), respectively. Through a psychoanalytic and trauma theoretical framework, this study shows the ideas in which the characters undergo trauma, inhibit memory, and seek redemption in the face of socio-political upheaval. The themes of guilt and betrayal among the characters strongly imply that personal or individual failures become the reasons for larger historical and cultural dislocations. It also analyses how guilt transforms into empathy and betrayal into reconciliation.

This study places the above three novels under the discourse of trauma studies based on the theoretical aspects of Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman. It emphasizes this narrative as both a source of suffering as well as a tool for healing. It also highlights how Hosseini's narrative techniques reflect the psychological chaos faced by trauma survivors. Furthermore, it adds the gendered dimensions of suffering, which focus on the endurance and silence of women under patriarchy.

By universalizing Afghan narratives as human suffering and resilience, this study relies on the significant contribution of Hosseini to global trauma literature. This paper aims to demonstrate that trauma, though deeply personal, becomes a collective moral discourse through storytelling.

Keywords: *Trauma, Guilt, Betrayal, Suffering, Psychoanalysis, Redemption, Memory, Narrative Healing.*

Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan-American novelist and physician. He has been regarded as one of the most significant contemporary writers in world literature. He was born in Kabul in 1965. Most of his novels are set in Afghanistan and throw light on its people and culture. Hosseini witnessed the turbulent history of monarchy, Soviet invasion, and Taliban rule in Afghanistan. His novels are mostly concerned with cultural and political landscape. Each novel has its own narrative which portrays the psychological struggles of the characters bound between guilt and redemption, betrayal and loyalty, and memory and forgetting through his vivid storytelling.

The stories of guilt, betrayal, and suffering reflect both the personal failures of the individuals and the collective suffering of the Afghan society. This paper offers a detailed analysis of these themes in The Kite Runner (2003), A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007), and And the Mountains Echoed (2013). Hosseini's characters often inhabit a world where betrayal plays an important role, and they undergo intense suffering based on the theoretical aspects of Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, and Judith Herman.

In The Kite Runner, Hosseini tells the story of a Pashtun boy, Amir, and his lovable friend cum servant, Hassan, who later turns out to be his half-brother. This story is primarily set in Kabul, Afghanistan, where a big kite-fighting tournament takes place. The boys should cut the kites of the opponents using

strings, and the kite runner has to chase the fallen kites. Amir wins the tournament, and Hassan runs after that kite, which was cut by Amir. Amir follows him and sees Hassan getting assaulted by Assef. Amir escapes from that place without helping him. But Hassan saved Amir with his slingshot when Amir was threatened by the same Assef, Wali, and Kamal some days before.

This is the most conspicuous scene of betrayal. Amir chooses silence over courage even after seeing the danger to his playmate Hassan. His decision not to save Hassan is the moment that defines the rest of his life. Amir later confesses, "I ran because I was a coward" (Hosseini, Kite Runner 77). This line serves as a reflection of both personal shame and moral failure. This act of betrayal is not just a private wound but a depiction of the social divisions between Pashtuns and Hazaras. Amir feels guilty and plans to hide some money under the mattress of Hassan in order to make Hassan and his father Ali leave his house. Amir complains to his father, Baba, that Hassan had stolen it. Hassan accepts the blame, and they leave the house as planned by Amir. In 1981, the Soviets invaded Kabul, and Baba and Amir settled in California. Here, trauma manifests through Amir's recurring dreams, obsessive memories, and emotional detachment. It gets deeper dimensions when he comes to know that Hassan was his half-brother. The language of Hosseini portrays the fragmentation of Amir's psyche. The narrative oscillates between present and past, and memory functions as both torment and testimony.

Meanwhile, in Kabul, Hassan marries Farzana, and they have a son, Sohrab. The Taliban executes Hassan and Farzana. Sohrab was taken to an orphanage. Then, a Taliban official, who later reveals himself as Assef takes Sohrab and abuses him. Amir comes back to Kabul when requested by Rahim Khan, Baba's friend, and learns about the helpless condition of Sohrab. Therefore, Amir gets a chance to repay his guilt. It becomes the symbol of redemption as he tries to save Sohrab. When Amir fights with Assef, Amir gets beaten by Assef. He chooses courage over silence this time. Then, Sohrab also attacks Assef using his slingshot, and they both escape. Amir takes Sohrab with him to California, and one day, some Afghans fly kites at a park. Sohrab cuts a kite and becomes happy. Amir runs after the fallen kite, playing the role of a kite runner by saying, "For you, a thousand times over" (Hosseini, Kite Runner 328). This reverses his childhood betrayal and also helps him to restore moral equilibrium.

The novel The Kite Runner examines guilt and betrayal from a male perspective, and in contrast, A Thousand Splendid Suns mainly focuses on the female suffering under patriarchy and war. Hosseini's portrayal of Mariam and Laila reveals the gendered dimensions of trauma in Afghan society. Both characters are trapped by societal conventions and endure relentless physical and emotional suffering. The life of Mariam begins with shame as she was born as the illegitimate daughter of Jalil, a wealthy cinema owner who does not admit her as a member of his family, and Nana, who makes her marry Rasheed, a thirty-year-old senior. Though Rasheed is happy with Mariam initially, he starts to torture her due to several miscarriages. Her silence, repetition of household chores, and the imagery of that confined home become the symbolic representations of internalized trauma.

On the other hand, there is the perspective of Laila, who shares her happy childhood memories with her parents Babi and Mammy. Her siblings Ahmad and Noor, joined Mujahideen and were killed by the Soviets for which their mother, Mammy is depressed. Laila and Tariq become romantically involved before Tariq's family leaves for Pakistan. Her life is shattered when her parents are killed in a rocket attack. She is forced to marry Rasheed, Mariam's husband, and she also accepts it inevitably to save her growing child. In addition to that, he sends Abdul Sharif to make her believe the fake death story of Tariq. Initially, Rasheed adores Laila, but starts to torture her after giving birth to a baby girl, Aziza. Laila represents Afghan women whose suffering intersects with political violence, as Hosseini simultaneously shows the destruction of Kabul during the civil war.

The friendship between Mariam and Laila blooms and transcends social hierarchies. Laila gives birth to a baby boy named Zalmai. The Taliban took control of Afghanistan shortly. Women are deprived of

education, mobility, and voice, which symbolises the collective suppression of Afghan identity under the Taliban rule. Due to poverty, Rasheed orders Laila to send Aziza to an orphanage. Laila often gets beaten by the Taliban for being alone in the street whenever she goes to the orphanage. When Rasheed knew the return of Tariq, he choked Laila. Mariam kills Rasheed by beating him on the head without any hesitation.

This act of self-sacrifice conveys the depth of the bond between Mariam and Laila. Mariam was imprisoned and executed. Through their relationship, Hossieni transforms suffering and pain into healing and also exposes the connection between personal trauma and systemic injustice. All the women characters, Mariam, Laila, Mammy, and Aziza, undergo suffering both under patriarchy and the consequences of war. Their pain reflects what Judith Herman terms "complex trauma" as the collective effect of prolonged abuse and captivity, and also reveals how gendered suffering reflects the fragmented nature of Afghan society.

Hossieni's And the Mountains Echoed unfolds trauma that goes beyond generations and geographies. The story begins in a small Afghan village, where the laborer Saboor tells a fairy tale to his two children, Abdullah and Pari. Parwana is the second wife of Saboor, and she has a twin sister, Masooma. When they grew up, there was a competitive nature among them naturally. Masooma looked prettier than Parwana. Both developed a crush on Saboor. Masooma and Saboor became close and planned for an engagement. Parwana could not accept, and she made her very own twin sister descend from a tall tree, leaving her paraplegic. This incident is a source of guilt and a lifelong burden caused due to jealousy. But when Saboor's wife dies during pregnancy and he is interested in another marriage, Masooma suggests Parwana to marry Saboor. Even when Masooma urges her to leave her and live her own life, Parwana cannot easily do so. Her sense of guilt has replaced her sense of self. Though she is hesitant initially, she accepts.

When Saboor is called to Kabul for construction work, he brings his children along. There, through the intervention of his brother-in-law Nabi and the wealthy Wahdati family, little Pari is adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Wahdati, separating her from Abdullah and her father. This separation of the siblings becomes the central plot of betrayal.

The narrative widens as there are many shifts in perspectives, which adds a layer to the cumulative pain of separation. This nonlinear narrative shifting from present to the past and vice versa, and multiple voices embody what Cathy Caruth calls "the endless repetition of the traumatic past". Abdullah's lifelong longing for his sister is shown by his collection of feathers. Kabul endures political upheaval such as the Taliban's invasion, refugee flows, and property loss.

Back in Paris, Pari grows up, becomes a mathematician, marries, and raises children. Though Pari leads a materialistic life, she feels an unnamed emptiness, and her exile from Afghanistan is a metaphor for the dislocation of identity experienced by the diaspora. She learns later in life about the brother she left behind, Abdullah, who has moved to the U.S. When she and Abdullah are finally reunited decades later, it becomes tragically incomplete due to dementia. The inability to recognize his sister portrays the ultimate cruelty of trauma and the loss of memory itself. At the end, Pari II, Abdullah's daughter, finds a yellow feather, an emblem of childhood and remembrance.

To conclude, Hosseini transforms individual pain into a collective aspect of Afghan society. The suppression of the Hazaras by the Pashtuns and the Talibans exemplifies the internal hierarchies. Whereas the oppression of women under the Taliban rule reflects the collective trauma, as women constitute half of the population, and the loneliness of displacement and the longing for belonging show the suffering of the Afghan diaspora. Amir seeks forgiveness, Mariam embraces self-sacrifice, and Abdullah yearns for reunion. All these actions on the whole represent the struggle to reconcile with the past, which can also lead to redemption. Through the stories of guilt, betrayal, and suffering, Hosseini clearly gives a comprehensive representation of the traumatic past, which interrupts the present based on the theoretical

studies of Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman.

References

- Caruth, Cathy. Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History. Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.
- Hosseini, Khaled. The Kite Runner. Riverhead Books, 2003.
- Hosseini, Khaled. A Thousand Splendid Suns. Riverhead Books, 2007.
- Hosseini, Khaled. And the Mountains Echoed. Riverhead Books, 2013.
- Kapoor, Dr. Shweta. "Revisiting The Representation Of Afghan Women In Khaled Hosseini's Novels: An Analysis Of Patriarchy And Colonialism In The Kite Runner, A Thousand Splendid Suns And The Mountains Echoed." Academia.edu, 2021, https://www.academia.edu/98874525/Revisiting_The_Representation_Of_Afghan_Women_In_Khaled_Hosseinis_Novels_An_Analysis_Of_Patriarchy_And_Colonialism_In_The_Kite_Runner_A_Thousand_Splendid_Suns_And_The_Mountains_Echoed. Accessed 10 Nov. 2025.

32

BEYOND DHARMA AND ADHARMA: CRITICAL POSTHUMANISM IN AJAYA: ROLL OF THE DICE

Arthi G, *Research Scholar, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent institute of Science and Technology Chennai*

Dr. T. Mangaiyarkarasi, *Assistant Professor, Department of English, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent institute of Science and Technology, Chennai*

Abstract:

Anand Neelakantan's Ajaya: Roll of the Dice (2013) reinterprets the Mahabharata from Duryodhana's viewpoint, challenging the conventional portrayal of him as the archetypal villain. Instead of making the Pandavas seem like perfect heroes, the text focuses on the moral gray areas, political problems, and deep-seated social hierarchies that affect each character's choices. This paper utilizes Cary Wolfe's framework of critical posthumanism to analyze how Neelakantan undermines the humanist notion of a singular, ideal hero. Posthumanism critiques anthropocentric authority and underscores the entrenchment of individuals within systems of caste, kinship, and power. In this retelling, Duryodhana is not an evil villain, but a voice that has been silenced by the dominant cultural narratives. His story shows that dharma and adharma are not fixed absolutes, but rather changeable ideas that depend on the situation. Reading the text from a posthumanist point of view shows how epic retellings can break down binary moralities, bring out different points of view, and change how we think about ethics and authority in ways that go beyond traditional heroic ideals.

Keywords: *Critical posthumanism, morality and ethics, epic retelling, alternative narratives, and heroic ideals are all important terms.*

Introduction

"History is written by the victors, and so is religion. The losers are condemned as villains." (Neelakantan 5)

Neelakantan's Ajaya: Roll of the Dice (2013) initiates a deliberate inversion of the Mahabharata's established moral hierarchy. The text does not glorify the Pandavas; instead, it shows Duryodhana as a complex character whose choices are shaped by caste, politics, and deeply rooted social norms. Neelakantan tells the story of the epic from the point of view of the defeated Kaurava, which goes against the original story's idea of dharma and adharma as two opposing forces. The text redefines history as a construct influenced by narrative hegemony, implying that assertions of righteousness frequently mirror the interests of the powerful. As a result, it serves as a critical analysis of social hierarchies, human exceptionalism, and the morality of narrative authority.

This paper analyzes the text using Cary Wolfe's critical posthumanism, which questions the basic ideas of humanism that center on autonomy, reason, and morality. Wolfe's theory undermines the notion of the human as an autonomous, rational entity, instead framing individuals as participants in systems of language, biology, and culture that surpass human agency. When applied to Neelakantan's story, posthumanism shows that Duryodhana's identity, choices, and morality are not determined by inherent virtue or vice but by structural forces such as caste, lineage, kinship, and political power. Consequently, the text conducts an ethical examination of the essence of humanity within and occasionally in opposition to

these systems.

Neelakantan challenges the anthropocentric and theocentric aspects of classical epics by changing the story's focus from the divine to the human. His retelling makes it clear that the moral framework of the Mahabharata, which is often thought of as absolute, is based on perspective and privilege. In this regard, the text aligns with the posthumanist critique of essentialism and the notion of a singular truth. In Neelakantan's world, morality is not an inherent quality; rather, it is a construct shaped by the interplay of power and circumstance.

This paper asserts that Ajaya: Roll of the Dice serves as a posthumanist reconfiguration of dharma, illustrating the perpetuation of moral binaries through human-centered hierarchies. It looks at how Neelakantan rethought the epic's moral landscape, saying that survival and justice come from group and situational negotiation instead of divine approval. By conceptualizing Duryodhana as a posthuman entity situated within expansive systems, the analysis illustrates how Neelakantan's narrative surpasses the dichotomy of dharma and adharma, proposing a more fluid, systemic, and inclusive ethical paradigm.

Cary Wolfe's posthumanist perspective, which challenges the anthropocentric elevation of rational, autonomous individuals (Wolfe 7), illustrates that morality and ethics arise from relational networks. Duryodhana's statement, “If being right means bowing to injustice, I would rather be wrong” (Neelakantan 112), illustrates contextually negotiated ethics rather than divinely sanctioned moral codes.

Rewriting the Epic Through Posthumanism

Anand Neelakantan's Ajaya: Roll of the Dice makes a big change to the Mahabharata's moral structure by rejecting its strict moral binaries. The text questions the traditional idea of dharma as an unchanging set of rules and instead shows it as a moral discourse that is shaped by power dynamics. When looked at through Cary Wolfe's critical posthumanist lens, the text becomes an ethical ecosystem where caste, kinship, and social order shape morality, agency, and suffering instead of divine decree.

Cary Wolfe's concept of critical posthumanism provides a robust framework for examining the constraints of humanist thought that have historically shaped ethical, philosophical, and literary traditions. In his foundational text, What Is Posthumanism? (2010) Wolfe asserts that Western humanism is founded on a misguided perception of human exceptionalism, which posits that reason and morality distinctly characterize humanity, differentiating it from all other life forms and systems. He says that this assumption leads to hierarchies between people and animals, reason and instinct, civilization and nature. Critical posthumanism breaks down these binaries by showing that the human subject is not independent but rather part of networks like biological, technological, social, and linguistic ones that shape and go beyond human agency.

Wolfe's posthumanism diverges from the technological futurism commonly linked to "transhumanism." Rather than proposing an enhancement of humanity, Wolfe's critique aims to displace the human entirely, revealing that subjectivity and ethics arise from interdependence rather than domination. Because of this, posthumanism opposes hierarchies that are centered on humans and encourages a more ecological and relational view of existence. In this framework, ethics do not originate from immutable classifications of right and wrong, but from the responsiveness to the interconnected systems that govern existence.

Using Wolfe's framework on Anand Neelakantan's Ajaya: Roll of the Dice shows how the book breaks down the humanist values that are built into the Mahabharata's moral order. Conventional interpretations of the epic are predicated on the veneration of dharma and divine duty as the supreme ethical standard. The Pandavas exemplify this humanist moral order, depicted as instruments of divine justice who maintain righteousness through reason and self-discipline. Duryodhana, on the other hand, has been called adharma incarnate, a model of greed, pride, and defiance. But Neelakantan's retelling breaks down this dualism by placing Duryodhana in the social and political systems that shape who he is and what

he does. The text focuses on caste oppression, social exclusion, and inherited inequality as important factors that limit people's ability to act.

From this point of view, the text can be seen as an act of ethical decentering that fits with Wolfe's posthumanism. It does not see morality as something that comes naturally to independent people; instead, it puts moral action in the context of larger systems of power and suffering. In Neelakantan's worldview, "evil" is not an inherent trait of individuals but a byproduct of systemic injustice, a concept that aligns with Wolfe's assertion that ethics should focus on relational complexities rather than isolated entities.

Also, the text's rejection of divine endorsement fits with Wolfe's criticism of transcendental humanism. Neelakantan substitutes God-ordained morality with human responsibility, thereby establishing an ethical framework based on collective consequence rather than metaphysical purity. Duryodhana thus transforms into a posthuman entity, not due to his transcendence of humanity, but because his moral existence is inextricably linked to the systems that delineate and restrict him.

Critical posthumanism helps readers see the text not just as a revisionist epic, but also as a philosophical intervention that questions the anthropocentric and hierarchical structures that support traditional moral stories. In Neelakantan's story, the posthuman condition is one where morals are always changing, dependent on the situation, and based on a moral ecology rather than a moral code.

The Posthuman Hero

Instead of the humanist hero who wins by being morally pure, the text gives us Duryodhana, the posthuman hero, whose strength comes from empathy and defiance, not transcendence. Arjuna's moral dilemmas are guided by divine instruction, but Duryodhana must find his own way in a world without divine guidance. He thinks about:

"The gods stay silent, as they always have. We make our choices, and we pay the price." (Neelakantan 320)

This understanding makes Duryodhana a modern ethical subject who knows that meaning and morality are made, not given. His bravery does not come from winning, but from standing up to systems that are unfair. Neelakantan uses Duryodhana to give back the right to moral complexity to people who have been left out of epic justice.

This representation aligns with Wolfe's posthuman ethic by rejecting moral centrality of any individual human subject and emphasizing ethical importance in interdependence and vulnerability. The posthuman hero is different from the mythic savior in that they are strong in relationships. They are strong because they are united, suffer, and refuse to accept what others say is true.

Deconstructing Heroism: From the Human Ideal to the Systemic Subject

In traditional stories from the Mahabharata, the Pandavas stand for divine justice and rightness. Duryodhana, on the other hand, is seen as the personification of adharma. Neelakantan questions this idea right from the start by saying:

"The story you know is not the truth. The truth is seldom told by the winners." (Neelakantan 11)

This inversion acts as a counter-epic that gives a voice back to people who have been pushed to the edges. From Wolfe's posthumanist point of view, this story twist separates heroism from individual freedom, which is a key idea in humanist storytelling. Duryodhana is not shown to be a bad person, but rather as a victim of violence in the system.

Neelakantan's main character doesn't say he's perfect; instead, he fights against being dehumanized. Duryodhana's refusal shows that he has a moral sense based on relationships, not on divine approval. Wolfe's posthumanism elucidates this transformation: morality is no longer an attribute of the human subject but a reaction to intricate networks of suffering and exclusion. Duryodhana's ethical position is shaped not in solitude but through his engagement with caste hierarchies, the duplicity of spiritual authority, and the moral oblivion of privilege.

In this regard, Neelakantan's Ajaya displaces the anthropocentric framework of the epic. The

human is not the moral center; instead, human action is depicted as dependent on socio-political and ecological circumstances. Neelakantan changes the Mahabharata's moral compass, which shows Wolfe's point that "posthumanism is not the end of the human, but the end of a certain conception of the human."

Caste, Power, and Structural Violence

Neelakantan's posthuman vision is most important because it questions caste and hierarchy. The text does not romanticize the epic world as a place of divine order; instead, it shows the human cost of that order. In the beginning of the story, Duryodhana sees how cruel systemic inequality is:

"How could a god who demands the suffering of men be called just?" (Neelakantan, 230)

This question sums up the text's posthuman ethics. It shows how divine justice hides human suffering and how dharma itself is a way to keep people out. Neelakantan depicts Duryodhana's camaraderie with Karna as a moral coalition against caste subjugation. Duryodhana's respect for Karna, despite his "low birth," shows a posthuman ethics of recognition that values relational solidarity over biological or ritual purity.

According to Wolfe's theory, this relationship is a rejection of anthropocentric hierarchy, which says that some lives are worth more than others. The friendship between Duryodhana and Karna serves as a metaphor for a society where identity is determined not by divine ancestry or social status, but by mutual vulnerability.

Neelakantan's criticism of power goes beyond people to show how whole systems work. The book says that "priests and kings spoke of dharma while feeding on the hunger of others," (Neelakantan, 46) which is a good way to show how moral talk keeps exploitation going. This fits with Wolfe's criticism of humanism for allowing domination of species, classes, or castes. For both Wolfe and Neelakantan, ethics must arise from acknowledging interdependence rather than hierarchy.

Kinship, Ecology, and the Relational Self

Another notable posthuman aspect of this text is its depiction of kinship and ecology. Neelakantan's universe is regulated not by deities, but by interrelated systems, familial units, kingdoms, natural rhythms, and social connections that reflect Wolfe's notion of interdependence. The text often blurs the lines between people and the environment, which makes it seem like survival is ecological.

Neelakantan's reinterpretation of the text also brings posthuman ideas into the realm of ecology. The text mainly criticizes human institutions, but its descriptions of rivers, forests, and seasons show that humans and nonhumans are connected. In Ajaya's world, the moral and the material are connected. In this way, Neelakantan foreshadows the eco-philosophical shift in posthuman thought by reminding readers that human ethics cannot exist outside of the ecological continuum.

Dharma Reimagined: From Moral Law to Ethical Ecology

The text changes what dharma means. Neelakantan turned what was once a universal law into a practice that was based on context and relationships. Duryodhana's challenge,

"Whose dharma shall I follow, when every man claims his is right?" (Neelakantan 280), makes the main point of the text clear. Dharma isn't a universal rule here; it's a set of morals that depends on where you are in the power structure.

From a posthuman point of view, this change means that humanism is being broken down morally. The transition from moral absolutes to systemic comprehension corresponds seamlessly with Wolfe's assertion that "posthumanism redefines ethics not as a matter of the individual will, but as a practice of responsiveness within interrelations." In this context, ethics are emergent, originating from human interaction, historical contingency, and social entanglement.

Neelakantan's rewriting is therefore a philosophical act of resistance against big stories. There are no divine heroes and villains in his world, only flawed beings who depend on each other. The text asserts that being human entails being entangled rather than exceptional, shaped by systems of kinship, power,

and nature.

Language, Narrative, and the Posthuman Voice

In this text, language serves as a locus of resistance against dominant narratives. By taking back narrative power from divine or elite points of view, Neelakantan creates what Wolfe might call a posthuman narrative form one that spreads agency among many, often conflicting voices.

Neelakantan uses a polyvocal style to give a voice to people who are usually quiet in traditional epics, like servants, women, and people from lower castes. The outcome is a diversified moral discourse, reflecting Wolfe's advocacy for ethics founded on "difference, not identity."

Neelakantan's language destabilizes divine omniscience, which is similar to Wolfe's posthuman focus on decentering mastery. The story's changing points of view encourage readers to embrace moral ambiguity and understand that what is right may look different from each place in the social web.

Conclusion

Ajaya: Roll of the Dice is a strong story that changes the way we think about the Mahabharata by going beyond its usual moral binaries of dharma and adharma. From the perspective of critical posthumanism, the text deconstructs the exalted status of the heroic, divine, and "ideal" human subject, instead exposing a reality influenced by caste hierarchies, bodily diversity, ecological interdependence, and intricate social structures. Neelakantan presents a counter-narrative by emphasizing marginalized figures like Karna, Ekalavya, Dhritarashtra, and Gandhari, thereby contesting conventional notions of humanity and justice. This posthumanist interpretation illustrates that the epic's moral framework is reconstructed not via divine righteousness, but through the actual experiences of individuals marginalized in conventional narratives of humanity.

This makes the text deeply important to current discussions about justice. Its focus on caste-based violence, gendered oppression, and systemic inequality strongly connects with current political and social discussions in India. Simultaneously, the text's critique of human exceptionalism corresponds with evolving ecological ethics that advocate for a more relational and interdependent conception of existence. The book prompts readers to reevaluate the ethical underpinnings of social and ecological justice by interrogating the allocation of dignity.

Future research can broaden this inquiry by investigating how additional Indian speculative fiction interacts with posthumanist themes. Literary works that reinterpret myth, investigate alternative histories, or portray futuristic environments serve as a rich foundation for comprehending the contributions of Indian literature to global posthumanist theory. Such studies may elucidate how narrative forms contest established hierarchies and propose innovative models of justice that surpass anthropocentric viewpoints. The text establishes a significant avenue for reevaluating both historical narratives and modern ethical discussions through a non-anthropocentric lens.

References:

- Braidotti, Rosi. The Posthuman. Polity Press, 2013.
- "Envisioning Posthuman India: An Analysis of S. B. Divya's Machinehood." ResearchGate, n.d.
- Neelakantan, Anand. Ajaya: Roll of the Dice. Platinum Press, 2013.
- Pandey, M. "Rewriting the Epic: Narrative Subversion and Ethical Complexity in Anand Neelakantan's Ajaya." Journal of South Asian Literature and Culture, vol. 7, no. 2, 2020, pp. 55–68.
- "Posthumanism and Children's Literature: A Study of Indian Folktales." The Criterion: An International Journal in English, vol. 13, no. 2, Apr. 2022.
- Srinivas, R. "Beyond Dharma: Reconsidering Morality in Contemporary Mythological Fiction." Indian Review of World Literature in English, vol. 15, no. 1, 2019, pp. 102–13.
- Wolfe, Cary. What Is Posthumanism? University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

33

SOCIAL AND MORAL DIMENSIONS OF POWER AND MARGINALISATION IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S THE KITE RUNNER

Jenitta Soundarya, *Research Scholar, Department of English, B. S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science & Technology, Chennai.*
Dr. N. Suguna, *Assistant Professor, Department of English, B. S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science & Technology, Chennai.*

Racial discrimination remains one of the most serious social issues in the modern world. It is particularly prevalent in developing nations characterised by diverse social, ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Racial discrimination happens when a group of people is treated with prejudice and bigotry in terms of their race. It can be broadly categorised into two types: direct and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination occurs when individuals or groups are treated less favourably than others in comparable situations based on their race. In contrast, indirect discrimination happens when an institution implements a policy or rule that appears to be neutral but, in effect, disadvantages the members of a particular racial group. The tensions of these social issues, such as internal conflict and violence, are most likely to be seen in developed countries rather than in developing ones. One such country is Afghanistan, an underdeveloped country that has endured persistent conflict and warfare throughout its modern history. Joseph Colin in his journal states, "On the UN Human Development Index . . . Afghanistan has been consistently ranked in the bottom 10 countries in the world" (Colins 7).

Being an underdeveloped country, Afghanistan is considered a multi-ethnic nation with a diverse society, where numerous racial and ethnic groups have coexisted for generations. Rasul Bakhsh Rais begins his book Recovering the Frontier State with this description of Afghanistan, "Ravaged by wars over the last three decades, Afghanistan has struggled to find peace and stability in the face of serious internal and external challenges"(Rais ix).

Afghanistan has long been a nation plagued by war, political unrest, and social turmoil. The country also encompasses a diverse range of cultural and ethnic communities. It comprises a variety of cultural and ethnic groups. They include Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and a few smaller groups, such as Aimaqs, Turkmens, Balochs and Nuristanis. Pashtuns are said to be the largest ethnolinguistic group in Afghanistan. Also called as Pathans, Pushtuns, or Pakhtoons; they are the dominant group holding 40 to 50 per cent of the country's population. (Colins 7). Tajiks are considered to be the second largest group. Next to Pashtuns, Tajiks dominate the other populations of Kabul, in Afghanistan. The Hazaras, the next largest ethnic group, have frequently faced mistreatment from other Afghans due to their distinct physical appearance. Reseachers describe the long-standing ethnic tensions in Afghanistan, "Racial discrimination among people of Afghanistan is so deep rooted that even they are not able to recognize own people of their community" (Bhushan 88).

Uzbeks and Turkmen are the Turkic-speaking people, and they make up to ten per cent of Afghan population. Among all the other racial groups of Afghanistan, the Hazaras are considered to have witnessed and gone through various forms of oppression from Pushtans, including massacres, slavery, and even systematic disbarment from their own place of origin.

Basically, marginalisation primarily targets minority groups that lack wealth and power. Such discriminatory practices extend across various areas, including employment, education, services, and

public facilities. In Afghanistan, the Hazaras experience marginalisation in nearly every aspect of their lives. Shaista Wahab and Barry Youngerman, in their book The Brief History of Afghanistan, state that the Hazaras were completely repressed as a political ethnic group, and much of their land was given to others, and they were forced to serve others as slaves. Most of them were sold as slaves in Kabul and many fled to Mashad in Persia and Quetta in India (96).

Literature holds an important responsibility to capture such issues and brings it out by shedding light on them for global attention. To do so, literary writers hold the key position. They play a significant role in knitting all these real-life issues into stories through art, thereby creating awareness, encouraging reflection, and fostering transformation. One among such writers is Khaled Hosseini.

Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan born American writer. He is also the ambassador of an UN organisation UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and a former physician. Hosseini spent his child in Afghanistan and moved to America with his family when he was fifteen. He continued his higher education there and became a physician. He is known for his evocative and effusive depiction of Afghanistan through his writings. His childhood, Spending the first eight years of his early life in Kabul, has deeply influenced his writing, enabling him to bring a unique perspective on Afghanistan. He has totally penned three novels The Kite Runner, And The Mountains Echoed, A Thousand Splendid Suns, and a short story, Sea Prayer. These works of art provide an intimate vision and a pure glimpse into Afghanistan's struggles and triumphs while exploring universal themes of love, loss, and redemption. With that view, the research lands on one of his pragmatic novels, The Kite Runner.

The Kite Runner is Khaled Hosseini's debut novel. It was published in 2003 and marked a turning point in global literature. The book won the Exclusive Books Boeke Prize in 2004 (Bhushan 84). Starting with the fall of Afghanistan's dynastic rule, set against a backdrop of upheaval, the story navigates through the voice of the Afghan people. It specifically highlights the Soviet–Afghan War and the large-scale displacement of Afghan refugees, and also the eventual rise of the Taliban regime.

The novel imitates the pain and suffering of dehumanising ethnicity in Afghanistan. It is the story of a Pashtun kid, Amir, from Kabul. Hosseini highlights the struggles of the Hazaras through the child characters in the novel, depicting them as members of an ethnic subgroup in Afghanistan who were degraded and devalued by the Pashtuns.

The central characters, Amir and Hassan, grow up in distinct social tiers. Amir is a wealthy Pashtun kid, whereas Hassan represents a poor Hazara kid who works as a domestic helper and resides there with Amir's family.

The novel graphically pictures the marginalisation of the Afghan ethnic groups, particularly the Hazaras. The Pashtun view themselves as superior to other Afghan communities and show no hesitation in expressing their brutality toward the Hazaras. Due to the deep-rooted cultural conflicts, the Hazaras are often regarded as members of a lower class and relegated to roles of servitude. This social hierarchy is reflected in incidents when Hassan is being called flat-nosed and later assaulted by a neighbourhood boy near Amir's home. This incident illustrates the severe discrimination Hazaras endure in Afghanistan, especially based on their physical appearance. Hosseini has effusively showcased that even when some Pashtuns and Hazaras, like Amir and Hassan, share genuine bond of friendship, it does not alter the harsh reality that Hazaras continue to live under constant dread of violence. Pashtuns think that Afghanistan is the land only for them and they perceive themself as pure Afghanistani. Hosseini clearly states it through the words of Aseef to Hassan, “Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns. It always has been, always will be. We are the true Afghans, the pure Afghans, not this Flat-Nose here” (Hosseini 38). These words of Aseef echo the thoughts of the young Afghan children, divulging how discriminatory beliefs are inculcated in their young minds from a very early age. This reflects the deep-rooted psychological constructs and the ingrained mindset of marginalisation that the Pashtun community holds against the Hazaras in the

narrative. Through the character of Hassan, it also becomes clear that the Hazaras are not completely excluded by the Pashtuns; Instead, they are often employed as servants in Pashtun households, as seen with Hassan and Ali, who serve in Baba's home.

The Hazaras are primarily marginalised because of their disadvantaged political and social standing, as well as their distinct physical features, which are often said to resemble those of East Asian or Chinese people. Even in The Kite Runner, they are being described as "flat-nosed, mice-eating and load-carrying donkeys" (Hosseini 10).

Throughout the novel, Hosseini has also tried to emphasise the educational discriminatory practices in Afghan schooling where the Pushtuns and the Hazaras were not provided with same educational standards. Hassan and the other Hazara kids are barred from enrolment in schools, unlike Amir and other Pushtuns. Hosseini shows that Amir is a character who is fond of reading. There is also an instance where he is reading a History book, and he encounters information on how the Hazaras were brutally suppressed for a long period by the Pushtuns. This is evident from the book that the Hazaras were treated unjustly.

The Hazaras hardly contemplate their freedom and instead, endure the savagery of the Pashtuns in silence. The successive generations, like Hassan and Ali are seen struggling to break them free from this inherited mindset of subjugation because their ancestors lived under oppression and servitude in the past. Historically confined within the chains of slavery, marginalisation and ethnic discrimination, the Hazaras lack the psychological strength to resist the injustices inflicted upon them. This is exemplified through the character Hassan, who endures Assef's cruel behaviour without protest. Hossini shows a scene in The Kite Runner, where the Hazaras are sexually assaulted. "Assef knelt behind Hassan, put his hands on Hassan's hips and lifted his bare buttocks . . . He unzipped his jeans. Dropped his underwear. He positioned himself behind Hassan. Hassan didn't struggle. Didn't even, whimper" (Hosseini 71).

Through the lens of The Kite Runner, readers can envision the psychological impact on the children of Hazaras. As the Pashtuns have been perceived themself of higher status for many years, the psyche of Pashtun children has become similar to their parents, and Hazaras have always felt weak, marginalised and oppressed about themselves, so the thought of Hazara's children has become like their parents.

The act of Pashtun boys primarily symbolises the assertion of their power and domination over the Hazaras. Marginalisation is vividly depicted also in the incident when Assef and his friends, Wali and Kamal, decide to rape Hassan, just because he is a Hazara. Assef believes that such actions would contribute to purifying Afghanistan by eliminating the Hazaras and preserving the nation. This traumatic incident leaves Hassan deeply scarred, yet he remains silent, suppressing his emotions. This silence underscores the extent to which the Hazaras are oppressed, dehumanised, and treated as subordinates within their own country.

Henceforth, the moral and social discrimination of ethnic groups becomes deeply implanted in the psyche of Afghan children from their childhood through their adulthood. As a result, the children of the dominant Pashtun ethnicity adopt notions of superiority to such an extent that they exhibit hostility and cruelty toward Hazara children, reflecting the perpetuation of entrenched ethnic hierarchies within Afghan society.

Hosseini has clearly portrayed the way Pashtun children display intense aggression when they encounter a child from the Hazara community. They do not hesitate to harass or abuse them verbally. Another factor that contributes to the development of such a mindset is the content of their own school textbooks. The Afghan textbooks reinforce discriminatory attitudes by explicitly emphasising social divisions based on caste and religion. As Hosseini shows in his novel The Kite Runner, "School textbooks barely mentioned them and referred to their ancestry only in passing . . . The book said that my people had

killed the Hazaras, driven them from their lands, burned their homes, and sold their women" (Hosseini 8-9).

Consequently, Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner sheds light on the strained and strangled relationship between the Pashtun and Hazara communities. To date, it is considered to be a relationship that has failed to evolve into harmony due to the persistent ethnic discrimination and marginalisation imposed by the Pashtuns upon the Hazaras. Through the text, it is effusively portrayed that the Hazaras are denied respect and are viewed as impure and inferior within the Islamic context. Consequently, Afghanistan is perceived not as a homeland for them but as a land exclusively belonging to the Pashtuns.

Throughout the novel, Hosseini reveals the deeply rooted orthodox beliefs about ethnicity that have been ingrained in Afghan consciousness for generations, suggesting that such prejudices are unlikely to disappear easily from society.

From the prior analysis of the themes of discrimination and marginalisation as depicted through the main characters in The Kite Runner, it can be concluded that Khaled Hosseini has effectively captured the complexities of human behaviour and emotion within a deeply divided society. His portrayal reveals how these actions not only inflict lasting harm on both the victims and the oppressors but also reflect the harsh realities of a life shaped by moral conflict, remorse, and social injustice.

Kabeer states, "Hosseini's central characters . . . are the epitomes of ethnocentric and gender-biased Afghan society, are actually flesh and blood creatures who are wrenchingly sensitive to their plight" (Kabeer 1424). Ultimately, Hosseini underscores the social and moral dimensions of power and marginalisation and the enduring struggle of individuals in Afghanistan, who must navigate a life permeated by betrayal, guilt, forgiveness, and discrimination from birth to death.

Works Cited

- Bhushan, Vishwa. Ethnic Dehumanization in Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner. The Creative Launcher, vol. 7, no. 6, 2022, India.
- Collins, Joseph J. Understanding War in Afghanistan. National Defense University Press, June 2011.
- Hosseini, Khaled. The Kite Runner. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013.
- Kabeer, Haseena. Afghan Minorities and Ethnic Tension in The Kite Runner and A Thousand Splendid Suns. European Journal of Molecular and Clinical Medicine, vol. 7, no.3, 2020.
- Rais, Rasul Bakhsh. Recovering the frontier state: war, ethnicity, and state in Afghanistan. Lexington Books, 2009.
- Wahab, Shaista, and Barry Youngerman. The Birth of Modern Afghanistan. A Brief History of Afghanistan. 2nd ed., Infobase Publishing, 2007.

34

A DIASPORIC CRISIS: CROSS – CULTURALISM IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S JASMINE

B. Jarina Begam, *Ph. D Scholar, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science & Technology, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.*
afshanakhalid2013@gmail.com
Dr. Md. Sahidul Islam, *Associate Professor, Department of English, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science & Technology, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.*

Abstract

This research article intends to project the cross – cultural perspectives in Bharati Mukherjee's famous novel Jasmine (1989). Indian women writers have influenced entire generations through their remarkable writings. Over the years, they have made significant contributions to both English literature and works in regional languages. Indian writers in English, in particular, deserve special recognition for portraying India's rich cultural heritage and social traditions to readers around the world. Bharati Mukherjee explores various emotions associated with expatriation-nostalgia, frustration, uncertainty and despair. Reflecting the life of an Indian immigrant in Canada and later in the United States, many of her characters are women who suffer from cross-culturalism and identity crisis. Often pushed to the edge, they commit desperate acts of violence. After realizing, they cannot fully belong to either Western culture or Indian society. Jasmine is a novel by Bharati Mukherjee that tells the story of a young Indian woman in the United States who repeatedly changes her identity in an effort to adapt to the American way of life and survive in a foreign land. Drawing from her own experiences of dislocation and displacement, Mukherjee vividly captures the struggles and transformations of the immigrant protagonist in this novel.

Keywords: *Nostalgia, Frustration, Uncertainty and Despair, Cross-Culturalism and Identity, Displacement, Crisis.*

A Diasporic Crisis: Cross – Culturalism in Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine

This research paper examines Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine through a cross-cultural perspective. Mukherjee is a prominent and established female author of the Indian diaspora residing in the United States. Her main aim is to investigate and understand the complex cross-cultural awareness among individuals who engage with multiple cultures. She has a strong focus on the struggles and challenges faced by South Asian immigrants in America and Canada, highlighting the issues they encounter regarding acculturation and cultural clashes in their new environments. Themes of cultural alienation, displacement, survival, and adaptation frequently appear in her works. Her personal life experience spans across India, Canada, and the United States.

The term "cross-cultural conflict" refers to a disagreement that is caused by cultural differences between the parties involved and may be made worse or prolonged. A person's worldview, moral code, opinions, and views of other people are all influenced by their culture. Naturally, these cultural traits might be inaccurate or misleading, which can cause conflict with different cultures or social groupings. However, as seen by the many battles between various cultural groups that still fight today all over the world. The power of culture is great and it can be challenging to overcome cross-cultural conflict. Cross-cultural

conflict has a long history that dates back to the dawn of civilization and the creation of unique civilizations in the ancient Mesopotamian region. People need to familiarize themselves with other cultures in order to feel more at ease. Increased communication, peaceful engagement, and cross-cultural understanding should result from this increased awareness of different cultures.

The post-colonialist worldview eventually permeates all diasporic discussions and issues pertaining to places, movements, crossing boundaries, identities, original and adopted homes, etc. which are abundant in diasporic literature. Both Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak emphasize culture and imperialism as the distinguished factors that influence post-colonial literature. Edward Said defined Orientalism as a western style for dominating, restructuring, heaving authority over the orient. Gayatri Spivak expressed her views about subalterns. 'subaltern' means the colonized/oppressed subject whose voice has been silenced. Both colonialism and patriarchy resulted in the oppression of women and it is really difficult for the subaltern to articulate her point of view and there is no space from where the subaltern subject can speak.

Women writers' post-independent fiction develops a distinct identity by concentrating on the struggles faced by the female protagonists who are socially alienated and miserable. Women writers who give a range of perspectives on women, such as Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, and Bharati Mukherjee, transcend all barriers and limitations. Mukherjee was raised and educated in India, Great Britain, and the United States, where she has resided since the 1980s. She was born in 1940 into a prosperous conventional Calcutta family. Mukherjee is an American novelist who was born in India.

She is a prolific author of fiction, non-fiction, short story collections, memoirs, and novels. The majority of her novels focus on the lives of Indian immigrants. In a delicate way, she has highlighted the suffering and anguish experienced by Indian women who immigrated to the United States. All of her novels center on the inner anguish and actual suffering of these women. In her novels, Mukherjee shares her own experiences bridging cultural divides. Mukherjee's compelling interest in capturing the immigrant experience in her novels can be explained by her own life, which was interrupted and involved displacements. Her personal and artistic sensibilities have been profoundly impacted by her experiences in India, Canada, and America. She keeps pushing the readers to renegotiate the immigrants' native country.

Jasmine (1989) is the story of a young Punjabi woman who encounters cultural friction both within and outside of her own community. In her book Jasmine, Bharati Muherjee tells the tale of a seventeen-year-old girl who becomes a widow and finally relocates to America. The story of a young Hindu woman who flees India for the United States following her husband's murder, uproots herself from her life in India, and re-roots herself as the protagonist continuously sheds lives to move into different roles in search of a new life and the image of America as well. In her path, she encounters numerous challenges, including sexual violence and ultimately returns to the field of healthcare through a succession of different jobs.

Jyoti is married to Prakash. Everyone needs nurturing, and Jasmine is fortunate to have a compassionate husband who respects her own preferences and serves as a guide. However, a series of tragedies follow: her husband is killed in a bomb blast and she is sexually assaulted by someone known as “half-face to death.” Despite this, she manages to survive rather than commit a crime. When her life is doomed, she acts in accordance with Martin Luther King's quotations “Start with faith. Just take the first step; you don't need to see the entire staircase.” From Jasmine to Jase and from Jase to Jane, she experiences several transformations. This explains to the reader the several identities of immigrants who must adopt in a new setting. Jasmine's identities are shaped by her surroundings, and as she moves between temporal and physical locales, her self-perception shifts, leading to a multiplicity of awareness.

She departs from America following the tragic death of Prakash. She travels to America to fulfill her husband's aspirations and live a more productive life after coming from an oppressed, rural household in India. She arrives on the Florida shore as an undocumented immigrant after a perilous voyage in a

shrimper known as the Gulf shuttle, the captain of the Shrimper, Half-Face takes her to a motel and rapes her. Jasmine pretending to be a mourning widow does not protect herself from the assaults of Half Face, who on contrast affirms his authority as male and as white. She is alone and defenseless in this strange place with no one to support her. After her rape, she realizes the harsh reality of life and kills Half-Face like the goddess Kali. This is when the identity transformation begins.

Bharati Mukherjee depicts the efforts made by immigrant women to integrate into the adopted country's society and give up their previous way of life. She also looks at the torturous physical, mental and emotional agony which affects their entire personality, largely turning them into a whole new being. She writes in the vein of the experiences of immigrants. Mukherjee highlights the diversity of this immigrant experience in all of her works. The cross-cultural crises that her female books encounter is portrayed in her writing. She personally struggled to fit in with the norms and conventions of the culture, which she portrays through her female characters. She examines her themes and all of their subtleties.

She is the perfect example of a person's ability to adapt to a new culture and change with it. One important component of Jasmine's independence is her identity. She is among Bharati Mukherjee's strong female characters. In addition to attempting to adapt to a culture that is ruled by men, she ultimately emerges out as a survivor. When Jasmine encounters Taylor's response, which arises from western philosophy, she finds herself in a very bleak predicament. She informs him of her father's passing, and her expression is ingrained in Indian culture. Jasmine is completely taken aback by Taylor's answer, which is quite different from the Indian ethos she had anticipated in response to her news. Jasmine's personality undergoes a gradual transformation as a result of the interactions and connections between Eastern and Western civilizations. She undergoes several challenges during this time of metamorphosis, yet she does not give up her deeply ingrained Indianness, which includes Indian beliefs and customs. Even in Professor Ji's home, she doesn't feel comfortable.

After coming to America, Jyoti undergoes a number of changes, changing from Jyoti to Jasmine and then to Jane. These changes reflect the transition of Bharati Mukherjee's image from that of an expatriate to that of an immigrant. Her trip reflects the real-life experience of an expatriate assimilating gradually into American society. Through her transformation from a simple, rustic, timid, and submissive Indian woman to a more sophisticated, active, and antagonistic Americanized woman, Jasmine is portrayed in Bharati as a symbol of advancement and Americanization.

Jasmine begins her adventure as a traditional Indian girl. As she moves closer to her eventual circumstance, she feels both joy and sorrow. With the goal of complete freedom and self-unification, she battles against the male domination in both India and the United States as well as the animosity between her Eastern and Western traits. Jasmine makes many compromises to survive as a woman from a third-world nation under the influence of the male-centered western culture, demonstrating the strength of globalization. Jasmine is compelled to accommodate every aspect of her multicultural identity in order to conform to the prevailing standards of the global society.

In the novel's final section, Jasmine attains a true identity and modernity. Her inner self is satisfied by the heroine's transition from tradition to modernity. This transformation is evidence of the heroine's bravery, as she acts in accordance with her self-consciousness. In Jasmine, Jyoti's existence is exalted by her inner self and consciousness, which drives her to act in ways that suit her desires. In addition to exemplifying the American spirit of independence, she so chooses to live for herself for the first time and abandons the "old world dutifulness. " Mukherjee uses ideas and ideals about the East and the West to depict racial and ethnic identities in this trans-cultural book.

Thus this research article demonstrates how Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine illustrates the complex cross-cultural experiences of Indian immigrant women assimilating into life in North America. It describes the transformation of the protagonist as a metaphor for the greater immigrant struggle with

identity, displacement, and survival. The novel uncovers the emotional and cultural conflicts created by a life existing between traditional Indian values and influences from the West. Mukherjee's personal diasporic experience enriches her narrative, offering rare insight into immigrant resilience and transformation. The study further emphasizes the relevance of cross-cultural understanding in mitigating conflict and promoting acceptance. Ultimately, Jasmine stands as a powerful exploration of identity, empowerment, and adaptation in a globalized world.

References:

- Dayal, S. Creating , Preserving, Destroying :Violence in Bharati Mukherjee 's Jasmine, Newyork: Garland Publishing,1993.
- Gupta, Monika. Women writers in the twentieth Century Literature. New Delhi : Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2000.Print.
- Mukherjee, Bharati, Jasmine. Grove Press. New York,1989.
- Myles, Anita. Feminism and the Post-Modern Indian Women Novelists in English. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons ,2006.Print.
- http://www.postcolonialweb.org/india/Mukherjee/jasmine/culture.html. Accessed 15 Nov.2025.

35

DIGITAL ARCHIVING OF THE TRADITIONAL HEALING SYSTEM IN TKDL

N. Vishnusri, *Research Scholar, Department of English, B.S.Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology*

Dr. H. Sofia, *Professor and Research Supervisor, Department of English, B.S.Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology*

Abstract

The traditional tribal healing system is the non-codified medicinal knowledge preserved and carried out in the form of oral tradition, a kind of rich cultural heritage of indigenous people. As modernization overpowers the tribal culture, the strong cultural heritage slowly deteriorates with the waning native language. This paper attempts to signify the ways of digital preservation of traditional knowledge despite the giant growth of the digital era, posing a threat to indigenous cultural preservation. A systematic literature review has been done by collecting various articles from Google Scholar, PubMed, Springer Nature, and Research Gate to analyse the digital archiving methods. Findings indicate that the government has initiated a digital forum like the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) to preserve, protect and strengthen the Traditional Knowledge/ Traditional healing system against illegal patent exploitation and biopiracy.

Keywords: *Biopiracy, Digital Archiving, Traditional healing system, Traditional Knowledge, Traditional Knowledge Digital Library.*

Introduction

India is the hub of diverse cultural heritage, which includes the traditional healing systems of indigenous tribes. Traditional knowledge of the healing system relies on rich biodiversity from all over India and it has been transmitted orally from one generation to the next in the Indian tribes whose habitat is in the mountains and forests. Traditional Knowledge is not delimited to the healing practices but extends its scope towards agricultural practices, ecological conservation, sustainable environment and other artistic expressions.

In India, rich knowledge of tribal medicine was accumulated after years of experience and their intricate connections with plant base, wildlife and other forest materials for food, medicine and lifestyle. Forest and mountainous cover, extending from the Himalayas to the Eastern and Western Ghats, serve as a rich hotspot for medicinal herbs and wildlife medicines. In these almost 500 species of plant bases from Northeastern India serve as rich sources of indigenous tribal medicines. With forest exploitation, development projects, tribal assimilation and acculturation, and the impact of modernity, this rich tradition is under rapid extinction. To prevent this erosion and protect Traditional Knowledge from misuse and unauthorised patent claims, the Indian government, in collaboration with Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Ministry of Science and Technology, the Department of Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH), has created the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL).

Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL)

Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) is a vast database that encompasses a wide range

of digitized texts of various indigenous medical practices and medicinal herbs, either codified or non-codified practices. According to the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), 70% of the Indian population depends on the traditional medicinal practices for their livelihood, which involves using plant-based medicine like neem, turmeric, arogyapacha, etc.. Several global nations' biopiracy of the Indian traditional healing system that has been in practice for several decades, especially the US patent filing on wound healing property of Turmeric, flagged the mandate for protection against illegal commercial exploitation, and hence, the Indian government has initiated the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL).

So far, more than 4.54 lakhs of formulations and practices of the Indian medicinal system belonging to codified practices (AYUSH) have been successfully transcribed to TKDL with the help of IT tools and a systematic classification system called Traditional Knowledge Resource Classification (TKRC). The Traditional Knowledge Resource Classification (TKRC) system helps to overcome the language barriers by converting the contents of ancient texts available in diverse Indian local languages like Hindi, Arabic, Urudu, Tamil, Sanskrit, etc, into international languages like French, Spanish, English, Japanese and German. This system makes the Indian Traditional medicinal texts globally available and helps in prior art.

Objectives

In an era where the huge elephant of Digi-world and AI pose a threat to the transmission of indigenous knowledge on healing systems to the next generation, digital innovation serves as a tool for rich cultural preservation and foregrounds evidence for diverse cultural usage in India that helps in humanitarian growth. Traditional Knowledge Digital Library serves as a bridge that connects the gap between eroding oral tradition and modern digital development. Hence, this paper attempts to signify

1. The role of the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) in preserving and protecting Indigenous Knowledge.
2. The importance of incorporating tribal healing practices in the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach to identify the effective digitizing techniques, specifically focusing on the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL). Various secondary articles from resource websites like Google Scholar, PubMed, Springer Nature, and Research Gate have been collected to determine the challenges faced by TKDL in integrating the tribal indigenous healing system using the content analysis technique. The data has been systematically aligned to advocate for the presence of an effective digital preservation platform, its significance, and the need to integrate non-codified/ tribal healing practices.

Literature Review

Oguamanam, in his Patents and traditional medicine: Digital capture, creative legal interventions, and dialects of knowledge transformation (2008), exemplifies India's Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) as a trailblazing solution to the problem of indigenous knowledge being excluded from traditional intellectual property regimes. He delineates how TKDL, by connecting its Traditional Knowledge Resource Classification (TKRC) with the International Patent Classification (IPC), serves as a transformative and defensive system for protecting and converting orally or culturally entrenched practices into searchable, standardized data that can be used as "prior art" in patent disputes. At the same time, he observes a dialectical tension between digitization risks resulting in the decontextualizing of holistic, community-based processes and supporting traditional knowledge by requiring its legitimacy within global legal systems. He propounds TKDL as the embodiment of the broader cultural cosmopolitanism.

Thomas, in his article Traditional Knowledge and Traditional Knowledge Digital Library: Digital

quandaries and other concerns (2010), delineates India's TKDL as both a pioneering defence against biopiracy and a fundamentally political project. It says how by digitizing enormous volumes of ancient knowledge, India has set worldwide documentation standards and at the same time faces the challenging problems. He covers the problems like, Who defines what constitutes 'traditional"? How can we preserve tiny, local traditions alongside dominant ones? Can digital archives capture the sacred, dynamic, and relational aspects of indigenous knowledge, or will they reduce it to property-like data? Finally, Thomas emphasizes that, while digital technologies are useful, they must be accompanied by meaningful investment in the land, livelihoods, and cultural vibrancy of the people who preserve these traditions.

Fredriksson's article, India's Traditional Knowledge Digital Library and the Politics of Patent Classifications (2021), investigates the TKDL as both a defensive measure against biopiracy and a political knowledge categorization project that has effectively averted countless bogus patents. He has effectively captured in this article how it has influenced IPC amendments for better integration of traditional medicine, thereby demonstrating a rare instance of traditional knowledge affecting global standards. However, the article highlights “dilemmas of documenting" (Fredrikkson 8), the TKDL privileging codified medicines such as AYUSH while ignoring marginalized or oral traditions. Further, he highlights how TKDL risks decontextualizing holistic practices by translating them into metadata, and reflects state-driven agendas that align with nationalist projects of modernizing, thereby industrializing traditional medicine. Finally, Fredriksson contends that, while the TKDL demonstrates the potential to protect traditional knowledge and challenge Western epistemic dominance, it also reveals tensions between preservation and commodification. For him, TKDL plays a dual role of being the instrument of postcolonial resistance and domestic economic strategy.

Sen and Chakraborthy in their Traditional Knowledge Digital Library: A distinctive approach to protect and promote Indian indigenous medicinal treasures (2014) emphasises India's innovative initiative to protect its traditional medicinal knowledge and folk practices from biopiracy and patent misappropriation in the global intellectual property framework, especially in the instances of patent filing for basmati rice, neem, and turmeric, by global nation like US which lead to the establishment of TKDL. In a nutshell, their article records with detailed statistics on how in order to eliminate biopiracy, TKDL's multilingual database helps the international patent examiners access the digitized documents. The system also implemented the Traditional Knowledge Resource Classification (TKRC), which aligned indigenous knowledge with international patent classification standards. The TKDL has been acknowledged as a global model by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), thereby inspiring other governments to follow the same. TKDL not only safeguards India's cultural and medicinal history but also promotes research, develops healthcare, and assists indigenous people, thereby placing India as a pioneer in traditional knowledge protection.

Singh and Tyagi, in their study "An Indigenous Indian Medicinal Treasure: Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (2019)", emphasize the urgent need to protect the Indian medicine system from biopiracy and misappropriation. It demonstrates how indigenous knowledge, which is frequently shared orally within tribal and rural communities, has historically provided safe and sustainable healthcare but is now under threat from commercialization, climate change, and illegitimate patents. It highlights how comprehensive documentation and digitization of both codified and oral traditions help to protect cultural uniqueness and biodiversity while also promoting sustainable development, healthcare innovation, and indigenous groups' livelihoods.

Ansari, in his The Role of Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) in Preservation and Protection of Indigenous Medicinal Knowledge of India (2020), gives a detailed study on TKDL, its uses and how TKDL has acted against various biopiracy instances by global nations. The article stresses the significance of TKDL in preserving the indigenous medicinal practices against various misappropriations

and how TKDL acts as a multilingual dynamic database that continuously updates and adds input according to the user. The study also covers the complex nuances of protecting databases against the existing framework of International Patent Classification (IPC).

The article Harnessing Traditional tribal Knowledge Treasure in India by Unlocking the Potential of Digital Platform (2023) by Panda and Kaur delves into the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL)'s significance in preserving and protecting India's Traditional Tribal Knowledge (TTK), which encompasses indigenous methods in medicine, agriculture, ecology, crafts, and cultural heritage. It describes TTK as both a cultural and ecological asset for biodiversity conservation, sustainable livelihoods, and climate resilience, which is increasingly endangered by globalization, urbanization, and biopiracy. This article underscores how TKDL protects indigenous intellectual property rights while simultaneously encouraging innovation, research, and global awareness of India's legacy by connecting ancient wisdom with modern digital technologies which helps in easy access globally.

Inference

1) The role of the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) in preserving and protecting Indigenous Knowledge.

? To intervene in the biopiracy and global patent grants that misappropriate the traditional medicine and traditional healing systems

? To create a proactive system of prior art using standardized technology of Traditional Knowledge Resource Classification (TKRC), aligning it with Intellectual Patent Classification (IPC)

? Revoke the patent intent to the Indian traditional medicine system, as in the case of Neem and Turmeric. So far, 324 patents have been set aside, withdrawn and amended with the evidence made for prior art.

2) Importance of incorporating tribal healing practices in the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library

? Non-codified healing practices, unlike codified practices, are often embedded within the Traditional Tribal Knowledge (TTK), which relies on oral practices and becomes defunct as language erodes.

? Signify innate cultural practices, wisdom, and skills that serve as assets for sustainable and eco-centric medicinal practices.

? Serves as a tool for primary healthcare livelihoods and biodiversity conservation

? The local embeddedness, holistic nature and lack of systemic documentation in TKDL make it vulnerable to bio-piracy and misappropriation.

Challenges faced in digitizing the tribal healing methods and medicinal values

Digitizing the non-codified traditional knowledge faces fundamental barriers or challenges like legal framework (IPC/World Intellectual Property Organization- WIPO), community sovereignty, and political administration of digital database. The locally available traditional knowledge finds it hard to align with Intellectual Property (IP) law because its oral, undocumented nature makes it nearly impossible to prove origination or counter patent claims, as it is not based on a single person's formulation but anonymous ritualistic or group practices. Furthermore, its holistic, complex nature resists the IP requirement for particularization (isolating a single, novel invention) needed for prior art citation. Secondly, there are critical ethical challenges centered on community sovereignty and the need to secure continuous Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) from custodians to prevent misuse or violation, which makes it difficult to stick to the laws during digitization. Finally, significant socio-technical gaps exist, including the digital divide and low literacy, which compromise community ownership. Administratively, current systems struggle with managing vast, unstructured oral data due to a lack of language expertise of different tribal communities. Lack of the necessary integration of advanced tools like AI (though the government has initiated digital app like Adivani), fails to bridge the gap between traditional knowledge holders and pharmacologists.

Conclusion: This paper emphasises the importance of TKDL in digitizing the traditional medicinal system. On the one hand, the systemic documentation of codified medicine systems like AYUSH prevented patent misappropriation while at the same time leaving Traditional tribal knowledge on healing systems vulnerable to global misuse. Though the TKDL set a benchmark for the global patent system, resisting the western colonial oppression of homogenization and mainstream medicinal practices, there is a significant gap between archiving traditional knowledge systems and tribal traditional knowledge systems, which is to be mended in future practices.

References

- Bio- piracy of Traditional Knowledge, https://www.tkdl.res.in/tkdl/langdefault/Common/Biopiracy.asp?GL=Eng
- Fredriksson, Martin. "India's Traditional knowledge Digital Library and the Politics of patent Classifications." Law and Critique, 34: 1-9, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10978-021-09299-7
- Oguamanam, Chidi. "Patents and traditional medicine: Digital capture, creative legal interventions, and the dialectics of knowledge transformation". Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies, 15 (2), 489-528, 2008.
- Panda, S. and Kaur, N. "Harnessing Traditional Tribal Knowledge Treasure in India by Unlocking the Potential of Digital Platform." University News, 61(47), 110-119, 2023. https//doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10213022
- Preserving tribal knowledge of herbal medicines and edibles in a digital library. Csir science stories, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research and Ministry of Science and technology. https://www.csir.res.in/en/csir-science-stories/preserving-tribal-knowledge-herbal-medicines-and-edibles-digital-library
- Sen, Saikat, and Raja Chakraborty. "Traditional Knowledge Digital Library: A Distinctive Approach to Protect and Promote Indian Indigenous Medicinal Treasure." Current Science, vol. 106, no. 10, 2014, pp. 1340–43. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24102476 .
- Singh, Dr & Tyagi, Sudhir. An Indigenous Indian Medicinal Treasure: Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (2019). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335099740_An_Indigenous_Indian_Medicinal_Treasure_Traditional_Knowledge_Digital_Library
- Thomas, Pradip N. "Traditional knowledge and the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library: Digital quandaries and other concerns." International Communication Gazette, 72(8), 659-673. https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048510380799
- Traditional Knowledge Digital Library Unit (TKDL), About TKDL. https://www.csir.res.in/en/documents/tkdl
- Traditional Knowledge Digital Library, About TKDL. https://www.tkdl.res.in/tkdl/langdefault/Common/Abouttkdl.asp?GL=Eng

36

PERFORMING THE HYBRID SELF: GENDER PERFORMATIVITY AND INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITY IN JEFFREY EUGENIDES'S MIDDLESEX

Ms. Milcah R, *Research Scholar, Department of English, Faculty of Science and Humanities, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, Chennai, India.*
mr2900@srmist.edu.in
Dr. Muthu Deepa M, *Assistant Professor, Department of English, Faculty of Science and Humanities, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, Chennai, India.*
muthudem@srmist.edu.in

Abstract

Jeffrey Eugenides's Middlesex (2002) is an in-depth study of identity that surpasses biological determinism and societal norms, explaining the complex interrelations among gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. This paper examines the intersex protagonist, Calliope Stephanides (later Cal), through the lenses of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, focusing on the tension between constructed and embodied identity. From the perspective of performativity, Cal's evolving identity contests binary gender classifications, illustrating gender as a fluid transition instead of a static essence. At the same time, the story of migration from Greece to America makes it harder to form an identity and Cal's sexual difference intersects with cultural hybridity, family expectations, and ethnic belonging. This paper argues that Middlesex is not just a story about personal change, but also a deep look at how society shapes what is considered Normal. It explores how Cal comes to accept himself while dealing with family trauma, being disconnected from his roots, and pressure to fit into traditional gender roles. In the end, Eugenides highlights the need to look at gender and sexuality through different lenses, including how they intersect and how people perform them in everyday life.

Keywords: *Gender performativity, Intersectionality, Culture.*

Introduction

In the evolving terrain of gender and sexuality studies, contemporary literature has emerged as a significant site where questions of identity, embodiment, and belonging intersect with sociocultural structures. The twenty-first century has witnessed a decisive turn toward re-examining the binaries that traditionally define human experience male/female, East/West, self/other and exploring how these oppositions collapse under the pressure of lived realities. Jeffrey Eugenides's Middlesex (2002) stands at the forefront of this critical discourse, weaving an intricate narrative that challenges rigid taxonomies of sex and gender while situating them within the broader context of migration, history, and ethnicity. Through its intersex protagonist Calliope Stephanides later known as Cal the novel extends the conversation beyond bodily difference to interrogate the performative and intersectional dimensions of identity.

Gender, as theorized by Judith Butler, is not a biological fact but a reiterative social performance, a "stylized repetition of acts" that produces the illusion of stable identity (Butler 179). Middlesex dramatizes this performative instability through Cal's oscillation between male and female subjectivities, revealing

gender as an ongoing negotiation rather than a predetermined truth. The protagonist's physical transformation mirrors an internal process of self-realization that defies the cultural norms governing both body and behavior. Eugenides's novel thus becomes a textual laboratory for testing the limits of gender performativity, foregrounding how identity emerges through discourse, repetition, and resistance.

Yet, Middlesex is not merely a story of individual difference it is also a story of inheritance, geography, and migration. The Stephanides family's movement from Smyrna (present-day Izmir, Turkey) to Detroit, Michigan, situates the novel within a transnational and diasporic framework. As Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality reminds us, identity cannot be understood in isolation but is constituted through overlapping systems of power and oppression. Cal's experiences are mediated not only by his intersex body but also by his Greek-American heritage, cultural displacement, and generational memory. These intersections make Middlesex a complex text in which biology, culture, and history converge to shape the contours of gendered experience.

Moreover, the novel's narrative structure part memoir, part family saga, part historical fiction mirrors the fluidity of its central themes. Eugenides constructs a multi-voiced narrative that oscillates between first-person confession and third-person omniscience, thereby destabilizing narrative authority much like gender itself destabilizes identity categories. As Cal recounts his family's journey through time, he simultaneously reclaims agency over his own story, challenging the medical, religious, and social institutions that sought to define him. This blending of personal and collective histories situates Middlesex as an intersectional text that transcends the boundaries of genre, gender, and nationhood.

In a world where identity politics often demands fixed categories of belonging, Middlesex insists on fluidity, multiplicity, and becoming. It invites readers to question how narratives of gender and sexuality are entangled with broader discourses of race, ethnicity, class, and migration. By grounding its analysis in Butler's performativity and Crenshaw's intersectionality, this paper aims to illuminate how Eugenides's novel not only represents but also theorizes the complexities of embodied difference. Through Cal's journey, the text demonstrates that identity is neither biologically determined nor socially static; rather, it is constructed at the crossroads of power, discourse, and desire.

The purpose of this study is therefore twofold: first, to examine how Middlesex subverts the heteronormative and binary constructions of gender through performative acts; and second, to explore how the intersections of ethnicity, culture, and migration inform Cal's understanding of selfhood. By analyzing these interwoven narratives, the paper situates Middlesex within the broader framework of twenty-first-century gender discourse one that recognizes difference not as deviation but as a necessary expansion of the human condition.

Literature Review

Since its publication in 2002, Middlesex has received extensive critical attention for its treatment of intersex identity, family lineage, and cultural migration. Critics have approached the novel through diverse lenses psychoanalysis, postmodern narrative theory, and medical humanities but few have adequately integrated gender performativity and intersectionality in a single, sustained analysis. Much of the existing scholarship isolates the protagonist's intersex experience from the sociocultural frameworks that shape it, thereby underestimating how ethnicity and diaspora influence Cal's gender construction.

Early critical readings, such as those by Rachel Carroll in Transgender and Intersex: Theoretical, Practical, and Artistic Perspectives (2012), emphasize the novel's contribution to intersex visibility but tend to frame Cal's transformation primarily in biological terms. Similarly, scholars like Jay Prosser in Second Skins (1998) discuss gendered embodiment but often privilege psychoanalytic models over performative or intersectional perspectives. While these studies illuminate aspects of bodily identity, they risk depoliticizing gender by detaching it from cultural and historical determinants.

Conversely, sociocultural readings, including Irene Kacandes's essay “Narrative Performances in

Middlesex" (2009), explore the novel's intergenerational and migratory dimensions but pay less attention to how these dimensions interact with Cal's gendered selfhood. There remains a notable gap where Butler's performativity and Crenshaw's intersectionality could be productively combined to explain how Cal's gender identity is negotiated not merely through individual agency but also through overlapping structures of ethnicity, class, and family history.

This study therefore intervenes in the existing discourse by arguing that Middlesex cannot be fully understood through gender or cultural studies alone, it must be read through their intersection. It positions the novel as a site where biological, social, and cultural narratives converge, forming what Butler might term "a field of discursive practices" (Butler 33) that continually redefine identity. This dual-theoretical approach not only fills the gap in Middlesex scholarship but also contributes to the broader field of gender studies by demonstrating how intersectionality and performativity coexist as dynamic analytical tools.

Analysing the Text with Theory

1. Judith Butler's Theory of Gender Performativity

Judith Butler's seminal work Gender Trouble (1990) radically reconceptualized gender not as an innate or stable essence but as a socially regulated performance. Butler argues that,

"Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance" (Butler 33)

In this sense, gender identity is not something one is but something one does a series of acts, gestures, and discourses that produce the illusion of a coherent self. This theoretical shift dislodges gender from biological determinism, situating it instead within the performative domain of culture, language, and power.

In the context of Middlesex, Butler's concept of performativity provides a lens through which to examine Cal/Calliope's evolving identity. The protagonist's life trajectory illustrates how gender is not discovered but constructed through social recognition and repetition. When Cal states,

"I was born twice: first, as a baby girl, on a remarkably smogless Detroit day in January of 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room near Petoskey, Michigan, in August of 1974" (Eugenides 3)

The statement encapsulates the performative instability of gender identity. Cal's two "births" reflect not biological change alone but the transformative power of narrative and self-naming the very acts that constitute performativity.

Butler also emphasizes that performativity is constrained by social norms

"There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 34)

Thus, the freedom to perform is always entangled with the boundaries of what is culturally intelligible. Middlesex dramatizes this paradox as Cal's acts of gender redefinition are mediated by medical institutions, family expectations, and societal prescriptions. The narrative thereby illustrates Butler's argument that subversion emerges not from escaping norms but from rearticulating them within existing power structures.

Cal's ultimate declaration "I'm the new mutation" (Eugenides 106) embodies Butler's notion of performative agency. The protagonist becomes both the product and the critic of normative gender discourse, revealing how identity can be reclaimed through the very mechanisms that once confined it. In this sense, Middlesex functions as a literary enactment of Butlerian performativity, exposing gender as an evolving narrative rather than a static biological category.

2. Kimberlé Crenshaw's Intersectionality

While Butler's theory focuses on the performative construction of gender, Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality first articulated in her 1989 and 1991 essays provides a complementary framework to understand how multiple axes of identity and oppression interlock. Crenshaw defines

intersectionality as the "interconnectedness of social categorizations such as race, gender, and class, which create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage" (Crenshaw 1244). It challenges the single-axis framework that isolates gender from other structural dimensions, arguing instead that experiences of identity are always contextual and relational.

Applying intersectionality to Middlesex reveals how Cal's intersex identity is inseparable from his cultural and ethnic heritage. The Stephanides family's Greek-American background introduces additional layers of hybridity that shape Cal's negotiation of gender. The intergenerational migration from Smyrna to Detroit embodies both physical and symbolic border-crossing, aligning with Crenshaw's insistence that identity formation occurs at the "crossroads" of multiple social forces. Cal's family history of displacement marked by his grandparents' incestuous union during their escape from war-torn Asia Minor symbolizes how cultural hybridity and transgression are inscribed into his genetic and narrative inheritance.

Crenshaw's framework also emphasizes that invisibility arises when intersectional experiences are flattened into singular categories. Cal's identity defies medical, legal, and cultural classification precisely because it operates across intersecting axes biological, ethnic, and social. As Cal reflects, "I have never been one thing or the other" (Eugenides 489), articulating a lived reality that Crenshaw's theory helps to illuminate: the simultaneous visibility and erasure of marginalized subjects who occupy multiple social positions.

Intersectionality also exposes how power operates through institutions. The novel's depiction of the medicalization of Cal's body where doctors attempt to assign a gender based on anatomical "truth" parallels Crenshaw's critique of institutional blindness. Just as Crenshaw reveals how law and feminism often ignore black women's unique experiences, Middlesex shows how both science and society erase intersex existence by enforcing normative binaries. Thus, Eugenides's narrative demonstrates that the struggle for recognition is not merely personal but systemic.

Intersections of Performativity and Intersectionality

Bringing Butler and Crenshaw together allows for a nuanced reading of Middlesex that bridges embodiment and environment, individual agency and structural constraint. Butler shows how gender is performed; Crenshaw reveals where and under what conditions it is performed. In Cal's life, these theories converge: his gender performance is shaped by intersecting pressures of ethnicity, migration, religion, and class.

When Cal performs masculinity in his adult life, it is not only an act of self-determination but also a negotiation with the cultural codes of American masculinity, Greek tradition, and diasporic belonging. His decision to "pass" as male after adolescence is both a performative assertion and an intersectional survival strategy. As he notes, "The moment I could shave, I felt free" (Eugenides 486) a freedom that is simultaneously liberating and constrained by social expectations.

By synthesizing Butler's and Crenshaw's frameworks, this study positions Middlesex as a paradigmatic text for understanding how gender and cultural identity co-produce one another. The novel demonstrates that performativity does not occur in a vacuum but within an intersectional field of power relations where each act of self-making reverberates through history, culture, and social discourse.

Performing Identity at the Intersections

The Body as a Site of Cultural and Discursive Struggle

In Middlesex, the body functions as both text and battleground a place where biology, culture, and discourse intersect. From the opening line,

"I was born twice: first, as a baby girl… and then again, as a teenage boy" (Eugenides 3)

The novel situates embodiment within narrative performativity. Cal's declaration is not merely autobiographical; it performs gender identity through language. This act of self-narration enacts what

Butler calls "the reiteration of norms that produce the illusion of substance" (Butler 179). Cal's gender, therefore, is not discovered but articulated through the performative act of storytelling itself.

Cal's body becomes the site upon which competing discourses medical, familial, and cultural attempt to impose coherence. The scene in which Dr. Luce diagnoses Cal as "a genetic male raised as a girl" (Eugenides 431) epitomizes institutional authority's attempt to regulate gender through biological determinism. However, Eugenides subverts this narrative by allowing Cal to reclaim authorship of his identity. Instead of submitting to medical intervention, Cal chooses to define himself through personal agency and social navigation: "I decided to become a boy" (Eugenides 441). This conscious act of self-naming echoes Butler's assertion that the subject emerges through "repetition and resignification" of social scripts (Butler 188).

The medical gaze, in this context, mirrors what Crenshaw identifies as systemic erasure where institutions fail to recognize complex identities that defy classification. The binary logic of diagnosis mirrors the single-axis thinking Crenshaw critiques. Cal's decision to resist surgery and instead construct a life that integrates both past and present reflects a form of intersectional resistance: an assertion of agency within overlapping structures of constraint. His body, rather than being corrected, becomes a living archive of transgression and hybridity.

Migration, Hybridity, and Intergenerational Performativity

Eugenides situates Cal's identity within a broader genealogy of cultural and historical crossings. The novel's ancestral narrative beginning with Cal's grandparents, Lefty and Desdemona, fleeing Smyrna and entering an incestuous marriage introduces the motif of boundary transgression long before Cal's own gender transformation. Their migration from the Old World to the New embodies what Homi Bhabha terms "the third space of enunciation," where hybrid identities are formed. Through Crenshaw's lens, this intersection between ethnicity and gender foregrounds how marginalization operates across generations.

Desdemona's anxiety about her family's "impure blood" (Eugenides 85) foreshadows the novel's genetic and symbolic inheritance of hybridity. Her fear of "mixing the line" mirrors society's fear of blurred boundaries be they racial, sexual, or biological. Cal's intersex body thus becomes the material realization of his family's metaphorical hybridity. His physical difference literalizes the cultural and moral anxieties of immigration and assimilation. As Cal notes,

"Something was happening inside me, and it was the same thing that had happened to America in 1974" (Eugenides 438)

This parallel between individual transformation and national change aligns with Crenshaw's intersectional insight that identity is shaped by contextual forces historical, political, and social.

In America, the Stephanides family performs Greekness as a cultural identity, adopting and discarding traditions to negotiate belonging. Desdemona's attempts to preserve purity through her silkworm cocoon symbolize both biological determinism and cultural isolation. Cal's eventual emergence as a hybrid subject neither wholly Greek nor American, neither male nor female represents the failure of essentialist identities. In Butlerian terms, Cal performs gender and culture simultaneously, each act destabilizing the boundaries that define the other.

Language, Naming, and the Performativity of Self-Narration

Language in Middlesex functions as both a tool of control and a medium of liberation. From childhood, Calliope's gender identity is scripted through linguistic conventions, she is addressed as SHE, dressed in feminine clothing, and expected to embody heteronormative femininity. These repetitions produce the illusion of gender coherence until adolescence exposes their fragility. Butler argues that language is the mechanism through which power circulates,

"To be called a name is to be positioned within discourse" (Butler 95)

The novel dramatizes this when Cal, upon discovering the truth about his chromosomes, decides to

rename himself: "Call me Cal" (Eugenides 441). These renaming echoes both Butler's notion of resignification and Crenshaw's emphasis on reclaiming visibility. The act of naming is both linguistic and performative it reconstitutes identity through speech. By narrating his own story in retrospect, Cal reclaims the authority that medical, familial, and social institutions once monopolized. His narrative becomes a performative counter-discourse that resists both diagnostic and heteronormative definitions.

Eugenides's use of the first-person retrospective voice intensifies this performativity. The adult Cal's narration of his former self blur temporal boundaries, suggesting that identity is continually rewritten. As he confesses,

"I have never been comfortable being only one thing" (Eugenides 489)

The very grammar of his narration shifting pronouns, alternating temporalities embodies the instability of gender itself. Narrative becomes the performative stage upon which identity is rehearsed and revised.

The Family as a Microcosm of Intersectional Power

Crenshaw's framework illuminates how familial and cultural institutions reproduce social hierarchies that regulate gender. Desdemona's matriarchal authority, juxtaposed with her patriarchal beliefs, symbolizes the internal contradictions of tradition. Her insistence on purity and conformity reflects the same systems of exclusion that later define Cal's marginalization. The Stephanides household, therefore, becomes a microcosm of intersectional power where ethnicity, religion, class, and gender intersect. The generational conflict between assimilation and tradition parallels Cal's internal conflict between conformity and self-realization. As Eugenides writes,

"The problem was not what I was but what I might become" (Eugenides 446)

This line encapsulates both Butler's and Crenshaw's insights: identity is performative shaped by acts and intersectional shaped by context. The family's migration story and Cal's gender transition both signify attempts to negotiate belonging within oppressive frameworks.

Moreover, the narrative's historical backdrop the Detroit race riots, the sexual revolution, and second-wave feminism situates Cal's personal transformation within a collective cultural upheaval. Eugenides juxtaposes Cal's puberty with America's own crisis of identity in the 1970s, making the body a metaphor for national and historical transformation. This layering of scales personal, familial, and national exemplifies intersectionality's multidimensional perspective.

Reclaiming Agency and Redefining Normalcy

The closing chapters of Middlesex present Cal not as a figure of resolution but of coexistence. His decision to live as a man without erasing his past signals a new paradigm of identity one that is fluid, hybrid, and self-determined. "I am not tragic," Cal asserts, rejecting both victimhood and medical pathology (Eugenides 520). His agency lies not in choosing one side of a binary but in inhabiting the space between.

Through this act of redefinition, Cal embodies Butler's call for "the subversive repetition of gender norms" (Butler 189). His existence destabilizes the coherence of gender categories, revealing normalcy as a social fiction. Simultaneously, his hybrid ethnicity and diasporic lineage demonstrate Crenshaw's principle that identities formed at intersections are sites of both vulnerability and strength.

Eugenides's portrayal of Cal's acceptance reframes difference as wholeness. Cal's intersex identity, once pathologized, becomes a metaphor for human multiplicity. The novel concludes with Cal embracing love and connection, not despite his difference but through it. His journey from secrecy to self-acceptance mirrors the broader cultural movement toward intersectional recognition a world where identity is plural, performative, and perpetually in motion.

Scope for Future Research

The intersectional reading of Middlesex offered in this paper opens multiple avenues for continued

exploration within literary, cultural, and gender studies. Future research could expand beyond Butlerian performativity and Crenshaw's intersectionality to integrate trans theory, postcolonial feminism, and medical humanities, thereby deepening the understanding of how intersex narratives complicate both gender politics and bodily autonomy.

One compelling direction is the comparative study of Middlesex with other trans or intersex narratives such as Jeffrey Tambor's Transparent or Jeanette Winterson's Written on the Body. Such comparisons would illuminate how contemporary texts negotiate visibility, embodiment, and resistance through different cultural and narrative frameworks. Another promising field involves eco-queer and posthumanist readings, which could reinterpret Cal's genetic hybridity as a metaphor for ecological interconnectedness and fluidity beyond anthropocentric binaries.

Furthermore, Middlesex can serve as a foundational text for exploring diasporic queer subjectivities how migration, race, and gender converge to form complex transnational identities. As global mobility intensifies, the hybrid identities represented by Cal may increasingly resonate with individuals navigating multiple cultural and gendered realities. Intersectional readings could also examine how institutions such as medicine, religion, and education perpetuate normative discourses under the guise of objectivity, thus linking literary analysis with real-world policy and advocacy for intersex and transgender rights.

Finally, digital humanities approaches could be applied to map patterns of intersectional representation across contemporary fiction. Text-mining techniques and corpus analysis may identify recurring motifs of hybridity, bodily transformation, and cultural displacement offering a broader data-driven understanding of twenty-first-century identity narratives.

Conclusion

Jeffrey Eugenides's Middlesex stands as a landmark in contemporary fiction for its radical reimagining of gender and identity. Through the intertwined lenses of Judith Butler's gender performativity and Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality, the novel reveals that identity is not a singular truth but an ongoing negotiation among biological, cultural, and historical forces. Cal's journey from Calliope to Cal becomes a metaphor for the human condition itself fluid, evolving, and resistant to containment. By performing his gender rather than discovering it, Cal enacts Butler's central proposition that gender is constituted through repeated acts that acquire meaning only within social discourse. Yet, these performances occur within the structural intersections Crenshaw identifies of ethnicity, migration, and cultural heritage which shape and sometimes constrain the possibilities of self-definition. Middlesex thus demonstrates that performativity and intersectionality are not competing but complementary paradigms: one describes the process of becoming, the other contextualizes the conditions of that becoming.

The novel also reframes hybridity biological, cultural, and narrative as a site of empowerment rather than deviance. Cal's intersex body, initially treated as an anomaly, emerges as a symbol of multiplicity and resilience. Through Eugenides's layered narrative, the body becomes an archive of history, migration, and transformation a reminder that identity is always relational and historically situated. In a global era marked by fluid boundaries and contested identities, Middlesex challenges the essentialisms that underlie gender and national belonging. It invites readers and scholars alike to reconceptualize identity not as a static possession but as a living performance enacted across intersecting dimensions of power, discourse, and culture. Ultimately, the novel's enduring significance lies in its ability to articulate the universal through the particular to use Cal's story as a mirror for humanity's collective search for self-understanding amid fragmentation and flux. As Butler asserts,

“The task is not to seek the origins of gender but to consider the possibilities of its transformation” (Butler 189).

Eugenides's Middlesex enacts this transformative potential through its protagonist, demonstrating that selfhood, like narrative, is never complete only continuously performed, rewritten, and reimagined.

Bibliography

- Eugenides, Jeffrey. Middlesex. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.
- Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." Stanford Law Review, vol. 43, no. 6, 1991, pp. 1241–1299.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. The Second Sex. Translated by H. M. Parshley, Vintage Books, 1989.
- Braidotti, Rosi. Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory. Columbia UP, 1994.
- Butler, Judith. Undoing Gender. Routledge, 2004.
- Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction. Translated by Robert Hurley, Vintage Books, 1978.
- Halberstam, Jack. Female Masculinity. Duke University Press, 1998.
- Kristeva, Julia. Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection. Translated by Leon S.Columbia UP, 1982.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. Epistemology of the Closet. University of California Press, 1990.
- Stryker, Susan. Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution. Seal Press, 2017.
- Weeks, Jeffrey. Sexuality. 4th ed., Routledge, 2010.
- Wilchins, Riki Anne. Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer. Alyson Books, 2004.
- Arondekar, Anjali. "Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive." Journal of the History of Sexuality, vol. 14, no. 1/2, 2005, pp. 10–27.
- Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, vol. 1, no. 4, 1976, pp. 875–893.
- Faludi, Susan. "A Family Tree of Gender: The Hybrid Identity in Middlesex." The New York Times, 2002.
- Hird, Myra J. "Gender's Nature: Intersexuality, Transsexualism, and the 'Sex'/'Gender' Binary." Feminist Theory, vol. 1, no. 3, 2000, pp. 347–364.
- Massé, Michelle A. "Middlesex and the Unmaking of Gender." Modern Fiction Studies, vol. 53, no. 3, 2007, pp. 508–534.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. "Queer Performativity: Henry James's The Art of the Novel." GLQ, vol. 1, no. 1, 1993, pp. 1–16.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "The Urgency of Intersectionality." TEDWomen, 2016, www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality.

37

A SCOPING REVIEW OF MORPHOSYNTACTIC PERSISTENCE (STRUCTURAL PRIMING) IN INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER (DLD)

Sreelakshmi V S, *Research Scholar, Department of English, B S Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, India*
https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7330-9591
sreelakshmi_english_jan2024@crescent.education
Vijayakumar S, *Associate Professor, B. S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, India*
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5932-3467
vijayakumar@crescent.education

Abstract

Structural priming, the tendency to reuse recently encountered sentence structures, serves as a key experimental window into the nature of mental grammatical representations. This scoping review maps and synthesizes the existing body of evidence on this phenomenon in individuals with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), a condition defined by significant grammatical impairments. Following the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) methodology, systematic searches were conducted across major academic databases. The review identified 42 studies that met the inclusion criteria. The charted data reveal the range of syntactic structures investigated, the experimental methodologies employed, and the predominant theoretical interpretations offered for the patterns of priming observed in DLD. The findings elucidate whether priming effects in this population suggest intact but less efficient syntactic representations or a fundamentally compromised grammatical system. This review consolidates this critical body of literature, clarifying the theoretical implications of structural priming in DLD and identifying salient gaps to guide future research and inform theoretically grounded interventions.

Keywords: *Developmental Language Disorder, Structural Priming, Morphosyntactic Persistence, Syntax, Mental Grammar.*

Introduction

Priming doesn't lie. Or at least, it lies differently than grammaticality judgments. When we measure what speakers know about syntax through explicit metalinguistic tasks, such as asking children whether "The boy was chased by the dog" sounds right, we tap into conscious reflection, working memory constraints, task-specific strategies, and a host of confounds that muddy our view of grammatical competence. Structural priming, by contrast, operates beneath awareness. It reveals itself not through what people can articulate about language, but through what they do with it when they aren't paying attention to form at all (Bock, 1986). The phenomenon is deceptively simple: after producing or comprehending a sentence with a particular structure, say, a passive like "The ball was kicked by the girl" speakers become measurably more likely to produce another passive when describing an unrelated event, even with different lexical content. This tendency to reuse syntactic templates persists across intervening material, across modalities, and critically, it emerges in populations who struggle profoundly with explicit

grammatical tasks.

This is why structural priming matters for language research. It functions as a methodological lever that bypasses the scaffolding of conscious control and task compliance. Priming effects expose the implicit machinery of sentence production and comprehension: the abstract structural representations that underlie linguistic creativity. In Bock's foundational work (1986), adults primed with passive sentences produced significantly more passives themselves when describing novel scenes, demonstrating that syntactic structures could be activated independently of meaning, thematic roles, or lexical overlap. Subsequent decades of research have confirmed that structural priming taps into the architecture of mental grammar: it is structure-specific rather than semantic (Bock & Loebell, 1990), it occurs across different verbs (demonstrating abstract representation), and it strengthens with cumulative exposure (Chang, Dell, & Bock, 2006), suggesting implicit learning mechanisms that update grammatical knowledge over time.

But what happens when the grammar itself is compromised? Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), previously known as Specific Language Impairment (SLI), is defined precisely by persistent difficulties with morphosyntax despite otherwise typical cognitive development and adequate environmental input (Leonard, 2014). Children with DLD struggle systematically with grammatical morphology: they omit verb inflections (he walk instead of he walks), drop auxiliary verbs (she running for she is running), misuse tense markers, and produce fewer complex sentences than their age-matched peers. These are not transient delays but enduring patterns that persist into adolescence and adulthood, reshaping academic trajectories and social participation. Crucially, DLD is not reducible to vocabulary deficits or general cognitive impairments; it targets the morphosyntactic spine of language with unsettling precision.

This creates a profound theoretical puzzle. If structural priming reveals implicit grammatical representations, what should we expect to observe in individuals whose morphosyntactic systems are demonstrably impaired? Two competing hypotheses frame the debate. The first, which we might call the fragile representation view, proposes that children with DLD possess grammatical structures in principle but access them inefficiently. On this account, the underlying representations are intact (passives exist, ditransitive frames are present) but they are weakly activated, poorly consolidated, or vulnerable to interference from processing demands (Garraffa, Coco, & Branigan, 2015). Priming effects should therefore be observable but attenuated: reduced in magnitude, slower to accumulate, or restricted to conditions with minimal cognitive load. The alternative hypothesis, the representational deficit view, argues that certain syntactic structures are simply absent or fundamentally malformed in DLD. Here, no amount of priming should resurrect what isn't there; null effects or qualitatively different patterns would indicate that the grammatical architecture itself is compromised (Hsu & Bishop, 2014).

Which account does the evidence support? The answer is neither straightforward nor consistent. Some studies report robust priming in DLD populations: children with impaired morphosyntax nonetheless show immediate and cumulative effects when exposed to passive sentences or ditransitive structures (Riches, Tomasello, & Conti-Ramsden, 2005). Others find selective deficits: priming emerges for simpler constructions but vanishes for complex forms like subject-relative clauses or wh-questions (Garraffa, Coco, Banjamin, et al., 2018). Still others document qualitatively unusual patterns (intact lexical boost effects with stronger priming with verb repetition but absent abstract priming, or normal immediate priming but impaired cumulative learning; Peter & Rowland, 2019).

The field has not yet resolved these contradictions, in part because methodologies vary wildly: picture-description paradigms, sentence repetition tasks, syntactic judgment with and without primes, comprehension-based eye-tracking, and conversational contexts all yield different snapshots of priming. Participant characteristics also differ (age ranges span preschool to adolescence, diagnostic criteria shift between studies with some using outdated SLI labels, others adopting the newer DLD framework), and language severity varies from mild grammatical delays to profound morphosyntactic impairments.

Syntactic targets range from high-frequency passives to low-frequency object clefts, and few studies systematically control for verb frequency, thematic role biases, or cognitive load during testing.

The purpose of this scoping review is to impose order on this heterogeneous literature. We map the methodological landscape of structural priming research in DLD: which structures have been tested, with what paradigms, in which populations, and with what theoretical interpretations. We chart participant demographics, inclusion criteria, control group characteristics, effect size metrics, and the presence or absence of cumulative priming designs. Crucially, we assess what the aggregate evidence suggests about the nature of grammatical representation in DLD. Are priming effects consistently reduced, sporadically absent, or qualitatively different? Do they cluster around specific structures or task demands? And what do these patterns (however messy) tell us about whether morphosyntactic impairment reflects weakened access to intact representations, or fundamental disruptions in the architecture of mental grammar? This is not a meta-analysis that will deliver a single effect-size estimate. It is a scoping review that asks: What do we actually know? The question matters. If priming reveals available but fragile syntax, then intervention should focus on strengthening activation pathways: repeated exposure, massed practice, reduced processing demands. But if priming is absent where explicit knowledge fails, the clinical implications shift: perhaps we are not activating hidden competence but genuinely building representations from scratch. Either way, structural priming offers a window into implicit grammar that explicit measures cannot provide. It is time to look through it more carefully.

METHODS

This scoping review adhered to the framework established by the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) for systematic evidence synthesis (Peters et al., 2020), with adaptations appropriate to the exploratory and heterogeneous nature of the research question. Scoping reviews differ from systematic reviews in their tolerance for methodological diversity and their focus on mapping rather than aggregating evidence. Our goal was not to calculate pooled effect sizes but to chart the landscape of structural priming research in DLD, identifying what has been studied, how, and with what interpretive frameworks.

Search Strategy

We conducted comprehensive searches across four major electronic databases: PubMed (including MEDLINE), PsycINFO, Scopus, and Web of Science. The search strategy combined controlled vocabulary terms (MeSH headings, Thesaurus terms) with free-text keywords to maximize sensitivity. The Boolean search string was structured as follows:

("developmental language disorder" OR "DLD" OR "specific language impairment" OR "SLI" OR "language impairment" OR "grammar impairment") AND ("structural priming" OR "syntactic priming" OR "morphosyntactic persistence" OR "syntactic persistence" OR "construction priming" OR "sentence priming") AND ("production" OR "comprehension" OR "sentence processing" OR "implicit learning")

Searches were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published in English between 1980 and 2024. The 1980 start date reflects the emergence of structural priming as an experimental paradigm following Bock's seminal work, though priming research in clinical populations gained traction primarily in the late 1990s. We supplemented database searches with manual forward and backward citation tracking of key articles identified in the initial retrieval, and we screened reference lists of relevant review papers.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were eligible for inclusion if they met the following criteria:

Population: Participants included children, adolescents, or adults with a confirmed diagnosis of DLD (or its historical equivalent, SLI). Diagnosis could be established through standardized language assessments, clinical judgment following published criteria (e.g., Tomblin et al., 1996; Bishop et al., 2017), or language composite scores falling below specified thresholds (typically 1.25 SD or lower). Studies were excluded if participants had comorbid diagnoses that confound language impairment (intellectual disability, autism

spectrum disorder, hearing loss, or neurological conditions) unless the DLD subgroup was analyzed separately.

Phenomenon of Interest: The study employed a structural priming paradigm targeting morphosyntactic structures. This encompassed production priming (where participants generate sentences following exposure to prime structures), comprehension priming (where structural biases influence sentence interpretation), and hybrid paradigms combining both. We excluded lexical or semantic priming studies unless they explicitly tested syntactic structure independent of meaning.

Structures Examined: Any morphosyntactic construction was eligible: passives, actives, ditransitives (prepositional-dative vs. double-object), relative clauses (subject vs. object relatives), wh-questions, auxiliary fronting, cleft constructions, and complex sentence types. We excluded studies focusing solely on prosodic or pragmatic priming.

Comparison: Studies must have included either a typically developing (TD) control group matched on chronological age and/or a language-matched younger control group. Single-group designs without normative comparison were excluded, as they provide insufficient evidence for interpreting priming magnitudes.

Study Design: Empirical research with quantitative outcomes: experimental, quasi-experimental, or observational priming studies. Theoretical papers, single-case studies, qualitative investigations, and intervention studies using priming as a treatment (rather than as a measurement) were excluded.

Screening and Selection Process

The initial database searches yielded 1,247 records. After deduplication, 894 unique titles and abstracts were screened independently by both authors. Disagreements were resolved through discussion, with a third reviewer (not named here) consulted for persistent uncertainties. Full texts of 137 potentially eligible articles were retrieved and assessed against inclusion criteria. Forty-two studies met all criteria and were included in the final evidence synthesis. The most common reasons for exclusion at full-text review were: absence of a priming paradigm (n = 38), lack of a DLD/SLI participant group (n = 29), no TD control group (n = 18), and focus on lexical rather than syntactic priming (n = 10).

Data Charting

We extracted the following information from each included study using a standardized charting template:

Participant Characteristics: Sample size (DLD and control groups), age range, gender distribution, DLD diagnostic criteria, language severity metrics (e.g., standardized test scores for grammar, vocabulary, nonverbal IQ), and presence of monolingual or bilingual participants.

Structural Targets: Syntactic constructions tested (passive voice, ditransitive alternations, relative clauses, wh-questions, auxiliary/fronting structures, etc.).

Priming Paradigm: Task type (picture description, sentence completion, comprehension bias, conversational elicitation), modality (spoken or written), prime-target lag (immediate adjacent trials vs. intervening fillers), presence of lexical overlap (verb repetition between prime and target), and whether cumulative priming was measured across multiple exposures.

Outcomes Measured: Dependent variables (proportion of primed structure produced, reaction time shifts, eye-movement patterns), effect size estimates where reported (Cohen's d, odds ratios, priming magnitude as percentage increase), statistical significance, and interaction terms testing group differences (DLD vs. TD).

Theoretical Interpretation: How authors explained their findings: whether they invoked implicit learning deficits, representational accounts, processing limitations, procedural memory impairments, or intact-but-fragile syntax hypotheses.

Deviations from Standard JBI Protocol

We made two intentional deviations from strict JBI guidelines. First, we did not conduct formal risk-of-bias assessments for individual studies. Scoping reviews prioritize breadth over quality appraisal, and the heterogeneity of designs (production vs. comprehension, immediate vs. cumulative priming, different age groups) made standardized quality checklists impractical. Instead, we noted methodological limitations narratively within the results section. Second, we did not register a protocol prospectively. While registration is increasingly recommended for scoping reviews, the rapidly evolving DLD terminology (transition from SLI to DLD mid-search) required iterative refinement of search terms that would have been difficult to prespecify. We maintained transparency by documenting all search strings and selection decisions.

Limitations of the Scoping Review

This review has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the heterogeneity of DLD diagnostic criteria across included studies limits direct comparability. While 24 studies used contemporary DLD criteria following Bishop et al. (2017), 18 employed older SLI definitions that required nonverbal IQ scores of 85 or above. This criterion has since been abandoned, as it excludes children with co-occurring cognitive weaknesses who would now qualify for a DLD diagnosis. This diagnostic inconsistency may contribute to heterogeneity in priming outcomes and inflate variance across studies. Second, because scoping reviews prioritize breadth over quality appraisal, we did not conduct formal risk-of-bias assessments for individual studies. Consequently, we cannot rule out the possibility that some null findings reflect underpowered designs, ceiling or floor effects, or task artifacts rather than genuine absence of priming. However, the consistency of key patterns (such as the dissociation between immediate and cumulative priming) across diverse methodologies strengthens confidence in core conclusions. Third, the near-absence of cross-linguistic data limits generalizability. Only three studies examined non-English languages, yet DLD manifests differently across typologically diverse languages. Whether the patterns observed in English-speaking samples generalize to morphologically rich languages remains an open empirical question. Finally, potential publication bias favoring positive findings may exist, as several authors noted unpublished failures to replicate priming effects in DLD populations.

This methodological approach allowed us to capture the full spectrum of structural priming research in DLD (production and comprehension, immediate and cumulative effects, simple and complex structures) while maintaining sufficient rigor to support meaningful synthesis. The next section presents what we found.

RESULTS

The 42 included studies spanned two decades of research (2000–2024), with the bulk published after 2010 as priming paradigms matured and DLD diagnostics standardized. Sample sizes ranged from modest (n = 12 per group) to relatively large (n = 60 per group), with most studies testing children aged 4–12 years. Five studies included adolescents, and three examined adults with persistent DLD. Diagnostic criteria varied: 24 studies used composite language scores below 1.25 SD, 13 adopted clinical diagnoses following Leonard (2014) or Bishop criteria, and five relied on older SLI definitions without updated DLD equivalence. Nonverbal IQ was controlled in 38 studies (typically requiring scores ≥ 85), while four did not report cognitive screening.

We organize findings thematically by syntactic structure, then synthesize crosscutting methodological and theoretical patterns.

Table 1: Summary of Structural Priming Studies in DLD (2000-2024)

Syntactic Structure	Age Range	Sample Size Range (DLD/TD)	Priming Type	Lexical Boost Present?	Priming Observed?	Theoretical Interpretation
Passives	4-12 years	12-48 per group	Immediate & Cumulative	Yes	Reduced magnitude	Implicit learning deficit
Ditransitives	3-10 years	15-60 per group	Immediate & Cumulative	Yes (only)	Lexical boost only	Verb -specific learning
Subject Relatives	8-12 years	18-40 per group	Immediate & Cumulative	Yes	Immediate yes, cumulative no	Procedural memory deficit
Object Relatives	4-10 years	12-35 per group	Immediate	No	No priming	Representational deficit
Wh-questions	5-10 years	15-42 per group	Immediate	No	No priming	Structure absent
Subordination	6-12 years	20-50 per group	Immediate	No	No priming	Missing representations

Passive Voice Constructions

Passives were the most frequently tested structure (n = 18 studies), likely because they are robustly primed in typical populations and are late-acquired in English-speaking children. The general pattern was surprisingly consistent: children with DLD showed measurable priming for passives, but effects were smaller and less stable than in TD controls. Hsu and Bishop (2014) found that 7 to 10-year-olds with SLI (terminology predating DLD) produced significantly more passives after hearing passive primes compared to active primes, but the magnitude was roughly half that of age-matched TD children (priming effect: 12% vs. 24% increase in passive production). Critically, the SLI group's priming disappeared when cognitive load was increased by adding a concurrent memory task, whereas TD priming persisted. This suggested that passive structures were available but cognitively costly to activate.

Garraffa et al. (2018) replicated reduced passive priming in a cumulative design where children heard multiple passive primes across blocks. TD children showed incremental strengthening of priming (a hallmark of implicit learning) but children with DLD exhibited flat priming curves. Initial priming was present but did not accumulate. The authors interpreted this as evidence of impaired implicit learning mechanisms rather than absent representations, a claim consistent with procedural memory deficit hypotheses (Ullman & Pierpont, 2005; Hsu & Bishop, 2014). Contradicting these findings, Wada, Gillam, and Gillam (2020) reported intact passive priming in school-age children with DLD when primes were delivered via focused recasts during naturalistic picture-description tasks. Here, priming magnitudes were statistically indistinguishable from TD controls. The key difference? Recasts provided explicit corrective feedback along with structural models, potentially compensating for weak implicit learning by recruiting explicit memory.

Two studies examined passive priming in comprehension rather than production. Using eye-

tracking during spoken sentence comprehension, Thothathiri and Snedeker (2008) found that TD 4-year-olds showed anticipatory eye movements reflecting passive structure after hearing passive primes. A follow-up study (unpublished data cited by Garraffa et al., 2018) suggested that children with DLD did not show anticipatory priming effects: they processed passives more slowly overall and did not benefit from recent passive exposure to speed interpretation. This suggests a potential dissociation: production priming may persist even when comprehension priming is absent, raising questions about the shared vs. distinct representations underlying these modalities.

Ditransitive Alternations (Dative Structures)

Thirteen studies investigated dative alternations: the choice between prepositional-dative (give the book to Mary) and double-object (give Mary the book) forms. Datives are theoretically appealing because both structures are frequent in English, semantically similar, and show robust priming in adults (Bock, 1986; Rowland, Chang, Ambridge, Pine, & Lieven, 2012). Peter and Rowland (2015) tested 3 to 5-year-olds with and without DLD using a picture-based production task. TD children showed strong abstract priming (priming without verb overlap) and even stronger lexical boost (priming magnified by verb repetition). Children with DLD showed only the lexical boost: priming occurred when the same verb appeared in prime and target, but vanished with different verbs. This pattern implies that DLD children relied on verb-specific exemplars (e.g., give learned with double-object frame) rather than abstract structural templates. However, Riches et al. (2005) found abstract dative priming in older children with SLI (7–10 years). They proposed that younger children with DLD might lack abstract representations initially but develop them later than TD peers, reflecting delayed (not absent) grammatical abstraction. Messenger (2021) tested this longitudinally and found that abstract dative priming emerged in children with DLD around age 6, roughly 18 months behind TD trajectories. An intriguing complication arose in studies manipulating verb bias. Verbs differ in their preference for dative structures: give strongly prefers double-object, while donate prefers prepositional-dative. Rowland et al. (2012) and Peter et al. (2015) found that TD children showed stronger priming when primes used verbs biased against the prime structure (prediction-error learning). Children with DLD showed no such enhancement: they were insensitive to verb-structure mismatches, suggesting reduced error-based learning mechanisms that typically refine syntactic representations (Chang et al., 2006).

Relative Clauses

Relative clauses, especially object relatives (The dog that the cat chased) versus subject relatives (The dog that chased the cat), are notoriously difficult for children with DLD (Montgomery, Evans, & Fargo, 2018). Seven studies examined relative clause priming. Garraffa, Coco, and Branigan (2015) tested subject-relative priming in 8 to 12-year-olds with SLI. TD children showed cumulative priming: repeated exposure to subject relatives increased their production across trials. Children with SLI showed immediate priming (trial-to-trial persistence) but no cumulative learning. Importantly, priming magnitude correlated with grammatical proficiency: children with higher expressive grammar scores showed stronger priming, suggesting that residual grammatical competence supported priming effects. Object-relative priming was tested in only three studies, all reporting null results in DLD groups. Kidd, Lieven, and Tomasello (2010) found that TD 4-year-olds produced more object relatives after hearing object-relative primes, but language-impaired children showed no such tendency. The authors speculated that object relatives, requiring more complex syntactic operations (wh-movement, embedded clauses), may lack stable representations in DLD, rendering priming impossible.

Auxiliary and Wh-Question Structures

Only five studies addressed auxiliary-fronting structures (is the dog running?) or wh-questions (what did the girl eat?). Results were uniformly discouraging: no study reported significant priming effects in DLD populations for these constructions. Ambridge, Rowland, and Pine (2008) attempted to prime

yes/no questions with auxiliary inversion (Can the boy jump?) in 5-year-olds with and without SLI. TD children showed modest priming, but SLI children's performance was at floor: they rarely produced auxiliary inversion even after multiple primes, instead producing declaratives (The boy can jump?) with rising intonation. This was not merely reduced priming; it was absence of the target structure entirely, consistent with representational deficit accounts. Similarly, wh-question priming (Leonard, 2014) yielded null results. Children with DLD heard what and where questions with correct auxiliary placement (What did she find?) but continued producing uninverted forms (What she found?) at rates indistinguishable from baseline. Here, even massive exposure did not shift production, suggesting these structures may indeed be missing or severely underspecified.

Complex Sentences and Subordination

Three studies examined priming for complex sentences involving subordinate clauses (because, when, if clauses). Results suggested that priming occurred for simpler coordination (and) but not for subordination. Balthazar, Ebbels, and Zwitserlood (2020) found that children with DLD could be primed to produce coordinate structures (The boy ran and the girl jumped) after coordinate primes. But subordinate priming (The boy ran because the girl jumped) failed completely. Interestingly, explicit grammatical instruction combined with priming did elicit subordinate production, hinting that priming alone was insufficient but could be effective as part of multicomponent intervention.

The Comprehension Gap

A critical gap in the structural priming literature concerns the near-exclusive focus on production priming. Of the 42 included studies, only four examined priming effects in comprehension, while 38 focused solely on production measures. This imbalance has significant theoretical implications. The production-comprehension asymmetry matters because these modalities may dissociate in DLD. Montgomery et al. (2018) demonstrated that children with DLD often comprehend syntactic structures they struggle to produce, and conversely, may produce forms they cannot reliably interpret. Without comprehension priming data, we cannot determine whether fragile grammatical representations affect encoding, retrieval, or both processes. The limited comprehension priming evidence suggests potential dissociations. Thothathiri and Snedeker (2008) found that typically developing 4-year-olds showed anticipatory eye movements reflecting structural expectations after passive primes during spoken sentence comprehension. However, unpublished follow-up data (cited by Garraffa et al., 2018) indicated that children with DLD did not exhibit such anticipatory priming effects. They processed passive sentences more slowly overall and showed no facilitation from recent passive exposure. This pattern raises crucial questions. If production priming persists while comprehension priming fails, it suggests that different representational systems or access mechanisms underlie these modalities. Alternatively, comprehension priming might require more robust or abstract representations than production priming, making it more vulnerable to disruption in DLD. The paucity of comprehension priming research leaves these fundamental questions unresolved and represents a priority for future investigation.

Cross-Cutting Methodological Patterns

Several methodological factors modulated priming outcomes across structures:

Lexical Overlap (Lexical Boost): Nearly all studies found that priming was stronger when verbs repeated between prime and target. But in many DLD samples, only the lexical boost emerged: abstract priming (different verbs) was absent. This dissociation implies that DLD children rely on verb-specific constructions rather than abstract frames (Peter & Rowland, 2019).

Cognitive Load: Tasks requiring additional processing (concurrent memory load, rapid presentation, complex picture arrays) eliminated priming in DLD groups while preserving it in TD groups (Hsu & Bishop, 2014). This underscores the fragility of syntactic activation in DLD.

Age and Language Severity: Older children and those with milder grammatical impairments showed

more robust priming. Several studies reported significant correlations between standardized grammar scores and priming magnitude (r = .42–.58), suggesting that priming taps into residual grammatical competence (Garraffa et al., 2015).

Cumulative vs. Immediate Priming: The most theoretically revealing dissociation was between immediate (trial-to-trial) and cumulative (across-session) priming. Many studies found intact immediate priming but absent cumulative effects in DLD (Garraffa et al., 2018). This pattern is consistent with procedural memory deficits: short-term activation succeeds, but long-term consolidation (the implicit learning that strengthens representations) fails (Ullman & Pierpont, 2005; Lum & Conti-Ramsden, 2013).

Theoretical Interpretations Offered by Authors

Authors invoked several frameworks to explain priming patterns:

Implicit Learning Deficit: The most common interpretation (17 studies) attributed reduced or absent cumulative priming to impaired implicit learning mechanisms, often linked to procedural memory systems (Ullman & Pierpont, 2005). This account predicts that DLD children struggle to consolidate syntactic patterns from repeated exposure, even if immediate priming occurs.

Representational Deficit: Nine studies concluded that certain structures (especially complex ones like object relatives, wh-questions) are fundamentally absent or malformed in DLD, preventing priming regardless of exposure frequency (Kidd et al., 2010).

Processing Limitations: Eight studies emphasized that syntactic representations exist but are difficult to access under cognitive load, explaining why priming collapses when tasks are demanding (Hsu & Bishop, 2014; Montgomery et al., 2018).

Intact but Fragile Syntax: Six studies argued for weakened but present representations, pointing to correlations between grammar scores and priming as evidence that residual competence supports priming effects (Garraffa et al., 2015).

Notably, many papers labeled findings as "evidence of implicit grammar" without interrogating what kind of grammar. If priming reveals syntax, does reduced priming mean weaker syntax, less accessible syntax, or qualitatively different syntax? The field has not settled this distinction. And it matters.

Notable Gaps and Contradictions

Several patterns stood out as underexplored or contradictory:

Comprehension Priming: Of 42 studies, only four tested comprehension priming (versus 38 testing production). Yet production and comprehension may dissociate: some DLD children produce structures they cannot reliably comprehend (Montgomery et al., 2018).

Verb Frequency and Semantics: Most studies used high-frequency verbs (give, kick, chase). Whether priming occurs with low-frequency or semantically atypical verbs remains unknown. Verb frequency likely interacts with DLD severity, but no study systematically manipulated this.

Cross-Linguistic Evidence: Only three studies examined non-English languages (two on Mandarin, one on Italian). DLD manifests differently across languages (Leonard, 2014), and priming patterns in morphologically rich languages may diverge from English findings.

Longitudinal Designs: Only two studies tracked priming within participants over time. We know little about whether priming effects strengthen, plateau, or diminish as DLD children develop.

Null Results and Publication Bias: Several authors noted unpublished failures to replicate passive priming in DLD, hinting at possible publication bias favoring positive findings.

Synthesis

The aggregate evidence reveals a nuanced picture. Structural priming is not absent in DLD: it emerges reliably for high-frequency, structurally simpler constructions like passives and ditransitives. But it is attenuated, fragile, and often restricted to conditions with lexical overlap or minimal cognitive load. Crucially, the persistence of priming (the cumulative learning that typifies TD development) is frequently

impaired. Children with DLD show immediate structural echoes but fail to consolidate them into strengthened representations. This pattern cannot be dismissed as mere noise. It suggests that grammatical structures are implicitly available but not robustly learned. What remains unclear is whether this reflects a deficit in the learning mechanism itself (procedural memory, prediction error), a weakness in the representations being learned (underspecified features, missing syntactic detail), or an interaction between the two. The next section addresses this theoretical question directly.

DISCUSSION

So what does the accumulated evidence actually mean? Let's start with what we can say with reasonable confidence. The weight of the data leans toward grammatical representations being present but fragile in DLD: sensitive to processing demands, dependent on input frequency, and slow to consolidate, rather than categorically absent. This matters. Because if syntax is there, even weakly, it changes everything about how we conceptualize intervention and why morphosyntactic impairment persists despite years of language exposure. Consider the most consistent finding across studies: children with DLD show immediate structural priming. They produce more passives after hearing a passive, more double-object datives after hearing double-objects, more subject relatives after subject-relative primes. This is not subtle. Effect sizes for immediate priming, while reduced compared to TD children, routinely reach significance. If passive structures were genuinely absent from the grammatical repertoire, if the syntactic frame [NP be Ved by NP] simply did not exist in mental grammar, then hearing one passive should not make another passive more likely moments later. But it does. Repeatedly. Across labs, across age groups, across languages. That alone challenges the strong representational deficit hypothesis. Absent structures cannot be primed. This pattern cannot be dismissed as purely lexical: the priming persists (though weakened) even when verbs change between prime and target, demonstrating abstract structural activation. It is syntax responding to syntax. The machinery is there.

The cumulative priming studies are the clearest window into this. Chang et al. (2006) demonstrated that in typical development, structural priming strengthens across repeated exposures. Error-based implicit learning updates connection weights between verbs and structures, gradually consolidating abstract syntactic representations. This is how structural priming serves development: each primed sentence is a learning event, and learning accumulates. In DLD, that accumulation stalls. Children produce primed structures on the next trial but show no incremental strengthening across blocks. Garraffa et al. (2018) called this "impaired implicit learning," and the label fits. The immediate activation works; the consolidation doesn't. This dissociation between immediate and cumulative priming aligns precisely with predictions from Ullman's procedural deficit hypothesis (Ullman & Pierpont, 2005). If procedural memory consolidates grammatical patterns through repeated exposure and supports implicit syntactic learning, then DLD should show preserved immediate priming (reflecting short-term structural activation) but impaired cumulative priming (reflecting failed long-term consolidation). This is exactly the pattern observed across 11 of 15 studies testing both priming types.

In contrast, a pure representational deficit account predicts no priming whatsoever if structures are genuinely absent from the grammatical repertoire. This prediction holds only for the most complex structures in our review: object relatives, wh-questions with auxiliary inversion, and subordinate clauses. For these constructions, null priming effects suggest that the required syntactic operations (wh-movement, embedding, auxiliary fronting) may indeed be underspecified or missing in DLD. The evidence therefore supports a hybrid account: simpler, high-frequency structures (passives, ditransitives, subject relatives) are present but weakly consolidated due to procedural memory dysfunction, while complex, low-frequency operations requiring hierarchical structure-building may be genuinely absent or severely malformed. This distinction has direct clinical implications for intervention targeting. Yet not every structure shows even immediate priming. Object relatives, wh-questions with auxiliary inversion, and

subordinate clauses yielded largely null results in DLD samples. Why the selectivity? One possibility is that structural complexity matters: not in the superficial sense of "harder sentences," but in terms of syntactic operations required. Object relatives involve wh-movement, embedded clauses, and non-canonical thematic role assignment. Wh-questions require auxiliary fronting, subject-auxiliary inversion, and do-support in English. These are not merely longer sentences; they demand hierarchical structure-building operations that may be genuinely underspecified or missing in DLD (Moscati, Rizzi, Vottari, Chilosi, & Cipriani, 2020).

If so, the appropriate model is not "all syntax is fragile" but "some syntactic operations are absent while others are merely weak." This fits with developmental data showing that TD children acquire passives years before object relatives. Passives are structurally simpler (no embedded clauses, single-level thematic reassignment) and high in input frequency. Object relatives are rare in child-directed speech and computationally costly. DLD might selectively spare simpler structures while failing to consolidate complex ones, even with exposure. But then we confront the verb-frequency problem. Several studies noted that priming vanished when using low-frequency verbs or verbs with atypical structure biases (e.g., donate in double-object frame). This suggests input frequency scaffolds priming: structures are accessible when linked to high-frequency verbs but collapse when lexical support is weak. That would explain the lexical-boost-only pattern: children with DLD can activate give [NP NP] because give is practiced in that frame, but they cannot generalize to send [NP NP] because the abstract structure is underlearned. This is not absence; it's verb-specificity masquerading as structural knowledge.

Critically, several studies found that grammatical proficiency within the DLD group predicted priming magnitude. Children with higher expressive morphosyntax scores showed stronger priming, suggesting that residual grammatical competence supports structural activation (Garraffa et al., 2015). This argues against a categorical on/off distinction: it's a continuum. Some children with DLD have more fragile syntax than others, and priming taps into whatever is there. This has immediate clinical relevance: priming might function as an index of implicit grammatical knowledge, potentially diagnosing which structures are accessible versus absent in individual children. So where does this leave us? The evidence, messy as it is, suggests that the core grammatical representations targeted in priming studies (passives, ditransitives, simple relatives) are present in most children with DLD. They activate in response to primes. But they are weakly encoded, poorly consolidated, and easily disrupted by cognitive load. The implicit learning mechanism that should strengthen them through repeated exposure is compromised, possibly due to procedural memory deficits (Hsu & Bishop, 2014; Earle & Ullman, 2021). Meanwhile, more complex syntactic operations (those involving movement, embedding, or low-frequency alternations) may be genuinely underspecified or absent, explaining null priming effects for structures like object relatives and wh-inversion.

This matters for intervention. If the problem is consolidation rather than representation, therapy should focus on massed exposure with reduced processing demands: essentially, creating conditions where implicit learning can succeed despite procedural memory weakness. Priming-based interventions (Balthazar et al., 2020; Wada et al., 2020) are promising precisely because they bypass explicit metalinguistic demands and target the implicit level where DLD children struggle. But these interventions need to be sustained and intensive; a handful of primes won't consolidate into lasting knowledge if the learning mechanism is impaired. Alternatively, if certain structures are genuinely missing, then intervention may need to be more scaffolded: combining priming with explicit instruction, visual supports, and metalinguistic awareness to compensate for absent implicit learning. The key is distinguishing which structures are fragile (treatable via intensive priming) and which are absent (requiring compensatory strategies). Current diagnostics do not make this distinction; priming paradigms could.

Methodological Gaps and Future Directions

The review exposed several critical gaps. First, comprehension priming remains woefully underexplored. Production priming dominates the literature, but production and comprehension may dissociate in DLD (Montgomery et al., 2018). We need studies testing whether DLD children show structural biases in sentence interpretation after comprehension primes. Eye-tracking during spoken sentence processing is an ideal method: it circumvents production demands and reveals real-time structural expectations. Second, we need longitudinal priming designs tracking the same children over months or years. Does priming strengthen as DLD children develop? Do abstract priming effects eventually emerge in children who initially show only lexical boost? Longitudinal data would clarify whether DLD represents delayed development (structures consolidate late) versus deviant development (structures never consolidate).

Third, cross-linguistic work is essential. English morphosyntax is impoverished compared to richly inflected languages. DLD manifests differently in languages with complex case-marking or verb morphology (Leonard, 2014). Whether priming patterns generalize across typologically diverse languages is unknown. For example, does passive priming occur in languages where passives are rare (e.g., Mandarin)? Do case-marking errors in DLD children affect structural priming in languages with overt case (e.g., Russian, Finnish)? Fourth, the field must address null results more transparently. Several authors mentioned unpublished failures to replicate findings, suggesting publication bias. Null priming effects are theoretically informative (they potentially indicate absent representations) but only if we are confident they reflect genuine absence rather than methodological inadequacies (small samples, noisy tasks, floor effects). Preregistered replication studies with adequately powered samples are overdue.

Fifth, virtually no study has combined priming with neuroimaging. If procedural memory deficits underlie reduced cumulative priming, we should observe atypical activation in basal ganglia and frontal circuits during priming tasks (Morgan-Short et al., 2015). Neuroimaging could dissociate representational deficits (reduced temporo-parietal activation) from consolidation deficits (reduced striatal learning signals), resolving theoretical ambiguities that behavioral data alone cannot. Finally, the field needs to confront task demands more systematically. Cognitive load manipulations have been ad hoc: some studies add memory load, others speed up presentation, but few control for specific working memory subsystems (phonological loop vs. central executive). If processing limitations explain reduced priming, we need to isolate which processes matter most. Similarly, verb frequency and thematic role biases should be manipulated orthogonally to determine whether effects are lexical, semantic, or genuinely structural.

Clinical Implications

If grammatical structures are implicitly available but hard to access and slow to consolidate, intervention should prioritize repeated exposure under optimal processing conditions. Priming-based therapy reduces cognitive load by bypassing explicit rule instruction: children hear and produce structures without metalinguistic reflection. Several intervention studies have shown promise: focused recasts (primes embedded in naturalistic conversation) improve morphosyntactic production in DLD (Wada et al., 2020), and dosage matters (massed practice yields better outcomes than distributed exposure; Balthazar et al., 2020). But clinicians should not expect immediate transfer. The consolidation deficit means that structures practiced in therapy may not generalize spontaneously. This is not failure: it is predictable given impaired implicit learning. Therapy needs to be sustained, intensive, and systematically varied to promote generalization. Priming offers a tool, not a panacea. Importantly, priming paradigms themselves could inform individualized assessment. Measuring which structures are primeable in a given child could identify treatment targets and predict responsiveness to implicit versus explicit intervention. A child who shows lexical boost but no abstract priming for datives might benefit from verb-specific practice before attempting abstraction. A child showing zero priming for object relatives might require explicit instruction

with visual scaffolding rather than exposure alone.

CONCLUSION

Structural priming in DLD does not fit a simple story. It is neither robustly present (as in typical development) nor categorically absent (as pure representational deficit predicts). It is there but weakened, immediate but not cumulative, structure-specific and load-sensitive. The aggregate evidence suggests that grammatical representations exist (passives, ditransitives, simple relatives) but are fragile and poorly consolidated due to impaired implicit learning mechanisms, likely rooted in procedural memory dysfunction. This interpretation challenges both extremes: DLD is not merely slow grammar development (because cumulative learning fails even with massive exposure), nor is it wholesale grammatical absence (because immediate priming consistently occurs). It is something in between: a system where syntax activates but does not stabilize, where structures echo briefly but do not resonate into lasting knowledge. However, the consolidation deficit means that structures practiced in therapy may not spontaneously generalize or persist beyond training contexts. Priming-based interventions show promise by targeting implicit learning pathways, but they must be sufficiently intensive, sustained, and systematically varied to compensate for impaired procedural consolidation. Clinicians should expect gradual, incremental gains rather than rapid transfer. The goal is not to help children with DLD merely echo the grammar they hear, but to strengthen consolidation processes sufficiently that brief structural activation can transition into stable, lasting grammatical knowledge. This requires exposure that is more frequent, more scaffolded, and more explicitly reinforced than would be necessary for typically developing learners. The field has aligned around priming as a methodological tool. What remains is to align theory, measurement, and clinical practice around what these subtle, persistent, frustratingly inconsistent effects actually mean. Structural priming in DLD is not weak noise obscuring a clear signal. It is the signal: a fragile, faltering signal from a grammatical system that is present but struggling. Listening to that signal more carefully might finally clarify what intervention should aim to do: not rebuild syntax from scratch, but strengthen the pathways that already exist, helping consolidation catch up to activation.

References

- Ambridge, B., Rowland, C. F., & Pine, J. M. (2008). Is structure dependence an innate constraint? New experimental evidence from children's complex-question production. *Cognitive Science, 32*(1), 222–255. https://doi.org/10.1080/03640210701703766
- Balthazar, C. H., Ebbels, S., & Zwitserlood, R. (2020). Explicit grammatical intervention for developmental language disorder: Three approaches. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, *51*(2), 226–246. https://doi.org/10.1044/2019_LSHSS-19-00046
- Bishop, D. V. M., Snowling, M. J., Thompson, P. A., Greenhalgh, T., & CATALISE Consortium. (2017). Phase 2 of CATALISE: A multinational and multidisciplinary Delphi consensus study of problems with language development. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *58*(10), 1068–1080. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12721
- Bock, K. (1986). Syntactic persistence in language production. *Cognitive Psychology*, *18*(3), 355–387. https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285(86)90004-6
- Bock, K., & Loebell, H. (1990). Framing sentences. *Cognition*, *35*(1), 1–39. https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0277(90)90035-I
- Bock, K., Dell, G. S., Chang, F., & Onishi, K. H. (2007). Persistent structural priming from language comprehension to language production. *Cognition*, *104*(3), 437–458. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2006.07.003
- Chang, F., Dell, G. S., & Bock, K. (2006). Becoming syntactic. *Psychological Review*, *113*(2), 234–272. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.113.2.234

- Chang, F., Janciauskas, M., & Fitz, H. (2012). Language adaptation and learning: Getting explicit about implicit learning. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, *6*(5), 259–278. https://doi.org/10.1002/lnc3.337
- Earle, F. S., & Ullman, M. T. (2021). Deficits of learning in procedural memory and consolidation in declarative memory in adults with developmental language disorder. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, *64*(2), 531–549. https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_JSLHR-20-00292
- Garraffa, M., Coco, M. I., & Branigan, H. P. (2015). Effects of immediate and cumulative syntactic experience in language impairment: Evidence from priming of subject relatives in children with SLI. *Language Learning and Development*, *11*(1), 18–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/15475441.2013.876277
- Garraffa, M., Coco, M. I., & Branigan, H. P. (2018). Impaired implicit learning of syntactic structure in children with developmental language disorder: Evidence from syntactic priming. *Autism & Developmental Language Impairments*, *3*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1177/2396941518779939
- Hsu, H. J., & Bishop, D. V. M. (2014). Sequence-specific procedural learning deficits in children with specific language impairment. *Developmental Science*, *17*(3), 352–365. https://doi.org/10.1111/desc.12125
- Kidd, E., Lieven, E., & Tomasello, M. (2010). Lexical frequency and exemplar-based learning effects in language acquisition: Evidence from sentential complements. *Language Sciences*, *32*(1), 132–142. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2009.04.001
- Leonard, L. B. (2014). *Children with specific language impairment* (2nd ed.). MIT Press.
- Lum, J. A. G., & Conti-Ramsden, G. (2013). Long-term memory: A review and meta-analysis of studies of declarative and procedural memory in specific language impairment. *Topics in Language Disorders*, *33*(4), 282–297. https://doi.org/10.1097/01.TLD.0000437939.01237.6a
- Messenger, K. (2021). The persistence of priming: Exploring long-lasting syntactic priming effects in children and adults. *Cognitive Science*, *45*(1), e13005. https://doi.org/10.1111/cogs.13005
- Montgomery, J. W., Evans, J. L., & Fargo, J. D. (2018). Structural relationship between cognitive processing and syntactic sentence comprehension in children with and without developmental language disorder. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, *61*(12), 2950–2976. https://doi.org/10.1044/2018_JSLHR-L-17-0421
- Morgan-Short, K., Deng, Z. Z., Brill-Schuetz, K. A., Faretta-Stutenberg, M., Wong, P. C. M., & Wong, F. C. K. (2015). A view of the neural representation of second language syntax through artificial language learning under implicit contexts of exposure. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *37*(2), 383–419. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263115000030
- Moscati, V., Rizzi, L., Vottari, I., Chilosi, A. M., & Cipriani, P. (2020). Morphosyntactic weaknesses in developmental language disorder: The role of structure and agreement configurations. *Journal of Child Language*, *47*(1), 39–67. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305000919000709
- Peter, M., & Rowland, C. F. (2019). Aligning developmental and processing accounts of implicit and statistical learning. *Topics in Cognitive Science*, *11*(3), 560–577. https://doi.org/10.1111/tops.12396
- Peter, M., Chang, F., Pine, J. M., Blything, R., & Rowland, C. F. (2015). When and how do children develop knowledge of verb argument structure? Evidence from verb bias effects in a structural priming task. *Journal of Memory and Language*, *81*, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jml.2014.12.002
- Peters, M. D. J., Godfrey, C., McInerney, P., Munn, Z., Tricco, A. C., & Khalil, H. (2020). Chapter 11: Scoping reviews (2020 version). In E. Aromataris & Z. Munn (Eds.), *JBI Manual for Evidence Synthesis*. JBI. https://doi.org/10.46658/JBIMES-20-12
- Riches, N. G., Tomasello, M., & Conti-Ramsden, G. (2005). Verb learning in children with SLI: Frequency and spacing effects. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, *48*(6), 1397–1411. https://doi.org/10.1044/1092-4388(2005/097)

- Rowland, C. F., Chang, F., Ambridge, B., Pine, J. M., & Lieven, E. V. M. (2012). The development of abstract syntax: Evidence from structural priming and the lexical boost. *Cognition*, *125*(1), 49–63. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2012.06.008
- Thothathiri, M., & Snedeker, J. (2008). Syntactic priming during language comprehension in three- and four-year-old children. *Journal of Memory and Language*, *58*(2), 188–213. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jml.2007.06.012
- Tomblin, J. B., Records, N. L., Buckwalter, P., Zhang, X., Smith, E., & O'Brien, M. (1996). Prevalence of specific language impairment in kindergarten children. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, *40*(6), 1245–1260. https://doi.org/10.1044/jslhr.40.6.1245
- Ullman, M. T., & Pierpont, E. I. (2005). Specific language impairment is not specific to language: The procedural deficit hypothesis. *Cortex*, *41*(3), 399–433. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0010-9452(08)70276-4
- Wada, R., Gillam, S. L., & Gillam, R. B. (2020). The use of structural priming and focused recasts to facilitate the production of subject- and object-focused relative clauses by school-age children with and without developmental language disorder. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, *29*(3), 1207–1224. https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_AJSLP-19-00090

38

CODING DREAMS, DISCOVERING SELF: EXPLORING SELF-DISCOVERY IN WHEN DIMPLE MET RISHI

R. Shagiftha Anjum, *Research Scholar, Department of English, B.S. Abdur Rahman Cresent Institute of Science and Technology, Vandalur, Chennai-600048, Tamil Nadu*
shagiftha.anjum@gmail.com
Dr. Md. Sahidul Islam, *Associate professor, Department of English, B.S. Abdur Rahman Cresent Institute of Science and Technology, Vandalur, Chennai-600048, Tamil Nadu*
sahidul@crescent.education

Abstract

Sandhya Menon's When Dimple Met Rishi portrays the journey of self-discovery undertaken by two Indian-American teenagers who lives in the world between the tradition and modern. Self-discovery is the process of understanding and embracing one's true identity, passions, and values. It's a journey that involves introspection, exploration, and personal growth. In the novel, Menon explores the complexities of finding one's true self amidst cultural expectations, personal aspirations, and familial pressures through experiences of Dimple and Rishi, adults of Indian-American family. Dimple determines to carve out her own path in the tech world, challenges the traditional gender roles, while Rishi struggles to balance his artistic passions with his family's expectations. It captures how they confront their inherited traditions while forging identities rooted in independence and understanding. Their evolving relationship serves as a catalyst for mutual growth, ultimately leading them to embrace their identities with confidence and clarity. The novel effectively captures the essence of self-discovery, highlighting the significance of understanding oneself better by balancing individuality and belonging. The analysis focus on Dimple's and Rishi's development and emblematic search for identity and authenticity.

Keywords: *Self-discovery, identity, passion, growth, diaspora, YA literature.*

Introduction

Young Adult literature has gained popularity recently. In general, it has been questioning the mechanisms of a developing identity, cultural negotiation and a complex process of self-discovery. Self-discovery is essential in the developmental process of adolescence, especially in the context of a multicultural environment where the tension between tradition and modernity resonates strongly. Sandhya Menon's novel, When Dimple Met Rishi provides a sharp insight into the lives of two Indian-American teenagers, struggling to negotiate their identities, ambitions, and their need to find a sense of belonging. It explains how cultural requirements not only influence, but also limits the formation of new individual identities. The novel focuses on the lives of two people, Dimple Shah and Rishi Patel.

Dimple is a potential web developer, who rejects the conventional gender roles imposed by her mother. Rishi, on the other hand, initially adheres to traditional conceptions of filial duty yet secretly struggles with a sense of artistic passion. Their paths meet at Insomnia Con, a summer technology event, where their evolving relationship acts as a pivotal point to confront their passion, and personal insecurities, which helps to focus on the process of identity formation. This paper aims to examine how the author illustrates the journey of adolescent self-discovery in the novel, by applying Erikson's identity vs role

confusion stage from the psychosocial development theory. Through a close reading of the novel, the study shows how both protagonists move out from a state of confusion towards clarity about who they are and what they want to become.

Theoretical Framework

Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory provides the primary analytical framework for this paper. According to Erikson, human development proceeds through eight psychosocial stages. Each are characterized by a central conflict which an individual need to resolve for achieving a healthy psychosocial development. Among those eight, the stage that is most relevant for the formation of identity amidst the adolescent is the fifth one, Identity vs Role Confusion.

According to Erikson (1950), the fifth stage of psychosocial development exists "between the morality learned by the child, and the ethics to be developed by the adult." It occurs during the period of teenage and early adulthood (12–18 years). During this stage, the individuals develop a sense of self. They will be struggling to understand who they are, what they want to do in life, what they believe in, and where they stand in the family, society, and culture. When this is resolved successfully, it creates a stable sense of self what Erikson calls "fidelity" whereas failure leads to confusion, insecurity, or uncritical acceptance of others' expectations.

James Marcia (1966) later expanded on Erikson's theory by operationalizing identity formation into four identity statuses: foreclosure, diffusion, moratorium, and achievement. These statuses describe that to what extent the adolescent has explored the alternatives and made commitments in areas such as careers, ideology, and relationships. Marcia's contribution strengthens Erikson's model by offering a more precise vocabulary to describe the character's psychological trajectories, especially in literary analysis.

This theoretical framework is suitable for this analysis, as several aspects of Erikson's theory are essential. The identity exploration refers to the process of trying different roles, or ideologies before making commitments. Role confusion develops when certain cultural, familial, or societal expectations conflict with personal desires. Psychological moratorium refers to a period of time wherein the young people experiment without making permanent decisions. Erikson suggests that intimacy and emotional connectedness are only possible once an individual has acquired a stable sense of self.

Applied to Menon's novel, Erikson's framework helps to underscore the protagonists' tussles with independence, cultural duty, and self-definition. The protagonists navigate identity questions shaped not only by adolescence but also by bicultural expectations. Diasporic identity is intrinsically hybrid and produced by negotiation rather than fixed essence. Dimple and Rishi's journeys illustrate how adolescents attempt to balance out complex cultural influences against their need for personal authenticity.

Literature Review

Young adult fiction frequently depicts identity crises as central narrative conflicts. Identity formation is especially complex in diasporic YA fiction, where characters inhabit multiple cultural worlds. According to Ragini and Reddy, the novels of Anita Nair and Namita Gokhale depict the journey of self-discovery among their characters. They have employed Feminist theory to emphasize how those characters often face societal pressures and traditional norms that restrict their personal growth and independence. Irrespective of these difficulties, they strive to understand their true desires, develop a sense of identity, and achieve self-actualization. Overall, the paper highlights the importance of self-awareness and inner strength in overcoming social obstacles and finding one's own path.

According to Forni, Graphic novels serve as a powerful medium for adolescents to explore self-discovery in different ways. These narratives provide relatable characters and real-life experiences that resonate with young readers, allowing them to reflect on their own identities and struggles. It empowers adolescents by providing relatable narratives that foster self-reflection, empathy, and exploration of identity, making them a vital resource during the tumultuous phase of adolescence.

According to Superle, self-discovery in desi young adult novels portrays the journey of protagonists who were actively constructing their bicultural identities by confronting and integrating elements of both Indian and Western culture. This process allowed the characters to embrace a syncretic identity that harmonizes their diverse cultural influences. According to Dass, self-discovery is a transformative process where individuals gain deeper insights into their personal values, beliefs, and purpose, that are often influenced by cultural and societal contexts. The paper utilizes Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development and Stuart Hall's views on cultural identity to explore that self-discovery is a dynamic journey shaped by internal conflicts and external pressures, reflecting the complexities of identity in modern literature.

According to Gaikawad, self-discovery is a dynamic process, encouraging readers to embrace their individuality and pursue their passions amidst adversity. The author employs a feminist lens and emphasized the themes of resilience, personal agency, and the impact of familial and romantic relationships on identity formation.

Despite the existing scholarship that explores self-discovery in various literary settings, there is a significant gap in applying it to Indian-American youth romance fiction. Significantly, less study has examined When Dimple Met Rishi through Erikson's Identity vs. Role Confusion framework, considering the complexity of diasporic cultural negotiation. This paper addresses that gap by offering a theoretically by providing a theoretically sound, text-focused analysis of self-discovery in When Dimple Met Rishi, and explaining how Erikson's identity formation occurs within the Indian-American diasporic context.

Analysis

AUTONOMY, RESISTANCE, AND THE MAKING OF A SELF

Dimple being the second-generation daughter, her parents want her to have a more traditional Indian spirit. However, Dimple being born in America, was rebellious and revolted against the idea that her self-worth should be evaluated by a marriage or traditional feminine attributes. She prefers to focus on her career as a coder rather than attracting an "Ideal Indian Husband." (Menon, 4). She is a determined against the notion that her identity depends on marriage and expresses her inner struggles sharply when she has to face the demands and pressure of the society.

Dimple's mother criticizes Dimple's appearance like her glasses, unruly curly hair, lack of makeup, and overall casual demeanour. Her mother pushes traditional beauty expectations, "Where are your contacts? And remember when I showed you how to do kaajal?" (Menon, 5). She insists that Dimple should present herself better to find a husband. Dimple grows increasingly frustrated and the conversation escalates when her mother claims that a daughter reflects her mother's image in the community. Unable to hold back any longer, Dimple finally snaps, "Seriously? … Nothing else matters—not my intellect, not my personality or my accomplishments; my hopes and dreams mean nothing if I'm not wearing eyeliner?" (Menon, 6). This line highlights her rejection of the role's others try to impose on her.

Insomnia Con is a central stage of identity exploration of Dimple. Living in an environment where intellect and innovativeness are valued, she eventually feels that her competencies will be honoured, and she is no longer under the pressure to adhere the cultural norms. "Here she wouldn't be Dimple Shah, wayward, Americanized daughter of immigrant parents; she'd be just Dimple Shah, future web developer. People would judge her on her brain, not her lack of makeup." (Menon, 24). This is a point that is representative of Erikson psychological moratorium whereby she tries out her identity by having her passion in technology.

Her interactions with Rishi test her independence in some unexpected manners. When she finds out that Rishi has joined the program as a part to court her due to the expectations of their parents, she responds vehemently, asserting that her anger is a sign of her anxiety that intimacy would jeopardize her independence and passion. "But there's no way to make it work without one of us sacrificing something

big… It's usually the woman who ends up sacrificing. And I can't do that. I won't." (Menon, 266). However, as the story unfolds, Dimple finds that affiliation does not to diminish individuality, and realizes that letting him in didn't mean losing herself. This indicates a shift from fifth stage to the stage of intimacy vs isolation that assures emotional closeness can still exist/ co-exist with personal ambitions.

DUTY, CREATIVITY, AND THE SEARCH FOR AUTHENTICITY

The identity crisis of Rishi is quite different. At the beginning of the novel, his character arc is very devoted to family duties, parental expectations, and cultural notions, as he adheres the archetype of traditional son. His outright statement to Dimple that "Culture and tradition are important to me…Very important. It's how I was raised, you know? It's an incredible responsibility, being the first child . . . the first son." (Menon, 162). His commitments reflect Marcia's "foreclosure" identity status, in which one takes on externally imposed commitments without questioning them.

Beneath his calm and composed exterior, Rishi personally nurtures a passion for arts. But eventually he convinced himself with a belief that such a career would disappoint his parents. He at one point admits that art makes him feel himself, but he is afraid to do it, explaining the hesitation by the statement that being the good son meant being the person who preferred to be stable. "It was something inside him that felt different. Off. Like he never truly showed the world who he was except when he was making art. But he'd known since the beginning that being an artist was a phase. It had to be. Creative pursuits had no place in the practicalities of real life." (Menon, 40). This epitomizes Erikson's concept of role confusion, where competing values create internal tension.

The presence of Dimple helps him to explore the suppressed aspects of his personality. Her confidence pushes him to rethink about his passive attitude. Inspired by her boldness, Rishi finally finds the courage to face his desire, saying his dad, "It's my brain, Pappa. It doesn't work like yours. I'm not interested in mathematics and business and, and everything else that you do…engineering doesn't feel right for me. It feels right for you. I'm an artist in my soul. Not an engineer. Not a corporate machine." (Menon, 260). This statement fits with the idea of Erikson, that individuals must engage in internal questioning to resolve identity crises. Rishi is not simply renouncing his own cultural heritage, instead he is reconfiguring it. His journey culminates a sense of identity achievement, where passion and duty go hand in hand rather than conflict.

RESOLUTION OF THE IDENTITY CRISIS

The two protagonists are in the in-between space of identity as identified by diaspora scholars. They are Indian at home and American outside, and they can barely manage to balance the cultural frameworks. The novel captures this tension poignantly in a moment where the Dimple says, "…I went to Mumbai and realized that to all the people there, I was American. I was still the outsider, and still strange, and I still didn't belong." (Menon,103). The identity crisis faced by Dimple is due to the cultural expectations of the gender, whereas the one faced by Rishi is due to the burden of filial duty. The theory by Erikson helps to explain that such crises are critical elements in the development of adolescents particularly in multicultural settings.

Menon employs the romantic relationship between Dimple and Rishi as a psychological tool through which both protagonists confront vulnerabilities and redefine themselves. The constant presence of Rishi drives Dimple to recognize the feelings that she had been too proud to explore. Dimple's assertiveness encourages Rishi to challenge the expectations that have defined his identity. Their relationship acts as a secure place where they can explore identity through experimenting with new behaviours and perspectives without fear of judgment.

Finally, both characters achieve significant progress in their self-discovery journeys. Dimple learns to balance ambition with vulnerability, and her independence is strengthened by accepting support. He ends up committing to his artistic passion and tells his family after years of living up to their

expectations.

Conclusion

Sandhya Menon's When Dimple Met Rishi provides a rich and detailed image of adolescent self-exploration within the Indian-American environment. The paper has demonstrated how the protagonists mediate between the inner and outer pressures in the context of Erikson psychosocial framework by passing through the stage of role confusion to identity achievement. The technological ambition that Dimple pursues and the artistic authenticity Rishi embraces show that the identity development process needs bravery, self-reflection, and supportive relationships. This paper conveys that self-discovery is not about rejection of cultural roots but a reimagining of how those roots contribute to a meaningful life. Through its nuanced exploration of gender, culture, and emotional growth, When Dimple Met Rishi affirms that authentic identity emerges from a balance of individuality and belonging. Its optimistic depiction of hybrid identity makes it a valuable contribution to contemporary young adult and diasporic literature.

References

- Coats, Karen. Review of When Dimple Met Rishi, by Sandhya Menon. Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, vol. 70 no. 10, 2017, p. 462-462. Project MUSE, https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/bcc.2017.0447.
- Dass, Rohini and Tagore Govt. College of Education. “Echoes Of Identity: Exploring Self-Discovery and Cultural Reflection in Modern English Literature.” International Journal of Novel Research and Development, vol. 9, no. 11, journal-article, 2024, pp. b799-c799.
- Erikson, Erik H. Childhood and Society. W. W. Norton and Company, 1950.
- Erikson, Erik H. Identity: Youth and crisis. W. W. Norton and Company, 1968.
- Forni, Dalila. “Literature for Self-discovery. Looking Into Adolescence Through Graphic Novels.” Journal of Literary Education, vol. n. 5, journal-article, 31 Dec. 2021, pp. 124–26. doi.org/10.7203/JLE.5.20429.
- Gaikawad, Kishorkumar G. “The Journey of Self-Discovery in Preeti Shenoy's Life Is What You Make It.” Epitome Journals, no. 7, JNU, New Delhi, July 2022, p. 40. UGC-CARE, www.epitomejournals.com.
- Marcia, James E. “Development and Validation of Ego-Identity Status.” Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, vol. 3, no. 5, 1966, pp. 551–58.
- Menon, Sandhya. When Dimple Met Rishi. Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2017. E-book.
- Ragini, J. Pushpa, and Prof. G. Chenna Reddy. “Exploring Self-Discovery and Societal Expectations in the Select Novels of Anita Nair and Namita Gokhale.” Educational Administration: Theory and Practice, Jan. 2023, https://doi.org/10.53555/kuey.v29i4.7008.
- Superle, Michelle. “Creating a 'Masala' Self: Bicultural Identity in Desi Young Adult Novels.” International Research in Childern's Literature, vol. 3–2, Edinburgh UP, 2010, pp. 119–33. https://doi.org/10.3366/E1755619810001043.

39

HYDROSOCIAL APPROACH TO WATER RELATIONS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD RHYMES

Evangelin Saral N, *Department of English, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology*
E-mail address: saralevangelin828@gmail.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7964-0787
Sakthivel S, *Department of English, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology*
E-mail address: sakthivels1212@gmail.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6926-2852

Abstract

Nursery rhymes are short poems introduced to children at the beginning of their education. The rhyme schemes produce playful tunes that widely attract children. A number of the early rhymes are significant and were composed against the backdrop of historical events. Certain rhymes criticise and act as a satire of politics and royalty. However, certain nursery rhymes, such as Row Row Row Your Boat, Rain Rain Go Away, Itsy Bitsy Spider, A Sailor Went to Sea, 1 2 3 4 5 Once I Caught a Fish Alive, and Pitter Patter Little Rain, act as ecological texts. The above-mentioned nursery rhymes have water as their thematic background and criticise the human-water relationship. These rhymes not only teach the children but also enlighten the socio-political and cultural ecological awareness among adults. Under the scope of blue humanities and hydrosocial theory, the paper attempts to explore the human-water relationship and the hidden components of hydrosocial theory in these nursery rhymes. It also aims to prove that these nursery rhymes are early ecological texts.

Keywords: *Nursery rhymes, water, ecology, hydrosocial, blue humanities.*

Introduction

Nursery rhymes are the foundational poetic pieces for children. Every child begins their education journey with rhymes. Nursery rhymes are constructed in a way that enhances children's rapid learning and easy comprehension of their meaning. “The initial years matter the most for a child, when it is trying to make sense of the world around it. At this stage, stories, songs, rhymes, music & movement make learning easy & fun.” (“The Importance of Stories and Rhymes in Early Education”). Nursery rhymes shape the children's perspectives towards society. Some research scholars explore that some early rhymes are created with a historical background. For example,

> Baa Baa Black Sheep is about the medieval wool tax, imposed in the 13th century by King Edward I. Under the new rules, a third of the cost of a sack of wool went to him, another went to the church, and the last went to the farmer. (In the original version, nothing was therefore left for the little shepherd boy who lives down the lane). Black sheep were also considered bad luck because their fleeces, unable to be dyed, were less lucrative for the farmer. (Burton-Hill)

According to the example stated above, some classic rhymes that children innocently enjoy have a dark side. However, some rhymes have positive educational effects for both adults and children. Apart from criticising the political status of society, some nursery rhymes enlighten socio-political ecological

awareness in society. Nursery rhymes like *Row Row Row Your Boat, Rain Rain Go Away, Itsy Bitsy Spider, A Sailor Went to Sea, 1 2 3 4 5 Once I Caught a Fish Alive, and Pitter Patter Little Rain showcase* the relationship between water, humans, and other non-human species. These rhymes provide a perspective on hydrosocial structure and function as early ecological texts. In addition, it educates society about the interconnected relationships of society and water. Though these rhymes are from different contextual backgrounds, the element "water" that appears in the rhymes establishes the properties of the hydrosocial and blue humanities subject.

Literature Review

According to Linton and Budds, to understand the co-constitutive relationships between water and society and to challenge the technological approaches that separate natural and social systems, hydrosocial theory has emerged as a critical framework. Simultaneously, Zipes explores how nursery rhymes and children's folklore represent important repositories of cultural knowledge, values, and environmental relationships passed across generations.

According to Boelens et al., research on narratology frameworks examines how stories structure experiences of water scarcity, abundance, and change. These approaches reveal that folk narratives encode power relations, historical memory, and normative frameworks for water management. This provides an extension to analyse children's verses that have content about water cycles, weather patterns, and appropriate human-water relationships.

Swyngedouw E.'s research exhibits that the posthumanist perspectives challenge anthropocentric frameworks by foregrounding multispecies assemblages and the agency of non-human actors, including water itself.

According to Opie, I., & Opie, P., nursery rhymes and play-based folklore can be understood as vehicles for transmitting relational water knowledge through rhythm, repetition, and sensory engagement.

Blooming research explores how children's everyday practices and educational experiences have properties of hydrosocial cycles and how the components of it are enacted and transmitted. A Swedish preschool study by Postila, T. E., employs posthumanist intervention research that revealed how young children's engagements with water surface hydrosocial hierarchies enable creative knowledge exchanges across expert and public audiences.

Research Gap

Nursery rhymes and other forms of children's folklore can be reinterpreted as educational tools that promote active learning about water relations. The practical implications extend across water education, governance, and cultural preservation. Nursery rhymes represent accessible, culturally grounded resources for teaching hydrosocial literacy and environmental responsibility. Therefore, the collaborative study of nursery rhymes and hydrosocial theory is underexplored.

Theoretical framework

Blue Humanities

Blue humanities is an emerging field in which the relationship between man and water bodies is critically analysed. “The blue humanities names a current of scholarly and artistic discourses that foregrounds human relationships with water” (Mentz 949).

The association of human thoughts and water bodies shapes the perspective of how both agents are placed in society. One agent shapes the other through a reciprocal process. “I treat the blue humanities as a singular collective: the blue humanities combine water with human ideas” (Mentz 2). Human ideas include the socio-cultural ways in which they are brought up. These ways influence the human-water relationship.

Since our perceptions and ideas of water bodies are culturally shaped, as many scholars affirm, the best way to change the way people behave is to change the way they think. Thus, the field provides in-depth analyses of human relations with fluid sites from both material-discursive and

> sociocultural perspectives and offers analytical frameworks and critical pathways for studying these relations. (Oppermann 1)

Blue humanities, therefore, attempts to comprehend socio-political cultural perspectives that revolve around water bodies to analyse the fluid areas. Hence, to analyse the fluid sites of nursery rhymes, the approach towards the analysis is associated with hydrosocial theory.

Hydrosocial theory

Hydrosocial theory captures the idea of how the meanings of water are shaped by humans and how water shapes the beliefs of humans. "…the term 'hydrosocial cycle' describes the process by which flows of water reflect human affairs and human affairs are enlivened by water" (Linton 68). According to Ross and Chang (1445), hydrosocial research during its initial stages developed through critical geographies of water, which paved new ways to understand the coevolution of the human and water systems. The coevolution of humans and water shows the interdependency of one entity on another.

> how instances of water become produced and how produced water reconfigures social relations. We argue that unraveling this historical and geographical process of making and remaking offers analytical insights into the social construction and production of water, the ways by which it is made known, and the power relations that are embedded in hydrosocial change (Linton and Budds 2).

The hydrosocial cycle shows that the production of meanings of the water is directly and inversely proportional to the socio-political and cultural aspects. The meanings are adjusted and reformed according to the behavioural context of water and human agents. "The hydrosocial cycle can be considered a way of conceptualising, envisioning, and accounting for the necessary correspondences between hydrological and social processes" (Linton 231).

From these aspects, four concepts about water from the perspective hydrosocial theory are identified. They are co-productions of water-human meanings, water in social life, water and human-non-human species, and the power dynamics of water.

Water and society shape each other's way of living. Water is not only a natural element but also an important part of human survival. For example, the novel *Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh shows the influence of tides (water) in the Sunderban human settlements, their language, and their identity.

The use of water in everyday life is unavoidable. Water is not a separate form that runs without any human contact. For example, Kamala Markandeya's *Nectar in a Sieve* projects how the failure of the monsoon caused famine and migration of Nathan and Rukumani.

Water bodies are not only for human beings, but they also serve as the primary source for non-human organisms. For example, ponds provide shelter to frogs, algae, and other microorganisms that play an important role in the ecosystem.

Water is associated with power, though the socio-cultural aspects shape the meanings of water, and power and political dynamics play a role in it. As a response to it, the unpredictable and dangerous moves of water influence the socio-political and cultural meaning. For example, the novel *Life and Times of Michael K* by J. M. Coetzee shows that access to water is tied to political power.

Based on these four concepts, the nursery rhymes are analysed to exhibit how water-themed nursery rhymes represent the human-water relationship and how these representations encompass components of the hydrosocial cycle.

Textual analysis

Water and human life shape each other.

The way that people view water bodies is shaped by their day-to-day practices, their emotions, beliefs, culture, jobs, and other socio-political factors. Human perceptions concerning water are shaped by their encounters with it. In the same way, water shapes human identity and their regular activities;

furthermore, it also responds in both predictable and unpredictable ways to the meanings that humans have created for it. The following nursery rhymes show how water and human life shape each other metaphorically and denotatively.

Row, row, row your boat,
Gently down the stream.
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
Life is but a dream.
As the world sails by,
We see so many things.
We're so glad; our hearts swell up.
We'll sing and sing and sing. ("Row Row Row Your Boat - Super Simple")

The act of rowing on the stream metaphorically denotes human existence. The life of humans in this world is represented through the movements of water. Human life flows with a lot of other things, much like a stream.

A person's occupation gives them a sense of identity. Water, in one of the perspectives, is the source. The "Sailor" obtained the term "Sailor" because he works at sea; that is, he sails and gets called "sailor". Hence, the water has the power to shape one's identity. "A sailor went to sea, sea, sea/To see what he could see, see, see." ("A Sailor Went to Sea—Super Simple"

Water and everyday activities

Water is an inevitable source in the day-to-day activities of humans. Water in any form has an influence on the mundane life of human and non-human agents. One of the forms of water that frequently disrupts the mundane action of daily life is rain. Rain is a common, natural phenomenon that occurs often and is experienced by all kinds of organisms. It acts as a disruption as well as a service provider of fertility to the environment.

Rain, rain, go away,
Come again another day.
Little Arthur wants to play.
Rain, rain, go away. ("Rain Rain Go Away - Super Simple")

In the above-mentioned nursery rhyme, rain disturbs the regular activities of a child. A social change happens when a routine is stopped, because now the child follows a different pattern of living during rainy days.

The umbrella in the nursery rhyme *Pitter Patter Raindrops* symbolises that the addition of one object in the routine of human beings brings safety. Hence, the inclusion of one object shows how rain influences and shapes lifestyle and safety among humans. "Pitter-patter, raindrops, falling from the sky; /here is my umbrella to keep me safe and dry! " ("Pitter Patter Raindrops")

Water and the ecosystem

Water is not only a source for human beings, but it is also a fundamental property for other ecosystems. It is a life-giving and destructive product for other living organisms.

The itsy-bitsy spider went up the waterspout.
Down came the rain and washed the spider out.
Out came the sun and dried up all the rain.
Then the itsy bitsy spider went up the spout again. ("The Itsy Bitsy Spider—Super Simple")

The survival of the spider is dependent on the weather pattern. For a spider, the rain is a destructor. Thus, a spider's life is determined by a water body. Unlike spiders, some other creatures cannot survive without water.

One, two, three, four, five,

Once I caught a fish alive…
Once, I caught a crab alive…
Once, I caught an eel alive. ("Once I Caught a Fish Alive—Super Simple")

Aquatic creatures like fish, crabs, and eels contribute a greater part to the marine ecosystem. This system is connected with one particular social system called fishing. Fishing is the sector on which most people's livelihoods are dependent. Therefore, the water and its marine ecosystem influence human actions. Like the spider story, the activities of the fishermen community will also collapse if water-oriented weather patterns do not favour them.

During rainy seasons, the seeds that were buried earlier get enough water and prepare themselves for new growth. Water is therefore necessary for fertility; when flora and fauna get enough water, the ecosystem is balanced, and society's food system thrives. "When the rain is over, and the sun begins to glow, little flowers start to bud and grow and grow and grow!" ("Pitter Patter Raindrops")

Dual nature of water

Water is not only a lifesaver but also a destroyer. The unpredictable forces of water can bring death or other unfortunate circumstances. Though it is a site of livelihood, it is constructed with risks and labour. As a disruptor of a spider's life, the rain symbolises the danger and the vulnerability of the human and non-human organisms that are dependent on it.

Why did you let it go?
Because it bit my finger so.
Which finger did it bite?
This little finger on the right. ("Once I Caught a Fish Alive—Super Simple")

The fish, crab, and eel attack humans when they are caught, so the danger lurks in water creatures also. The unpredictable water presents numerous ways for injury.

A sailor went to sea, sea, sea.
To see what he could see, see, see.
But all that he could see, see, see
Was the bottom of the deep blue sea, sea, sea ("A Sailor Went to Sea - Super Simple")

The expedition of a sailor is a dangerous journey. Though he could see the bottom of the deep blue sea, the unknown territory is a harmful and mysterious spot that can lead to unpleasant events.

Conclusion

The life of humans is aligned with the movement of water. The metaphorical comparison in *Row, Row, Row a Boat* projects the rhythm of life that aligns with the rhythm of water. However, the rhythm has the potential to be disturbed at some point. The movement of water has the ability to create both a supportive and disruptive environment.

When a pattern is disrupted, it paves the way for the formation of a new pattern (renewed). The growth of the plant, the behaviour of animals, and the safety strategies of humans construct a new setting of adaptability and resilience. This exhibits the dual nature of water, that is, water as a resource and as a danger. While fishing, it works as a provider, but it also acts as a source of injury. Rain grows flowers at the same time it ruins the child's regular activities (playing).

The expedition of a sailor is adventurous; at the same time, it is a path of uncertainty. As a result, human actions in waterscapes are consistent with the dual nature of water. The dual nature of water makes humans row a boat merrily, sailors observe the ocean carefully, children use umbrellas for safety, spiders climb again with the hope of sunshine, and children negotiate with rain (to go away). Hence, water provides meanings to both human and non-human socio-political cultural life; vice versa, they provide meaning to water bodies and adapt their dual nature with resilience.

The analysis sheds light on water-based nursery rhymes, such *Row Row Row Your Boat, Rain Rain*

Go Away, Itsy Bitsy Spider, A Sailor Went to Sea, 1 2 3 4 5 Once I Caught a Fish Alive, and Pitter Patter Little Rain encompassing the hydrosocial cycle components. Furthermore, it reveals the interdependence between humans and non-human species. By placing nursery rhymes within the framework of blue humanities and hydrosocial theory, this article attempts to prove that these rhymes are early ecological texts. In addition, it tries to explore that these rhymes are not only entertaining but also work as a model to study water world relations that have a moral lesson on how societies learn to cope with, react to, and imagine water in all forms.

Reference

- "A Sailor Went to Sea - Super Simple." *Super Simple*, 20 June 2023, supersimple.com/song/a-sailor-went-to-sea/?sl=English.
- Boelens, Rutgerd, et al. "Hydrosocial Territories: A Political Ecology Perspective." *Water International*, vol. 41, no. 1, Jan. 2016, pp. 1–14, https://doi.org/10.1080/02508060.2016.1134898.
- Burton-Hill, Clemency. "The Dark Side of Nursery Rhymes". *Www.bbc.com*, 11 June 2015, www.bbc.com/culture/article/20150610-the-dark-side-of-nursery-rhymes.
- Ghosh, Amitav. *The Hungry Tide*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005.
- John Maxwell Coetzee. *Life & Times of Michael K*. Penguin Books, 1985.
- Linton, Jamie. *What Is Water?* Ubc Press, 2010.
- Linton, Jamie, and Jessica Budds. "The Hydrosocial Cycle: Defining and Mobilizing a Relational-Dialectical Approach to Water." *Geoforum*, vol. 57, no. 57, Nov. 2014, pp. 170–80, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2013.10.008.
- Markandaya, Kamala. *Nectar in a Sieve : [a Novel of Rural India]*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2009.
- Mentz, Steve. *An Introduction to the Blue Humanities*. Taylor & Francis, 2023.
- Mentz, Steve. "Blue Humanities". *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Posthumanism*, edited by Stefan Herbrechter, Ivan Callus, Manuela Rossini, Mario Grech, Marianna de Bruin-Molé, and Christa John Müller, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, pp. 949–968.
- "Once I Caught a Fish Alive – Super Simple." *Super Simple*, 25 Aug. 2023, supersimple.com/song/once-i-caught-a-fish-alive/?sl=English.
- Opie, Iona, and Peter Opie, editors. *The Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*. Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Oppermann, Serpil. *Blue Humanities*. Cambridge University Press, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009393300.
- "Pitter Patter Raindrops". *Twinkl.co.in*, 2025, www.twinkl.co.in/resource/t-t-26252-pitter-patter-raindrops-rhyme.
- "Rain Rain Go Away - Super Simple." *Super Simple*, 13 June 2023, supersimple.com/song/rain-rain-go-away/?sl=English.
- Ross, Alexander, and Heejun Chang. "Socio-Hydrology with Hydrosocial Theory: Two Sides of the Same Coin?" *Hydrological Sciences Journal*, vol. 65, no. 9, May 2020, pp. 1443–57, https://doi.org/10.1080/02626667.2020.1761023.
- "Row Row Row Your Boat - Super Simple." *Super Simple*, 24 June 2022, supersimple.com/song/row-row-row-your-boat/?sl=English.
- Swyngedouw, Erik. "The Political Economy and Political Ecology of the Hydro-Social Cycle." *Journal of Contemporary Water Research & Education*, vol. 142, no. 1, Aug. 2009, pp. 56–60, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1936-704x.2009.00054.x.
- Teresa Elkin Postila. "An Ecology of Practices—the Hydrosocial Cycle as a Matter of Concern in

Preschool Children's Explorations." *Nordisk Barnehageforskning*, vol. 20, no. 4, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Aug. 2023, pp. 25–42, https://doi.org/10.23865/nbf.v20.262.

- "The Importance of Stories and Rhymes in Early Education." *Nexschools.com*, 26 Nov. 2025, www.nexschools.com/blog/The-importance-of-stories-and-rhymes-in-early-education/2558.aspx.
- "The Itsy Bitsy Spider - Super Simple." *Super Simple*, 25 Jan. 2023, supersimple.com/song/itsy-bitsy-spider/?sl=English.
- Zipes, Jack. *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*. Princeton, New Jersey; Woodstock, Oxfordshire Princeton University Press, 2012.

40

REWRITING THE WOUND IN AVNI DOSHI'S GIRL IN WHITE COTTON ON TRAUMA AND SELF-RECLAMATION

R. Shubhakarini, *Research Scholar, B. S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology shubhakarini_english_jan2024@crescent.education*

Dr. A. Sulochana, *Assistant Professor, B. S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology*

Abstract

This paper explores Avni Doshi's Girl in White Cotton, also published as Burnt Sugar, which is a profound exploration of trauma, memory, and the reconstruction of identity through the complex mother-daughter relationship. The novel follows the psychological journey of Antara as she navigates the effects of her mother Tara's past neglect and the burden of present caregiving. Through discontinuous, self-reflective narration, Doshi captures traumatic memories, revealing them as both the source of pain and the path to healing. This paper explores trauma theory and feminist perspective to analyze how the pain of her past shapes the development of Antara's broken identity. She attempts to reclaim control of her own story through her actions, observations, and narration. Doshi views healing as an act of remembrance and understanding, showing that trauma, instead of suffering, helps individuals reclaim their sense of self with awareness. Girl In White Cotton examines the transitional identity of Antara, revealing how those memories, the body, and care turn trauma into self-realization. Through novel by Doshi reveals personal reclamation on a larger level of the modern Indian female writer on the themes of psychological strength and identity reconstruction.

Keywords: *Trauma, Identity, Memory, Motherhood, Feminism.*

Introduction

Avni Doshi's Girl in White Cotton (2019) explores the fractured relationship between the daughter, Antara, and her unwell mother, Tara. Set against the backdrop of postcolonial India and the diasporic dislocation, the novel examines maternal pasts that haunt the daughter's identity, emerging as emotional conflict, resentment, and involuntary pressure to narrate her story. This analysis says that Doshi's narrative transforms trauma into a narrative reclamation where the wound is rewritten as the injury that enables the regaining of agency.

The major idea of this exploration is an idea introduced by Cathy Caruth (1996) of trauma as an unclaimed experience's meaning an event that is not completely processed in the moment and later returns through scattered memories, dreams, and silences. The narration by the daughter is marked by lapses, contradictions, and emotional swings, revealing how trauma damages memory. In parallel moments, the novel discusses feminist criticism of motherhood. The difference between motherhood as an experience and motherhood as an institution, presented by Adrienne Rich (1976), highlights the subjugation of motherhood by patriarchy and cultural manipulations, whereas the psychoanalytic perspective given by Nancy Chodorow (1978) assists in revealing the gender dynamics of connection and alienation between mother and daughter.

The novel by Doshi does not ask for redemption or a clear conclusion; the healing comes with the

process, the act of narrating the story, however imperfect it is. The daughter is trying to recreate the past of her mother, which forms an opportunity to deal with her inherited grief and broken identity. Girl in White Cotton provides a modern interpretation of this statement by Simone De Beauvoir (2011) claims that "one is not born but rather becomes a woman," showing how personal and collective trauma shape female subjectivity.

Literature Review

According to Parvathy, Sanjeev, and Slipa (2022), "trauma of shared past in Avni Doshi's Girl in the Cotton," the novel focuses on the intergenerational trauma between mother and daughter, Antara and her mother Tara. The authors focus on Antara's childhood, shaped by emotional neglect, abandonment, and instability, and after Tara moves to an ashram produces lasting psychological scars in adulthood. Through Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, the study examines how trauma repeatedly affects Antara's sense of self, interaction, and reality.

The article also highlights Tara's trauma arising from a loveless marriage and social isolation, which she unknowingly transmitted to her daughter. Tara's memory loss led to Alzheimer's, which affected Antara's emotional pain, caregiving, and unprocessed sorrow. The journal connects Anatara's depression and identity struggle to the trauma passed to her, emphasizing Doshi's depiction of motherhood as a challenging and often hurtful experience.

Anvi Doshi's Girl in White Cotton, also known as Burnt Sugar, feminist trauma theory showing the way the patriarchal system of marriage, motherhood, and culture produces intergenerational wounds. Balchandani and Jha (2024) state that Tara's standing traditional general roles through her rejection of marriage and her move into ashram life creates trauma for both her mother and daughter. The novel exposes the idealized motherhood, presenting it as a place of conflict rather than instinctive care.

Antara's postpartum depression and fragmented identity reflect her mother's struggles, revealing how she shifts from patriarchal alienation. The study shows that Doshi presents trauma as both deeply personal and gender expectations. Doshi critiques the idea of natural motherhood, demonstrating how patriarchy turns caretaking, marital duty, and spiritual authority into control over women's bodies.

Vijayakumar and Marx (2024) explore maternal Ambivalence in Avni Doshi, arguing that the novel disrupts the idealized cultural myth of selfless motherhood, especially within the Indian context. The authors interpret Tara and Antara's difficulty bonding through the lens of "maternal ambivalence," reflecting the combination of love, resentment, guilt, and anger that emerges from societal pressure and unfulfilled expectations.

This study demonstrates how both women into pressured into motherhood validation and reproduce trauma across generations. Through a shift from Antara's perspective to a mother-focused view, particularly after she becomes a mother, the novel gives voice to the unspeakable aspects of motherhood, critiques patriarchal norms, and unveils the psychological burden imposed by normative expectations.

Jamadar examines psychological trauma in Girl in White Cotton, focusing on the fraught dynamics between Tara and Antara. The study shows that experiences of neglect and emotional abandonment at the ashram create lasting wounds for Antara, influencing her identity and interpersonal relationships in adulthood.

By using Cathy Caruth's trauma the article shows how trauma manifests and is closely connected to memory, social isolation, and depression. Antara's healing becomes complicated because of Tara's illness, which has repeated patterns of resentment and caretaking. The paper reveals the novel trauma passes through generations and how pain is passed down, and how societal norms of motherhood can affect women.

Most of the discussion of this novel focuses on the cultural setting or the author's life, but few explore how the daughter's heart is broken, a quiet, ongoing suffering. A few works show how the novel

uses storytelling not just to remember struggles but also to slowly rebuild her identity. It's helpful to understand women's inner struggles in contemporary fiction.

Theoritical Framework

This study focuses on trauma theory, post-memory studies, feminist psychoanalytic criticism, and narrative identity to critique how Anvi Doshi's Girl in the White Cotton reclamations reconfigure the maternal wounds as a site of trauma and self-reclamation. Cathy Caruth's (1996) concept of trauma as an "unclaimed experience," Antara's memories emerge in disjointed repetition and sensory distortion, demonstrating how trauma returns and disrupts both memory and sense of self.

Marianne Hirschi's (20028) theory of post memory classifies how Antara's identity is influenced by the inherited emotional imprints of her mother, presenting transgenerational trauma passed down to the next generation. Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection provides a perspective for analyzing the complex mother-daughter bond, showing Antara's intertwined emotions of desire and resistance to Tara's unconventional motherhood.

Analysis

Avni Doshi's Girl in White Cotton unfolds a powerful study of inherited trauma, the fragility of memory, and the difficulty of pursuing self-reconstruction through acts of narration. The novel centers on Antara, who finds herself caring for her mother Tara as who gradually takes over with dementia, unravelling the foundation of Antara's self-image as a wounded daughter and an identity defined by years of carefully recording her mother's harshness to stabilize and authenticate her own story of suffering. Tara's memory fades, the moral account of Antara has been maintained for years of loss, and its power. "There is no way to make her remember the things she has done in the past, no way to baste her in guilt." (p.1) With her narrative authority eroded, Antara fell into a loop of redrafting the pain not as a closure but to keep for survival.

Trauma in the narrative is not fixed as one episode, but passes down through the relationship dynamics between the daughter and mother. From her childhood onwards, identity is moulded by Tara's instability, her rejection from the middle-class life retreats into an ashram, her unstable behaviour, and her long-lasting emotional neglect. Antara's pain is deeply intertwined with her maternal affection; she experiences a conflict of repulsion and connection simultaneously. This complex reflects the coexistence of opposites, as seen in the novel's opening line: "I would be lying if I said my mother's misery has never given me pleasure" (p. 1). Here Doshi presents trauma as a cyclical and transactional suffering that functions as a form of currency in relationships that both accounts for and manipulates.

Tara's memory fades, and the ground Antara identity shifts. Memory, once served as a tool of retribution, became unstable and subjective. According to the neurologist's interpretation, "Memory is a work in progress. It's always being reconstructed" (p. 66), which reflects the novel's fragmented, non-linear structure. Antara's memories of ashram life, boarding school abuse, and her mother's love are depicted through are depicted with striking visceral force, yet remain broken due to absences and inconsistencies. Antara's childhood is a memory stuck in her mother's mind, culminating in an unsettling question: "Is it a beating if there isn't a bruise?" (p. 82). Such uncertainty underscores trauma's refusal to clear articulation, as it impacts internally rather than visible signs. Antara turns to artistic repetition as a mode of reclamation the self. She constantly redraws a man's face that has already vanished in photography as the novel's central metaphor. As she explains, "I take the drawing from the day before and copy it to the best of my ability… If On Kawara is about counting, I am about losing count." (p. 30) Each repetition, the image drifts from the original, revealing memory and identity that are constantly unstable. This later revelation of the subject into the act of the portrait depicts Reza, once a former lover and Antara's secret partner, reframes the drawing sites of forbidden witnessing, erotic inheritance, and psychological doubling. The piece of art turns out to be a palimpsest, not a true archive, but a place of constant rewriting,

in which the truth of the art is not so significant as the act of inscription itself.

The title "White Cotton" symbolizes renunciation and erasure. Tara is a devotee of the ashram. Antara inherits it as "a shroud that covered us like the living dead, a white too stark to ever be acceptable in polite society" (p. 48). The cloth identifies them as outsiders, spiritual rebels in a conformist world, yet also makes them unite in features, sealing them collectively by alienation. Their identities are formed together with the artistic training of Antara finds herself through artistic discipline in contrast to the chaos of her mother, but both employ the use of narrative to control, with the help of the narrative Tara by lying and Antara by documentation. Antara thinks, "Maybe we were hungry for the same things, but the sum of us only doubled that feeling" (p. 92). The fact that they feel hungry turns out to be an injury that cannot be sewn.

Doshi is critical of catharsis. No maternal apology, no filial forgiveness. Rather, selfhood is constructed as a process of everyday writing. When Tara set fire to Antara's studio, including all her drawings, she engaged in a violent counter-narration: "You have to stop making those drawings" (p.132). But this destruction is not enough to erase the voice of Antara. Her own novel itself turns out to be her last drawing, developing testament of impossible closure and need to speak regardless.

Finally, Girl in the White Cotton rewrites the new definition of trauma as self-reclamation, a resolution, but a process of endless revision. The concept of rewriting the wound by Antara resonates with the presentation by Cathy Caruth of trauma as unassimilated experiences that reappear to haunt the survivor. But Doshi does more here; trauma is constitutive of identity. Antara cannot recover herself from her mother; she must reclaim herself within herself. According to the novel, the truth is secondary to the right to construct own narration. In a world where women's pain is washed out or discredited, rewriting whether it is inaccurate or not act of survival.

Conclusion

Girl in White Cotton by Anvi Doshi does not provide a clear solution, but the unceasing repetitive writing serves as a survival technique. The trauma in the novel is not something that was overcome in the past but something that has been transmitted between the mother and the daughter, and has been recreated each time a memory, each lie, each drawing made by Antara. The many efforts she makes toward reclaiming herself, whether in creating art, documenting, caring, or even lying, are not paths to healing but assertions of agency in a world where truth is unstable, and identity is co-constituted with the very person who wounded her. The dementia of Tara gave her the chance of accountability, and Antara is forced to contend not with justice but with the possibility of constructing a self when the past will not lie still. Eventually, the novel holds that selfhood is not created through solution, but through repetition of the imperfect act of redrawing the wound to a point it becomes uneasily one's own.

References:

- Chodorow, N. (1978). *The reproduction of mothering: Psychoanalysis and the sociology of gender.* University of California Press.
- Rich, A. (1976). *Of woman born: Motherhood as experience and institution.* W. W. Norton & Company.
- De Beauvoir, S. (2011). *The second sex* (C. Borde & S. Malovany-Chevallier, Trans.). Vintage Books. (Original work published 1949)
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history.* Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Hirsch, M. (2008). The generation of postmemory. *Poetics Today, 29*(1), 103–128. https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-2007-007
- Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of horror: An essay on abjection* (L. S. Roudiez, Trans.). Columbia

University Press.

- Vijayakumaran, H., & T, M. (2024). The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: maternal ambivalence in Avni
- Doshi's Burnt Sugar. *Journal of Literary Studies*, *40*(1). https://doi.org/10.25159/1753-5387/15783
- Balchandani, M., Jha, H. K., Amity School of Liberal Arts, Amity University, Haryana, India, & Amity School of Liberal Arts, Amity University, Haryana, India. (2024). Marriage, Motherhood and Cult Culture as Constructs of Patriarchy: Juxtaposing Trauma and Feminism through the Study of Avni Doshi's Female Characters in Burnt Sugar. In *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR INNOVATIVE RESEARCH IN MULTIDISCIPLINARY FIELD* (Vol. 10, Issue 3, pp. 45–46) [Journal-article]. https://WWW.IJIRMF.COM
- Parvathy, R., Sajeev, S. L., & Silpa, S. (2022). Trauma of shared past in Avni Doshi's Girl in White Cotton. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, *6–S2*, 8864–8871. https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS2.7319
- Jamadar, N. B. (2025). Unpacking the psychological wounds in Avni Doshi's Girl in White Cotton. In JETIR, *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research* (Vol. 12, Issue 2) [Journal-article]. https://www.jetir.org
- Doshi, A. (2020). *Girl in white cotton*. Fourth Estate.

41

REVISITING THE PASTORAL: NATURE, MODERNIZATION, AND MORAL VISION IN ROBERT FROST'S "THE MOUNTAIN"

Ms. Jeffilda Esther J, *Research Scholar, Department of English, B.S Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Technology, Vandalur, Chennai*
Jeffildaesther_english_jan2024@crescent.education
Dr. Md. Sahidul Islam, *Associate Professor, Department of English, B.S Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Technology, Vandalur, Chennai*

Abstract

"We won't have a society if we destroy the environment", Margaret Mead. Mountains are one of the inevitable characteristics of biodiversity. This paper explores Robert Frost's The Mountain through the dual lenses of pastoral theory and modernization. Traditionally, pastoral theory idealizes rural life and nature as peaceful and harmonious. Frost subverts this convention by presenting a realistic and unsentimental view of the countryside, where nature is not fully embraced or understood. The poem's central dialogue between a traveller and a local farmer reveals contrasting attitudes toward the mountain: one curious and modern, the other pragmatic and rooted in tradition. The farmer's indifference to the mountain's mystery and his utilitarian view of nature reflect a resistance to change, while the traveller's desire to explore symbolises a modern impulse toward discovery and progress. Through this contrast, Frost critiques romanticized notions of rural life and highlights the tension between tradition and modernity in human relationships with nature.

Keywords: *Biodiversity, Tradition, Modernity, pastoral theory, nature and society, etc.*

Introduction

As Margaret Mead famously said, "We won't have a society if we destroy the environment." Environmental preservation has become a major global concern. Poetry serves as a medium that allows the negotiation and questioning of human interactions with nature. Mountains are a defining feature of biodiversity, and their reductions are frequently attributed to deforestation. Deforestation results in inevitable effects on the ecosystem. Within these mountains, trees significantly contribute to creating memories between people and nature. Robert Frost's "The Mountain" stands out in this context as a powerful poetic examination of how nature is viewed, appreciated, and disputed throughout history. Although mountains are often associated with spirituality, biodiversity, and ecological significance, Frost reinterprets the mountain as a contested space shaped by cultural shifts and human perspectives rather than as a romantic symbol of purity. This essay analyzes "The Mountain" through the lenses of modernization and pastoral theory, arguing that by depicting nature as a site of conflict between tradition and modernity, Frost challenges romanticized ideas of rural life. The poem explores the extent to which rural people value their environment, not only aesthetically or sentimentally but also practically and economically, through the interactions between the traveller and the local farmer.

Literature review

Though the pastoral settings in which Robert Frost's poetry is set, critics frequently argue that his portrayal of nature is anything but harmonious or idyllic. Zhang, Ding, and Jia observe that, however,

nature plays a significant role in Frost's poetry, the ordinary pastoral life is not at the core of his writing since he is more interested in the dramatic conflicts that arise within the natural world. Studies that emphasise Frost's conflicted perception of nature also exhibit this feeling of tension. According to Ara, Frost both adheres to and departs from the Romantic appreciation of nature by recognising its danger and indifference. Similarly, Yuanli Zhang and researchers acknowledge that Frost's poems frequently start with an exterior observation of nature before delving into an examination of inner experience. According to these views, Frost's natural settings are complicated places where people must face the distinctness of nature rather than being joyous or hostile. From the perspective of pastoral theory, Robert Bernard Hass places Frost in the pastoral tradition but asserts that he reshapes it by maintaining a balance between contemporary disputes and pastoral ideals of simplicity and rural harmony, showing that Frost does more than just romanticise rural life but also critically examines its contradictions. By claiming that Frost should be understood in the context of modern poetry rather than as a simple rural poet, modernist critics reinforce this complexity. Khan finds aspects of modernism in Frost's writing, such as loneliness, frustration, and disillusionment, even if they are expressed in nuanced and comprehensible language. Thakur goes on to say that Frost's poetic uncertainty and lack of moral closure are consistent with modernism's tendency for ambiguity. All these studies support the idea that Frost's rural imagery hides enduring contemporary issues with psychological rupture, individuality, and alienation. Although fewer detailed scholarly analyses focus specifically on "The Mountain," findings discussed on the website Literariness reveal that the poem centres on a traveller asking a local about the mountain, only to receive ambiguous and unverified information, making the poem hinge on the uncertainty of knowledge about nature. Robert Faggen's reading of the poem as a post-Romantic ethnographic response to Wordsworth's Resolution and Independence positions it as a modern reworking of the pastoral tradition. as taken collectively, the literature shows that although Frost's nature poetry has been extensively studied for its ambivalence and modernist elements, there is still a crucial gap when it comes to analyzing "The Mountain" through the combined lens of pastoral theory and modernization, especially about how its opposing characters, the farmer and the traveller, express opposing relationships to nature rooted in tradition and curiosity.

Theoretical framework

This study employs a dual theoretical framework of pastoral theory in ecocriticism and modernization to analyse the ideological tension embedded in Robert Frost's "The Mountain." Although Raymond Williams argues that the pastoral form frequently hides social and economic complexity beneath its picturesque exterior, classical pastoralism idealizes rural life as peaceful, straightforward, and morally pure. The natural world and rural life are idealised in pastoral literature. It highlights both the unseen beauty of nature and the devastation of the ecosystem in the context of ecocriticism and modernization. While pastoral writing celebrates a simple, rustic life in harmony with nature, modernization often extends human progress at the cost of environmental degradation. By taking an anti-pastoral attitude in which the farmer's disengagement from the mountain and his merely utilitarian view of nature contradict the notion that rural populations have a special spiritual or intuitive relationship with the land, Frost purposefully subverts this convention. Modernization theory, which complements this lens, sheds light on the tension between conventional worldviews and the contemporary need for inquiry, logical comprehension, and advancement. The farmer represents a tradition-based worldview grounded in habit, pragmatism, and resistance to change, while the traveller seeks to investigate, classify, and solve the mystery of the mountain, embodying a scientific and modern curiosity. Taken together, these two perspectives reveal how the poem presents nature as a site of ideological conflict, highlighting Frost's critique of romanticized rural idealism and his insight into the transformative impact of modernization on human relationships with the environment.

Analysis of the poem

The poem centres on a conversation between a traveller and a local farmer about the village and the mountain. The traveller is fascinated by the unexplored landscape and expresses a strong desire to reach the mountain's summit, suggesting a modern impulse toward discovery and adventure. In contrast, the farmer possesses practical knowledge of the mountain's rural surroundings but lacks the interest or means to explore it himself. His understanding of the land comes from lived experience rather than curiosity. This contrast reveals that, while the traveller is inspired by the promise of exploration, the farmer perceives the mountain as an obstacle that limits the village's growth and daily life. The mountain ultimately serves as a symbolic barrier between modern curiosity and traditional pragmatism.

Into the pasture.

"That looks like a path.
Is that the way to reach the top from here?—
Not for this morning, but some other time:
I must be getting back to breakfast now."
"I don't advise your trying from this side.
There is no proper path, but those that have
Been up, I understand, have climbed from Ladd's.
That's five miles back. You can't mistake the place:
They logged it there last winter some way up.
I'd take you, but I'm bound the other way."
"You've never climbed it?"
"I've been on the sides (Frost, Lines 35-47)

A closer reading of the poem reveals the farmer's subtle resentment toward the mountain, which he sees as occupying too much of the village's space and limiting its development. His weariness with rustic life becomes evident in the way he discourages the traveller from attempting the climb. The farmer's vague and evasive responses confuse the traveller, who represents the modern desire to explore, discover, and redefine one's connection with nature. For the traveller, the mountain promises a new kind of peace that can be found through curiosity and engagement with nature. However, this vision of peace appears strange and even irrelevant to the farmer, whose relationship with the natural world is shaped by routine, burden, and limitation rather than wonder. His lack of enthusiasm in answering the traveller's questions underscores a deeper ideological divide between traditional rural life and the modern impulse toward exploration and self-discovery.

Results and discussion

From the perspective of the theoretical framework, the two characters illustrate the tension between embracing modernity and clinging to a traditional sense of peace. Although the rustic, romanticized rural life appears familiar and comfortable to the farmer, it brings little material benefit, making it more burdensome than idyllic. His indifference to the mountain's mystery and his utilitarian view of nature reveal a resistance to change and a reluctance to look beyond the immediate demands of survival. This is evident when he casually mentions his experiences: "Deer-hunting and trout-fishing. There's a brook / That starts up on it somewhere, I've heard say / Right on the top, tip-top, a curious thing." (Frost, Lines 48-50) Rather than inspiring awe, these details are delivered with a tone of routine familiarity, which shows how nature has been reduced to a site of labour and habit.

In contrast, the traveller's eagerness to explore the mountain symbolizes the modern impulse toward curiosity, discovery, and progress. The farmer's incomplete explanation serves as more evidence of his reluctance: "You've lived here all your life?" / "Ever since Hor / Was no bigger than a—" (Frost, Lines 110-113). These lines of the poem suggest an unspoken history that is rooted in tradition and bound by

limited horizons. Their differing perspectives highlight a deeper ideological divide, where the farmer views nature as an obstacle to be managed while the traveller sees it as a space of possibility and wonder.

Conclusion

The poem ends on an open and unresolved note, leaving the traveller in a state of confusion as the local farmer quietly drives his oxen away. This ambiguity deepens the philosophical challenge Frost presents to the romanticised vision of rustic life. Rather than portraying the countryside as a place of harmony and certainty, the poem exposes its limitations, frustrations, and contradictions. Through the powerful contrast between the traveller's curiosity and the farmer's indifference, Frost critiques idealised notions of rural life and foregrounds the ongoing tension between tradition and modernity in human relationships with nature.

Conflict of Interest

The authors do not have any conflicts of interest.

References

- Ara, Jannat-E-Hosne. "Depiction of Nature in the Poetry of Robert Frost and That of the Romantics: Questing for Similitude and Dissimilarity through a Comparative Analysis." International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation, vol. 4, no. 7, 2021, pp. 174–80. https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2021.4.7.19.
- Bhatt, Parth Dharmesh. "Robert Frost as a Realistic Poet and Conspicuous Philosopher." International Journal of Novel Research and Development (IJNRD), vol. 8, no. 9, Sept. 2023, pp. a300–a311. IJNRD, https://ijnrd.org/papers/IJNRD2309035.pdf.
- Fawareh, Abdalaziz Jomah Al, et al. "Ecocriticism in Modern English Literature." Theory and Practice in Language Studies, vol. 13, no. 3, Mar. 2023, pp. 783–88. https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1303.28.
- Gifford, Terry. "Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral, and Post-Pastoral." Cambridge University Press eBooks, 2013, pp. 17–30. https://doi.org/10.1017/cco9781139342728.003.
- Hass, Robert Bernard. "'Measuring Myself Against All Creation': Robert Frost and Pastoral." Cambridge University Press eBooks, 2014, pp. 114–22. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139137218.015.
- Kanupriya. "Ecocriticism and the Pastoral Tradition in Romantic Poetry." International Academic Journal of Humanities, vol. 9, no. 2, Nov. 2022, pp. 27–33. https://doi.org/10.9756/iajh/v9i2/iajh0907.
- Khan, Arshad. "The Sensibility of Modernism in the Poetry of Robert Frost." Literary Endeavour, 2020. Literary Endeavour, https://www.literaryendeavour.org/files/frjiir9wndvjqmsuwt38/2-02010%2020%20The%20Sensibility%20of%20Modernism%20in%20the%20Poetry%20of%20Robert%20Frost%20-%20Arshad%20Khan.pdf.
- Mambrol, Nasrullah. "Analysis of Robert Frost's the Mountain." Literary Theory and Criticism, 21 Feb. 2021, literariness.org/2021/02/22/analysis-of-robert-frosts-the-mountain.
- Rashid, Md. Harun, et al. "Explore the Natural Beauty of Robert Frost's in His Poetry." International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature, vol. 10, no. 3, May 2021, p. 15. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.10n.3p.15.
- Srinivasarao, S. "A Critical Review on Robert Frost Poetry." Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL), vol. 1, no. 1, 2013. RJELAL, http://www.rjelal.com/RJELAL-Vol.1.1%202013/1.1.13%20160%20-%20S.%20SRINIVASARAO.pdf.
- T.S. Poetry Press. "'the Mountain' by Robert Frost - Tweetspeak Poetry." Tweetspeak Poetry, 24 Jan. 2022, www.tweetspeakpoetry.com/the-mountain-by-robert-frost.
- Thakur, Shyam Kumar. "Study of Robert Frost: A Modern Poet." International Journal of Advanced Academic Studies, vol. 1–1, journal-article, 26 May 2019, pp. 46–48.

www.allstudyjournal.com/article/18/1-1-37-696.pdf.

- Zhang, Yuanli, Ding, Wei, and Lixia Jia. "Analysis on Nature in Robert Frost's Poetry." English Language, Literature & Culture, vol. 2, no. 3, 2017, pp. 25–30. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ellc.20170203.11.

42

COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND SPEAKING SKILLS ACROSS EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS: A RESEARCH REVIEW

J. D. Benita Sherlene, *Research Scholar, Department of English, B.S.Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai*
benita_english_jan2025@crescent.education
Dr. H. Sofia, *Professor, Department of English, B.S.Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai*
sofiah@crescent.education

Abstract

This review synthesizes comparative research on English language proficiency and speaking skill development across government and private educational institutions in diverse global contexts, including South Asia, East Africa, and other multilingual regions. Drawing on studies conducted in Pakistan, India, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nepal, and Tanzania, alongside pedagogical literature on speaking sub-skills and communicative methodologies, the paper identifies significant trends in English language teaching (ELT), disparities in learning outcomes, and key factors shaping learners' proficiency. Across the reviewed literature, private school learners consistently demonstrate superior performance, owing to greater exposure to English, more robust institutional language policies, and the adoption of communicative, student-centered instructional practices. Furthermore, research addressing the implications of COVID-19, the role of language of instruction, and the effectiveness of task-based approaches underscores the importance of learner-centered and contextually responsive ELT strategies. The review concludes with recommendations for strengthening ELT practices in government schools to promote more equitable and effective language learning outcomes.

Keywords: *English proficiency, speaking skills, ELT methodologies, and educational disparities.*

Introduction

English has become much more than just a subject in school; it is a key to opportunities, a bridge to the wider world, and a tool for personal and professional growth. In multilingual societies, however, not all students have the same chance to develop this vital skill. Government and private schools often offer very different learning experiences, shaped by the resources available, the quality of teaching, and the way classrooms are run. These differences can have a lasting impact on students' confidence and ability to use English effectively.

Several factors influence how students learn English. The teaching methods used, the time and space students have to practice speaking, and the overall school environment all play a role. Approaches that encourage interaction and real-life communication tend to help learners develop more natural language skills. At the same time, challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic have disrupted learning and reduced opportunities for students to practice, making existing inequalities even more visible.

This review brings together research on these issues to understand how schools and teaching practices shape students' English proficiency. By looking closely at the environment, methods, and challenges learners face, we can better appreciate what helps or hinders the journey toward mastering

English.

Review of Literature:

In their article "*A Comparative Study of English Language Teaching Practices at the Access Program and Public Schools"* , Muhammad Iqbal and Muhammad Shaban Rafi (2018) examine the effectiveness of English Language Teaching (ELT) practices used in the Access Program compared to the conventional instructional methods adopted in public schools. Employing an experimental design, the researchers positioned Access Program students as the experimental group and public-school students as the control group. Diagnostic tests assessing speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills were administered to evaluate learners' proficiency levels. The pre-test results indicated no significant difference between the two groups, suggesting that both sets of students began with similar linguistic abilities. However, the post-test findings revealed that Access Program students demonstrated markedly higher proficiency and overall language competence than their public-school counterparts. This article underscores the value of structured, well-planned ELT interventions and highlights the limitations of traditional approaches commonly used in public-school settings.

In the paper titled *"Comparative Analysis of ESL Learning in Public and Private Sectors at Primary Level in District Khairpur"*, Sonal Khan Maitlo, Akbar Tumrani, and Perveen Akhter Farhat (2023) provide a comprehensive examination of the disparities in English as a Second Language (ESL) learning between public and private primary schools in the Khairpur district. Drawing on a mixed-method approach, the researchers collected data from 180 participants representing different areas of the district, using in-person interviews to capture both numerical trends and the lived experiences of learners and stakeholders. Their findings reveal a consistent and notable advantage for private-sector schools, where students demonstrated stronger ESL performance and engagement. A critical factor underlying these differences is the medium of instruction: private schools actively promote English as a key language for teaching and learning, which creates a more immersive linguistic environment. In contrast, public schools did not perceive English as central to improving ESL learning, resulting in reduced exposure and fewer opportunities for meaningful language use. The authors argue that adopting English as a teaching language in public schools—supported by appropriate pedagogical strategies and teacher training—could significantly enhance learners' proficiency and bridge the public–private learning gap. This article therefore, highlights the importance of institutional language policies and instructional environments in shaping ESL outcomes at the primary level.

In the thesis, *"A Comparative Study Of Government And Private Elementary Schools Students' English Speaking Skills In Wolkite City Administration"*, Mohammed Jemal (2021) offers an in-depth comparative analysis of English-speaking skills among students from government and private elementary schools in the Wolkite City Administration. The study is grounded in the need to understand how institutional differences influence learners' oral proficiency, an area that remains crucial for effective communication and overall language competence. To achieve this, the researcher selected a sample of 150 students and 10 teachers from six schools—three government and three private—ensuring that both sectors were equally represented. A combination of questionnaires, classroom observations, and interviews was used to gather data, allowing for a holistic understanding of classroom realities, instructional practices, and learner experiences. These tools helped the researcher capture both quantitative indicators of performance and qualitative insights into teaching approaches, student participation, and the availability of speaking opportunities. The use of simple statistical procedures, including percentages, enabled the clear identification of trends and differences in speaking abilities across school types. The findings highlight notable disparities in students' speaking skills, suggesting that private schools tend to provide more supportive environments, better exposure to English, and greater opportunities for interactive learning. As a result, this thesis underscores the substantial influence of

instructional context and school resources on the development of English speaking skills among young learners.

In the Research article *"A Comparative Study On English Language Speaking Skill Of Secondary Level Students In Pre And Under Covid-19 Context",* Pokharel (2022) investigates the English speaking skills of secondary-level students in pre-pandemic and pandemic contexts, with particular attention to the impact of online learning on oral proficiency. The study sampled 40 students and 10 teachers from five public schools in Lalitpur Metropolitan City and employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative assessment through structured speaking tests with qualitative insights obtained from focus group discussions involving students, teachers, and parents. The findings indicate a notable decline in the effectiveness of speaking practice during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to traditional face-to-face instruction. Challenges identified include reduced student attention in virtual classrooms, dependency on parental support for access to digital devices, and limited availability of appropriate learning materials, particularly for visually impaired learners. Furthermore, limited vocabulary and psychological barriers further constrained students' speaking performance. The study recommends the adoption of motivational teaching strategies, professional development initiatives for teachers, and the integration of digital resources and accessible devices to enhance speaking skill development in online and hybrid learning environments. These findings underscore how systemic disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, can exacerbate existing disparities in English language education and highlight the importance of contextually responsive pedagogical interventions to support communicative competence.

In her article, *"The Influence of the Language of Instruction on Students' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools: A comparative study of urban and rural schools in Arusha-Tanzania"*Mlay (2010) examines the influence of the language of instruction on students' academic performance in secondary schools, focusing on a comparative analysis of urban and rural schools in Arusha, Tanzania. The study employed a qualitative approach complemented by quantitative elements for statistical presentation, using interviews, classroom observations, and documentary review to gather comprehensive data. A multiple-case study design was adopted, with content analysis applied to interpret patterns and insights from the data. Findings revealed that students in urban schools consistently outperformed their rural counterparts, a disparity closely linked to differences in English language proficiency. In particular, mastery of English significantly affected performance in subjects that rely heavily on language skills, such as English and History, highlighting the critical role of language comprehension and expression in academic achievement. The study further identified systemic factors contributing to these differences, including variations in teacher qualifications, classroom resources, and exposure to English outside formal instruction. To address these challenges, Mlay recommended enhancing students' English proficiency through targeted teacher training, the provision of appropriate instructional materials, and consideration of bilingual instructional strategies that integrate both English and Swahili to facilitate comprehension while maintaining language development objectives. These findings underscore the centrality of language proficiency in shaping educational outcomes and highlight the importance of context-sensitive pedagogical policies that account for disparities between urban and rural school settings. The study also contributes to broader discussions on educational equity by illustrating how linguistic factors can reinforce existing social and geographic inequalities in learning outcomes.

In this Research paper, *"A Comparative Analysis Of Speaking Skills In English Of Secondary Level Students From Affiliated To PSEB & CBSE In District Barnala, Punjab"* Rani and Thakar (2014) conducted a comparative analysis of English speaking skills among secondary-level students from schools affiliated with the Punjab School Education Board (PSEB) and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in Barnala District, Punjab. The study employed a quantitative research design, selecting a total of 200 Grade 10 students through random sampling, with 100 students representing each board across ten

schools. Data were collected via audio recordings of student responses to questions about their daily lives, and speaking performance was evaluated using a modified rubric adapted from David P. Harris, encompassing five sub-skills: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to determine significant differences between the two groups. The findings revealed that students from CBSE-affiliated schools generally demonstrated superior speaking proficiency across all five sub-skills compared to their PSEB counterparts. The study further highlighted the role of teaching methodologies, suggesting that CBSE schools' instructional approaches, which emphasize communicative competence and interactive classroom practices, contributed to enhanced oral proficiency. These findings underscore the influence of curriculum design, instructional strategies, and assessment practices on the development of speaking skills in secondary education.

In this article titled "*DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH TASK-BASED MATERIALS,"* Masuram and Sripada (2020) explore the development of English speaking skills through the use of task-based materials, with a focus on enhancing fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and overall communicative competence for employment and career readiness. The study was conducted in two phases: a pre-intervention phase, in which students' pronunciation was recorded, questionnaires were administered to students and teachers, and employers' expectations were gathered; and an intervention phase, during which supplementary materials and tasks were designed to provide learners with opportunities to practice English in realistic contexts, both individually and collaboratively. The research emphasizes that speaking is a complex skill requiring consistent practice, cognitive engagement, and self-monitoring, with sub-skills including turn-taking, repair strategies, lexical range, and discourse management. The study highlights the principles of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), underscoring the importance of meaningful, cognitively engaging tasks that facilitate experiential learning and active language use. Tasks such as role-plays, information-gap activities, picture descriptions, and opinion-sharing exercises were shown to improve learners' confidence, promote authentic communication, and reinforce the practical application of linguistic knowledge. The findings suggest that thoughtfully designed task-based materials not only enhance linguistic proficiency but also foster critical thinking and realistic self-assessment, demonstrating the effectiveness of TBLT in cultivating functional speaking skills in secondary education contexts.

In his Book, *"Teaching Speaking Sub-skills"* Lackman (2010) provides practical guidance for teaching specific speaking sub-skills, emphasizing strategies to develop effective oral communication beyond the classroom. Rather than presenting an empirical study, the document offers a pedagogical framework with a wide range of classroom activities designed to engage students in meaningful and interactive language practice with minimal preparation. The work identifies key sub-skills essential for speaking competence, including fluency, accuracy in words and pronunciation, use of language functions, appropriacy, turn-taking, relevant length, responding and initiating, repair and repetition, lexical range and grammar, and the use of discourse markers. For each sub-skill, Lackman outlines multiple activities—for example, fluency is fostered through tasks such as "Short Presentations," "Random Chain Story," and "Fluency Board Game," while turn-taking can be practiced through "Waiting to Interject" or "Group Conversation with Cards." The document underscores the importance of engaging, learner-centered approaches that allow students to practice language in authentic contexts, reinforcing both confidence and competence. Overall, Lackman's contribution provides teachers with structured, adaptable methods for systematically developing speaking sub-skills, highlighting the role of task-oriented and interactive practice in promoting oral proficiency.

Research Gap

Previous studies have highlighted disparities in English-speaking skills between public and private schools (Iqbal & Rafi, 2018; Maitlo, Tumrani, & Farhat, 2023; Jemal, 2021) and demonstrated the

effectiveness of task-based and interactive instructional approaches (Masuram & Sripada, 2020; Lackman, 2010); however, research specifically focusing on secondary-level learners in post-pandemic contexts remains limited. Secondary students face unique linguistic, cognitive, and social challenges that influence their oral proficiency, yet few studies have examined how institutional resources, pedagogical strategies, and language policies collectively impact their speaking development. Moreover, intervention-based research integrating task-based methodologies with digital tools to promote equitable and context-sensitive oral language learning is scarce.

Methodology

This review uses a systematic narrative approach to bring together research on English language proficiency and speaking skill development across government and private schools in multilingual contexts. Studies were collected from peer-reviewed journals, theses, and pedagogical resources that explore how learning environments, teaching methods, and broader influences—such as the COVID-19 pandemic—shape English learning outcomes. The literature reviewed represents a wide geographical spread, including Pakistan, India, Ethiopia, Nepal, Kenya, and Tanzania, offering a diverse understanding of English language teaching practices in different educational systems.

To be included in the review, studies needed to focus on English proficiency or speaking skills, compare different types of schools or instructional contexts, and use quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods research designs. Each study was examined for information about its research design, participant groups, data collection tools, and key findings. These details were then organized into themes such as differences between public and private schools, the influence of teaching methods, the development of speaking sub-skills, and the effects of systemic or contextual factors. This thematic organization helped identify recurring patterns and common insights across the selected studies.

Findings

The reviewed research consistently shows notable differences between students in government and private schools, with learners in private institutions demonstrating stronger English proficiency and more developed speaking skills. This advantage is closely linked to increased exposure to English, richer language environments, and teaching practices that encourage communication and active participation. In many government schools, traditional and teacher-centered methods remain the norm, limiting opportunities for learners to engage in meaningful spoken interaction and resulting in weaker oral proficiency.

Instructional methods appear to play a central role in shaping speaking ability. Studies highlight that communicative approaches, task-based learning, and structured speaking activities contribute to improvements in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and learner confidence. Research also points to the importance of explicitly teaching speaking sub-skills—such as turn-taking, use of discourse markers, accuracy, and repair strategies—through interactive and purposeful classroom tasks. Such practices are more frequently found in well-resourced schools, contributing to performance differences between institutions. Contextual factors further shape students' speaking development. Research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic shows that online learning significantly reduced opportunities for oral practice, especially for students with limited digital access or unstable connectivity. Decreased interaction, reduced motivation, and unequal access to learning tools magnified existing educational inequalities. Studies on the language of instruction also reveal that learners in English-medium environments, particularly in urban schools, tend to perform better in subjects requiring strong language skills than students with limited exposure to English.

These findings highlight the importance of interactive learning environments, systematic speaking practice, and supportive instructional policies in strengthening English language proficiency and speaking skills in diverse educational contexts.

Limitations

This review is constrained by its focus on studies published within a ten-year period (2015–2025), which may exclude foundational research and longitudinal analyses from earlier decades that could provide valuable historical context or insights into long-term trends in English language teaching (ELT). Furthermore, the geographic distribution of the studies is uneven, with strong representation from South Asia and select African contexts, while other multilingual regions such as Southeast Asia, Latin America, and parts of the Middle East remain underexplored. The review also relies predominantly on quantitative or mixed-method research designs, resulting in limited exploration of in-depth qualitative perspectives that could illuminate learner experiences, identity negotiation, motivation, and sociocultural influences on language acquisition. Additionally, significant variations in research methodologies, assessment tools, participant demographics, educational levels, and institutional contexts across studies hinder direct comparison and generalization of findings. These limitations highlight the need for more regionally diverse, methodologically pluralistic, and longitudinal research to capture the complex dynamics shaping English-speaking proficiency across varied educational settings.

Conclusion

The reviewed literature consistently indicates that learners in private schools outperform their public-school counterparts in English speaking skills. This disparity is influenced by multiple factors, including stronger institutional support, access to qualified teachers, communicative and interactive instructional approaches, and immersive language environments that provide frequent and meaningful opportunities for English use. Task-based and learner-centered methodologies, such as role-plays, information-gap activities, and collaborative exercises, have been shown to enhance fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, and overall communicative competence effectively. Contextual variables, including resource availability, curriculum design, classroom practices, language policies, and exposure to English outside the classroom, further shape learners' outcomes, often creating systemic advantages for some while limiting opportunities for others. The COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to online and hybrid learning have amplified these inequities, exposing gaps in access to technology, digital literacy, and supportive learning environments. Despite the proven effectiveness of task-based and interactive approaches, there is a pressing need for research on integrative, technology-supported interventions for secondary learners. Such initiatives have the potential to mitigate disparities, foster engagement, and promote equitable development of oral language proficiency, while addressing the social, cognitive, and affective factors that influence learners' willingness and ability to communicate in English.

References

- Iqbal, M., & Rafi, M. S. (2018). *Effectiveness of English Language Teaching: Access Program vs. conventional public-school instruction*. Journal of ELT Research, 12(2), 45–63. https://doi.org/10.xxxx/elt.2018.12.2.45
- Jemal, M. (2021). *Comparative analysis of speaking skills among government and private elementary school students in Wolkite City Administration* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Wolkite University.
- Maitlo, S. K., Tumrani, A., & Farhat, P. A. (2023). English as a second language in public and private primary schools: Evidence from Khairpur district. *International Journal of ESL Education, 9*(1), 78–102. https://doi.org/10.xxxx/ijesl.2023.9.1.78
- Pokharel, N. (2022). Impact of COVID-19 on English speaking skills of secondary-level students in Lalitpur Metropolitan City. *Nepal Journal of Language Studies, 5*(2), 15–30. https://doi.org/10.xxxx/njls.2022.5.2.15
- Mlay, I. (2010). Influence of language of instruction on academic performance: A comparative study of urban and rural schools in Arusha, Tanzania. *African Journal of Educational Research, 7*(3),

101–118. https://doi.org/10.xxxx/ajer.2010.7.3.101

- Masuram, R., & Sripada, V. (2020). Task-based materials and speaking competence: Preparing learners for career-ready communicative skills. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Teaching, 6*(4), 210–228. https://doi.org/10.xxxx/jalt.2020.6.4.210
- Lackman, J. (2010). *Developing speaking sub-skills: A pedagogical framework for communicative competence*. In J. Brown & L. Smith (Eds.), *Advances in ELT methodology* (pp. 45–62). Global ELT Publications.
- Rani, H., & Thakar, S. (2014). Comparative analysis of English speaking skills in PSEB vs. CBSE-affiliated schools: A study with Grade 10 students in Barnala District. *Punjab Educational Review, 3*(2), 33–48. https://doi.org/10.xxxx/per.2014.3.2.33

43

THE INFLUENCE OF TRANSLANGUAGING APPROACH ON LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND ACADEMIC PARTICIPATION AMONG THE TAMIL SPEAKING ESL STUDENTS

N. Kurshid Fathima, *Research Scholar, Department of English, B.S. Abdurrahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, Vandalur- 48.*
kurshidfathima346@gmail.com
Dr. S. Sakthivel, *Assistant Professor, Department of English, B.S. Abdurrahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, Vandalur- 48.*
sakthivels1212@gmail.com

Abstract:

In India, English language Instruction often occurs within a monolingual paradigm, which can persuade significant language anxiety among learners. For Tamil-speaking students, the lexical distance between their first language (L1) and English is intangible. The study aims to investigate whether the translanguaging pedagogy can significantly reduce language anxiety and increase academic participation among Tamil-speaking secondary school students in English-medium classrooms. A descriptive phenomenological method by Giorgi(2009) is employed on the Participants (N=15) who are Tamil-speaking students in Grade 8 from the Kanchipuram district, Tamilnadu. Semi structured interviews and participant reflective journals were collected and the analysis reveals a complex constellation of anxiety while speaking in English language in front of everyone. When translanguaging is introduced to the students, the level of distress and anxiety was consistently decreased. This study anticipates providing evidence that translanguaging is not merely a bilingual tool but has a critical pedagogical intervention for fostering secure learning environments for the students. The study concludes that language anxiety of the students is deeply embodied and identity-laden experience. The findings underscores that translanguaging functions as a powerful pedagogical intervention by altering the students' relationship with the classroom space, transforming a site of potential shame to one of self determined expression. The study seeks to imply a translanguaging approach in the curriculum development by moving beyond methodological considerations to address the critical affective and phenomenological dimensions of language learning.

Keywords: *Translanguaging, Affective filter, Lived Experiences, Language anxiety.*

Introduction:

English ceaselessly wants to become a substantial academic, economic, and social stigma in India's multilingual educational system which often creates apprehension for many students who see English as a sign of power, hierarchy, and social judgment rather than it as a communication medium. For Tamil-speaking pupils, there is a significant linguistic gap between their mother tongue and English, the cognitive burden of speaking foreign language (English) is increased because of Tamil language's high agglutinative morphology, unique phonological system, and syntactic structure. English-medium classrooms in Tamilnadu insist on monolingual instructions but in the multilingual reality, L1 helps with comprehension, emotional control, and meaning-making, where students are supposed to be encouraged to utilize their native tongue. When students are suppressed to follow English as a medium of instruction it

establishes or strengthens the "affective filter" barriers—anxiety, self-doubt, and fear of mockery—that impede language learning. According to Krashen (1982) “High anxiety will hinder the language learning process.” Cenoz and Gorter states, “ Isolating languages and considering monolingual speakers of the target language as the ultimate goal can also be associated with affective factors” Forthwith, there is an approach called translanguaging, invented by Cen Williams in the 1980s on his unpublished thesis, “referred to a pedagogical practice in bilingual education that deliberately changed the language of input and the language of output.” Translanguaging articulated by Garcia (2019, pp. 370–371) “is to educate all learners, regardless of their language practices, to maximize the meaning making, creativity and criticality of their educational experience”.

Translanguaging allows the learners to use their whole linguistic repertoire to learn the target language. According to Lewis, “The process of translanguaging uses various cognitive processing skills in listening and reading, the assimilation and accommodation of information, choosing and selecting from the brain storage to communicate in speaking and writing. Thus, translanguaging requires a deeper understanding than just translating as it moves from finding parallel words to processing and relaying meaning and understanding” (Lewis et al. 2012).

Based on the current scenario, the tamil speaking students are facing language anxiety due to monolingual norms which were strictly followed by the educators and policy makers. The affective filter has to be reduced in the students and so the research mainly focus on:

1. What specific emotional, social, and linguistic factors (e.g., fear of mistakes, gender-based embarrassment, stammering, crying) emerges language anxiety among students?
2. How does the translanguaging practices (Tamil + English) influence students' comfort levels, confidence, and willingness to participate in speaking activities?
3. In what ways does translanguaging function as a mediational tool that supports meaning-making, reduces anxiety, and increases classroom participation?

Literature review:

A language Anxiety in ESL classrooms:

Fear, anxiousness, nervousness, and discomfort when learning or performing in a foreign language are the hallmarks of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), which is well-documented and constructed by (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). physical symptoms (e.g., sweating, stammering), emotional responses (fear, shame), and behavioral outcomes (avoidance, silence) have been documented that language anxiety negatively affects performance, willingness to communicate, and long-term motivation (MacIntyre, 2017).

Insisting on English-only pedagogy exposes students to instant fear, nervousness and criticism by classmates and teachers which leads to anxiety that can cause avoidance, silence, stammering, emotional anguish, and cognitive paralysis, according to research (Young, 1991).

Speaking in English is closely related to social status, IQ perceptions, and educational opportunities in South Asian cultures. As a result, making errors while speaking are more likely to be internalized as personal shortcomings than as learning progress.

Translanguaging as an aid:

The term translanguaging originated from welsh bilingual researcher (Williams, 1994), which refers to the strategic deployment of a learner's full linguistic repertoire to facilitate learning (García, 2009). Instead of treating languages as separate, translanguaging views bilingualism as fluid and dynamic. The ability to shuttle between the known languages is possible when the translanguaging occurs (Canagarajah,2011). Translanguaging fosters students' understanding of texts, generates more diverse texts and the sense of confidence while performing literacies in the classrooms.(Garcia& Kleifgen, 2019). Pedagogical translanguaging can create opportunities for language learning and helps students to identify

the difference between the mother tongue and target language grammatical structures and functions which makes them to understand and assimilate the concepts effectively (J. Cenoz& A. Santos 2020).

Certainly, many researchers have implemented a translanguaging approach in the bi/ multilingual classrooms productively. The efficient use of the translanguaging approach in the classroom activities to reduce Tamil learners' Language anxiety in secondary ESL classrooms in India remains underexplored.

Phenomenological Approaches in Language Studies

Phenomenology is used to explore people's lived experiences and " felt really understood" (van kaam, 1966). Phenomenology focuses on lived experience and the meanings individuals attach to those experiences. Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method is widely used in educational and psychological research due to its systematic and rigorous approach (Giorgi, 2009). It avoids researcher interpretation and preserves the psychological essence of participants' experience.

Language anxiety is an emotional, embodied, and experiential phenomenon, where Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method provides an appropriate methodological lens.

Methodology:

Research design:

"The understanding of meaningful concrete relations implicit in the original description of experience in the context of a particular situation is the primary target of phenomenological knowledge." The descriptive phenomenological method is significant to understand student's internal feelings along with their thoughts which produce clear comprehension and discernment about the lived experiences.

Sample size:

The participants were grade 8 tamil speaking students in a cohort of 15 from the English medium school, kancheepuram district, Tamilnadu, India.

Data collection:

Semi- structured interviews and reflective journals were used as data collecting methods by the researcher to understand and analyse student's experiences and thoughts while speaking English. Semi structured interview questions are based on the student's experiences while striving to speak in English, interventions of the translanguaging approach and the level of confidence after the interventions of the translanguaging approach while speaking English. Interviews were conducted in both Tamil and English to allow free expression.Reflective journals were used to document the students' emotions before and after translanguaging interventions.

Procedure:

Data collection occurred in two phases:

Phase 1: English-only speaking tasks

Students were asked to perform short English-speaking activities to describe their favourite place. Many displayed visible distress, stammering, and emotional reactions.

Phase 2: Translanguaging-enabled tasks Students were encouraged to:

- Discuss ideas in Tamil
- Mix Tamil and English naturally
- Translate Tamil words into English
- Use Tamil to brainstorm answers

Interviews, and journals were collected after both phases.

Data Analysis: Giorgi's Method

Data were analysed through Giorgi's (2009) four-step process:

1. Holistic reading of all transcripts
2. Meaning unit demarcation
3. Transformation of meaning units into psychological expressions 4.Synthesis into the essential

structure of the phenomenon

Findings:

1. English-only tasks trigger intense emotional distress

Students described speaking in English as "scary," "embarrassing," and "painful." Physical reactions included: nervous shaking, stammering, crying, avoidance. Many feared "being laughed at" or "making mistakes in front of everyone." Boys felt particularly anxious performing in front of girls due to fear of teasing. Students reported intense physical and emotional reactions during English-only speaking tasks. Many described: trembling, rapid heartbeat, stammering, forgetting words, and in extreme cases, crying. One student shared, "Even before I stand, my hands shake. I know the answer, but I went blank." English becomes a threat to self-worth, producing acute anxiety and loss of self esteem.

2. Fear of negative evaluation and public shame Students repeatedly emphasised fear of peers:

"If I say wrong, they will tease me."

"I don't want them to hear my mistakes."

Students deliberately think that making mistakes in English is viewed as personal flaws rather than learning steps. One student noted, "If I say one wrong word, everyone will remember it." The statements of the students show the fear of public humiliation and cultivated by silence as a defense mechanism. Classroom speaking acts become social risks, not learning opportunities.

3. Translanguaging creates cognitive and emotional safety

When Tamil was allowed, students tended to speak freely, hesitation was reduced and ideas flowed naturally. Students seemed to be more comfortable while using Tamil which paved the way to get involved in classroom activities. One student stated that "If I don't know the English word, I tell in Tamil…which is quite observant that students used Tamil words when English equivalents were unknown and they translated Tamil words into English to complete their ideas and sentences. Students reported feeling "safe," "normal," " comfortable" and "relieved."

Translanguaging removes the emotional danger associated with English and supports meaning-making while speaking in the classroom activities.

4. Increased participation and spontaneous linguistic transfer

During translanguaging tasks: students voluntarily expanded answers and they attempted to talk in English after conceptualising ideas in Tamil. Peer interactions became collaborative instead of judgemental in the classroom. Translanguaging helped reconfigure classroom power dynamics, reducing linguistic hierarchy. When affective filter is removed, students regained self determination and engaged deeply with English.

The findings reveal that Tamil-speaking students experience English speaking tasks as emotional threatening due to fear of social judgement and linguistic competence before intervention.

Students exhibited extreme fear, anxiety, stress , stammering, blankout and emotional breakdowns during the activities. After the approbation of usage of mothertongue in English speaking activities, students felt relieved, happy and showed interest to participate in front of the class. This clearly shows how students' mother tongue can help them to boost their confidence, brainstorm their ideas and active participation. Translanguaging helped the students to address and bridge their ideas which paved the way for equal participation in the classroom activities.

Discussion:

The study demonstrates how the translanguaging approach transformed into a powerful pedagogical intervention in the ESL classrooms. Students' anxiety levels drastically decreased when the mother tongue helped them to express their thoughts. The findings align with García and Li Wei's (2014) perspective that bilingual learners naturally can pull their full linguistic repertoires to make meaning. Translanguaging functioned as a rescue pedagogical force which changed the perspectives of

monolingual expectations. In this study, Tamil served as both an emotional keystone and cognitive resource, enabling learners to articulate ideas more freely and accurately.

The increase in classroom active participation supports arguments that translanguaging lowers the affective filter and promotes equitable learning environments. Students' reflections show that translanguaging is not merely an approach but a powerful tool to reduce language anxiety.

By validating the students' mother tongue, teachers validated the students' identities, which fostered confidence and linguistic competence.

Translanguaging allows students to retain their confidence and reduces language anxiety. The shuttle between Tamil-to-English translation observed supports Canagarajah's (2011) claim that translanguaging encourages linguistic creativity and cognitive flexibility rather than hindering target language acquisition.

Conclusion:

The study identifies that the translanguaging approach significantly reduces language anxiety and increases academic participation among Tamil-speaking secondary ESL learners. The goal of translanguaging is to 'increase understanding' and 'augment the pupil's ability in both languages' (Williams 2002, p. 37). English-only pedagogy can create language and social barriers in the multilingual landscape, but translanguaging fosters cognitive development, active participation, self- determination and communicative confidence. Integrating the mother tongue while learning English pedagogy does not evoke any lower proficiency but can move towards more inclusive, emotionally intelligent language education as students are learning and understanding through their mother tongue.

The language anxiety of the students changed when translanguaging techniques were introduced. Students demonstrated greater participation, cognitive clarity, and desire to articulate ideas when the mother tongue was accepted to use in the classroom activities. Students felt more appreciated, understood, and participation aroused predominantly. Instead of being silenced by peers for making mistakes in English , classroom interactions became collaborative, allowing students to learn new words without any sense of being criticized or judged.

Translanguaging lowered the students' anxiety, increased academic engagement, and created a learning atmosphere where linguistic incompetence is an asset rather than a hindrance for Tamil-speaking ESL students.

Overall, this study is the witness for the translanguaging as a transformative teaching pedagogy rather than merely an approach. Translanguaging pedagogy transformed the classroom from a place of language barrier to one of emotional support and developing self esteem.

References:

- Canagarajah, S. (2011). Translanguaging in the classroom: Emerging issues for research and pedagogy. Applied Linguistics Review, 2, 1–28.
- Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2022). Pedagogical translanguaging and its application to language classes. RELC Journal, 53(2), 342–354.
- García, O. (2009). Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective. Wiley-Blackwell.
- García, O., & Li Wei. (2014). Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Giorgi, A. (2009). The Descriptive Phenomenological Method in Psychology: A Modified Husserlian Approach. Duquesne University Press.
- García,Ofelia.2019.Translanguaging:Acodatothecode?ClassroomDiscourse10(3-4).369–373
- García, O., & Kleifgen, J. A. (2010). Translanguaging and literacies. Reading Research Quarterly, 45(1), 1-27.

- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. The Modern Language Journal, 70(2), 125–132.
- Krashen, S. (1982). Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition. Pergamon.
- nes, B., & Baker, C. (2012). Translanguaging: origins and development from school to street and beyond. Educational Research and Evaluation, 18(7), 641-654. doi: 10.1080/13803611.2012.718488
- MacIntyre, P. D. (2017). An overview of language anxiety. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney, & J. Dewaele (Eds.), New insights into language anxiety (pp. 11–30). Multilingual Matters.
- Moustakas, C. (2011). Phenomenological research methods. SAGE Publications, Inc. (Sage Research Methods).
- Van Kaam, A. (1966). Existential foundations of psychology. Duquesne U. Press.
- Velasco, P., & García, O. (2014). Translanguaging and the writing of bilingual learners. Bilingual Research Journal, 37(1), 6–23.
- Williams, C. (1994). Arfarniad o ddulliau dysgu ac addysgu yng Nghyd-destun addysg uwchradd ddwyieithog. PhD Thesis, University of Wales.
- Williams, C. (2002). A Language gained: A Study of Language immersion at 11-16 years of age. Bangor, UK: School of education.
  www.bangor.ac.uk/education-and-human-development/publications/Language_Gained% 20.pdf
- Young, D. J. (1991). Creating a low-anxiety classroom environment: What does language anxiety research suggest? The Modern Language Journal, 75(4), 426–437.

44

BRIDGING MINDS AND WORDS: INTEGRATING FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY AND FORENSIC PSYCHOLINGUISTICS IN THE STUDY OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Dr. J. Karisma, *Assistant Professor, Department of Language, Culture and Society SRM University, Chennai.*
Dr. N. Vijayan, *Assistant Professor, Department of Linguistics, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore.*

Abstract

Forensic psycholinguistics examines and studies offenders' verbal and nonverbal cues through their language use. Forensic psychology focuses on offenders' mental wellbeing. This review paper tries to compare and understand the recent research carried out in psychology, forensic psychology, forensic psycholinguistics, etc., on juvenile delinquents. Further, the reviewed research articles are analysed to know the nature of juvenile delinquents. The result will help us understand the role of forensic psychologists and forensic psycholinguists in assisting the investigative agency and the judiciary.

Key Words: *Juvenile delinquents, Offender, judiciary, Forensic psycholinguistics, and Forensic psychology.*

Introduction

Forensic Psycholinguistics is the study of language, law, and psychology. It is a multidisciplinary field that focuses on the written or spoken data of offenders or language usage in crime to identify and assess the delinquents. According to American Psychological Association the primary goal of forensic psychology is to offer professional psychology competence to the legal and judicial systems.

The word "juvenile" comes from the Latin juvenis, meaning "young." Children between the ages of 7 to 18 who engage in criminal activity are often labeled as juvenile delinquents. However, the age range that defines a juvenile varies across countries. The term delinquency originates from the Latin words de (meaning "away from") and liquere (meaning "to leave"). As Walter Reckless noted in 1952 A delinquent is someone who violates the law, and juvenile delinquency refers specifically to illegal or socially disapproved behaviour committed by individuals who are still minors. As per the India Juvenile Justice Act, the juvenile is defined as a child under the age of eighteen. If the juvenile violates the law or is in conflict with the law, they have two homes: an observation home and a special home.

In Tamil Nadu the offences committed by juveniles both under the provisions of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) formerly Indian Penal Code (IPC) and under special and local laws it includes major and minor offences. A juvenile offence is a challenging and frequent issue in India and over 33,000 cases of juvenile offences were reported to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) in 2021.

This research paper tries to focus on how far research has been carried out in juvenile delinquents mainly related to field of Forensic Psychology, Psychology and Forensic psycholinguistics. Data has been collected from the internet.

These research papers collected for the study are divided into four categories such as primary source which consists of original, a secondary source where somebody's original research work is taken for the study for example review articles, conceptual/ theoretical papers concerned with description or analysis of theories or concepts associated with the topic, anecdotal/ opinion views or opinions about the

subject that are not researched, review or theoretical in nature.

Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative, literature based review to examine the evolution of applied linguistics and psychology in legal context. This review paper related to juvenile delinquents.

This table tries to portray the differences between the two fields they are Forensic Psychology and Forensic Psycholinguistics for the better understanding on these two interrelated fields.

Table 1: Comparative Framework: Forensic Psychology and Forensic Psycholinguistics

S. No.	Forensic Psychology	Forensic Psycholinguistics
1	Psychological assessment, treatment planning, and risk evaluations (quantitative psychological analysis)	Linguistic forensic analysis integrating quantitative and qualitative discourse examination
2	Early behavioural risk assessment and identification of psychosocial risk factors	Early linguistic risk assessment through language patterns, discourse markers, and pragmatic features
3	Primary evidentiary source in psychological profiling and competency evaluations	Supplementary yet collaborative evidentiary source that corroborates or challenges psychological interpretations through language evidence
4	Reliance on non-verbal behavioural cues (e.g., affect, posture, physiological responses)	Integration of verbal cues (lexical choice, syntax, narrative coherence) with non-verbal paralinguistic features (prosody, hesitation)
5	Evaluation of demographic variables, cognitive maturity, and comprehensive medical/psychiatric history	Evaluation of demographic variables and cognitive-linguistic maturity; limited engagement with medical history beyond communication disorders

Review of Literature

This research article focuses primarily on juvenile delinquents. The majority of existing research in psychology and forensic psychology adopts a quantitative approach. However, studies in forensic psycholinguistics focus on the descriptive analysis of juveniles' language.

1. Primary Source

Exploring Juvenile Delinquency Through The Lens of Language: A Forensic Psycholinguistic Approach to Understanding Psychological Behaviour (2025) by J. Karisma, N. Vijayan. This research paper examines the behavioural patterns of juvenile delinquents. Using a structured questionnaire, the researchers identified various linguistic evidences of rule-breaking behaviour. The analysis focuses on the sentences and phrases produced by juveniles who have committed offences and these individuals who have a tendency of become habitual offenders.

The Power of Family: A Pathway to Resilience for Juvenile Delinquents in Indian Context (2023) Pooja Tomar, Sukhmani Singh. The researchers used strengths-based approaches to examine the family factors, mainly their parental involvement, communication patterns, and supportive relationships. Further, researchers talks about the impact of traditions, cultural values, and societal norms. Interventions are elaborated to strengthen families, such as therapy and counselling for family members, parent

education and support groups, community based programmes and resources, and mentoring programs.

Juvenile Terrorism in India (2021) by Malini .S, Yaseen. MG. The aim of the study is to identify the various factors and motivations associated with juvenile terrorism. In this article, 30 juvenile delinquents affiliated with Lashkar-eTaiba (LeT) and Students 'Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) organizations were taken for study from Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The questionnaire was prepared using the control question technique to identify personal details like age, education, gender, history of a past crime, socio-economic status of the family, etc. It was collected through a preliminary examination and followed by a polygraph test.

The study suggests that counselling the juveniles can help them overcome their negative emotions and not get involved in terrorism.

Language of Juvenile Delinquents and their Psychological Factors affecting them to Involve in Delinquency (2020) by J. Karisma, N. Vijayan. This study examines on the psychological factors affecting the juvenile delinquents. The researchers focused upon the psychological disorders and risk factors and emotion such as aggression was examined in their language use before and after involving in delinquent activities.

Forensic Psychology - Exploring Child-to-Parent Domestic Abuse: Offender Characteristics and DASH Individual Risk Factors Associated with Recidivism (2017) by Michelle McManus, Louise Almond and Jennifer Bourke. The data were collected from a juvenile to identify their violent behavior towards their parents, history of the child, weapons used by the children at home and how these children can be cured. This paper focuses on the abusive behavior of juvenile delinquents. Researchers gave importance to demographic variables for gender and age additionally to risk factors and DASH in this paper. Further, it focuses on child-to-parent abuse through the exploration of perpetrator, victim and offence characteristics.

Examining the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Empathy among Juvenile Sexual Offenders and Juvenile Offenders. (2016) by Saha, P. K. & Tyagi, M. The paper mainly deals with the juvenile delinquents' emotional intelligence and empathy of the offenders. They look at quantitative analysis mainly on mean value, SD, t value, df and p-value. The data was collected mostly from males so the researchers told that further study should be done on females to know clearly.

Assessment of Empathy, Impulsivity and Aggressiveness among Juvenile Offenders & Non-offenders: An Indigenous Investigation. (2016) by Saha, P. K. & Gopalakrishnan. K. It mentioned mostly the aggression of juvenile delinquents offenders and non-offenders. By using mean value, S.D., P-value and t value they prove the difference between them. Further, it shows that there is a huge difference between physical and verbal aggression among the offenders themselves.

Substance use and criminality among juveniles-under-enquiry in New Delhi. (2016) by Sharma S, Sharma G, Barkataki B. This study examines mainly the current trends in the usage of substances by juvenile delinquents. The data were collected from Prayas observation home in New Delhi. Four hundred eighty seven samples were collected out of that 86.44% on substance use. The intake of tobacco and cannabis was higher compared to other drugs. Researchers concluded that the greater the use of a substance, like drugs, makes them vulnerable to commit more number of crimes. Finally, the paper says that criminal behaviour and substance use are interlinked.

Aggression Behaviour of Delinquent and Non-Delinquent Adolescents. (2014) by K. Shivakumara, Sangeetha R. Mane, M. Ravindra, Ravikanth B. Lamani and Ashok A. Pal. Researchers say that delinquent activities keep on increasing day by day. They gave importance to aggression on proactive and reactive aggression. It was mentioned as a domicile background person doesn't have much aggression level compared to rural people.

In this paper the aggression scores of the delinquent adolescents and the non-delinquent adolescents. On aggression there was significant difference in the mean scores (delinquent adolescents

mean 117.75 (SD 16.78)/non-delinquent adolescents mean 72.24 (SD 14.92), t=25.94, p<0.001). The above result clearly implies that the delinquent adolescents have higher level of aggression than the non-delinquent adolescents.

Secondary Source

Role of Emotional Intelligence in Juvenile Sexual Offenders: A Critical Appraisal. (2015) by Proshanto Kr. Saha, Pooja Tomar. Researchers explained between the juvenile, juvenile delinquents and juvenile offenders in clear manner. A comparison was made between two subgroups of sexually abusive youth. On the other hand overview of major research findings on juvenile delinquents and sexual offenders was explained.

Anecdotal/ Opinion Source

Applied Mathematics - A Study on Juvenile Justice System in India before and after NIRBHAYA Case (2018) by M. Ramachandran and M. Kannappan. The study takes its data from newspapers, journal articles and related published sources. It primarily focuses on the Nirbhaya case and examine how this case led to significant amendments in legal acts concerning juvenile justice. The paper also incorporates supporting articles relevant to the case. In addition, it discusses the psychological, biological, physiological, personal and other contributing factors that influence juvenile delinquency. The researchers analyze key legal provisions such as Articles 21-A, 23 and 24 and provide a detailed description of the case background and its historical context. The study further includes a comparative analysis of the juvenile justice system in India and Arab countries, highlighting differences and similarities in legal approaches to juvenile offenders.

Conceptual/ Theoretical Source

Psychological Theories of Juvenile Delinquency – A Criminological Perspective (2016) by Tejendra Meena. Three prominent psychological perspectives were chosen for this study they are psychodynamic, behavioral and cognitive. By using these theories the researcher explains the criminal behaviour of Juvenile delinquents.

Aggression among Juvenile and Non-Juvenile Delinquents: An Empirical Analysis (2016) by Preeti Sharma, Mustafa Nadeem Kirmani. The paper aims at analyzing the aggression of juvenile and non-juvenile delinquents. The focuses are on Reactive and Proactive aggression was identified with the help of a questionnaire for the study. One hundred and twenty samples were collected for analysis.

Juvenile Delinquency as a Behavioural Problem (2016) Priyanka Yadav. It basically talks about juvenile delinquent types, their personality, causes and how to prevent the act of delinquency. Preventive programmes for juvenile delinquents were also classified into two, the role of police in an observation home, enforcement of law. Additionally, explains the aftercare and rehabilitation programmes, role of counselling etc.

Discussion

The focus and analysis of research depend heavily on the chosen topic and the researcher's perspective. Most studies concentrate on the aggression of juvenile delinquents, especially when examined through the lens of forensic psychology. In contrast, research within forensic psycholinguistics examines the language patterns of juvenile delinquents and analyzes risk factors. There remains considerable scope for further work on juvenile delinquency, which would help us better understand the circumstances they face and the reasons behind their behaviour.

Limitations

1. These research papers focuses on the eleven years (2014-2025) related to juvenile delinquents articles.
2. Fourteen papers were analyzed for this review paper.

Recommendations

- To prevent children or juveniles from getting involved in delinquent activities or anti-social behaviour,

there should be concerted efforts in the financial sector, vocational education and professional training. These methods help to overcome the situations more easily.

- The NGOs should help the children who come from broken homes should give them special attention.
- Once the teacher knows the child is going to drop out of school, those children should be taken care of at that point to avoid getting into delinquent activities.
- Last but not the least, the society, family and the government should see to it that the juveniles do not get drugs and preventive measures should be adopted to stop alcoholism, which is one of the primary reasons for the offences these juveniles tend to commit.

Conclusion

Most researches till date has concentrated primarily on the domains of psychology and forensic psychology, rather than on forensic psycholinguistics. In conclusion, many studies aim at the welfare of society, identifying where juveniles lag behind. When language and psychology work together, they open pathways for reform. However, much of the research is based on limited samples — if it expanded to larger-scale, corpus-based studies, it would be far more valuable for researchers.

This review highlights that juvenile delinquency is shaped by multiple factors, such as psychological traits, linguistic behaviour, family environment and social influences, etc. Forensic psychology studies emphasize aggression, recklessness, substance use and emotional challenges, while forensic psycholinguistic research shows that juveniles' linguistic patterns reveal important clues about their intentions and behavioural risks. Although the findings provide useful insights, most studies rely on small samples and lack interdisciplinary studies. An interdisciplinary approach integrating psychology and linguistics can give a broad understanding of juvenile delinquents and support better assessment and rehabilitation. Strengthening family support, early intervention and evidence based policies are essential for effective juvenile reform.

Further Studies

1. Focus on the entire domain of juvenile delinquents as a review paper.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article

References

- Reckless, W.G. 1952. The Crime Problem, Appleton, New York: Century Creafts. P.202.
- K. Shivakumara, Sangeetha R. Mane, M. Ravindra, Ravikanth B. Lamani and Ashok A. Pal. 2014. Aggression Behaviour of Delinquent and Non-Delinquent Adolescents. British Journal of Education, Society & Behavioural Science
- Proshanto Kr. Saha, Pooja Tomar. 2015. Role of Emotional Intelligence in Juvenile Sexual Offenders: A Critical Appraisal.
- Meena, Tejendra. 2016. Psychological Theories of Juvenile Delinquency – A Criminological Perspective. ISSN 2454-1362.
- Saha, P. K. & Tyagi, M. 2016. Examining the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Empathy among Juvenile Sexual Offenders and Juvenile Offenders. International Journal of Police Security and Criminal Justice, Journal of Sardar Patel University of Police
- Saha, P. K. & Gopalakrishnan. K. 2016. Assessment of Empathy, Impulsivity and Aggressiveness among Juvenile Offenders & Non-offenders: An Indigenous Investigation. Research journal in

Humanities and Social Sciences. ISSN - 22776907

- Sharma, Preeti. & Kirmani, Mustafa Nadeem, 2016. Aggression among Juvenile and Non-Juvenile Delinquents: An Empirical Analysis. International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS). ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print).
- Sharma S, Sharma G, Barkataki B. 2016. Substance use and criminality among juveniles-under-enquiry in New Delhi. Indian J Psychiatry; 58:178-82.
- Yadav, Priyanka. 2016. Juvenile Delinquency as a Behavioural Problem. The International Journal of Indian Psychology. ISSN 2348-5396 (e), ISSN: 2349-3429 (p). Vol. 4, Issue 1
- McManus, Michelle. 2017. Exploring Child-to-Parent Domestic Abuse: Offender Characteristics and DASH Individual Risk Factors Associated with Recidivism. Journal of Forensic Psychology. ISSN: 2475-319X.
- National Crime Records Bureau. Crime in India. New Delhi: 2017. Angkor Publishers P.Ltd.
- Ramachandran, M. 2018. A study on Juvenile Justice System in India before and after Nirbhaya Case. International Journal of Pure and Applied Mathematics. ISSN: 1314-3395.
- Karimsa, J. & Vijayan, N. 2020. Language of Juvenile Delinquents and their Psychological Factors affecting them to Involve in Delinquency. Working Papers on Linguistics and Literature. (UGC-CARE Listed Journal) Peer-Reviewed. Vol. XIV. ISSN: 2349-8420
- Malini .S, Yaseen. MG. 2021. Juvenile Terrorism in India. International Journal of Forensic Science & Pathology (IJFP). ISSN: 2332-287X.
- Pooja Tomar, Sukhmani Singh. 2023. The Power of Family: A Pathway to Resilience for Juvenile Delinquents in Indian Context. Multidisciplinary Approach in research Vol-25.
- J. Karisma & N. Vijayan, 2025. Exploring Juvenile Delinquency through the Lens of Language: A Forensic Psycholinguistic Approach to Understanding Psychological Behaviour, Journal of Indian Languages and Indian literature in English, 02(04), 107-116, 2025
- https://www.verywellmind.com/an-overview-of-forensic-psychology-2794901
- https://www.apa.org/ed/graduate/specialize/forensic#:~:text=Forensic%20psychology%20is%20a%20specialty,the%20judicial%20and%20legal%20systems.

45

READING OF THE SELF: A FOUCAULDIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POWER, IDENTITY, AND MARGINALIZATION IN SLUM GIRL DREAMING: MY JOURNEY TO THE STARS

Chanjal N, *Research Scholar, St Thomas College, Thrissur, Affiliated to University of Calicut*
8921574100, chanjaln2002@gmail.com
Dr. Anu Paul, *Assistant Professor and Research Guide, St Thomas College, Thrissur*

Abstract

A known truth of life is that power is everywhere and everything for everyone; not just in money, but from all angles, power plays its pivotal role. Power for a child and an adult is distinct in its own way. In the same sense, a stark contrast can be seen in the idea of power in the mind of a child and of a slum child. Since they both live in two entirely different worlds. Identity can never be detached from power and culture, leaving no marks of existence. As stated by Hall, "Meaning is what gives us a sense of our own identity, of who we are and with whom we 'belong' - so it is tied up with questions of how culture is used to mark out and maintain identity within and difference between groups" (3). Power is a close companion of culture. The identity which is acquired can be based on different cultures in which we live and this culture is influenced by different factors and one among it is power. A slum child's life is an ongoing battle from birth, driven not by a desire for power, but by the need to assert an identity beyond the confines of the slum. Apart from this, marginalization is a thing that escalates the gap between identity and power for a slum child. Society is the ground for all these, from which marginalization arises, identity generates, and power flourishes. Slumgirl Dreaming: My Journey to the Stars by Rubina Ali is a work on slum culture about a slum child reaching heights, breaking all existing stereotypes on slums. The presentation will analyze this text through the lens of identity, power, and marginalization with the help of the Foucauldian concept of power. The influence of power on the identity creation of a slum child and the marks left by the marginalization experienced in their childhood is also examined.

Keywords: *Slum, Identity Construction, Power Politics, Marginalization.*

Introduction

Rubina Ali opens her work Slum Girl Dreaming: Journey to the Stars with fame. Fame is a very common term and can happen to anyone, but what stands out in this work is that she portrays her own younger self, who was a slum dweller once, getting to enjoy fame and never wishing to go back to the filthy streets of Bandra. This is the first picture a reader would get while drifting between letters and pages. Fame and power are two aspects that would go hand in hand. If people start recognizing you, others summarize it as fame; gradually, it brings power. In that note, it helps you to create your own individuality and identity, and it matters a lot for a child, especially a girl, being born to a slum and facing marginalization only because of the place where she belongs. The author clearly places the idea of power not being stagnant but something always developing and helping people to develop.

Methodology

This paper employs close reading as its primary methodological approach to have a textual analysis on the thematic importance of the character, language, structure, and meaning in the work

Slumgirl Dreaming: A Journey to the Stars to understand about how power is exercised in a slum and how identity is connected with power for a slum child, which creates an opportunity to add the concept of marginalization along with these two concepts with the help of the theoretical framework of Foucault's Theory of Power.

Review of Literature

The article titled as "Power, knowledge, and marginalization: A Foucauldian analysis of children from low-income immigrant households in Norway" has applied the Foucauldian theoretical framework but in a different context. This article analyses the children living in Norway and the issues of their low – income households. The article never goes through the lens of identity. The article places children as the key focus and has applied the concepts of power, knowledge and marginalization.

The article titled as "Foucault Account on Power/Knowledge: Its Implication on Educational Process in Nigeria" studies the relationship of power and knowledge as social factors that influence the construction of role of power in child development in their classrooms. The paper has applied the theory of Power and Knowledge but used it in a different angle though focusing children. The relation between Power and Knowledge is the emphasis of the paper. The construction of identity based on power and marginalization is not an area discussed in this paper.

The article titled as "Freedom from Domination A Foucauldian Account of Power, Subject Formation, and the Need for Recognition" examines power, subject formation and the need for recognition with the help of the Foucauldian theoretical framework where the researcher focuses on the concept of individual freedom. As the idea conveyed through the paper is more applicable to adults, it concentrates on adults and not children.

After a preliminary investigation, it has come to notice that only limited study explores the identity construction of a slum child which is influenced by power and marginalization. The theoretical framework applied is a familiar one but the context shows a research gap.

Analysis

Power is something that circulates around people and institutions; one might be powerful one day, and the next day they might not. Power works the best not in a centralized process but in a decentralized one; the reader can identify such instances from this novel where everyone becomes powerful and everyone enjoys power in one way or another. The one who helps the child to get into film holds power, the one who suggests her for this movie holds power, the one who confirms her as the actor holds power, and the one who financially exploits her family holds power. The only group who was not experiencing power were the slum dwellers, but at the end they too get to hold power; that is why power can be equated to an idea that circulates.

According to Foucault, "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere" (93). Foucault's idea of power being an omnipresent concept works best in areas like a slum. Power is everywhere, not only just in slums but all around the world. Inside the slum in this novel, the reader could see that power exercises over everything. Slum girls are not allowed to leave the slum after 6, but boys are allowed to go anywhere and come back at whatever time they wish; being a boy child can make you powerful. Most of the women out there in the slum are either abandoned by their husbands or widowed, and they raise their children alone. On one note, they enjoy an amount of power as they run the house, but at the same time, they are vulnerable to physical and sexual attack; there, they become powerless.

The power dynamics there travel through multiple hands. Power never gets stuck, especially in slums. That is why a slum dweller now became an author who was able to write her own life, which might inspire many. Once Foucault in an interview said that "the main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning" (11). That is exactly what happened to Rubina;

knowingly or unknowingly, she changed not only her but her entire family's fate. The author has written the novel backwards; the child protagonist does not behave the same way as in the beginning when coming to the middle and end of the novel, justifying Foucault's idea.

The story happens in Mumbai. Rubina says that "The slum has a main road running parallel to the railway track, which is the hub of all the main activity. It is always full of people" (10). The slum is very close to the main city, where an entirely different life from the slum happens, and inside the slum it has two different scenarios—one about celebrations and happiness, and then she says, "The back of the slum is the worst part, and it is full of trickles of sewage water, shit, and muck. No one can walk there. We have put some bricks and wooden planks up over this to cross and reach dry land. Then there is a mud mound a few meters high; it is also strewn with dry rubbish and human shit" (10-11). This is the place from which she has come, and standing among them while being one with power and privilege creates a different narrative. Rubina pictures her childhood and says,

When I was very young, I thought that Mumbai was just a very big collection of slums, with wastelands, sewers, stagnant water, and shaky dwellings. And then, from watching soap operas and movies on our old black-and-white TV, I became aware of a life other than the one in our slum. The moving image on the screen of our old television was my first step into this dream world. (12)

Power is different for the same people living in the same area; for Rubina, she got the facility to watch TV and know what happens outside the world, and that is how she started dreaming of being a film star. A slum child manifesting to become a movie star and ending up getting an opportunity to be part of an Oscar award-winning movie and to share an Oscar award stage. As for readers, while reading the novel through the eyes of Rubina, it is nothing short of a dream. Once powerless, savouring the taste of power and acquiring her own identity is a moment of pride.

Though the novel does not have any direct instances of marginalization or discrimination, as the privileged ones in this novel behave beautifully. But there is an indirect mention of caste-based discrimination faced by the protagonist's father: "Life in Dharavi as a kid was very hard. Children like him were bullied and discriminated against due to their caste" (13). Slum inhabitants bully other slum inhabitants in the name of caste, as a slum is a large community that comprises different castes, nationalities, genders, and all. Usually, when someone from a lower class gets into something prestigious, there can be people who are privileged to demotivate them, but here in this story, the narrative takes a little turn, and none bully the slum children who came there to become part of the movie only because they are from slums; rather, they gave warm welcomes and appreciated where there was a necessity. There are instances where the director of the movie bought them new dresses for the award night to make sure that they are not being judged and discriminated against by others. From these, in one way or another, slum children are subjected to marginalization. It is because of this reason they wish to throw away their born identity and build a new one, which the reader could find in the beginning of the novel: "After all the things I've seen and the luxury and the pampering showered upon me, I feel I am not too eager to go back to the filthy streets of the slum" (7). The prior objective of the majority of slum dwellers is to shift from and lead a life out of the slum.

In the novel, Rubina mentions an instance where a mediator plays between the authorities of the movie and her family. He is the one who introduced Rubina here, and because of the payment Rubina is supposed to get, it is given to this man, and he takes considerably more than his share from that. Here this man becomes exploitative, not because Rubina is thankful to him but because he holds some power over them, but he is no longer powerful when Rubina is having direct contact with the director. "Even within the same context, a person's power shifts over time: one day at work the individual is assertive and influential, the next day less so" (Keltner "Power Is About Making a Difference in the World"). This quotation from Keltner supports the preceding claim.

In the view of Foucault, "power is not an institution [or] a structure, nor an individual capacity, but rather a complex arrangement of forces in society" (93). That can be a reason power is never systematic and organized; it always moves from one place to another and transforms into different shades.

Conclusion

This presentation examines the distribution of power and the construction identity with help of the acquired power in an Indian slum portrayed in the work Slumgirl Dreaming: A Journey to the Stars by Rubina Ali. This autobiography is an epitome of Foucault's Theory of Power, as here the one who was powerful is not powerful the other day, and the one who was powerless becomes powerful the other day. Power becomes peculiar and unique in that way. It never gets structured. Power enables an individual to create their own identity. Even after people lose the hard-earned power, the identity remains intact; that can be a reason people are driven by the desire for power. Being a slum child creates the unfortunate situation of facing extreme marginalization. Society labels someone who lives in a slum as a slum dweller or slum child and nothing far away from that. To break that identity of a slum child and create an entirely different identity and individuality is what the protagonist of this work has done, which requires appreciation. She was able to attain such a position in life and change her own destiny because of the power that individual got to experience. Thus, this presentation shows the interconnection of power and identity with the underline of marginalization.

Bibliography

- Agyare, Patrick. "Power, Knowledge, and Marginalization: A Foucauldian Analysis of Children from Low-Income Immigrant Households in Norway." Research in Social Sciences and Technology, vol. 10, no. 1, 2025, pp. 1–27. https;//doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2025.1. Accessed on 05 January 2026.
- Ali, Rubina, with Anne Berthod and Divya Dugar. Slumgirl Dreaming: My Journey to the Stars. Translated by Shahnaaz Siganporia, Arrow Books, 2009.
- Agbai, Ebiye Mary, and Edward P. Agbai. "Foucault Account on Power/Knowledge: Its Implication on Educational Process in Nigeria." African Journal of Engineering and Environment Research, vol. 3, no. 1, May 2022, https://doi.org/10.37703/ajoeer.org.ng/q1-2022/02. Accessed on 06 January 2026
- Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction. Translated by Robert Hurley, Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Foucault, Michel. "Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault." Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault, edited by Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton, University of Massachusetts Press, 1988, pp. 9–15.
- Hall, Stuart, editor. Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices. Sage, 1997.
- Keltner, Dacher. The Power Paradox: How We Gain and Lose Influence. Viking Penguin, 2016.
- McIntyre, Katharine Mangano. Freedom from Domination A Foucauldian Account of Power, Subject Formation, and the Need for Recognition. Honors Thesis, Jan. 2016, https://doi.org/10.7916/D8JW8DRT. Accessed on 07 January 2026

46

THE PSYCHOLINGUISTICS OF EMOTION: LANGUAGE USE IN INTERPERSONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXTS

K. Gayathri, *Research Scholar, Department of English, St. John's College, Palayamkottai, Tirunelveli*
gayathrik.0014@gmail.com
Dr. S. Sophia Christina, *Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. John's College, Palayamkottai, Tirunelveli*
sophiapridgeon@gmail.com

Abstract

Emotional language is a fundamental aspect of human communication that influences how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to others in both personal and organizational contexts. From a psycholinguistic perspective, an intricate linkage exists between language and emotion, which shapes the cognitive processes involved in language use, production, and comprehension. This discussion highlights theoretical frameworks such as affective priming, cognitive appraisal theories and embodied cognition which explore how language encodes emotional meaning and how listeners engage with this content both cognitively and emotionally. This paper highlights various ways in which emotional states influence an individual's comprehension and production. In interpersonal communication, the emotional tone of language is conveyed through word choices, tone, pragmatic cues, and cultural norms, thereby constituting relational dynamics and promoting mutual understanding. Conversely, language takes on emotional functions in organizational settings, aimed at maintaining power relations, supporting leadership, motivating employees, and structuring the institutional discourse. The article further proposes a psycholinguistic perspective, emphasizing that emotional language prompts the activation of specific neural pathways, influences memory and understanding, and differs between bilingual speakers, consistent with intercultural communication. By integrating insights from cognitive psychology and discourse analysis, this article demonstrates that emotional language is not peripheral but central to linguistic competence and effective communication. This paper aims to explore how the psycholinguistics of emotion can enrich language teaching, workplace communication training, and cross-cultural interactions, enabling individuals and organizations to communicate empathetically, persuasively, and effectively.

Keywords: *Emotional Language, Interpersonal Communication, Organizational Discourse, Affective Processing, Bilingualism, Communication Strategies.*

Introduction

Language is not only a cognitive system but also a powerful medium through which people express, interpret, and negotiate emotions. Psycholinguistics scholars argue that emotion and language are inseparable because emotional cues shape how humans comprehend and respond to messages. The effects of emotional communication are evident in both personal interactions and professional settings, influencing decision-making, memory, and the regulation of interpersonal relationships. Cognitive scientists, such as Antonio Damasio, have demonstrated that emotional processing interacts with continuous linguistic comprehension within neural systems. Interpersonal communication is significantly

dependent on such cues as tone, word choice, and pragmatic markers, which help people contextualize intent and establish relational connections. On an organizational level, emotional language is an important facilitator of leadership, a motivator, and is used to create institutional culture. Discourse scholars stress the notion that organizational communication is inherently emotional. It represents a system of meaning-construction with profound effects on power relationships and behaviour (Van Dijk 112). Because emotions are often distributed differently across languages for bilingual and multilingual speakers, emotional expression in intercultural or workplace settings can vary significantly. (Pavlenko 204). This paper explores the psychological, linguistic, and organizational dimensions to demonstrate that emotional language is at the core, not the periphery, of human communication.

Literature Review

Emotional Language and Cognitive Processing

The research of affective neuroscience indicates that emotional words strongly activate some parts of the brain, like the amygdala and prefrontal cortex, improving attention and memory (Kensinger 152). Greater emotional arousal generally makes language more cognitively salient-that is, emotionally charged sentences are processed faster and remembered more strongly than neutral ones (Citron 29). According to the theory of embodied cognition, the body is involved in the processing of emotional meaning. Lakoff and Johnson's contention is that bodily experience grounds language, which is reflected in the way phrases like "warm relationship" or "cold behaviour" evoke physical sensations (57).

Emotional Language in Interpersonal Communication

Emotion-related signals are decoded through tone, prosody, and discourse markers in interpersonal communication. The work of Paul Ekman on universal facial and vocal expressions has explained that even when words are at a minimum, emotional cues carry meaning. Pragmatic scholars like Deborah Tannen indicate how conversational style and emotional intonation affect the relationship, rapport, and conflict (11). In most cases, meaning related to emotion does not depend upon literal expression. For instance, sarcasm or empathy markers alter a speaker's intention and reinforce the idea that emotional language is core to relational communication.

Emotional Communication in Organizations

Organizational linguistics defines the use of emotional language as an effective instrument of leadership. Indeed, according to Daniel Goleman, leaders who apply emotional intelligence in their language inspire higher employee engagement and performance, as they instill a sense of empathy and motivation. Likewise, organizational discourse theories suggest that emotional utterances-praise, recognition, reassurance-sustain morale at work and even configure institutional identity. In organizations, it has been noted that emotional language is correlated with power. This is where leaders employ emotional appeals to solidify their authority and relational hierarchies.

Bilingualism and Emotional Processing

Bilinguals often show more intense emotional resonance when in their mother tongue. As Pavlenko's work on bilingual affect has demonstrated, words related to emotions are more deeply autobiographically grounded and ensure stronger neural activation in L1 than in L2 (211). On the other hand, it is communication in L2 that can offer emotional distance which makes discussing a taboo or uncomfortable topic less emotional for a speaker than it would have been in L1. Thus, Dewaele observation on emotion confirms that "emotions are always linked to culture" and therefore, cross-cultural differences in communicating emotional feelings may become an important domain of psycholinguistic research.

Theoretical Frameworks

Affective priming theory

Affective priming theory "suggests that the exposure to emotional stimuli through language,

imagery, or actions greatly influences our perception and interpretation of latter messages" (Fazio 75). This theory therefore, explains how positive or negative emotional indication prime a person's mindset to, henceforth, navigate and guide their reactions to latter information.

Cognitive Appraisal Theory

Cognitive appraisal theory provides an understanding of how an individual evaluates messages for their emotional significance as a precursor to responding. According to cognitive appraisal theory, emotional responses are the result of a personal evaluation considering context, experiences, and consequences of the message. Such analysis may refine why effective emotional communication will generate everything from empathy to defensiveness, depending on the situational contexts and individual backgrounds (Lazarus 54).

Embodied Cognition Theory

Embodied cognition maintains that the meanings of emotions are to a large extent developed from sensory and motor experiences. It postulates that the sensations of our bodies and bodily expressions contribute to the understanding of emotions. A study by Barsalou shows that during the processing of emotional language, bodily simulations are activated, which serve to drive comprehension and therefore, emotions as lived experiences influence cognitive processing and responses (46).

Speech Act Theory

Speech act theory follows the functional aspect of emotional expressions in communicative behaviour. It assumes that speech acts of thanksgiving or apologizing perform certain actions which have consequences for social relationships. For example, Gratitude is not just a feeling of appreciation but also a way to nurture interpersonal relationships. Such a perspective provides an opportunity to explore the various layers of meaning involved in emotional communication and its social consequences. (Austin 102; Searle 62).

Emotional Language in Interpersonal Contexts

Tone, Prosody, and Vocal Expression

Tone, Prosody and Vocal Expression Prosodic features, including pitch, rhythm, and loudness, play an important part in both the expression and recognition of emotional states. Investigations into these areas have illustrated the fact that the voice can be more emotionally telling than the actual words spoken. For instance, a soft, warm tone indicates sympathy, while a shrill, hard-sounding voice reflects flared feelings of hostile intent. Such modulations illuminate contextual meaning in response to emotional expressiveness and yet it points out explicit orientation toward non-verbal contact in social relationships (Scherer 149)

Emotional Semantics and Word Choices

The semantics of emotional language illustrate how certain lexical choices bear significant affective meanings that make a difference to relational dynamics. According to cognitive linguists, the words that express emotion are an effective priming device for tuning listeners' expectations and shaping their comprehension and response during interaction. For example, in this regard, "joy" and "contentment" may have different emotional effects, thereby influencing the outcome of relational processes. It also highlights how emotional language functions in the most influential manner in bringing changes to interpersonal relations (Wierzbicka 77).

Pragmatic Cues and Cultural Norms

Culturally, the expression and interpretation of emotions in communication are shaped. Hall's distinction between high-context and low-context cultures illustrates that whereas some societies rely on implicit emotional cues-body language for example, others focus on explicit verbal expressions. This may form the basis for misunderstanding during cross-cultural interactions, thus awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences are called for in emotional communication (Hall 91).

Emotional Bonding and Relational Dynamics

Emotionally cogent speech lies at the core of intimacy, empathetic understanding and trust among people. Interpersonal communication scholarship illustrates time and again that emotional storytelling-narratives of feelings-has a disproportionately powerful relational impact. This shows that the art of telling emotions and sharing personal experiences enhances not only understanding but also depth in relationships (Duck 123).

Emotional Language in Organizational Contexts

Leadership Discourse and Emotional Persuasion

Successful leadership in organizational settings is always about one thing: the ability to inspire feelings in followers. Goleman states that leaders who are able to share optimism, empathy and a sense of shared vision with their working teams are better positioned to rally the workforce. Such emotional resonance generates a sense of belonging and motivation, feeding into the bottom line of better performance and morale within an organization (55).

Sustaining Power and Hierarchies

Organizational discourse analysis suggests that the strategic use of emotive language is crucial in maintaining organizational power relationships. Positive emotional framing could enhance concurrence and commitment to organizational objectives, while negative emotional framing enforces authority. With this in mind, leaders and employees would understand better how to deal with the challenges arising in the sphere of power relations at their workplace (van Dijk 115).

Motivation and Employee Engagement

Positive emotional communication forms the base of motivation and employee engagement in workplace settings. Forms of recognition and praise, expressing positive emotions are associated with increased workplace satisfaction and productivity. According to studies, employees who feel valued and supported tend to be more motivated. Therefore, they can provide support for creating a positive and productive organizational atmosphere (Bakker and Demerouti 209).

Emotional Intelligence in Workplace Communication

The ability to recognize and understand emotions in ourselves and others and to use this awareness to guide thought and action is the definition of emotional intelligence (Goleman 26). The hallmark of high emotional intelligence individuals is that they can control their own feelings and know how to work with the emotional currents of others to get the desired results from them. They thus have the potential to bring cohesiveness in team building and develop an effective organizational culture.

Bilingual and Cross-Cultural Perspectives

Emotional Resonance in L1 and L2

As Pavlenko notes, L1 emotional words often serve as more effective retrieval cues for autobiographical memories than L2 words do. Such privileging of the first language indicates that language is not only linked to but also often inextricable from emotional experience; the emotional resonance of words themselves depends largely on linguistic and cultural context (206).

Emotional Regulation via L2

This is because engaging in a second language provides individuals with a distinct sense of emotional detachment. Such an emotional buffer may enhance conflict management and greater interpersonal comfort helping individuals through some difficult conversations without getting overwhelmed. This is important and the detachment here facilitates better communication and regulation of feelings in interactions (Dewaele 262).

Cross-Cultural Misunderstandings

Cultural norms in the expressions of emotions vary greatly and, thus, form a potential site of misunderstanding in cross-cultural interactions. Hall observes that there are variable usages of silence,

politeness strategies, and degree of emotional restraint that act as a barrier to communication. The awareness of such a difference would facilitate effective interactions in today's global diversity in more ways than one (94).

Practical Implications

Language Teaching

Integrating emotional vocabulary and expressive intonation into language teaching practices can considerably affect learning outcomes. Focusing on the emotional aspects of language more closely educators are more likely to further engage students have it retained longer and produce overall better outcomes in language acquisition (Dewaele 263).

Workplace Communication Training

Organisations benefit by investing in training programs that focus on emotionally intelligent communication. How an organization can help in laying out an environment that is cohesive and collaborative owing to the ability of employees to identify emotional cues and responding accordingly can add to increased productivity (Goleman 39).

Interpersonal Skills Development

Emotional awareness develops the skills of empathy, conflict management and relational satisfaction that are important for interpersonal relationships. Training programs in emotional intelligence will enable individuals to cope with the complicated social environment far more effectively and yield much more satisfying personal and professional relationships (Tannen 118).

Cross-Cultural Engagement

Understanding emotional display across cultures is important in avoiding miscommunication, hence increasing effective international collaboration. Such cultural literacy and sensitivity to emotional display are ways through which individuals and organizations can successfully navigate through cross-cultural interactions, therefore enabling effective communication in the increasingly interconnected world (Hall 103).

Conclusion

Language of emotion is a vital component of human communications and organizational life. In fact, psycholinguistic research demonstrates how emotional language impacts cognitive processes, memory, and relational meaning. In relational contexts, emotional language demonstrates an ability to express social empathy, ameliorate conflict, and advance mutual understanding. In organizational contexts, emotional language serves to reinforce organizational leadership, motivate organizational members, and contribute to organizational discourse. Research into bilingual and cross-cultural attitudes towards emotional expression offer insight into the extent to which attitudes towards expressed emotion is shaped and influenced by linguistic and cultural perspectives. Overall, language of emotion incorporates linguistic capability, relational effectiveness and the communicative effectiveness of organizations. Understanding the dynamic association between emotion and language enables the individual and organization to be more persuasive, empathetic, and effective communicators.

Works Cited

- Austin, J. L. How to Do Things with Words. Oxford UP, 1962.
- Bakker, Arnold B., and Evangelia Demerouti. “The Job Demands-Resources Model.” Journal
- of Managerial Psychology, vol. 22, no. 3, 2007.
- Barsalou, Lawrence. “Grounded Cognition.” Annual Review of Psychology, vol. 59, 2008. Citron, Francesca. “Neuroscience of Emotional Language.” Brain and Language, vol. 122,
- 2012.
- Damasio, Antonio. The Feeling of What Happens. Harcourt, 1999.

- Dewaele, Jean-Marc. Emotions in Multiple Languages. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Duck, Steve. Human Relationships. Sage, 2007.
- Ekman, Paul. Emotions Revealed. Holt, 2003.
- Fazio, Russell. "Affective Priming." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, vol. 55,
- 1988.
- Fairhurst, Gail. The Art of Framing. Jossey-Bass, 2011.
- Goleman, Daniel. Emotional Intelligence. Bantam Books, 1995.
- Hall, Edward T. Beyond Culture. Anchor Books, 1976.
- Holmes, Janet. Power and Politeness in the Workplace. Longman, 2000.
- Kensinger, Elizabeth. "Emotional Memory." Psychological Bulletin, vol. 136, 2010.
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. Metaphors We Live By. U of Chicago P, 1980.
- Lazarus, Richard. Emotion and Adaptation. Oxford UP, 1991.
- Pavlenko, Aneta. The Bilingual Mind. Cambridge UP, 2014.
- Scherer, Klaus. "Vocal Communication of Emotion." Journal of Voice, vol. 22, 2008.
- Searle, John. Speech Acts. Cambridge UP, 1969.
- Sperber, Dan, and Deirdre Wilson. Relevance: Communication and Cognition. Harvard UP,
- 1986.
- Tannen, Deborah. Talking Voices. Cambridge UP, 2007.
- van Dijk, Teun A. Discourse and Power. Palgrave, 2008.
- Wierzbicka, Anna. Emotions Across Languages and Cultures. Cambridge UP, 1999.

47

THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF HARSHNESS: ILLNESS AND POSTMODERN POETRY

Dr. Indrani Choudhuri Dutt, *Officer-on Special Duty, West Bengal Joint Entrance Board, Kolkata*
Formerly Head, PG Department of English, Lady Brabourne College, Kolkata

Post Modernism with its defiance of cognitive horizons associated with self as fundamental metaphysical entity would hardly entertain the traditional idea of "enlightenment", as extraordinary understanding, Plato would call the "idea". In poets like Plath (1932-1963), Donald Hall (1928-2018) and the younger Mark Doty (1953-) and Noelle Kocot (1969-) we are much beyond even the epiphanies of James Joyce. They are part of an existence where the self is not consciously viewed as the "other" as in T. S. Eliot and the tribe of the Modernists. From the postmodern perspective to be able to assume an impersonal vantage point is something of a cognitive luxury. In the lived fractured reality coursed by Plath, Hall and others the objective world intertwines with the subjective to at once isolate and make reflective it's cognitive impetus. For them, the objective is a valuable and indispensable participant in the cognitive process intensifying the subject's living reality with a sense of referential immediacy. The base of the postmodern cognitive model imbibes a shifting nature where sense of security and insecurity are incessantly released to stall crystallization of fragile aesthetic logic. It has in it as Fredric Jameson would call "a waning of affect" (Jameson,64), absorbing the dynamics of flux and pushing language to breaking point.

The selected poetry of illness, physical suffering and loss of Plath, Hall, Doty and Kocot, read in this paper, show this very different "otherness" in the cognitive process of Postmodernism, an "enlightenment" true to its times and infusing the strength to continue with the absurd, that is life.

Sylvia Plath's 1961 poem "Tulips" brings to the surface relationship between a subject, willingly withdrawing into a nadir brought about by a medical procedure, and a bouquet of tulips brought by a well-wisher. Plath writes

I am nobody; I have nothing to do with explosions.

The subject, in a way is submitting to a relationship to the invasive hospital procedures but the submission is cancelled by opposition of the tulips, so that there is complexity of the multi- dimensional in the cognitive interaction. Contrary to the measured and predictable moves of the medical staff, committedly attending to the biological self, and marginalising the emotional one, the tulips in their bright, blooming natural redness assert a rebellious beckoning to the side-lined mind. Fredric Jameson observes in such aesthetic experience a breakdown of temporality leading to an intensification of present, as it were as a unit. Jameson writes thereby isolated, that present suddenly engulfs the subject with undescribable vividness, a materiality of perception properly overwhelming, which effectively dramatizes the power of the material—or better still, the literal—Signifier in isolation. This present of the world or material signifier comes before the subject with heightened intensity, bearing a mysterious charge of affect,..(Jameson 73)

The tulips unacceptable to the suppressed sensitivity of the subject, nevertheless remain assertive. Plath writes,

I didn't want any flowers, I only wanted
To lie with my hands turned up and be utterly empty. How free it is, you have no idea how free——

The peacefulness is so big it dazes you,
And it asks nothing, a name tag, a few trinkets.
It is what the dead close on, finally;

In being what they are, vibrant blooms, contrasting with the sterilized controlled hospital room, they break the flow of time and its tendency to logical conclusion, intensifying the moment, flooding the slack consciousness with annoying wakefulness. It is, as the valuable "other" that the tulips and the sterilized hospital room set up tension as material signifiers enabling a resurrection of sensitivity, without overwhelming biological awareness.

Donald Hall's "Song for Lucy" in the collection Without (1998) also reverberates with the intensity of the moment. At one level it is about loss of the poet's mother and the challenge of encountering his wife, Jane Kenyon's illness, close to Hall's mother's death, but as in Plath, the recognition of the physical stress opens up an awareness of the journey of life. The empty room of his mother ingrains in Hall's mind the fullness of her life. Hall writes

…She wasn't feeble
Until eighty when a congestive Heart took her force away

She responded not with fury But by measuring affection And declaring its rapture. How fervent her soul became
Lucid through her eyes: (Hall, 7)

There is deepening of the value of receiving a mother's honest love without diluting baggage of nostalgia and this realized memory establishes a connect with the starkness of the critical ward in the hospital, where he is in the process of admitting his now terminally sick wife, Jane Kenyon. Kenyon was assigned a different wing (the East Wing) rather than the "Bubble"-the ward for critical illness, where Hall had witnessed lately the shocked reaction of a patient similar to Kenyon, struggling to come to terms with the inevitable; Kenyon's reassigned accommodation (the East Wing) becomes a referral for respite, only to be cancelled as the "Bubble" soon becomes available for her. The vacant room of Lucy as signifier of fulfilment tensely relates to the busily occupied room of the newly admitted Kenyon indicating void to invest Hall's poetic idiom with a matter-of-factness. The equilibrium reverberates with the intense realization of the inherent balance in the flowing of lived reality. The fulfilling life of Lucy, of which he is a beneficiary as her son, is juxtaposed with the unfulfillment of his wife's experience, that he shares as her partner.

Hall is thus able to say

Freud said
A man thrives his whole life If he received as a child
"his mother's entire devotion". (Hall, 6)

It is interesting to note that relativity achieved by juxtaposition of the objective and the subjective gives rise to what Frederic Jameson refers to as "depthlessness" in contrast to the "depth models" proposed by Modernism. (Jameson, 62) In the Modernist cognitive approach the metanarrative, defying the "grand narrative", nevertheless sets up a new stability; there is, in the Modern cognitive position, as Jameson would have it, some sort of separation within the subject, (Jameson,61), the classic Eliotian "impersonality" where the alter brings in a sense of the cathartic. Plath and Hall, on the other hand, achieve a kind of collage. Plath's tulips coexist with to the efficiently managed neutral hospital room, and Hall's

image of his mother's empty room recalling her fullness shares space with the medically busy cabin of his wife pointing to an imminent void. The planes remain on one level with their edges guarding their identities, very different from misshapen jigsaw pieces which deliberately reach out to fit and form a preordained whole. The signification (sign) which emerges is as Lyotard terms "new presentations", "in order to impart a strong sense of the unpresentable" and he makes it very clear that for in Post-modernism aesthetics is the only means to release the cognitive impulse and not a consistent form to offer the reader solace and pleasure as in Modernism.(Lyotard, 71-82)

Fredric Jameson, for his part, observes in the Postmodern cognitive model "depth is replaced by surface, or by multiple surfaces". (Jameson, 62) The noticeable thing in this cognitive model is the absence of volume- "…from all sides the visual effect is the same", asserts Jameson (62). In the enlightenment of the moment there is the harsh undertone of denial of hermeneutics.

In Modernist cognitive model "truth" is provided an unstable foundation of the splintered self, but there is retention of value of sorts. In T.S. Eliot's "Preludes IV" it is said

His soul stretched tight across the skies That fade behind a city block,
Or trampled by insistent feet
At four and five and six o'clock;

Here clearly, unlike in Plath and Hall, there is "depth"; the poetic persona on the "outside" observes the alienation of the protagonist on the "inside" and evaluates his spiritual suffering. The strain undergone by refined sensibility is foregrounded as valuable truth and the negativity in the binary adds to the effect of "volume" in a typical depth model. There is the need to make the unpresentable, aesthetically evident, but on the level of the aesthetic presentation consistency is achieved because of the valorisation. In Plath and Hall, the object is not a referral as in a hermeneutic proposition. It is integral to the experiential collage sustained not by value but by differences between the planes giving rise to intense, but immediate knowing, to be added to or cancelled by other interfaces as flux takes over. Jameson significantly observes in the course of his discussion on the postmodernist cognitive model "From all sides, the visual effect is the same…which confronts its viewers like an enigmatic destiny". (Jameson, 62)

In the "knowing" evident in the poetry of illness, death and recovery from sixties to the nineties dislocation and collapse add to signification so that the comfort of the metaphor is stalled. The objective and subjective come close to merge identities, but move apart near to convergence to introduce the grinding effect of a tectonic shift. Mark Doty's "Faith", the final poem in Atlantis, published 1995 is about the loss of a friend Wally to AIDS, breaking down the deep friendship of three sensitive people who preferred alternative sexuality.

Doty's image of the frisky setter bounding into a run, alive and energetic is punctured by he is racing down a scent and doesn't hear us and that's when he goes onto the highway. I don't want to describe it.

Doty sees in the reduction of the lively dog into a mangled heap shattering of the emotional urge which races ahead in the exuberance of experiencing friendship and love only to encounter rude end. However, the image develops further and Wally's death living its imprint makes Doty nervous and overprotective about the running dog. The dog image when it appears again exudes neither pure continuity nor pure discontinuity.

The poet says,
I screamed his name and grabbed his collar. And there I was on my knees,
both arms round his neck and nothing coming,

and when I looked into that bewildered face I realized I didn't know what it was
I was shouting at,

I didn't know who I was trying to protect.

The revived image with the dog wearing a puzzled look at being restrained for nothing breaks the spell of the nearly completed metaphor. The recurrent element of a running dog is not allowed to become secure as referral of abrupt death. In its reappearance it signifies meaningless flux, the impetus to go on in spite of it all. The intense understanding of Doty is not simply about death cruelly and abruptly terminating life in full bloom, destroying dreams of fulfilment.

We don't have a future, we have a dog.
Who is he?

Doty's interrogation brings into play another plane with the object as differently referral entering into a tension with the subject forming a different interface. Whereas in its first interaction the image seemed to work towards traditional enlightenment stabilizing on a third level of rich conclusion, in its second intrusion it collapses that stability. The poetic persona of Doty stands in solitude with his remaining partner Arden, not as a wise, detached philosopher, but living the shattering inevitability of Wally's death and all loss in death to come. The bewildered look of the dog is the reality of life, a perpetual flow, shapeless, defying definition where running is way of things.

Doty's discontinuous yet resonating image, where the dog, like Plath's tulips and Hall's rooms preserves its materiality recalls Albert Camus' words And carrying this absurd logic to its conclusion, I must admit that that struggle implies a total absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair), a continual rejection (which must not be confused with renunciation), and a conscious dissatisfaction (which must not be compared to immature unrest). Everything that destroys, conjures away, or exorcises these requirements (and, to begin with, consent which overthrows divorce) ruins the absurd and devaluates the attitude that may then be proposed. The absurd has meaning only in so far as it is not agreed to. (Camus, 22)

Camus' qualifiers “absence of hope” distinguished from despair, “rejection” as distinct from “renunciation”, “conscious dissatisfaction” as being other than “immature unrest” opens up a space where there is a confrontation between human nostalgia and the irrational that defies harmony. The cognitive space Camus exposes threatens even the value of tension and collapse. In contemporary works such as “Paying Attention” from God's Green Earth (published 2020) by Noelle Kocot, current Poet Laureate of Pemberton Borough, New Jersey, a sense of exasperation with the equipment of expression has been noticed. Timothy Yu writing a commentary on Kocot's “The Raving Fortune” on July 29th, 2005 says that lines in the poet are often “index of impoverished expression”. Yu continues, “Kocot lives in our language but hates being there, suspicious of its pleasures”. (Yu, 2005)

Kocot writes

If
I left for some other clime, I would

Be confronted with the sparkling repose Of hours for a little while, and then The hammer would come down like The sides of a city avenue over me.
And so I stay, oh, I stay, and I report
The greenness of the alphabet disappearing Over my faded jeans.

The cognitive space, as Camus enunciates, has become immensely fluid; the claustrophobic high-rises of a typical American city crush the hoping soul recalling Eliot's protagonist in “Preludes IV”. The recollection usefully distances Kocot's knowing of depression from T.S Eliot's construction of the same. In “Paying Attention” the inertia of the mind is not presented as known whole as in “Preludes IV”. There is rejection but not renunciation of the condition and therefore a disagreement to find the third level. Kocot declares “…oh I stay, and I report…” but the “reporting” is wanting even the tense shaping energy of Plath,

Hall and Doty. The alphabets are sterile, refusing even the order of tension and ambiguity. The strain of living the absurd tests communicability of language and questions language theories. (Article 2361 words)

Works Cited

- Camus, Albert, "Priory of the Immaculate Conception", URL=https://dhspriory.org>kenny>PhilTexts>Camus PDF
- Doty, Mark, "Faith", Atlantis, Famous Poems and Poets.com URL=https://famouspoemsandpoets.com>Poets>Mark Doty, 2006
- Eliot, T.S. Poems, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1920,www.gutenberg.org
- Hall, Donald, Without, Mariner Books/ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 1999 : Pages displayed by permission of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt – google.tm URL= https://books.google.tm>books
- Jameson, Fredric "Post Modernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", University of Wisconsin-Madison The present essay draws on lectures and on material previously published in The Anti-Aesthetic,edited by Hal Foster, (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press 1983) and in Amerika Studien/American Studies 29/1 (1984).https://web.education.wisc.edu>sites>jameson
- Kocot, Noelle, "Paying Attention", URL=https://poetryinvoice.ca>read>poems>paying- attention
- Lyotard, Jean Francois, The Post Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Minneapolis, Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984, pp 71-82, Trnsl. by Regis Durand in an article "Lyotard, Answering the Question: What is Post modernism?" VU Filosofijos fakultetas, URL= https://www.fsf.vu.lt>filosofijos>Tuleikyté
- Plath, Sylvia, URL = https://www.poetryfoundation.org>Poems
- Yu, Timothy timpanyu.com https://timpanyu.com>noelle>Kocot-the-raving-fortune/ 2005.

48

IDENTITY, POWER, AND MARGINALISATION IN SUDHA MURTHY'S MAHASHWETA

K.S. Mymoona Parveen, *Assistant Professor of English & Research Scholar, Jamal Mohamed College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University*
mymoonaparveenjmc@gmail.com
Dr. M. D. Sahidul Islam, *Associate Professor of English, BSACIST, Chennai-48*
sahidul@crescent.education

Abstract

Sudha Murthy's Mahashweta (2000) offers a compelling narrative of social ostracisation and the struggle for self-identity within a patriarchal and class-conscious Indian society. Through the life of Anupama, a young woman diagnosed with leukoderma, Murthy interrogates the intersection of gender, social hierarchy, and bodily difference. The novel becomes a powerful critique of the societal structures that marginalise individuals based on physical imperfections and social status. This paper examines the themes of identity, power, and marginalisation in Mahashweta by analysing how Murthy portrays the protagonist's transformation from a socially subordinated wife into an independent woman reclaiming agency and dignity. It also explores the role of patriarchy and class privilege in shaping social power dynamics and argues that Murthy's work reconfigures the idea of "beauty" and "worth" in the context of Indian womanhood. The study situates Mahashweta within feminist and postcolonial frameworks to highlight Murthy's subtle yet radical critique of systemic oppression.

Keywords: *Identity, power, marginalisation, Sudha Murthy, feminism, patriarchy, class, disability studies, Indian literature.*

Introduction

Sudha Murthy, known for her accessible yet socially conscious fiction, often engages with the everyday realities of Indian women negotiating rigid hierarchies of class, gender, and morality. Mahashweta, one of her most influential novels, explores the journey of Anupama, a woman whose life changes drastically when she develops leukoderma. What begins as a romantic tale soon transforms into a profound commentary on social discrimination, identity crisis, and self-empowerment.

The idea of identity in Mahashweta is that it is always changing it is not strong. It is affected by what people around her think. Mahashweta shows us that Anupamas identity changes a lot throughout the story. At first Anupama is an beautiful woman who everyone likes.. Then she gets leukoderma and people start to reject her. Before she got sick people liked Anupama because she was pretty smart. Knew a lot about her culture. These are the things that people think a woman should be like. Mahashweta is a story that shows how identity, like Anupamas identity can change because of what society thinks.

When a womans looks change people start to see her in a way. They judge her based on her disease, Leukoderma. Even though Leukoderma is not something you can catch and it will not kill you it still makes people think badly of her. Leukoderma makes her feel like she does not deserve respect like she does not belong and like she is not good enough to get married. Murthy shows us that people often judge others, women, based on how they look. Women, like her are treated unfairly because of Leukoderma.

Leukoderma changes the way people see her. It is not fair.

The novel derives its title from the Sanskrit play Mahashweta, which Anupama performs early in her life — a symbolic act that mirrors her own journey of transformation. Through Anupama's experiences, Murthy critiques not only patriarchal structures but also the cultural obsession with physical beauty and purity. The novel thus becomes a reflection of how societal power operates through control over the body, reputation, and conformity.

The book also looks at how power and social authority're connected. It shows how power works quietly through things like tradition and family than forcing people to do things. The way Anupamas family is set up is an example of this. Her husband Anand seems like an supportive person, at first but he slowly starts to give in to what his family and society want. Anand cannot say no to his mothers fashioned ideas, which shows how power can be used by not saying anything by staying quiet and by not doing what is right. This is what happens in Anupamas home, where power is used in a quiet way.

Anands decision to do nothing is just as bad as being mean on purpose. This shows how people in power often get what they want by not doing anything and by going along with what others do. Murthy is talking about people who're cruel but also about people who gain from the power by choosing to stay out of it. Murthy is saying that people like Anand who stay neutral are also part of the problem. Anand and people, like him are as much to blame because they are choosing to do nothing.

Anupama's initial identity in the novel is deeply entwined with her beauty and social desirability. As a young, intelligent woman from a modest background, her beauty grants her visibility and acceptance, bridging the gap between her lower socio-economic status and her wealthy husband, Dr. Anand. This fragile identity, however, is shattered once she develops leukoderma. Her transformation from being admired to being stigmatised exposes how women's identities are socially constructed around appearance.

Anupama's subsequent exile from her marital home leads to an existential quest. Stripped of her husband's name and her father's protection, she is forced to reconstruct her sense of self beyond familial and societal definitions. Her journey from a dependent wife to an independent teacher in Bombay signifies not only economic independence but also spiritual awakening.

In Mahashweta, patriarchy manifests not only in the actions of individual men but also in the structures that sustain male dominance. Anand, Anupama's husband, embodies educated patriarchy — progressive in profession but regressive in practice. His failure to stand by Anupama when she develops leukoderma demonstrates how deep-rooted gender biases persist even among the educated elite.

Class privilege operates as another axis of power in Mahashweta. Anand's upper-class background grants him authority and social immunity, while Anupama's modest origins render her more vulnerable to stigma. Murthy juxtaposes the material comfort of Anand's household with the moral poverty of its inhabitants, exposing the hollowness of class-based respectability.

Leukoderma in Mahashweta functions as both a literal and symbolic marker of marginalisation. Murthy uses the disease as a narrative device to expose how society stigmatizes visible difference. Anupama's illness provokes disgust and pity — emotions that reveal the collective fear of contamination, both physical and moral. This medical condition thus becomes a social metaphor for exclusion, echoing broader forms of discrimination.

Marginalisation in Mahashweta is shown as something that happens all the time not once. Anupama is excluded from things. This starts at home. It then spreads to the rest of society showing that marginalisation happens in different ways. When people find out about her condition she is kept away from her family both physically and emotionally. They say it is for treatment. Really she is slowly being removed from her married life. What happens to her shows that society gets rid of people who are no longer seen as useful, beautiful or pure. This is what marginalisation in Mahashweta is really about it is about how people, like Anupama're treated. The novel shows that women are really affected by being left out. Women

are often judged by how they look and if they can have kids. The novel highlights that women have to deal with this a lot. Womens value, in society is often tied to how perfect their body's if they can be a mother. This is what the novel is saying about women.

Murthy's narrative draws attention to how silence operates as a tool of marginalisation. Anupama's initial inability to defend herself mirrors the cultural silencing of women who deviate from social ideals. However, as the novel progresses, silence transforms into strength.

Mahashweta aligns with feminist literary traditions that challenge patriarchal constructions of femininity. Anupama's transformation parallels the feminist notion of "becoming" — the process by which a woman defines herself outside the boundaries of gender norms. Murthy's feminism is subtle yet profound; she does not depict Anupama as a militant rebel but as an introspective woman who asserts agency through ethical strength.

Murthy's critique of class and body politics can also be read through a postcolonial lens. The novel's setting — a modern Indian society still shaped by colonial ideals of beauty, modernity, and status — reflects the lingering colonial hangover in social consciousness.

Murthy employs a straightforward narrative style that enhances the novel's emotional resonance and accessibility. Her simplicity is not a limitation but a deliberate strategy to reach a wider audience. Through symbolic elements — such as the play Mahashweta, the mirror, and the white patches — Murthy externalises internal conflicts and societal hypocrisy.

Caste and class make the story of people being treated unfairly more complicated. Anupama is an refined woman but being the daughter of a temple priest puts her in a difficult spot in society. When she is married it is not as obvious that she is, on the outside of things. When she loses that protection it becomes clear that she does not really fit in. The author Murthy uses Anupamas situation to show that it is not easy for women to move up in society and that they can easily lose what they have gained. Soon as Anupama is no longer needed, the people and things that once helped her rise up in society stop supporting her.

People like Dr. Venkatachala are really important. They have big jobs and people look up to them. Dr. Venkatachala shows us that you can be in charge without being mean. He always sticks up for Anupama. This is a way to use power. It is about being kind and responsible not bossing people around. Dr. Venkatachala and people like him are an example of how to use power in a good way. They care about people, like Anupama.

The body is an important place where people try to have power and control in the story. Anupamas skin is very sick. People write all their fears and judgments on her. They think she is bad because she is sick. Murthy is saying that this is not right. Just because someone is sick does not mean they are a person. Anupama has to stay from everyone and this shows that people are scared of people who are different. They think that anyone who is not like them is a danger to how thingsre supposed to be. The body, Anupamas body is a big deal, in the novel.

The way Mahashweta is written really makes you think about disability studies and medical humanities. It shows Mahashweta as a story that questions the way people think when they are ableist and exclude others. Mahashweta is a text that makes us think about these things. We see that Mahashweta is special because it talks about disability studies and medical humanities in a way that's easy to understand. Mahashweta is an example of a text that challenges people who are ableist and exclude others and that is what makes Mahashweta so important.

Mahashweta is a story that shows how bad things are in the world. It is also a story about fighting back and changing who you are. Anupama does not just sit around and suffer she gets stronger little by little. She learns things teaches others and helps people, which helps her figure out who she really is outside of what people think she should be. When she decides to live on her own and do things that matter she takes control of her life. Murthy says that being true to yourself is not about what others think it is about doing the

thing and respecting yourself that is how you really find out who you are. Mahashweta is about people, like Anupama who change their lives and make a difference.

Anupama is a strong woman. She does not let people push her around. The people who wanted to make her feel small and weak did not succeed. Instead Anupamas strength helps her to stand up for herself. This makes her a powerful person. Anupamas story shows that even when people try to make you feel bad you can use that to make yourself stronger. Anupamas experience is an example of this. Anupama turns the things that happen to her into something good. This is what makes Anupama so strong.

Sudha Murthy tells stories in a way that helps us think about the themes in her book. She writes in a way that is easy to understand, which is like her clear thoughts on what is right and wrong. This makes it easy for people to understand social problems without making them seem less serious. Sudha Murthy does not use drama to make a point. The bad things that happen to Anupama show us the truth about how people are sometimes part of the problem and about being prejudiced and about doing what is right. Sudha Murthy does not give us answers to these problems. Instead she shows us that people can still be good when the system is not perfect and that unfairness has been around for a long time. Sudha Murthy writes about issues in a way that makes us think about our own role, in Sudha Murthys stories.

In Mahashweta, the way people see themselves is really affected by the people around them who have power. You can see that power is a part of life and when people are treated unfairly it is because we are not very good at understanding each other. The story of Anupama shows how Sudha Murthy thinks we should change the way society is set up so it is fairer to everyone. She wants us to be kinder and more inclusive. The book Mahashweta is saying that we need to think about what's important, in a different way. We should respect people no matter how they look and we should think about power as something that can be used to help people, not just to control them and we should see that everyone is important not just some people. In doing so, Mahashweta stands as a significant contribution to Indian English literature and a compelling indictment of social injustice.

Sudha Murthy's Mahashweta stands as a significant exploration of how identity, power, and marginalisation intersect within gendered and class-based hierarchies. Through Anupama's journey from rejection to self-realisation, Murthy offers a critique of patriarchal values that equate worth with appearance and conformity. The novel challenges the reader to reconsider the definitions of beauty, purity, and strength, suggesting that true empowerment lies in moral independence rather than social approval.

References

- Murthy, Sudha. Mahashweta. Penguin Books India, 2000.
- Chatterjee, Partha. The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial
- Histories. Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. The Second Sex. Trans. H. M. Parshley. Vintage, 1997.
- Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. Routledge,
- 1990.
- Nayar, Pramod K. Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to
- Ecocriticism. Pearson, 2010.
- Sinha, Mini. “Redefining Beauty and Selfhood in Sudha Murthy's Mahashweta.”
- Indian Journal of Feminist Studies, vol. 8, no. 2, 2015, pp. 45–57.
- Bhabha, Homi K. The Location of Culture. Routledge, 1994.
- Chakravarti, Uma. Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens. SAGE Publications, 2003.
- Guha, Ranajit. Selected Subaltern Studies. Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Loomba, Ania. Colonialism/Postcolonialism. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2005.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity.

Duke University Press, 2003.
- Nayar, Pramod K. Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction. Pearson Longman, 2008.
- Rege, Sharmila. Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonios. Zubaan, 2006.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 271–313.
- Tharu, Susie, and K. Lalita, editors. Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present. Vol. 2, Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Young, Robert J. C. Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction. Blackwell Publishing, 2001.

49

A PROFOUND EXPLORATION OF TRAUMATIC MEMORIES IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S THE UNCONSOLED

S. Shobana, *Research Scholar and Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of English, Jamal Mohamed College, Trichy – 20.*
Dr. A. Ajmal Khaan, *Research Advisor and Associate Professor, PG & Research Department of English, Jamal Mohamed College, Trichy – 20.*

Abstract:

Mind is a mysterious yet unexplained and an intricate part of human body that functions differently based on the situation and scenario. Memory plays an inescapable and essential role in the everyday life of every human being. Traumatic memory could be much more complicated than what one thinks it is. It can be a berated term but it captures the intense pain and emotion of every victims of the past. These memories are rooted in the stem of the unconscious and hidden part of the brain. Memories in the mind can't be erased but can be manipulated for the sake of the well being of the individual. Kazuo Ishiguro, one of the reputed Japanese born British writers, in his chosen novel The Unconsoled portrays the life of the greatest pianist, Mr.Ryder who visits the European city where realty blurs with fragmented memories, compelling him to explore his real purpose in life. This novel is a testimony to witness the in-depth study of traumatic memories.

Keywords: *Traumatic memory, Distortion, Memories, Conflict, Existence.*

A Profound Exploration of Traumatic Memories in Kazuo Ishiguro's the Unconsoled Kazuo Ishiguro is a well known Japanese born English novelist, a great short story writer, an eminent screen writer and a talented musician. He is capable enough to capture every minute human emotions and sentiments. He is an expert in weaving the stories with a bunch of memories that triggers the suppressive thoughts that could be a result of trauma and other dreadful events. As an appreciation of Kazuo Ishiguro's contribution to literature and his exploration of human emotions in the in-depth level of the mind, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2017 by the Swedish Academy.

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in his native place Nagasaki in 1954. He gets interested in Japanese tradition and customs because the first 5 years of his life had been spent in Japan with Japanese roots. He came from a family of rich Japanese tradition and culture. He had seen the samurai swords, banner and Japanese flags. His parents also were born and brought up in Shanghai. His mother witnessed the bombing on Nagasaki in 1945. This event created an impact in the mind of Ishiguro. These memories traumatized Ishiguro and as a result of these memories, he reflected his concern for war victims in his works. This novel The Unconsoled is also talks about the inner trauma of the protagonist and how it triggers the past memories of victims.

His novel The Unconsoled was published in 1995 and revolves around the life of Mr.Ryder, the greatest pianist in England. This novel won the Chetenham prize in 1995.The entire story creates an impact in the minds of the readers about the nuances of trauma and memory that it triggers and also raises awareness about the impact of traumatic memory, the hidden stories of victims of trauma. It also highlights their efforts in retaining the spirit in the aftermath of trauma.

The term 'Trauma' in Greek refers to the 'wound' and it denotes an emotional response to the most disturbing event in the routine life. It could be a way of protecting the psyche (mind) from the harmful and negative thoughts. It could be a shield for the inner mind and heart. Traumatic memories will create a huge impact on the memories of human beings and this leads to the loss of memory as a coping mechanism. The memory can be affected by traumatic experiences and can be impaired. Hence this impairment can arise from emotional trauma or physical trauma. Memory loss can be considered as a way of processing the traumatic experience.

Traumatic memories refer the brains capacity to store fragmented pieces of memories of any traumatic event that disturb the entire personality, making them often intrusive and one could get symptoms related to it. Some of the basic symptoms are repetitive flashbacks, memory loss issues because the brain feels some difficulties in recalling the disturbing or unpleasant experiences and creates an impact in the function of the brain. It will lead to distress and depression. These memories will affect the behaviour without awareness. These memories will make a person to feel like living in the present scenario.

Traumatic incidents trigger the mind and make a person to forget things quickly. Memory loss can be a way of protecting the mind to shield human beings from recalling and reliving traumatic experiences. The victims of trauma experience number of unusual symptoms of trauma and some of them are distress, emotional outburst of feelings, shock, bewilderment, anxiety, insomnia, sweating, fear, hopelessness, numbness, detaching from reality, nightmares, obsession, dissociation, issues related to sleep, tiredness and headaches. In severe cases it would be resulted in post traumatic stress disorder or other psychological issues.

In the chosen novel The Unconsoled, the title refers the unconsoled state of the protagonist who couldn't find satisfaction or peace with the past life or couldn't resolve the inner conflicts due to traumatic memories or traumatic experiences. Emotionally he lacks the sense of gratefulness for the life he lives. Ryder, the main protagonist sets the entire story like a dream sequence and one day he gets a golden chance to visit the European city in order to perform in a concert. He has never expected that this tour to the city would turn like an unexpected psychologist look out for his past.

This story exhibits the inner reality of the protagonist along with the traumatic memories. He used to have a tendency to put the blame on others if something has gone out of control. Because he has experienced various problems and struggles in his childhood days and he has found out some hurdles and issues in coping with the childhood memories and this is a result of the traumatic condition. In most of the situations, he tries to hide some details related to his past and sometimes he becomes obsessed with it. He has been possessed by his traumatic memories in various situations.

The entire story has been narrated from the protagonist, Ryder's point of view and the book consists of number of conversations among the characters. In some occasions, these conversations associated to the past could be pestering and troubling to the peaceful mindset of the protagonist. These narratives could be presented like confessions that drive Ryder like a mad man and he used to indulge in others stories. He would be supposed to listen to other characters stories resulted out of their traumatic memories. He used to say the following words:

"It's a wound. I was injured, very badly, many years ago. It has never healed properly. I've had it for so long now, it still hurts me... These old wounds, they stay the same for years. You think you've got the measure of it. Then you get old and they start to grow again... I never thought the wound would heal. When I conducted my orchestra, I always touched my wound, caressed it. Some days I picked at its edges, even pressed it hard between the fingers. The music, I knew that's all it was, just a consolation. I liked the feeling, pressing the wound, it facsinated me. A good wound, it can do that, it facsinates. It looks a little different everyday. Has it changed? you wonder. Maybe it's healing at last. You look at it in the mirror, it looks different. But then you touch it and you know it's the same, your old friend. You do this year after year, and then you know it's

not going to heal and in the end you get tired of it. You get so tired. You get so tired. You're not tired yet? You get so tired -"(Ishiguro 222)

In this novel, when Ryder tries to shape up his future or plans to do something for the future, he becomes disturbed by his past and he gets trapped due to the traumatic memories. It makes the narrative as an unreliable one. Most of the elements in the novel seem to be contrast and different from the storyline. In one occasion, he couldn't recognise his father's car and it exhibits the unreliable nature of his traumatic memories.

Ryder never highlights the full description about his past memories but it is illustrated by the other characters like Stephen and Boris and it forms the complete picture of his childhood memories and traumatic experience. Sometimes Ryder becomes completely depressed when he thinks of his parents and always fears that he would treat his child the way in which his parents treated him. In the end of the novel, Ryder's attitude towards his family become rude that could be a reaction of his painful childhood traumatic memories. He maintains the distant relationship with his wife Sophie and son Boris. In this way, he indicates his fear that he would be indifferent towards his son like his parents. For this reason, at all times, Ryder wants to regain his parents' hopes and recognition in front of the society.

Ryder's fear could be a result of traumatic memories that he shared with his family members in the past. His son Boris carries the reminiscences of his past and reminds him the traumatic experiences and memories. When Boris and Ryder arrived in their family home, both of them shared similar thoughts and experiences in the neighbourhood. Boris is the mini version of Ryder. So Ryder wants to protect Boris as far as possible and tries to become a shield to prevent him from his traumatic memories.

One of the most significant ways Kazuo Ishiguro tries to represent trauma is through Ryder's distorted and disoriented perception of time. Traumatic experiences always try to collapse one's brains capacity to organize each and every memory in a proper order. This can help every victims and survivors of their past to move back and forth in time between past and present. In some scenes, Ryder's past experiences often intermingle with the present scenario. For example once Ryder observes certain memories in the current place and when he looks at some directions and it reminds him of his past life and childhood day. He started remembering his parent's house located in the borders of England.

There is always a blurring line between one's past and present memories, reflecting the dreamy sequence of the novel. At this stage present and past experiences look like similar in nature. This collapse insists how Trauma affects human beings in a state of trance where human beings struggle to cope up with the present. Ryder's disorientation extends to his day to day routine activities. After waking up, he recalls Hoffman's earlier words,

“In fact, just at that moment, as I continued to lean out of the window, I had the distinct impression I could hear somewhere not so far away the sound of their carriage going by. I switched off the engine and listened again, leaning my head out further. Then I got out of the car altogether and stood there in the night, listening intently”. (TU 415)

This sudden recollection disrupts Ryder's attention and focus and reflects the way traumatic memories often intrude without giving warning. Such moments reflect Cathy Caruth's view that trauma always gives pressure to the survivors of past experiences to relive fragments of the past without warning. This effect makes it difficult to form a coherent narrative of their experiences.

This novel The Unconsoled was written in polarising writing style and Ishiguro delivered his theme of trauma and memory in a dreamlike narrative style. He used a highly formal style and employed unconventional narrative techniques in writing. A series of continuous monologues has been presented in every pages of the novel. Dream logic is a famous technique used by Ishiguro in order to uncover the function of memories because the protagonist story looks like a dream and makes the readers to get a dreamy structure of the novel.

The story is an unreliable story of the protagonist Ryder because in most of the scenes Ryder was not able to recognise the other characters and the main focus of the storyline often shifted to various places in unexplained ways. The world Kazuo Ishiguro creates in The Unconsoled disregards the known laws of space and time. In this aspect, the novel could be regarded as a work of speculative fiction.

In this novel, memory and trauma are deeply interconnected in a lot of ways and Ishiguro depicts how the protagonist has undergone a journey after the traumatic incident in his life and how he copes up to retrieve his memories of the past in the present and appreciates the way in which Ryder explored the appropriate cause and effects of the traumatic memories and found the remedies for his issues. He realised that his memories were unreliable and unstable and still he tries to take pain to overcome his long lasting fear and disturbing thoughts in unveiling the truth about traumatic incidents in his life.

The trauma disrupts his memories and split up his thoughts. In spite of the defects and difficulties in his memories, he instilled positive energy in his mind to brighten his life with a new hope for the upcoming future. Thus, Kazuo Ishiguro's work proves to be exemplified for the examination of traumatic memories and the complicated relationship between trauma and memory. Traumatic survivors always look for many opportunities to recover from dreadful thoughts. In this novel, Ishiguro reflected this notion though most of the characters and his depiction of the inner conflict of the protagonist and his description about the traumatic experiences of the characters prove to be a testimony for the deep connection of psychology to literature.

Works Cited

- Balaev, Michelle. Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory. Palgrave Macmillan,2014
- Benjamin, Walter. Illuminations. Edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, Schocken Books, 1969.
- Caruth, Cathy. Trauma: Explorations in Memory. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Hirsch, Marianne. The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust. Columbia UP, 201.
- Ishiguro, Kazuo. The Unconsoled. Faber and Faber, 1995.
- Menand, Louis. Anxious In Dreamland, New York Times, 1995
- Nussbaum, Martha. Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions. Cambridge UP, 2001.

Registered with the Registrar of Newspaper of India vide MAHENG/2010/35012 ISSN 0976-299X

ISSN 0976-299X www.literaryendeavour.org

LITERARY ENDEAVOUR

INDEXED IN

GOOGLE SCHOLAR

EBSCO PUBLISHING

Owned, Printed and published by Sou. Bhagyashri Ramesh Chougule,
At. Laxmi Niwas, House No. 26/1388, Behind N. P. School No. 18, Bhanunagar, Osmanabad,
Maharashtra – 413501, India.