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Untold Stories Told: Revisiting the Culture of Igbo Community in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Joseph K. J. and J. Amalaveenus

This study exposes the Igbo culture as described by Chinua Achebe in his novel, "*Things Fall Apart*", imparting a more insightful knowledge of the blooming Igbo community's culture in pre-colonial Nigeria. Achebe effectively places it by writing down unrecorded stories. This research concentrates on the religion and spirituality of Igbo, the clan life and social structure of Igbo, familial and societal ties of Igbo, the importance of gender roles, the central role of tradition and storytelling, colonialism and its after effects on Igbo culture. This scrutiny illustrates the importance of religion and spirituality in Igbo culture. It also gives details of the importance of societal structure and the presence of clan life in Igbo. It also examines the sophistication of family in Igbo culture demonstrating the prominence of patriarchy in the society. Oral tradition and storytelling are pictured as the two constructive ways through which the Igbo culture is transferred from one generation to another. Through all these aspects Achebe fruitfully stitches the story to offer a right knowledge of the identity of Igbo people. The harsh consequences of colonial rule are also evaluated in this study. This research is directed to supply in-depth knowledge of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and its input to our understanding of Igbo society.

Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* analyses Igbo spirituality and religion. He imparts to the readers a proper understanding of the beliefs that is intertwined with the daily life of Igbo community. There are several deities adored by the Igbo people and each deity touches upon any one of the aspects of their life. One of the important deities is Amadiora. She represents thunder and lightning and they pray to her to save them from unexpected natural calamities. Their spirituality is rooted in their worship of the ancestors. Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel seeks the help of his ancestors. As part of their religious life, there is a deity for each individual called chi. The Igbo people hold the belief that their chi, a spiritual entity, plays a significant role in shaping their destiny and determining their fortunes throughout their lives. The religious calendar of the Igbo people is replete with many rites and events, which serve as manifestations of a profound spiritual connection between the community and the supernatural realm. The yearly Feast of the New Yam is a ceremonial event that celebrates the bountiful crop and seeks the benevolence of the soil deity Ani. Chinua Achebe adeptly examines the Igbo religion and spirituality in his work *Things Fall Apart*, portraying it as a

dynamic and essential component of Igbo society. “This rich Igbo culture is encroached on and transformed by the white man’s guns, religion, education, and commerce” (VanZanten 90). The book provides readers with a more profound comprehension of the intricacies inherent in traditional African belief systems and their interconnections with external influences. Consequently, it serves as a stimulating investigation into the realms of culture and spirituality within a dynamic global context.

Against the background of a swiftly changing global context, the book offers a devastating portrayal of the resilience and fragility inherent in the traditional social structure of the Igbo community. Clan is the foundation on which the Igbo culture is founded. Common practices and beliefs tie the members of the clan together. Clan is model on which each family is built. Each individual has got his own duty to be fulfilled in the clan life. The clan is headed by the elders in the community. They do frame laws and orders needed for the smooth running of the clan. They do settle the conflicts that arise in the clan. They have a sense of belonging to the community. Gender role prescribed in the clan is a notable element of Igbo life. Men are normally breadwinners and warriors whereas women manage the household works. Nevertheless, Achebe also underscores the capacity for action and determination shown by Igbo women, notably exemplified by the character of Ezinma, the daughter of Okonkwo, who actively defies societal gender conventions and anticipated roles. The culture values and acknowledges the personal development of individuals. The character Okonkwo, who serves as the central figure in the book, exemplifies the phenomenon of upward social mobility within the Igbo community, highlighting the capacity for individuals to transcend their modest origins and to esteemed positions of leadership. Nevertheless, the process of achieving mobility in Okonkwo’s life is not devoid of difficulties, as his rise to success is accompanied by the need to make personal sacrifices and confront internal conflicts. Achebe meticulously illustrates the traditions and ceremonies that form the social fabric of the Igbo tribe. The New Yam Festival and the Week of Peace are significant events that symbolise the communal identity and cultural abundance of the clan. “The rift within the clan brought about by foreign domination” (Nnoromele 148). In the literary work, Achebe emphasises the inherent fragility of the Igbo societal framework when confronted with external forces, exemplified by the advent of European colonisers and the introduction of their Christian beliefs. The juxtaposition of tradition and change emerges as a prominent thematic element when the Igbo society undergoes a gradual disintegration due to the influence of colonisation.

Within Igbo culture, the family has a pivotal role as the fundamental building block of the social structure. The family structure exhibits a patriarchal system, whereby the father, often referred to as the 'man of the home', has considerable control. To present the notion of manhood in Igbo community, Achebe introduces readers to Okonkwo, the protagonist of the story. He carries out the gender roles as per the patriarchal norms in the society. They have the joint family system where the family members in a family stay together. In this joint family, they do share the resources and work together. The eldest member in the joint family is normally the head of the family. Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* discusses the complexities and relationships that are there in the joint family system. Igbo culture gives adequate prominence to the institution of marriage. Arranged marriage is the normal way of going about in marital relationship. Achebe gives detailed description regarding the marriage rites. If a member disobeys the rules of the marriage, there are punishments prescribed. "The fabric of society changed with the disappearance of values and morals" (Zlobin 148).

The concept of Gender roles plays a pivotal role in Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*. He develops the theme of gender roles using the characters' interactions in the society. "Put baldly, the central issue in *Things Fall Apart* is that of gender" (Anyokwu 19). Gender role had its own significance in the lives of Igbo people. Traditionally, breadwinners were men and household works were handled by women in the community. The societal expectation of gender role is depicted through Okonkwo's commitment to gender norms. Achebe uses the Ekwefi, the wife of Okonkwo to show women's suffering in the community due to the division of gender roles. Achebe challenges the conventional gender norms are challenged by Okonkwo's daughter Ezinma. Author uses the actions of Ezinma to invite readers to critically scrutinize the injustice embedded in the arrangement of gender roles in the society. The colonization by Europeans make attempts to dismantle this social setup of gender roles. Their gender roles and norms related to gender were different from that of the Igbo community. Colonialism caused the downfall of the gender system existed in the Igbo community.

Oral tradition is shown as the means of transferring the Igbo culture from one generation to the forthcoming generation by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*. Elders in Igbo community took up this responsibility of transferring their culture to their children through storytelling. Unoka, Okonkwo's father, is shown as an example who does this duty beautifully. The culture of the Igbo community is preserved using this oral transmission of culture. The stories contain unique qualities like resilience and strength at the face of adversities. This act of storytelling

promotes communal identity. They used to come together around fire to tell and to listen to the stories and it was also an act of strengthening their communal bond. This act helped in maintaining harmonious existence in the community. One notable storyteller whom Achebe presents in *Things Fall Apart* is Chielo. The entranced condition shown by Chielo during her storytelling sessions implies that storytelling has the capacity to transfer recipients to another dimension, facilitating a connection with the divine and the supernatural. The enormous impact of storytelling on the cultural and religious framework of Igbo culture is underscored by its spiritual component. “The use of irony to draw together the main strands of narrative and aid insight is what we may regard as Achebe’s forte. It is a quality which not only makes him a good story-teller but also a significant novelist” (Obiechina 44).

“The bonus accompanying this work is that it allows a class to engage in a mini-lesson on the history of the colonisation of Africa, specifically of Nigeria” (Puhr 43). The story highlights the profound impact of colonialism on Igbo culture, particularly via the introduction of Christianity. The arrival of missionaries in the Igbo community of Umuofia introduces a new religious paradigm that poses a significant challenge to the existing indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices. A considerable number of individuals from the Igbo ethnic group, including Nwoye, the son of Okonkwo, undergo a religious conversion to Christianity, resulting in a division within familial and communal structures. The introduction of the new religion in the Igbo community marked the deterioration of values and rituals that were practiced by Igbo community. Colonialism affected the framework that Igbo people maintained in the society and politics. British colonialists used violent ways to attain power over the Igbo community. The colonialists used the trick of including a few native people in the administration and dismantled age-old governing method used by Igbo community. Freedom and Identity of Igbo people were curtailed when the colonialists introduced their legal system. The economy of the Igbo community was also affected as the colonialists exploited the resources and wealth of Igbo community. Another area in Igbo community that was badly affected by the invasion of colonialists is the language of the community. The introduction of English as the primary language of contact and medium in schools resulted in the loss of native language. Achebe also shows an English man named Mr. Brown who had respect towards the language of the Igbo community. He attempts to make discourse for a mutual understanding. Achebe through *Things Fall Apart* break open before the audience the negative effects of colonialism on a culture.

The beauty of Igbo culture in the pre-colonial era is authentically presented by Achebe through his novel *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe takes his readers to the world of Igbo people and provides accurate information regarding the religion and spirituality of Igbo, the clan life and societal structure of Igbo, the familial and societal ties of Igbo, the importance of gender roles, the central role of tradition and storytelling, colonialism and its consequences on Igbo culture. It depicts the loss of one culture that happens through the invasion of colonizers and the imposition of the colonizer's culture over the native culture. *Things Fall Apart* stands out as a unique work that talks about the untold stories of the Igbo community.

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Rediscovering Tradition in Modernity: A Thematic Analysis of African and Caribbean Poetry

Deepa L. C.

African literature has never been a homogenous or coherent body of literature since Africa is a vast continent comprising over fifty nations, hundreds of languages, and diverse ethnic groups. Although cultural similarities and a history of colonialism may be unifying factors, there have been multiple verbal expressions of the multitude of African experiences across the continent. However, much of the literature and oral traditions in the African languages are little known or ignored outside the continent.

Africa was divided into colonies in the nineteenth century by Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Holland, resulting in diverse foreign languages and different cultures upon the native cultures. The geographical peculiarities of Africa add to the complications due to cultural diversity among the ethnically heterogeneous groups and accompanying rivalries and strife. In postcolonial Africa, conflict resulted also from the emergence of a distinct Europeanized class or elite Africans who shared the colonial contempt of native culture.

The most eloquent manifestation of anticolonialist poetry can be seen in the negritude movement formed in the 1930s by French-speaking African and Caribbean writers living in Paris, as a protest against French colonial rule. Educated in colonial schools, they had been taught to reject their African traditions and to emulate the French culture. The negritude poetry emanated from the need to reaffirm African values from which they had been alienated, and to reestablish an African identity. Thus, African literature, especially in the 1950s and 1960s attempted to rewrite the history of precolonial and colonial Africa, to affirm African perspectives, and to challenge the colonial outlook on Africa. African writers who wrote in European languages have often been accused of addressing a Western audience but they were trying to interpret true African culture and values to the West by using the colonizer's language and also attempting to reform African ideas about the African experience. Most negritude poems depicted two Africas- "a Utopian, pastoral, 'original', precolonial Africa and a victimized, suffering Africa of colonialism" (Julien 298). They also portray a cultural dilemma by juxtaposing an Africa marked by the communion of man and nature, and a Europe marked by the fragmentation and discord of life. Since the target audience was Africans most of whom were not literate in European languages, the African writers and intellectuals preferred

to address Africans by writing in the African languages and traditions, thus attempting to give a boost to African languages and literatures. Modern African literature is written in the indigenous African languages and in the European languages used in Africa. However, compared to the ever-popular indigenous oral traditions of literature, written African literature is relatively young.

In the present times, most African writers write in English, French and Portuguese. A major part of African literature is from West Africa, East Africa, South Africa and its suburb Rhodesia, which are different from each other. The common factors unifying them are the themes of national pride, anticolonial protest, displacement and rootlessness, deplorable living conditions of most Africans — poverty, misery, racial discrimination, economic and sexual exploitation, political oppression etc. which characterize African postcolonial literature. Postcolonial discourse, with its thrust on the political, linguistic and cultural experiences of the former colonies, has been widely used for analyzing African literature. It is the “discourse of the colonized, which begins with colonization and does not stop when the colonizers go home”(Altijani and Omer 161).

The impact of colonialism – the trauma of foreign conquest and the imposition of an alien culture – has been more severe in African countries than in the other commonwealth countries, as portrayed powerfully in the works of African writers. Fanon points out that worse than mere economic injustice was the oppression based on race or colour, which determined the native’s social class. The condition of Africans was worse than that of the other colonized people of other races due to slavery, prejudice and segregation based on race or colour. According to Edward W. Said, the ‘cultural hegemony’ or ‘positional superiority’ involved the Eurocentric view that European identity is superior to that of all non-European peoples and cultures. However, African literature has succeeded in asserting the Afrocentric version of the true African reality, and serves as a protest against the colonial, negative, Eurocentric representation of Africa. As Altijani and Omer point out:

As a form of protest and resistance, the inferior status that the West had assigned to the Africans necessitated the need for self-assurance among African intellectuals. Since African literature was generated by this traumatic collective experience of colonization, it strongly reflects the resistance to the colonial and neo-colonial invasion of African cultural space as its primary thematic preoccupation. (164)

Therefore, it is only natural that much of African literature is a powerful defense of the dignity of African culture, and protest or rebellion against racial prejudice, discrimination and exploitation. The negritude poets asserted their African identity to protest against colonial prejudice. Their portrayal of the African past, though at times appear to be romanticized and exaggerated, is a weapon against cultural annihilation. David Diop's poem *Africa* is a representative negritude poem in which he vehemently and passionately denounces slavery and colonial domination. It embodies his dream of an independent African nation and opens with an impassioned address to his motherland which is portrayed as a mother.

Africa my Africa

Africa of proud warriors in ancestral savannahs

Africa of whom my grandmother sings

On the banks of the distant river

His pride in the past glory of his motherland and its unique and rich heritage embodied in the line "Your beautiful black blood that irrigates the fields" soon gives way to melancholy, grief and moral indignation at the inhuman torture and humiliation meted out to his forefathers who were held in slavery by the white Americans. The tone soon shifts of one of optimism and resilience towards the end of the poem:

That is your Africa springing up anew

Springing up patiently, obstinately

Whose fruit bit by bit acquires

The bitter taste of liberty.

Diop, in *The Vultures* too, depicts the harsh reality of postcolonial Africa, the violence and exploitation his fellowmen were subjected to; but his trust and pride in the integrity and perseverance of his race, is optimistic that "Spring will be reborn under our bright steps". One of the most splendid and powerful expressions of African pride is seen in Leopold Sedar Senghor's *Black Woman*, where Africa is personified as an African woman and mother who represents the African race itself: where he equates her to everything that is beautiful and graceful. And in doing so, he reinforces the ideals and principles upheld by the Negritude movement that was founded by him. In *Night Rain*, J.P. Clark celebrates the physical landscape

and cultural values of Africa when he illustrates the bond between man and nature, and man's resilience and courage in the face of natural calamities. In the thick of the night rain, under a leaky roof, as the mother is busy shifting vessels to keep the raindrops from falling on her children, the child narrator's words resonate with hope and resilience:

Do not tremble then

But turn, brothers, turn upon your side

Of the loosening mats

To where the others lie.

Wole Soyinka's *Telephone Conversation* is a satirical account of a telephone conversation between a racially prejudiced white landlady and the speaker who is black, about renting a living space. It is a vehement and tongue-in-cheek critique of the dehumanizing nature of racism and he establishes that one's identity is too complex to be determined by race or skin colour. Even Achebe's *Refugee Mother and Child*, which is a realistic and painful portrayal of a refugee camp with all its starvation, illness and misery, celebrates the self-sacrificing love of an African mother, thereby universalizing motherhood. The form and style of the poem *Colonization in Reverse* reinforces African nationalism and records the poet's quest for a Jamaican national identity by

focusing on the issues of race, gender, language and identity. Written four years after the Jamaican independence, the theme of the poem is the mass migration of Jamaicans to Britain following the British Nationality Act of 1948 which accorded permission for all Commonwealth citizens to settle in Britain, which is depicted as a process of reverse colonization. The poem is imbued with the spirit of freedom and resistance following centuries of British colonization.

The contrast between the two cultures is powerfully expressed by the use of negative images to describe alien culture and positive ones to describe the African way of life. In *Africa*, David Diop uses the image of a "young and strong" tree to represent the newly independent Africa that holds a lot of hope and promise, while "white and faded flowers" stand for the decline of the power and glory of the white colonialists. Similarly, in *The Vultures*, the violence and callousness of the colonizers is represented by the images of the vulture and "the metallic hell of the roads". On the other hand, 'spring' drives home the idea of revival of

life under the powerful leadership of native leaders in the line “Spring will be reborn under our bright steps”.

Images and symbols peculiar to African culture and way of life, which were dismissed as savage or primitive by the westerners are often used profusely by African poets to reinforce and reaffirm their cultural identity. For instance, Senghor employs the symbols of the savannah and the tom-tom to defend the native culture in the lines:

Savannah stretching to clear horizons,
Savannah shuddering beneath the East Wind
eager caresses
Carved tom-tom, taut tom-tom, muttering
under the Conqueror’s fingers

African folklore abounds in folk tales, proverbs, myths and legends which African writers are found to draw the motifs, themes and characters. The supernatural plays a major role in African poetry as it does in the lives of the African people who believe that not everything that happens in life can be explained rationally. They believe in the influence of the ancestors, spirits and gods in the affairs of the living. Even the western educated writers are found to resort to the native cultural beliefs and superstitions such as reincarnation, spirit possession etc. peculiar to their particular ethnic groups. For instance, explicit manifestations of the Yoruba, Igbo, Ijaw and Ewe myths and mystical symbols are prolific in the works of Soyinka, Achebe, J.P. Clark and Awoonor respectively. J.P. Clark uses the indigenous images of the owl, bat, and also the iroko (tree) which Yoruba people believe is inhabited by a spirit, which, if seen turns one mad leading to his death. Time, in African literature, is often cyclical rather than linear and death is the beginning of a spiritual life, and birth the end of one phase of existence.

The rich oral tradition of Africa often renders a unique charm to the rhythms of African poetry, linking the traditional and the modern. “The language of modern African literature whether written in English, French or Portuguese is peculiarly African. It is informed by African languages with their proverbs, axioms, rhythms and oratorical structures” (Ojaide 54). Several African poets like Awoonor researched the oral poetry of their ethnic groups and translated it into European languages. In African poetry, European words are sometimes superimposed

on the framework of a native African rhythm giving them a distinctly traditional ring. Kofi Awoonor, whose grandmother was a Ewe dirge singer, captured in *Songs of Sorrow* the slow elegiac rhythm of the Ewe dirge. It is a pessimistic poem, a dirge in which the living blame the ancestors for the hardships caused by their departure. Louis Bennet, in *Colonisation in Reverse*, uses the English language in her own way, merging the identities of England and Jamaica.

Wat a joyful news, miss Mattie,

I feel like me heart gwine burs

Jamaica people colonizin

Englan in Reverse

The Jamaican Patois dialect is used as a tool of rebellion against the colonial prejudice that looked down upon the vernacular culture and language as vulgar and held everything European as refined. The native oral tradition that was condemned not only by the colonizers, but also by the English educated Jamaican elite class, is given a new lease of life by the poet.

David Diop rejected European culture and rhythms and frequently used colloquial phrases with rhythmic repetition, reminiscent of native rhythms. The poem *Africa* attains a traditional incantatory rhythm in the lines

The blood of your sweat

The sweat of your work

The work of your slavery

The slavery of your children

In his *The Vultures* too, Diop employs the native repetitive rhythms characteristic of African oral tradition, that makes account of the inhuman racial persecution all the more poignant:

Of the bitter memories of extorted kisses

Of promises broken at the point of a gun

Of foreigners who did not seem human.

Experience of displacement and rootlessness, caused by the complex history of colonization and decolonization, and the resulting search for identity is a recurring theme in postcolonial African literature. According to Altijani and Omer:

Displacement caused by colonization can take on several forms – physical displacement, figurative displacement. The figurative displacement is visible in the relationship of black African writers writing to African literary canon which has been mostly dominated by white African writing. The other forms of displacements include the displacement brought about by the appropriation of land by European colonizers, the displacement resulting from the forced removals under certain apartheid laws as well as the displacement caused by imprisonment or resulting from hostile political policies.(167)

The postcolonial situation in a modern African state often requires one to break off from the ties of the traditional past, which causes dislocation from one's native identity and creates a sense of rootlessness arising from the conflict between tradition and modernity. This sense of rootlessness is often aggravated by the juxtaposition of the native tradition with the alien tradition of the colonizers as is splendidly expressed in several African poems. Derek Walcott in *A Far Cry from Africa* gives a powerful and poignant expression to the theme of divided roots and identity crisis, of the racial and cultural tensions arising from the dilemma experienced by the poet himself, a black poet writing in English. It brilliantly records his sense of alienation and his search for identity. The poem closes with a series of heart-wrenching questions which are not, and cannot be answered:

...how choose

Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?

Betray them both, or give back what they give?

How can I face such slaughter and be cool?

How can I turn from Africa and live?

The poem *South* by Edward Kamau Brathwaite, describing the blandness of the poet's life away from his homeland and his longing for home, is a record of the poet's physical, cultural and emotional displacement and search for identity.

We who are born of the ocean can never seek solace

in rivers: their flowing runs on like our longing,
reproves us our lack of endeavour and purpose,
proves that our striving will founder on that.

Post independence disillusionment is another recurrent theme in African literature. On achieving political independence, justice, equality, social reform and economic progress became the most persistent dreams for most African communities. However, most post-independence African governments went back on their promise to end racial discrimination and formulate legislations to improve the quality of life of the native people. Therefore, independence, instead of bringing total emancipation, ushered in new hardships and injustices in the form of corruption, abusive power, communal wars, political instability, and military struggles and coups, and liberation meant a continuation of mass poverty, disease and ignorance. Ngugi wa Thiong'o gives powerful expression to his critique of post-independence regimes in *Decolonizing the Mind*, where he calls the corrupt and self-centered politicians "neo-slaves" who are "mass murderers, looters, robbers, thieves" (1986, 17). Achebe too voiced his frustration at the politicians who were driven only by personal ambition and depicted how colonialism, poverty and war had taken a heavy toll on the lives of Nigerian people. His poem *Refugee Mother and Child*, written during the Nigerian Civil War which was an unfortunate aftermath of colonialism, is a realistic portrayal of a refugee camp with its starvation, illness and death. J.P. Clark's poem *Night Rain*, gives a true picture of the poverty and miserable living conditions of the Nigerian people, their solidarity, perseverance and resilience in the face of natural disasters. Kofi Awoonor, in *Songs of Sorrow*, employs powerful of desolation and destruction to lament the deprivation and destitution in life,

... the sharps of the forest
Returning is not possible
And going forward is a great difficulty

Thus, most African writers share a common feeling of colonial consciousness and attempt to dismantle European cultural hegemony by registering their protest against racial prejudice and discrimination.

As a form of protest and resistance, the inferior status that the West had assigned to the Africans necessitated the need for self-assurance among African intellectuals. Since African

literature was generated by this traumatic collective experience of colonization, it strongly reflects the resistance to the colonial and neo-colonial invasion of African cultural space as its primary thematic preoccupation (Altijani and Omer, 164).

Whether written in native or European languages, African literature in general and poetry in particular, is invariably imbued with the true African spirit by virtue of the traditions, myths, images, symbols, native rhythms etc. Moreover, it is replete with criticisms of negative social and political practices with a view to grooming the sociopolitical transgressors into positive agents in society. Modern African writing is almost always didactic — utilitarian and socially committed, a manifestation of a deep sense of order and justice, reminding readers of the necessity of upholding high cultural ethos to build nations with harmonic ethnic coexistence.

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Compensatory Travel: The Text and Context of Travel in the Post-Covid Era

Ashley Treesa Antony

Travel has long been recognized as a powerful tool for reducing stress, promoting relaxation, and enhancing overall well-being. The immersive experiences, novel environments, and sense of freedom associated with travel offer individuals a temporary escape from the pressures of daily life, allowing them to recharge and rejuvenate both mentally and physically.

However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic ushered in unprecedented challenges, including widespread lockdowns, travel restrictions, and social distancing measures, effectively curtailing people's ability to engage in travel-related activities. As a result, individuals faced heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional distress stemming from prolonged periods of confinement, uncertainty, and disrupted routines. The inability to travel not only deprived individuals of a cherished coping mechanism but also exacerbated feelings of isolation and cabin fever.

The direct response to these constraints was the rise in compensatory travel. Compensatory travel refers to the deliberate pursuit of travel experiences to offset the stress and disappointment caused by confinement during the pandemic.

This paper seeks to explore the psychological underpinnings of how compensatory travel serves as a coping mechanism for stress due to COVID-19 restrictions by examining the motivations, behaviors, and outcomes associated with travel in the post-covid era.

Compensatory travel can be understood within the framework of compensatory consumption theory, which posits that individuals engage in consumption behaviors to satisfy unmet psychological needs and alleviate negative emotions.

Similar to compensatory consumption in other domains, such as indulging in comfort food after following a restrictive diet, compensatory travel involves satisfying suppressed leisure desires through travel experiences. This phenomenon is characterized by traveling for longer durations, allocating a larger budget, or embarking on more frequent trips to compensate for constraints that have limited travel opportunities, such as those imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

By indulging in compensatory travel, individuals seek to address psychological deficiencies and fulfill their desires for exploration, adventure, and relaxation that have been suppressed by external circumstances (Kim et al., 2021). This concept underscores the notion that travel

serves not only as a means of transportation but also as a form of pure psychological consumption, allowing individuals to fulfill their intrinsic needs for novelty, escape, and personal growth (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008; Woodruffe-Burton & Elliott, 2005).

The upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered the landscape of travel, imposing unprecedented restrictions and instilling fear of infection among the populace. When COVID-19 hit, there was a complete travel restriction, a fear of catching the infection, being affected by the news of illness and death.

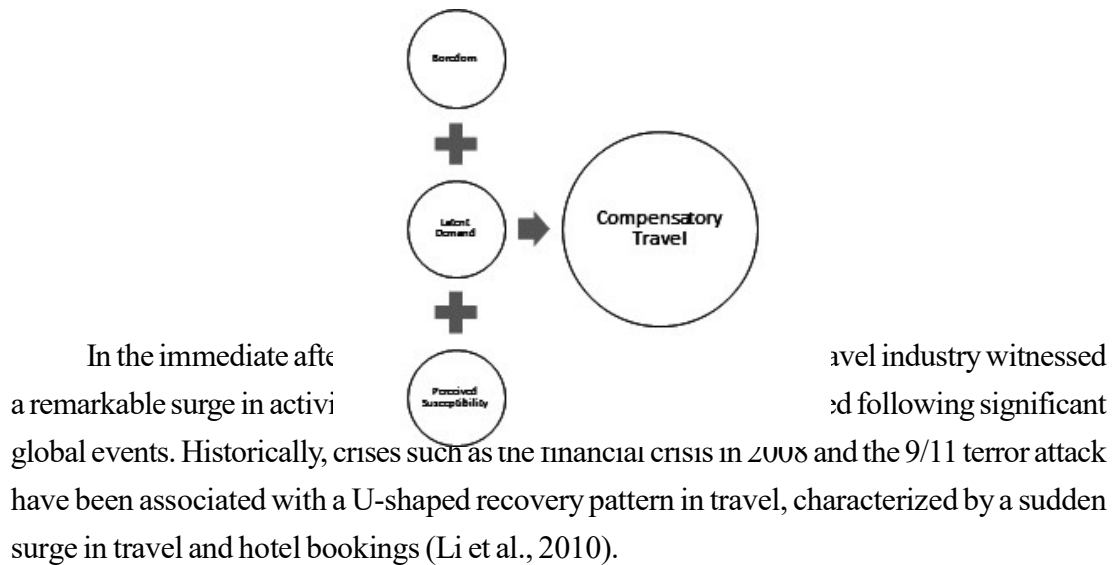
Prior to the pandemic, travel served as a positive means of escape—a temporary reprieve from the monotony of routine, work, responsibilities, and the stressors of daily life. However, the stringent measures implemented to curb the spread of the virus ushered in a period of stagnancy and prolonged boredom. Travel in the immediate aftermath of covid-19 was triggered by cognitive drives, such as boredom, latent demand, and perceived susceptibility.

Boredom, defined as an unwanted experience marked by a lack of desire to engage in fulfilling activities, has been linked to negative psychological states such as depression, anxiety, and stress (Fahlman et al., 2013). Moreover, boredom can trigger a need for novel stimuli and experiences, leading to sensation and stimuli-seeking behaviors (Reisenzein, 2017).

The restrictions imposed during the pandemic also gave rise to what psychologists refer to as the “latent demand for travel,” wherein individuals experience an irresistible urge to travel simply because they are prohibited from doing so. This latent demand for travel is a direct consequence of the extreme limitations placed on mobility. However, amidst this desire for travel, concerns about safety loom large.

This is where the third cognitive drive, perceived susceptibility, comes into play. Perceived susceptibility, rooted in the health belief model, refers to an individual’s perception of their vulnerability to specific diseases. Factors such as vaccination, prior infection-induced immunity, and reports of the virus weakening have contributed to a heightened sense of safety. Collectively, these cognitive drives—covid-induced boredom, latent travel demand, and perceived susceptibility—have fueled the rise of compensatory travel in the post-covid era.

The figure is a graphical representation of how the cognitive drives relate to compensatory travel in the post-pandemic times.



According to Airbnb’s financial report, the third quarter of 2021 saw a record-breaking net profit of USD 834 million, with a profit margin of 49%, marking a substantial increase compared to pre-pandemic levels (Airbnb Financial Report, 2021). This surge in travel activity was particularly pronounced for Airbnb, which experienced a surge in bookings due to its association with “authentic travel experiences” and perceived safety advantages, such as personalized accommodation options and lower perceived susceptibility to the virus.

The period also witnessed drastic changes to travel behaviour. The conventional travel model gave way to travel lifestyles like microtourism, digital nomadism, and workation. A closer examination of these travel trends is pertinent here to understand the text and context of compensatory travel.

Micro tourism, also known as micro-travel or micro-adventures, refers to short, local travel experiences that allow travelers to explore new destinations in a more sustainable and responsible way. Driven by the uncertainties and restrictions associated with long-distance travel during the pandemic, micro tourism represents a shift towards more localized and experiential forms of travel. With concerns over health and safety paramount, individuals turned to nearby destinations that offer convenience, affordability, and authenticity. The desire for meaningful and immersive travel experiences, coupled with a preference for supporting local

businesses and communities, has fueled the growth of micro tourism as a viable alternative to traditional tourism models.

The characteristics of micro tourism distinguish it from conventional forms of travel, emphasizing short-duration trips to destinations within close proximity. Travelers opt for one or two-day excursions to nearby attractions, cultural landmarks, and natural wonders, seeking to maximize their experiences within a limited timeframe. Micro tourism prioritizes authenticity, sustainability, and engagement with local culture and heritage, fostering a deeper connection between travelers and their surroundings.

From a psychological perspective, micro tourism satisfies fundamental human needs for exploration, novelty, and connection. By immersing themselves in nearby destinations, travelers fulfill their innate curiosity and desire for discovery, stimulating cognitive engagement and personal growth. The sense of accomplishment and fulfillment derived from exploring new environments enhances subjective well-being and satisfaction with life, contributing to overall psychological resilience and happiness.

The shorter travel distance, practicality, and economic factors made micro tourism the preferred travel trend for families (Antony, 2023). Travel influencers on Instagram and YouTube became the guiding force for families to choose their micro tourism destinations.

Digital nomadism refers to a lifestyle characterized by individuals who leverage technology to work remotely while traveling and living in different locations around the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of remote work and digital technologies, leading to a surge in digital nomadism as individuals seek greater flexibility and autonomy in their professional and personal lives.

Digital nomads are generally minimalists, who travel with large backpacks and stay in hostels or dorm-style accommodations for extended periods of time. Digital nomadism as a travel trend has been known to exist since the 1970s. The MBO Digital Nomad Report 2020 states that in 2019, 7.3 million U.S citizens identified themselves as digital nomads. However, after the covid restrictions were lifted in 2020, the number rose to 10.9 million.

Digital nomadism is more popular among the singles population as this travel trend demands a commitment-free lifestyle. The opportunity to “work from anywhere” as opposed to “work from home” impacted the millennials and generation Z so much that as of 2023,

there are 17 million digital nomads in the US. The trend is picking up in developing nations like India, although, lack of research has made it impossible to trace the trajectory.

Another work-based travel trend that emerged in the post-pandemic era is workation. Workation is a novel form of hybrid tourism that integrates work and vacation, allowing individuals to engage in professional activities while simultaneously enjoying leisure pursuits.

Unlike the digital nomads, workationers have a place they call “home” and return to, after their extended stays in a destination. Immediately after the restrictions were lifted, the workationers who set on travels avoided typical touristy destinations and chose lesser-known places, where they could feel safer during the pandemic. The choice of destination saw an inclination towards greener and ecologically abundant landscapes. This choice was a clear indication of a positive escapism from their concrete jungle home environments in corporate cities, where they were confined for months. Homestays and Airbnbs rose to the occasion to provide work desks and free and strong Wi-Fi connections.

The three travel trends, micro tourism, digital nomadism, and workation reflect the psycho-social adaptation of a stifled society to experience novelty in their physical and mental environment. Each of the trend is a solution to the needs and lifestyle of the different demographics of the society.

To conclude, the phenomenon of compensatory travel in the post-COVID era reflects a multifaceted response to the disruptions and restrictions imposed by the pandemic. The surge in travel activity following the pandemic can be attributed to a combination of factors, including the desire for escape, the need for novel experiences, and the evolution of work and travel behaviors. The emergence of compensatory travel underscores the resilience and adaptability of individuals in the face of adversity, as they seek to reclaim lost opportunities and explore new horizons.

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Representation of Femininity in Music Videos: An Analysis of Item Songs in Hindi Movies

Devaki S.

We live in an increasingly visual culture, one in which visual images of varying meanings and various purpose are circulated. We invest these images with varying degrees of power, the power to provoke in us a myriad of emotions and thought processes. Hence visual representation of women is a topic that has been subjected to a number of feminist critiques, particularly due to the fact that these representations of women in popular culture defines and confines women. The objective of this paper is to look into the rise of “raunch culture” (Ariel Levy) as exemplified by the representation of women in the music videos, particularly in what is known as “item songs”. But before I start, let me try explaining the term “femininity”. Susan Brownmiller argues that femininity is “an essence, is a romantic sentiment, a nostalgic tradition of imposed violations”. Naomi Wolf suggests that “femininity is a code for femaleness and whatever a society happens to be selling”. Wolf’s statement makes it clear that there will never be a fixed definition for femininity which reduces it to a static phenomenon for something lived by millions of women and one which is constantly changing and evolving.

Since popular culture is always part of the power relations, as the critic John Fiske pointed out, “it always bears traces of the constant struggle between domination and subordination, between power and various forms of resistance to it or evasions of it...”, it has been analysed by various researchers and critics about the representations of women, and how they are challenging or adopting stereotypical representations. Indian film industry is now more than a century old, and is recognized as an important element of the global entertainment industry. Mainstream Indian cinema’s depiction of women has been restricted by the definitions imposed by the patriarchal society and it is yet to achieve a democratic representation of women. Hence it is imperative to question the notions about Indian women that are being represented in Indian cinema. Many movies these days have something called “Item Songs”. An item song or an item number is a song that holds little relation to the story but is added solely for “entertainment value” where women dressed in skimpy outfits gyrate to suggestive lyrics. While many critics point out that these songs result in the commodification of the female body, there are some critics who believe that women dance to these tunes as a freedom of expression and they construct new sites of sexual desires and identity in India. The central

question raised in this article is to estimate which one of the above said definitions will be more applicable in the case of cinematic representation of women through these item songs in India. This paper also tries to examine the gradual increase in demand for items songs in India and why such repressive depiction of women is not met with stronger objections.

India is the largest producer of multi-lingual movies and of these the largest branch is the Hindi film industry based in Mumbai (formerly Bombay) known as Bollywood echoing the American entertainment industry. L. Srinivas traces the origins of Hindi film Industry to Dadasahib Phalke's *Harishchandra* which came out in the year 1913. From its beginning onwards dance has held a crucial role in Indian cinema. The role of song and its demand changed with the entry of item songs. Barrett Grant (2006) defines an item song as "a musical performance that holds little or no relevance at all to the film in which it features. It appears in a film to present beautiful dancing women in revealing and exposing clothes". The main function of the song is to generate publicity and to increase the marketability of the film. The earliest avatar of the item songs was the cabaret songs performed by artistes such as Helen, who possessed distinctive Western features. And later in the 1980s, these song-and-dance sequences came to be performed by the leading ladies of the time, for example Urmila Matodkar's dance sequence in the movie *China Gate* and of course, the (in)famous Madhuri Dixit song *Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hein* from the movie *Khalnayak*. Globalization and the entry of MTV into India, the political-economy of making dance videos, the granting of industry-status to Bollywood and the exponential growth of the cosmetics industry are all fundamental to these changes.

The origin of the term "item number" is obscure, but some researchers suggest that it was first used for the song 'UP Bihar Lootne' in the movie 'Shool' in 1999. Shilpa Shetty was termed as an Item Girl for the first time. It is likely that the word 'Item' has derived its meaning from the objectification of sexually attractive women. This is because an item in Indian slang is a sexy woman (Morey, Peter; Alex Tickell, 2005). Hence the objectification is no longer connotative; it is direct and is accepted as a description for the woman (item girl) and the genre (item song). One of the elements that stand out in item songs apart from the clothes and dance movements are the use of connotative language that stress upon sensuality, like 'jawani' or references to body and also about the loss of moral inhibitions exerted by the society. Hence, debates over obscenity and concerns about the deterioration of 'culture' have been raised frequently, but there is a lack of a definitive study about the place of item songs in the

movie industry and also about the nature of their target audience. Ravneet Kaur suggests that this genre was never taken seriously or canonized in the research because like the Bollywood phenomenon it was reduced to being 'kitschy'. Bollywood, in all its song and dance glory, was always homogenized as one genre of 'Bollywood musicals' and "item" songs face that same danger of not being studied as a separate category.

It is difficult not to point out the gross misrepresentation of femininity in these videos, starting with the word "item" itself. The word has an unsubtle allusion to women as objects to be flaunted and taken around. Women are one of the important subjects of the nation as well as the cinema, and so it is important to discuss what is considered as correct and what is considered as incorrect. The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act of 1986 that made punishable by law the 'depiction in any manner of the figure of a woman, her form or body or any part thereof in such a way as to have the effect of being indecent or of being derogatory or denigrating women or is likely to deprave, corrupt or injure public morality or morals'. So, can it be taken as if there is no skin show, the morality of India would be uncorrupted? As Flavia Agnes argued cogently, the definitions of 'obscenity', 'indecent' and 'morality' in the bill were questionable, inferring that female sexuality was not to be recognized or represented, and that 'upholding the dignity of women' meant reducing them to asexual beings. Also, Bindu Nair points out that, 'In these songs, the styling in terms of make-up and costumes, and the cinematic elements of lighting and shot taking, i.e. the way the body is arranged with respect to the camera and hence the eye of the audience, the movements of the body, all add up in turning the woman into a spectacle. The gaze is invited to certain parts of the body selectively considered sexual- the eyes, the lips, the breasts, the naval, the buttocks and the legs.'

Now that it is clear that these kinds of songs were always oppressive in their depiction of women, let us take a look at other observations made in some recent criticism. "Men act, women appear. Men look at women; women watch themselves being looked at." Laura Mulvey's observation about the male gaze in movies holds particularly true for most of the cinematic representations of Indian women. But the 'body' of the "item" girl, which stands corrected, modified, cosmeticized and tattooed escapes the confines of the traditional submissive role as she is expected to be bold and fiery outside of the filmic space. In the songs, they are depicted to be outside the realm of purity myth. Many studies, including that by Monica Mehta has pointed out that the objection is mostly raised against the suggestive

lyrics in the item songs, where women openly embrace their sexuality and often discuss their desire rather than the depiction of female body per se. Hence, we see that even the objections raised are gendered, and the item girls themselves have no unrealistic notions about their own role in the movie, they are expected to entertain and that is what they do.

Does this awareness make them more empowered and progressive as they reject the virginal space that is reserved for the traditional heroine? So is what we see on screen a celebration of a woman's sensuality or a "commodification" of her body? Where do we draw the line when it comes to the portrayal of women in cinema? Are the filmmakers at fault, is it a desperate attempt by actors to grab eyeballs or is the item song simply an easy target? Film makers have always been an easy target for the moral brigade who continues to condemn the 'defiling of Indian culture by the introduction of Western ideals'. While most of these objections have been raised to protect Indian culture, very little discourse is generated on the objectification of women in Hindi films.

While this debate goes on, a closer look at the economics of Hindi cinema will help us in deconstructing the phenomenon, and may also provide an answer to the question why do they continue to be popular despite the overall increase in the levels of social and political awareness of such depictions. Film industry in India continues to be male dominated and often the depictions that we see on-screen made by male professionals have gender biases and constraints that do not necessarily share women's realities and their perceptions. When an item song sequence appears out of nowhere in any movie, it is easy to recognize it as a lure for the audiences and to make more money. Taking a closer look we can understand why item songs increase the number of audiences. When a woman dances on an item song, she tries to please the men. These depictions are made by the film makers within the social frame work in which they live and is in accordance to their attitudes, beliefs and values. And the viewer likewise, consumes these images within the frame work of his societal value and the women continues to be perceived as objects to please men. This is patriarchy in the field of Cinema. Another point to be noted about the item song genre is that it is still blurry about who exactly are the consumers. They are regularly played on TV and are choreographed and displayed on various stages including familial gatherings including weddings. The sex and sensuousness of these songs no longer shock anybody, and they have become part of the heteronormative discourse. At the same time, academics like Amita Nijhawan argues that this type of discourse is detrimental as the women in these item numbers are in fact empowered and have the agency to express and

expose their desires and sexualities. These women are not the chaste Bollywood 'wives' according to Nijhawan, but talented dancers who are objectified and subjected to the male gaze, but are also loved and admired by all spectrums of audiences across all classes, genders and age groups.

As the demand for the item song seem unabated, it is important to study the consumers of such sexually explicit songs and also why do they continue to be popular and what exactly is the image of women represented onscreen through such depictions. Are these songs platforms of expression or are they just mediums to please the male gaze. Also, why the focus is on the obscenity of the Item Songs? All these questions demand a careful study and I guess the answers are directly related to the treatment of women in films and in society. The rupture that these dancing girls produce calls for a detailed analysis of the re-articulation of dances and the ideologies they produce.

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Tasting Identity: Food as a Cultural Marker in Diasporic Literature

Romy Thomas

Food has always been an integral part of human life and culture. Across the world, different cuisines, cooking techniques, and eating practices are markers of cultural identities. In diasporic literature, the significance of food in negotiating different cultural conventions has been a subject of extensive study. The present article aims to explore the ambivalent role played by food in the process of cultural transfer in diasporic literature, with a specific focus on the works of two renowned Indian American authors, Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. In their works, Lahiri and Divakaruni vividly capture the cultural significance of food in diasporic communities.

Food holds a special place in Indian culture. It is not just a source of nutrition, but it is also deeply intertwined with cultural and religious traditions. In Indian households, cooking and sharing meals are considered an act of love and hospitality. Women in particular play a crucial role in the preparation of food, using a variety of ingredients, methods, and techniques passed down through generations.

In Lahiri's novel 'The Namesake,' the protagonist's mother, Ashima, is shown to hold on to her Indian identity through her cooking. Despite living in the US, with her American husband and children, Ashima tries to hold on to her Indian identity through her cooking. She continues to prepare traditional Indian dishes and even replicates a street food she remembers from her hometown in Calcutta. Through her culinary practices, Ashima not only showcases her Americanization but also expresses her longing for her homeland. This highlights the dual nature of food in cultural transfer – it can both preserve and disrupt cultural identities.

Ashima is a pivotal character through whom the readers are able to witness the impact of cultural transfer on a diasporic individual's relationship with food. She is shown to meticulously prepare traditional Indian dishes using recipes passed down to her by her mother and mother-in-law. This not only reflects her dedication to preserving her cultural heritage, but also her desire to pass it on to the next generation, despite being in a foreign land.

Food preparations, such as making pickles and chutneys that require a lot of effort and time, are also a way for Ashima to connect with her cultural roots. These traditional dishes are not only a means of sustenance but also a way for her to connect with her childhood memories and familial ties in India. Her cooking becomes a way to cope with the challenges of being in

a different country and to maintain a sense of cultural continuity in her life. Additionally, Ashima's cooking also serves as a way to bridge the cultural gap between her Indian family and her American husband and children. Through her meals, she is able to introduce them to the flavors and traditions of her culture and help them understand her identity better. In this way, food becomes a vehicle for cultural exchange and can bring people from different backgrounds closer together. However, as the children grow up and become more Americanized, their tastes and preferences also evolve, leading to a clash of cultures in the kitchen. This is evident when Ashima's son, Gogol, rejects Indian food in favor of American fast food, causing tension and disappointment for Ashima. This highlights how food can also be a source of conflict and change in cultural identities. Throughout the novel, Ashima's cooking serves as a powerful symbol of her Indian identity and the struggles of being a diasporic individual. It shows the complexities and challenges of maintaining one's cultural heritage while living in a foreign land. Through Ashima's character, Lahiri shows that food is not just a means of survival but also a way to assert one's cultural roots and preserve a sense of identity.

However, Ashima's cooking also has a bittersweet undertone, as it is a constant reminder of her displacement and the longing for her homeland. In one scene, she replicates a popular street food from her hometown of Calcutta, using local ingredients available in the US. This act of culinary adaptation showcases the dual nature of food in cultural transfer – it can both preserve and disrupt cultural identities. While Ashima is able to recreate a taste of home, it is not the same as the authentic version, and this highlights the sense of loss and disconnection experienced by diasporic individuals.

Ashima's character in Lahiri's novel highlights the importance of food in cultural transfer and the role it plays in preserving and disrupting cultural identities. Through her culinary practices, Ashima expresses her longing for her homeland and her efforts to maintain her Indian identity. However, her cooking also reflects the challenges and conflicts of living in a foreign land and the evolving nature of cultural identities. The novel serves as a reminder that food is not just a way to nourish our bodies but also a way to connect with our past, present, and future. Similarly, Divakaruni's short story 'Mrs. Dutta Writes a Letter' also delves into the complex relationship between food and culture. Mrs. Dutta is an elderly immigrant struggling to adjust to life in America. She clings to her Indian heritage through food, using it as a way to maintain her sense of self and connect with her past. However, this also proves to be a source of conflict with her American-born children, who have adapted to a more westernized diet. This

conflict highlights the tension between preserving cultural traditions and assimilating into a new culture.

Through the use of food, Lahiri and Divakaruni effectively depict the challenges and complexities faced by diasporic individuals in negotiating their cultural identities. Food becomes a means of cultural exclusion as the characters are often seen struggling to fit into the dominant culture while holding on to their own traditions. It also reflects the larger societal pressure on immigrants to conform to the norms of their adopted country.

At the same time, food also serves as a conduit for cultural transfer in diasporic communities. It becomes a way for immigrants to maintain a connection with their homeland and pass on their cultural heritage to the next generation. In 'The Namesake,' Ashima's use of traditional recipes is her way of ensuring that her children stay connected to their Indian roots. Similarly, in 'Mrs. Dutta Writes a Letter,' Mrs. Dutta's insistence on cooking elaborate Indian meals for her daughter's American guests is a way of asserting her cultural identity in a foreign land. However, the reception of food in diasporic literature is not always positive. Food is also used as a symbol of resistance and defiance against traditional cultural norms. The novel explores the struggle of Mrs. Dutta to adapt to her new surroundings and maintain her cultural identity, while also trying to establish a connection with her son. Mrs. Dutta feels disconnected from her son, who she feels has become too Americanized, and embarks on a journey to reconnect with him through the one thing she knows best – food.

Through flashbacks and letters, the readers are taken on a journey through Mrs. Dutta's past, where she reminisces about her life in India as a young mother. These memories are often punctuated with descriptions of mouth-watering Bengali dishes, such as fish curry, samosas, and biryani. For Mrs. Dutta, these dishes are not just a part of her culture, but a way to express her love and care for her family. The most beautiful and profound bond between Mrs. Dutta and her son is activated by her cooking the food of his childhood. As Mrs. Dutta cooks her son's favorite dishes, she is able to connect with him on a deeper level and bridge the gap between their different cultural backgrounds. It is through food that she is able to express her love and understand her son's perspective on life in America. This highlights the role of food as a means of communication and connection between individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

However, the novel also portrays the clash between traditional and modern outlooks within the Indian diaspora. Mrs. Dutta's daughter-in-law, who is of Indian origin but raised in the United States, represents the modern outlook and is often at odds with Mrs. Dutta's traditional ways. The conflicts between the two women are often expressed in terms of food and cooking. In many Indian households, food is not just about nourishment but also a way to express love and care for one's family. Through the characters of Mrs. Dutta and her daughter-in-law, Divakaruni highlights the dynamics of cultural transfer and the importance of food in maintaining a sense of cultural identity among immigrants. The clash between the two women's culinary preferences also reveals the complexities of adapting to a new culture and the internal conflicts that arise when traditional cultural practices are challenged.

In many ways, food operates as a metaphor in Divakaruni's novel. It not only represents cultural identity but also serves as a medium to convey emotions and bridge the gap between generations. It also plays an important role in the economic and political aspects of the diasporic experience. The struggle of immigrants to find familiar ingredients and dishes to recreate the taste of home is a testament to the economic challenges they face in a new country. In addition, food also becomes a means of resistance and a way to negotiate one's identity in a new cultural environment. By preserving traditional cooking practices and passing them down to future generations, immigrants are able to hold onto a part of their culture and resist assimilation.

Divakaruni's 'Mrs. Dutta Writes a Letter' is just one of the many examples of how food operates as a powerful symbol in the immigrant experience. Her other works, such as 'The Mistress of Spices' and 'Sister of My Heart', also explore similar themes of cultural identity and family relationships through the lens of food. In all her novels, Divakaruni has emerged as a perfect interpreter of a cultural multiplicity, providing readers with a deeper understanding of the experiences of Indian immigrants in America. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels beautifully illustrate the relationship between food, cultural identity, and family bonds in the Indian diaspora. Through her poignant and evocative portrayals, she highlights the struggles and challenges faced by immigrants in maintaining their cultural heritage in a new country. Her works not only offer a glimpse into the vibrant and diverse Indian culture but also serve as a reminder of the power and significance of food in our lives.

In conclusion, food plays a central role in consolidating national identities in diasporic literature. As seen in the works of Lahiri and Divakaruni, it is often used as a means of negotiating different cultural conventions and serves as a marker of both cultural preservation and exclusion.

Food is a powerful tool that reflects the complexities of cultural transfer and highlights the challenges faced by diasporic individuals in reconciling their cultural identities in a new environment. As such, it serves as a significant element in the cultural imagination of diasporic populations and continues to play a vital role in shaping their identities.

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In Fear of the Sock: A Closer Look at the House-elves in *Harry Potter*

Merin Sabu

The *Harry Potter* universe was perhaps many a millennial's first taste of fantasy literature. The intricate world-building presented through seven books by JK Rowling, while not beyond criticism, is still praise-worthy and significant in its own right. However, for all the fantasy the books provide, reality and fiction merge when one inadvertently draws real life parallels between the 'others' in fiction, and the 'others' in the real world.

The *HP* universe is filled with divisions. Humans are classified as magic and non magic people, or 'muggles'. The ones who are considered magic, are further classified based on their blood status- Pureblood, Half-blood, and Muggle-born or Mudblood (a slur). Another classification occurs within the magical community, which has divided all magical creatures into either 'Beast', 'Being', or 'Spirit' (*Fantastic Beasts* xviii, xxiii). While reading HP, it becomes evident that while the magical community is a heterogeneous one, none of that heterogeneity transfers into the governing of said community. All the governing is handled almost entirely by the humans, or rather the 'Ministry of Magic', helmed by the witches and the wizards.

In *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, Rowling uses the character 'Newt Scamander' to talk about past efforts into the governing of the magical community. This included deciding who is considered 'beast' and who is considered 'being'. The book identifies 1811 as the year when the M.o.M decreed that a 'being' was "any creature that has sufficient intelligence to understand the laws of the magical community and to bear part of the responsibility in shaping those laws" (*Fantastic Beasts* xxii- xxiii). The 'beast' was then by definition the opposite of everything the 'being' was.

These definitions would allow house-elves, goblins, merpeople, werewolves, and centaurs, to name a few, to be considered as 'beings' along with the humans. However, the centaurs and merpeople declared they would manage their affairs, as they did not want to belong to the same category as creatures like hags and vampires. And werewolves are only considered 'beings' when in human form. Creatures like acromantulas, sphinxes, and manticores qualified as having intelligent speech. But they were not even offered the status as they tended to be extremely violent and lethal (*Fantastic Beasts* xxiv). The category of 'Spirits' was created as ghosts who'd been categorised under 'being' and had felt that the emphasis of

being was placed on being alive. As they were not alive the Ministry created another status to incorporate ghosts and several non-beings. *Fantastic Beasts* xxiii) The division should end there, but despite ministry mandates, the wizards tend to perceive the non-human magical creatures as the 'other', regardless of their being/beast status. And therein lies the problem.

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said criticises the European tradition of Orientalism which considers the Orient as the 'other' and hence inferior to the West. Orientalism, he says, is the "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient." The Orient is not an inert fact of nature, but a phenomenon constructed by generations of intellectuals, artists, commentators, writers, politicians, and more importantly, constructed by the naturalizing of a wide range of Orientalist assumptions and stereotypes (Ashcroft, 168). This imposing of white superiority over the projected inferiority of the East is acknowledged and addressed by him. This misrepresentation of the Orient was only to allow the West to see the fruition of their economic ambition. It is also to be noted that the relationship between the Occident and the Orient itself is a relationship of power, domination, and hegemony. The Western mind sees the Orient as the embodiment of all that they do not associate themselves with- cruelty, sensuality, incivility etc. There is also a tendency to see the East as a homogenous entity. The people thus become masses without identities of their own. This generalisation erases the individuality of that people, and emotions or reactions displayed by the 'other', is reduced to an act of racial instinct rather than conscious choice or decision. Homi Bhabha says that "The Other loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse" (31).

'Othering' is a term coined by Gayatri Spivak, to denote the process by which a hegemonic discourse creates its 'others'. The 'other' is the 'mastered' subject. According to Spivak, the creation of the 'other' as subjects also creates the colonizing Other. (Ashcroft et al., p. 156). The process of othering is dehumanising and persistent. It takes many forms and manifestations "to perpetuate the perennial hegemony of its discourse and to uphold its ideology of violence and domination" (Khaoula). By viewing someone or something unfamiliar as the 'other', and attributing it with negative inferences in accordance to the cultural context from which the 'other' is being viewed, this 'other' is being demonised to an extent and allows a reason for the viewer to assume and assert power over them. This is reminiscent of the way the Ministry of Magic which is the stronghold of wizards and witches assumes a role of power, and the 'other' is created in the magical creatures who are not humans. The 'others'

are forced to assume a position in the periphery or margin. The othering is systemic and justified by them.

The distinctions between creatures in the magical community are in many ways conflicted and unclear. But the fact that the Ministry of Magic took it upon itself to categorise all magical creatures rings an alarm regarding the self-centric view of the wizarding community. It is reminiscent of the coloniser who considered himself the saviour to the 'others' and imposed his rules and laws governing all. This action of the Ministry of Magic is not an impartial one. The other creatures are heavily under-represented in this ministry. The Ministry adopts an anthropocentric view where it sees the humans as the centre and other magical creatures as peripheries that stand around the wizarding community. This view is echoed in the statues set in the centre of the Ministry of Magic. The statues that stand in the entrance hall of the Ministry of Magic emulate the idea that the wizard, and hence the wizarding community, is the centre.

Halfway down the hall was a fountain. A group of golden statues, larger than life-size, stood in the middle of a circular pool. Tallest of them all was a noble-looking wizard with his wand pointing straight up in the air. Grouped around him were a beautiful witch, a centaur, a goblin, and a house-elf. The last three were all looking adoringly up at the witch and wizard. (*Order of Phoenix* 117)

The image created through these statues is a manifestation of the anthropocentric view of the wizard. While the titular character, Harry, does not think much of it the first time, later he realises that from what he knew, no goblin or centaur would ever look at humans of any description that way. He felt that "only the house-elf's attitude of creeping servility looked convincing" (*Order of Phoenix* 142). While certain characters like Harry and Dumbledore have been empathetic towards other creatures, that's not the case with the rest of the wizarding community. When Dobby meets up with Dumbledore for employment and asks for pay, Dumbledore offers him 10 gold-galleons (wizarding money) a week, and weekends off a decent amount even for a wizard. In the second book, *Chamber of Secrets*, at the young age of 12, Harry understands the mistreatment that is being meted out to Dobby. He can relate to the house-elf, who is stuck with a family that does not love him and is unable to leave. However, later on in the series, after years of contact with the magical community, Harry becomes less empathising as is clear from how he and Ron find Hermione's endeavour in Book 5, the Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare (SPEW), ridiculous. Ron even

says, ‘They. Like. It. They like being enslaved!’ (198) When Hermione deceives the house-elves into picking hats that she hid under waste papers in their common room, the forced liberation scares and angers the house-elves. Dobby becomes the only one who’d come to clean their rooms. But even Dobby backs out when Hermione mentions SPEW.

The intrusion and imposition of the ministry’s power onto other creatures starts with its formation of the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. All matters relating to magical creatures are delegated to this department which happens to be the second largest department in the Ministry of Magic. It is divided into three divisions according to the categorisations of magical creatures by the Ministry- Beast division, Being division, and Spirits division. It also houses the Goblin Liaison office, Centaur Liaison office, Pest Advisory Board, and Office of Misinformation. The Department is first spoken of in the 4th book, *Goblet of Fire*.

Another major imposition is the enforcement of the Wandless Act by the Ministry. This is first mentioned in the *Goblet of Fire* when Winky (Barty Crouch’s house-elf) is found near a wand and is accused of using a dark spell. A ministry official, Amos Diggory, is the one who finds her. On finding Winky with a wand he says, “Here, look. Had it in her hand. So that’s clause three of the Code of Wand Use broken, for a start. No non-human creature is permitted to carry or use a wand” (119). She is subsequently let off from her job as the house elf of Barty Crouch, a senior ministry official.

The Ministry of Magic had deemed it unlawful for any magical creature other than a wizard or a witch to possess, carry, or use a wand. In the text, the wand does not give a person the power to do magic. In the wrong hands, the wand is just another stick. The wand allows the magical powers in a person to be manifested more precisely. “The wand chooses the wizard,” is one of the recurring phrases in the *Harry Potter* books. This leads to the question as to why the Ministry would not allow ‘others’ to carry wands. It is common knowledge among the wizarding community that creatures like house-elves possess formidable magic. House-elves and goblins do magic out of sheer will, unlike humans who have to be taught. So, the only answer one may come to is that the Ministry is trying to curb the right of other creatures to extend their power and thus sustain its position higher than the ‘others’. If the wand chooses its owner, there does not have to be a restriction set by wizards regarding who must or must not own it. By restricting wands to just wizards and witches, the Ministry

is ensuring that humans remain the greater power. The wand is thus a symbol of the wizards' superiority over the others.

Since the usage of wands is restricted, the admittance of other creatures in institutions like the Ministry or Hogwarts or jobs in general becomes impossible. By curbing their right to use wands, the ministry is also denying them a place in the governance of the wizarding community. Griphook, a goblin addresses this in the last book, *Deathly Hallows*.

"The right to carry a wand," said the goblin quietly, "has long been contested between wizards and goblins." "Well, goblins can do magic without wands," said Ron. "That is immaterial! Wizards refuse to share the secrets of wand-lore with other magical beings, they deny us the possibility of extending our powers!" "Well, goblins won't share any of their magic either," said Ron. "You won't tell us how to make swords and armour the way you do. Goblins know how to work metal in a way wizards have never -" "It doesn't matter," said Harry, noting Griphook's rising colour. "This isn't about wizards versus goblins or any other sort of magical creature -" Griphook gave a nasty laugh. "But it is, it is precisely that! As the Dark Lord becomes ever more powerful, your race is set still more firmly above mine! Gringotts falls under Wizarding rule, house-elves are slaughtered, and who amongst the wand-carriers protests?" (395)

Ron, who belongs to the wizarding community, is only too ready to defend the actions of the wizards. When Griphook states an important point, Ron brings in the weak parallel of goblins not sharing their knowledge. Wizards are threatened by the great power house-elves and goblins possess without using a wand. If other magical creatures were to access more power, they would no longer remain the weaker, lesser 'other'.

The wand restriction was extended to include the muggle-borns too during the time Voldemort came to power the second time. If a muggle-born was found possessing one, their crime would be stealing a wizard or witch's wand. The Ministry was trying to make muggle borns look like people who are of the lowest Blood Status, hence unable to do magic. The Ministry's effort was to make the muggle-borns the 'other' just as they had made other magical creatures the 'other'. Just as the wizards had denied the right to use wands to other creatures, it now turns onto the side-lined amongst their own kind, under the pretext of keeping the wizarding community 'pure'.

The M.o.M had passed the Elfish Welfare Act in 1861. However, this was not implemented properly as several house-elves like Dobby were excessively punished and ill treated. Not much thought is wasted on house-elves in the wizarding world. The ministry's negligence is just another facet of the negligence the wizarding world employs when others' problems are at hand. Kingsley Shacklebolt, one of the good characters in *Harry Potter* says, "It's one short step from 'Wizards first' to 'Purebloods first' and then to 'Death Eaters'", are indicative of the wizard's compassion for his fellow humans, the muggles, and his belief in equality among humans (*Deathly Hallows* 357). It is natural that humans speak up for other humans. But what about the goblins who decided to stay neutral but still got slaughtered because of wizards, or the house-elves who must remain with their families despite having different allegiances, or werewolves like Lupin who decide to fight against Voldemort for a side that looks down on his kind. Stuck in the war of wand-holding wizards, other magical creatures find themselves incapable of fighting back let alone defending themselves. The question that remains (unanswered) is what becomes of the 'others'.

The case of the house-elf is particularly of interest because despite being categorized as 'beings' along with the wizards, they are not considered to be equal to them. The house elves are conditioned to servitude while the goblins are often considered untrustworthy because of their pride in their identity. The steady process of enslavement and conditioning the house-elves had undergone in the history of their world is not a part of the text. Their history is not only erased in the *Harry Potter* book series, but from the literature within the *HP* universe as well.

In *Deathly Hallows*, Hermione acknowledges this when she says 'Wizarding history often skates over what the wizards have done to other magical races' (409). Hermione, an avid reader, is unable to find anything related to elves in their library at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, other than their being enslaved for centuries. While there is information regarding the goblins and the centaurs, and several inter-racial wars, the house elves have been completely ignored. Despite Hogwarts having the largest number of house elves under a dwelling, there is no mention of them in '*Hogwarts, A History*'.

With the house-elves' stories being erased from history books, they are left without a history. Their identity has been created by their enslavers and their enslaved ancestors. This has led to an inability to come out of this warp of servitude in their consciousness. Frantz Fanon argued that "the first step for 'colonialised' people in finding a voice and an identity is

to reclaim their past". Without a history to their name or the memory of another 'history', the elves are denied any tools to move towards freedom or an identity of their own. Their identification as slaves or as free servants is a result of relentless conditioning from the wizards' side. Conditioning or rather 'social conditioning', is "The sociological process of training individuals in a society to act or respond in a manner generally approved by the society in general and peer groups within society" (*UNESCWA*). The wizards have conditioned the house-elves into believing that their objective in life is to serve the wizarding masters. Conditioning works most when certain approved behaviours are rewarded. By reinforcing the subject for their liked behaviour and by punishing them for the undesirable, the wizards were able to condition the house-elves to the point where that was all they knew.

Wizards and witches to bind house-elves and their progeny to their families for generations. And the elves serve, as in 'their nature' and according to their conditioning. The magical binding allows members of the wizarding community to treat house-elves as slaves. The house-elves are made to wear ill-formed pieces of cloth, like a pillowcase, rather than actual clothes because it is a mark of the house-elf's enslavement. Harry, and the readers, learn of this in the second book, *Chamber of Secrets*. Dobby goes on to say that he can be freed only if his masters present him with clothes.

The house-elves' conditioning is further proven through the stigma related to being liberated. Clothes break the magical bond and provide freedom. But the house-elves associate the act of receiving clothes with shame. They are made to feel as though their incompetence makes them lesser than 'good' elves.

"I told her to remain in the tent... And I find that she disobeyed me. This means clothes."
"No!" shrieked Winky, prostrating herself at Mr. Crouch's feet. "No, master! Not clothes, not clothes!" (*Goblet of Fire* 124)

Only centuries of abuse could make them think this way. This stigma makes the house-elves strive to get appreciation from their masters. Receiving compliments and being allowed to serve becomes their only wage. Being a free house-elf, is looked down upon and would make them outcasts. They believe that working for a wizarding family is better than being a free house-elf. When Winky says, "Winky is a disgraced elf, but Winky is not yet getting paid! Winky is not sunk so low as that! Winky is properly ashamed of being freed!" (*Goblet*

of Fire 331), she echoes the shame all house-elves associate with being free. They are conditioned to feel bad when they are 'free'.

The only notable exception that Rowling allows is Dobby. Dobby belonged to the Malfoys who used to mistreat him and encourage him to punish himself. Harry is the one who sets him free by tricking Mr. Malfoy into throwing a book with a sock at Dobby.

'Freedom is going to Dobby's head, sir,' said Winky sadly. Ideas above his station He is wanting paying for his work, sir. He is getting up to all sorts of high jinks sir, what is unbecoming to a house-elf' (*Goblet of Fire* 89-90)

Dobby says that families slam the door in his face when he asks if they're willing to pay for his service, saying, 'That's not the point of a house-elf!'. The other elves disapprove of Dobby's reasoning that he has to be paid as he is a free elf. They believe in belonging to a master, and that being an elf means being owned. They are only too proud to serve, as portrayed by the house-elves in Hogwarts.

The house-elves are considered luxuries that rich people own. Having a house-elf is an indicator of status in the books. George Weasley points out that, 'house-elves come with big old manors and castles and places like that; you wouldn't catch one in our house' (*Chamber of Secrets* 25). The three house-elves that appear in *Harry Potter* as characters Dobby, Winky, Kreacher, Hokey- were all owned by prestigious wizarding families.

Whenever Dobby makes a mention of his love for freedom, the other elves move away as if the feeling is a contagious disease. When Harry speaks with Winky, she says, 'House-elves is not supposed to have fun, Harry Potter... House-elves does what they is told. I is not liking heights at all...but my master sends me to the Top Box, and I comes, sir' (*Goblet of Fire* 90). She has been made to believe that her one purpose is to serve and obey. In the post-colonial context, one would call this the slavery of the mind. Mental slavery affects how people see their realities. Slavery of the mind is a state where one's mind becomes unable to distinguish between liberation and enslavement. For them, enslavement becomes liberation, and liberation is the equivalent of slavery. In the case of the house-elves, their minds have been enslaved by their masters into believing that their sole purpose is to serve. An example of mental slavery is Winky's behaviour after being let go by her master, Barty Crouch Sr. When Dobby mentions happily that he found that Winky had been freed, she

flings herself off her stool and lay face down, beating her tiny fists upon the floor and positively screaming in misery. (*Goblet of Fire* 330)

Winky is a house-elf who served her 'family' well and stuck with them through thick and thin (not that she had a say in the matter). She plays a significant role in keeping a family secret throughout the course of the novel *Goblet of Fire*. When Crouch Sr. smuggles out his son from the wizarding prison, Azkaban, it is Winky's job to look after him. While Crouch Sr controlled him using the Imperius curse, Winky kept his best interests in mind and offered to take him out once in a while. She is forced to sit with him during the Quidditch World Cup, even though she is afraid of heights. Because she couldn't control Barty Crouch Jr, she is let off from her position as the house-elf of the Crouch family. But even after 'getting the sock' because of her failure in controlling him, she stays loyal to them, never revealing this crucial information or even disrespecting them. After getting a job at Hogwarts, she takes to drinking and worries constantly about the Crouch family. Her behaviour shows that she loves her master, and in turn being his servant, even though he treats her ruthlessly.

The main trio in *Harry Potter* learns that there are house-elves in Hogwarts only when a ghost says it in passing. They were completely unaware of the existence of the large number of house-elves that worked for the school.

"They come out at night to do a bit of cleaning . . . see to the fires and so on. . . . I mean, you're not supposed to see them, are you? That's the mark of a good house-elf, isn't it, that you don't know it's there?" (*Goblet of Fire* 161)

This invisibility of the house-elf is a repeated idea in the books. The house-elves are not only barred from having a voice or presence in history but they're also told they are 'good' if their presence is not felt.

Despite the generalisation made by the wizards regarding house-elf behaviour, J K Rowling shows their individuality by portraying their behaviours towards humans they like in juxtaposition to ones that antagonise them. She shows that they respond to affection as well as malevolence. According to the wizarding laws, their loyalty must lie with the house they serve. But there are two separate instances in *Harry Potter*, where the house-elves' actions are not in favour of the house. The first is when Dobby meets Harry to warn him of a danger in Hogwarts. The readers are made aware later that Mr. Malfoy (Dobby's master) had placed a diary in Ginny Weasley's cauldron in a ploy to get rid of it. The diary originally

belonged to Lord Voldemort- the main antagonist in the book series- and had been made a horcrux by him. The portion of his soul in the horcrux takes control of Ginny and unleashes a Basilisk (a deadly beast) on muggle-born students to kill them. Dobby lets him know the bare minimum, fully aware that he'd have to punish himself. This display of disloyalty is because of the ill treatment meted out to him.

Kreacher's disloyalty results in the death of his owner, Sirius Black, Harry's godfather. Sirius Black was an outcast of the Black family. He was the first in the family to be in any house but Slytherin. He did not share their bias towards anyone based on blood or breed (one of his best friends was the werewolf, Lupin) and had left the house at age 16 to live with his best friend and Harry's father, James Potter's house, till he could live on his own. His actions pained his mother who eventually blasted him out of the family tree tapestry. Kreacher adored Sirius' mother and after her death, he followed the outrageous instructions that her portrait asked him to do. Sirius returning to the mansion only reawakened Kreacher's dislike for him. Kreacher blamed him for Mrs. Black's ill health and shared her dislike for the half bloods and 'mudbloods'. He says of Sirius,

Smells like a drain and a criminal to boot.... oh my poor Mistress, if she knew, if she knew the scum they've let in her house, what would she say to old Kreacher, oh the shame of it, Mudbloods and werewolves and traitors and thieves, poor old Kreacher, what can he do... (*Order of Phoenix* 100)

Sirius in his stead also disliked the house-elf heartily, but not because he held any bias towards house-elves. But he was different to Kreacher, probably because Kreacher served as a reminder of his cruel family. Dumbledore can be quoted as saying that he'd asked Sirius to treat him with kindness but that he didn't see him as "a being with feelings as acute as a human" (*Order of Phoenix* 733) Even though he disliked the elf, he never punished the elf or mistreated him. However, the lack of affection from his owner caused Kreacher to reach out to Bellatrix Lestrange, Sirius' cousin and prominent member of Voldemort's army, the Death Eaters, eventually leading to Sirius' demise in Book 5. As if it were a late realisation, Dumbledore says "we wizards have mistreated and abused our fellows for too long, and we are now reaping our reward" (*Order of Phoenix* 735) This is further proven when Kreacher responds to kindness in *Deathly Hallows* despite both parties' initial hostility.

Edward Said in *Orientalism* says that ‘the gradual establishment of an empire depended upon a stable hierarchical relationship in which the colonised existed as the ‘other’ of the colonising nature’. In the context of the *Harry Potter* books, it’d be right to assume that the wizards created the ‘other’ in magical beings including house-elves to establish a power structure. Without these binaries, no comparison can take place and without comparison, no othering can either. We are also able to see that even someone like Sirius considered elves as being inferior to wizards and witches. This belief extended all through the magical community. Hermione and Harry, who were brought up by non-magic folk, are the only ones who aren’t able to understand this ‘othering’ or the stigma attached to an elf who likes being free and seeks employment with pay. The binary created is that of an ‘inferior’ and the ‘master’. The statue at the Ministry of Magic portrays how much the wizards think of themselves as greater in comparison with the elves. Reality would be different. The novels show that while wizards and witches use the agency of a wand to perform magic, house-elves are perfectly able to do magic without one. They are capable of doing magic out of sheer will. They need not be taught magic like the wizards and witches. They are able to control their magic, and ‘apparate’ without being taught. This particular ability of the elves becomes a saving grace for the characters more than once in the novels. In Book 5, Dobby apparates into the Room of Requirements to warn Harry and the others, thus preventing their expulsion from Hogwarts. In Book 7, he saves them from the Malfoys’ clutches seconds before Voldemort arrives, thus preventing their death and inviting his own. In Book 7, Kreacher recounts how Voldemort made him drink a draught of a potion that makes one completely exhausted, to prepare a proper hiding place for one of his horcruxes. He was then dragged into the water around it by the dead. Kreacher escapes only because of his ability to apparate from the cave, which a wizard wouldn’t have been able to do. Voldemort, just like many other wizards, underestimates the magical prowess of the house-elves.

The continued enslavement of the house-elves may also be considered a testament to the wizards’ fear that the house-elves may surpass their powers once they learn more of their own. Nowhere in the book is mentioned a school for the elves so one may assume the masters preferred the house-elves to remain submissive, confined to the household, and without knowledge. And it has been demonstrated through Dobby that house-elves are capable of doing strong magic. Dobby uses a strong enchantment to seal the gateway in the King Cross Station which only wizards and witches can cross. He hexes a Bludger to hurt Harry to

make him leave Hogwarts and later uses his magic so that his earlier master Malfoy wouldn't hurt Harry. Winky's ability to bind her master's son is another instance of the power of elf magic. The fact that she is accused of using a wand to summon the dark mark indicates that house elves are capable of performing magic using the wand and would have been far more powerful had they not been restricted from using the wand.

The wizarding community, despite rebellion from other magical creatures, has held dominion over the magical community, in the *HP* universe. They've crafted a system that dehumanises the 'other'. The categories they've created under the guise of governance, and the hegemony that sustains their power, are instrumental in keeping the 'other' as one. The house-elves form a big part of the narratives in *Harry Potter*, however, the good house-elf is invisible and invisible they stay even in their subjugation. Unlike most 'beings' who value their autonomy, the house-elf fears it. And, it'd not be a far-reaching assumption that the name 'house-elf' instead of 'elf' contains the story of their subjugation.

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Racial Oppression in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Binil K. R. & Rejini T. K.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, is the autobiography of Maya Angelou, published in the year 1969. The author describes the early years—the age of three to the age of sixteen. At the tender age of three, Marguerite Johnson moves from California to a little town called Stamps in Arkansas and with her older brother Bailey. Because of their parents' marriage problems, the children were ordained to go and live with their paternal grandmother, Annie Henderson—their Momma. The children spend their days in the Store, held in reserve up by Momma and their Uncle Willie. It was in the black section of the town. Momma is the center and the moral compass in Angelou's life and her brother is her pride and joy. Angelou was in oppression in her childhood by racism and self-hatred was the result. After that, she was doing chores, reading books, and going on adventures, Angelou's father appears out of nowhere and takes her and Bailey to St. Louis. Their father, Big Bailey allows the children to live with their mother Vivian. When she was eighteen, o Angelou is raped by her mother's boyfriend, Mr. Freeman. After an unjust conviction, Mr. Freeman is released and killed, presumably by her uncles. Angelou was in shame and possible guilt after the rape. She stops speaking to anyone except Bailey. After that, her silence starts frustrating her family and they decide to send the children back to Stamps. Then, Momma introduces her to Mrs. Flowers, a gentle and educated woman who starts teaching Angelou the ways how to expose herself and regain her voice. In this time, she starts studying the weaknesses and strengths of her black community. She slowly finds different ways to fight racist oppression by silently protesting against her white oppressors.

When she was fourteen, Angelou and Bailey move back in with their mother, now lives in California. Vivian marries Daddy Clidell—is the first father figure in Angelou's life. While spending her vacation with her biological father, Angelou gets stabbed by his jealous girlfriend Dolores and runs away to live in a junkyard with other teenagers. She then returns to live with her mother in San Francisco as a strong and confident woman. She defies all laws when she starts working as the town's first black female streetcar conductor at only fifteen years old. In the last chapter of her autobiography, Angelou explains how she became pregnant at the age of sixteen and keeps as secret from her family. She gets education from high school and becomes mother to a beautiful son. This paper will focus on the issues related to racial oppression and the protest against racism.

Maya Angelou takes the motivation from Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem *Sympathy*. Here, in his poem, the caged bird sings because of frustration – it is imprisoned and its song becomes a prayer. Angelou sets her younger self in a similar situation; she is like a caged bird, imprisoned by self-hatred and racial oppression. She does not let the cage confine her: the cage becomes a vehicle for her self-realization. In her autobiography, Angelou explains how she adapted to her role as a young Black girl and also we can see all the failures on the way to her realization of how to discover herself and be comfortable in her own skin (McMurry 106). Racism was based on the belief that the racially oppressed were not human beings historically, like slaves. In response, Afro-American authors wrote texts that proved the opposite, saying they were humans who did not deserve such a treatment. Afro-American authors started to fight the beliefs in racial hierarchies and it classified them into second class citizens. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is a typical representative of this viewpoint, being written to prove just how undeservingly Maya Angelou “was placed into a lower category of society in her childhood, just based on her skin-color” (Walker 93). Maya Angelou designs *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* as a sequence of lessons that express her race and identity, but also lead the reader from “helpless rage and indignation to subtle resistance” and finally outright active protest against racial oppression” (Walker 93).

One of the most impactful stories happens at the opening pages of the autobiography. It is an anecdote from Easter Sunday in Stamps. Maya gets ready for the celebration of Easter in her Church and for the poem recital. Momma gave a lavender dress for her to wear. While watching Momma make the dress, Maya believes it the most beautiful thing she has ever seen and believes it has magical powers, thinking that the dress will change her into a white girl: “I was going to look like one of the sweet little white girls who were everybody's dream of what was right with the world” (2). On Easter morning, the depressing reality is expressed: “But Easter's early morning sun had shown the dress to be a plain ugly cut-down from a white woman's once-was-purple throw-away” (2). It does not keep any magic anymore and only shows that she lives in a “black dream” from which she cannot escape (Arensberg 278). While looking into the crowd in the church, Maya still thinks of her as a white girl in the wrong body. She thinks just how sorry would everyone be for mocking her if they knew the truth: “Wouldn't they be surprised when one day I woke out of my black ugly dream, and my real hair, which was long and blond, would take the place of the kinky mass that Momma wouldn't let me straighten?” (2). She then mixes the elements of fairy tale into the story by imagining a

cruel fairy stepmother who had changed her from a beautiful white girl into her present condition. When she fails to recite her poem and the whole Church starts laughing, Maya is overwhelmed with emotions and escapes the church peeing and crying.

This story introduces Marguerite Johnson as an extremely self-conscious child at a young age. She confesses her racial self-hatred by believing that underneath the ugly dress, her skinny legs, broad feet, nappy hair, and the space between her teeth hides the real Marguerite Johnson – a sweet white girl with blond hair and blue eyes (McMurry 106). Maya completely separates herself from her race and falls into an identity crisis.

Another important one is Maya describes her dress as sounding “like crepe paper on the back of hearses” (2). It shows that Maya mourns the death of her white dream and her white body. Her black body carries her dead dream and is the question of her existence, which is constantly threatened by white people. This opening incident presents Angelou’s inability to control her appearance, words, bodily functions and even thoughts and dreams. She starts realizing that she is not a sweet little white girl, Maya becomes embarrassed about her appearance and struggles to remember the words of her poem, leaving the church in tears. This episode could be described as the epiphanic moment of her youth. It presents us with the two main struggles in Angelou’s early life: her blackness and her outcast position in her community. As McMurry says, she “is in a cage which conceals and denies her true nature, and she is aware of her displacement” (107). Angelou concludes this story by saying: “If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat. It is an unnecessary insult” (4). She acknowledges how unnecessary this white fantasy” is in her generally painful childhood, but she continues to fantasize about this unreachable dream. Angelou also introduces the reader to her daily situations and people she is surrounded with.

In some stories, she depicts the racial oppression and segregation in her town and brings us into her own thoughts, where it is visible what she thinks of the oppressor the white race in general. Maya mentions the cotton pickers who would usually come to Momma’s Store. She talks about their caged condition, being trapped in the cotton fields without any chance to escape (McMurry 107): “But I had seen the fingers cut by the mean little cotton bolls and I had witnessed the backs and shoulders and arms and legs resisting any further demands” (8). Maya’s community instilled the realistic fear of whites into her. Momma once

said, she “didn’t cotton to the idea that whitefolks could be talked to at all without risking one’s life” (39).

A sheriff comes to the Store to warn Momma of the boys (the Klan) who might hurt Uncle Willie, just because a black man messed with a white lady. Angelou comments: “His confidence that my uncle and every other Black man who heard of the Klan’s coming ride would scurry under their houses to hide in chicken dropping was too humiliating to hear” (18). This episode shows how humiliating it was for every Black man to fear for his life, even if he was innocent and it is because of the color of his skin (Arensberg 282). Angelou again says that “the Black woman in the South who raises sons, grandsons and nephews had her heartstrings tied to a hanging noose” (95). Another incident of violence towards African Americans was when a black man was killed and thrown into a pond, just because he had had sex with a white woman. Then, Bailey finds himself near a pond, where the body of a dead black man is found in shock, and starts to interrogate why white people hate Black people cruelly. Then, Bailey is aware of the insecurity in their life. Angelou again says that Bailey was away in a mystery, locked in the enigma that young Southern Black boys start to unravel, start to try to unravel, from seven years old to death. The humorless puzzle of inequality and hate. His experience raised the question of worth and values, of aggressive inferiority and aggressive arrogance (198).

Angelou also expresses how severe the segregation was in Stamps. When she talks about the Black area of Stamps, she idealizes it: she lives under the care of her family, knows all the Black people in town, people help each other (mostly financially), and find comfort in each other. She feels safe and at home there and leads a normal life. The community is religion-centered, and God connects them with one another. Yet, when she talks about Whitefolksville, Angelou compares herself with an explorer “walking without weapons into man-eating animals’ territory” (25). They have been taught from a young age that white people are to be avoided.

Angelou calls to white people as “white folks” (26). Her friends are only humans, but not white people. The prejudice in her town goes to such an extent that “Black people cannot buy vanilla ice cream and need to be satisfied with chocolate” (49). Even in such a situation, black people develop an admiration for everything that belongs to white people. Maya is most envious of their opportunity to waste things: “They had so many clothes they were able to give perfectly good dresses, worn just under the arms, to the sewing class at our school for the larger girls to practice on” (49). On the other hand, every generous offer in the Black

community has been preceded by some kind of sacrifice. Maya even believes that “God is white, but not prejudiced” (50) and it explains why white people have the right to live so lavishly while Black people silently observe. The reality of growing up as a Black child especially a Black girl in a white dominated society is that childhood and violence go hand in hand in such communities Chapter five begins by Angelou explaining the basic rules of her household: “Thou shall not be dirty’ and ‘Thou shall not be impudent’” (27).

A child who is impudent brings shame and destruction upon their family. She also adds that “everyone [she] knew respected these customary laws, except for the powhitetrash children” (28). With this statement, she begins to tell one of the crucial stories in the autobiography. The story takes place when Maya is only ten years old. Momma is standing in front of the Store when some powhitetrash girls approach her. Maya hides inside, while Momma keeps standing on the porch humming a hymn. The girls tease Momma, mimic, and insult her appearance and behavior. Maya observes the scene, filled with humiliation and anger. Momma does not move nor address the children. As the girls leave, Momma enters the Store with a radiant look on her face.

Maya is depressed by the situation and feels humiliated and helpless and wants to hurt the girls for disrespecting her grandmother. After that, Momma says a polite goodbye to the girls, Maya’s rage peaks. She cannot comprehend why her grandmother has respect for such children. When she finally looks into her “grandmother’s face, she realizes that her grandmother has achieved something by not responding to the impudent children. Angelou also emphasizes the dirtiness of the children: “the dirt of the girls’ cotton dresses continued on their legs, feet, arms, and faces to make them all of a piece” (31). On the other hand, Angelou and her grandmother serve as an example of cleanliness and order. In chapter sixteen, Maya’s reaction to racial oppression progresses even further. She is employed as Mrs. Cullinan’s helper. When Mrs. Cullinan was a rich white lady and she continuously neglects and avoids Maya’s name and keeps calling her Mary, Maya decides to express her emotions by smashing Mrs. Cullinan’s favorite dishes. This occurs because, as Angelou explains, “[e]very person I knew had a hellish horror of being called out of his name. It was dangerous practice to call a Negro anything that could be loosely construed as insulting because of the centuries of their having been called niggers, jigs, dinges, blackbirds, crows, boots and spooks” (109). She takes matters into her own hands and decides to reclaim her own identity (Walker 99). Angelou does not feel humiliated anymore after doing this and shows she has learned her lesson after

the powhitetrash episode. In another chapter, the community is following a boxing match between Joe Louis, a black man, and a white man. The whole black race awaits the victory of Louis because otherwise, back in slavery and beyond help. It would all be true, the accusations that [they] were lower types of human beings” (135). His final victory fills his fans with racial pride: “Champion of the world. A Black boy. Some Black mother’s son. He was the strongest man in the world” (136).

His success is also a spiritual victory for his whole race. Angelou shows that everybody who was out of town needed to spend the night in Stamps because it would be difficult and dangerous for a black man to walk the road on the night when it was proven that black people “were the strongest people in the world” (136).

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Going Vegan: a Hunt for Bodily Independence in the Novel “The Vegetarian”

Meleesiya Johny & Gils M. George

From the past to the present, food was a basic need of society that never changed. They are providing different feelings and representing different emotions to the people who consume them. Furthermore, food has a relationship with man that extends beyond their physical health, mental strength and psychology and plays a significant role in shaping one's identity in several ways. It has different meanings for different people; for some, it is a necessity, while for others, it may be their identity, memory, or experiences. As a result, we can conclude that man is constantly intimate with food which is not only their consumption but also its connection with the social life of a man. When we consider food to be important; we perceive it in a number of ways depending on how we utilize it. There are several food-related concepts that may be recognized while comparing past and contemporary societies. When we look at food concepts from the past, it can be noted that they were very different from those of today. We see people from the past as having a different approach to food than people today. Along with necessity, they now exist with different notions that are far from satisfying an individual's appetite.

While considering contemporary society, the concept of food has changed a lot, and new dimensions of what food is have entered the lives of people. Food has acquired various functions over time, one of the most important of which is that of a social device. By social device, it is meant that food helps to connect people and create good relationship and time between individuals. Along with food becoming a social tool, it is also a symbol for social status. Another notion for food is food as a commodity. All these notion symbolizes food has social life too as like man.

Some of the notions of food as a social tool can be understood from the literature too. “The Vegetarian” is a novel by South Korean writer Han Kang. It was first published in South Korea in 2007 and was translated into English in 2015 by Deborah Smith. The title translates to “The Vegetarian” from the Korean version of “The Vegetarian Diary”. The novel follows the journey of a woman named Yeong-hye, who steers clear of eating meat after having vivid, disquieting dreams. This decision incites a chain of events that disturbs the lives of her family and the culture of South Korea. “The Vegetarian” is structured as a three-part novel,

each of which tells the story from the point of view of one of the characters. As the protagonist's resolve to remain vegetarian deepens, so does the conflict within her family, as well as her relationship with social norms. The novel explores themes of power, desire, rebelliousness, and social expectations, along with the psychological intricacies of the characters. It has been praised for its lyricism and provocative themes, as well as its human behavior. Han Kang's work gained international attention in 2016 when it won the Man Booker International Prize.

The novel explores much of the important themes related to food and its social life. It particularly shows the way how food is being related to an individual's life and how it becomes a stake to one's own life and identity as such, and makes one being cornered and criticized in the society so as in the novel "the Vegetarian". The novel focuses on the South Korean culture as such, and its food habits which the author uses to describe the patriarchy, overpowering culture, stake of identity, lack of body autonomy, mental health and social conformity.

The novel goes along with life-changing instances of the protagonist of the novel Yeong-hye's, whose choice challenges societal norms and highlights the themes of control, desire, and rebellion. The novel's unique narrative structure and vivid imagery make it a compelling read that delves into the complexities of identity and freedom. The novel through the character of Yeong-hye highlights the situation of an individual being alone in a society like the South Korea just for being a vegetarian. Here, these situations of a middle-class woman being targeted by her family and society is the major instance of the novel. Hence the rejection of the ideology of vegetarianism in the South Korean culture can be seen in particular in this novel.

Here, the novel brings out one of its major theme of bodily autonomy through the fight of Yeong-hye to gain control over her own body. The novel being divided into three parts, the first part is being narrated by Yeong-hye's husband Mr. Cheong. The opening lines of the novel described by Mr. Cheong about his wife's vegetarianism hints the reader to the past and present of the character's family life which in turn show that everything was fine before his wife chose to be a vegetarian in their family life.

Before my wife turned vegetarian, I'd always thought of her as completely unremarkable in every way. To be frank, the first time I met her I wasn't even attracted to her. Middling height; bobbed hair neither long nor short; jaundiced, sickly-looking skin; somewhat prominent

cheekbones; her timid, sallow aspect told me all I needed to know. As she came up to the table where I was waiting, I couldn't help but notice her shoes—the plainest black shoes imaginable. And that walk of hers—neither fast nor slow, striding nor mincing.(kang,10)

From the opening of the novel, Mr.Cheong comments on Yeong-hye. From his description the readers get the idea that she is his wife and they do not have anything in common for being together in life. However, if there wasn't any special attraction, nor did any particular drawbacks present themselves, and there was no reason for the two of us not to get married. The passive personality of this woman in whom I could detect neither freshness nor charm, or anything especially refined, suited me down to the ground (kang, 10). From these view point of Mr.Cheong the readers get to know that love is something that is missing among them. For Mr.Cheong what he needed was a typical obeying wife that he got from Yeong-hye but Yeong-hye never got a supportive attitude from Cheong for any of her opinions. Yeong-hye is depicted to be an introvert by Cheong and her character is being brought to the readers by Cheong, her husband himself, and the whole novel shows the character of Yeong-hye from others point of view not from Yeong-hye's view of herself, which immediately shows that, how a woman being judged by the society and her family and she being voiceless. In case of Yeong-hye, her self is being hidden from the readers by the author and a third person point is being used for her description. Mr. Cheong's opinions thus show how patriarchal he is which there by shows Yeong-hye's submissive nature to everything. The opening itself shows her vegetarianism to be the sole problem happening to the family by Mr.Cheong, which indeed let the readers know that how vegetarianism is a problem that is described as a identity issue in the Korean culture.

The opening lines make the reader clear that how Yeong-hye being made the sole responsible person for the problems of her fer family life just by choosing to be a vegetarian who in a way shows that how a woman's descision has been treated by the patriarchy, like Mr.Cheong who is the controlling husband make an issue of his wife's descision thereby highlights the point that how important a woman has to be obidient to her husband's norms and live accordingly without making a choice for their own. So here the vegetarianism become a stake to Yeong-hye's autonomy over her body and indeed affect her identity as a wife and woman.

Vegetarianism has shown to be an important cultural conflict in the novel, which is different in different culture, like that of India and its Hindu culture which embraces the

vegetarianism that contributes to a status of eliteness to the one who practice vegetarianism like that of the upper class bhraminical society. There vegetarianism led to the uplifting of a higher class, which is something missing in western countries as of in South Korean culture shown in the novel.

The quest for bodily autonomy, in the novel can be considered from the views of Yeong hye as well as that of In-hye, Yeong-hye's sister. So in particular the novel shows the quest for bodily independence to be a problem happening to the woman characters rather than the men in the novel that shows how men are powerful enough to control the freedom of a woman's body. 'Bodily autonomy' was a term first coined in 1994 by the Black Women's Caucus of the Illinois Pro-Choice alliance, a feministic movement which aimed to increase the bodily autonomy of marginalised populations(Body autonomy: meaning, rights and theory) . Bodily autonomy means my body is for me; my body is my own. It's about power, and it's about agency(Bodily autonomy:a fundamental right). It's about choice, and it's about dignity.

Yeong-hye, her days before being a vegetarian, was controlled by her husband, like that of her dressing where Cheong want Yeong-hye to wear a bra which Yeong-hye does not want to. But she was to be surrendered in front of her husband. This is an instance from the novel which shows how Yeong-hye being losing her freedom to dress up which in turn is on the sametime controlled by her husband and also by the society through their shameful gazes. So it is not only vegetarianism that has controlled Yeong-hye's life but anything that she does against the society's notion and against the patriarchy that rules. Eventhough she does not have a choice of her own by the novel still shows her autonomy in case of her body, but that is being judged by her loved one's like her husband. However, despite Yeong-hye's body is not described as a kind of beautiful woman based on her husband's objectification, her eyelid and prominent cheekbones show 'originality' face of Korean women. If it is associated with the context of plastics surgery, which was increasingly attracted by women in Korea, it shows that Yeong-hye is not referring to the standard of Korean women's beauty which often performs plastic surgery, to enlarge their eyelids and pointed their cheek bones and jaws. Hence, Yeong-hye character's description was like, she maintains her body shape is an indication of Yeong-hye's independence in possessing her own body. The description indicates that she does not care with her appearance which is the opposite of ideal standard of women's beauty in men's perspective. Nevertheless, it shows Yeong-hye's subjectivity

does not stuck in construction of ideal body, which is formed and discoursed by domination of masculine appraisal (Savitri, 3).

Yeong-hye had power in her hands of her body but looses it when she wanted to be a vegetarian. Bet she fought even after getting objections and later tries to assert her autonomy over her body in a violent way. Her choice challenges traditional gender roles and expectations, particularly in South Korean society, where women are often expected to conform to societal norms and expectations, including their dietary choices. Yeong-hye's figure before and after being a vegetarian is commented in the novel which indeed highlights a woman's beauty and perfect body. In *The Vegetarian*, Yeong-hye's experiences match the definition of suffering Levinas expounds: disturbing the order and being rejected. Yeong-hye's suffering originates from her rejection and challenge of the reigning norms of the society through her two refusals—not to wear a bra and not to eat meat (Kim,3).

Eventhough Yeong-hye's dream made her a vegetarian that was a decision absurd for her family and society around her. Not only her husband but even her own family does not supported her. Eventhough it was Yeong-hye's choice of being a vegetarian it seemed to be that she was being criticized by everyone including Mr.Cheong. Cheong considered his wife's action to be an act done out of madness or possession and he even consider that a person only clears meat when he is upto dieting this was the initial thought of Chong when he saw Yeong-hye throwing the meat into waste. As far as I was concerned, the only reasonable grounds for altering one's eating habits were the desire to lose weight, an attempt to alleviate certain physical ailments, being possessed by an evil spirit, or having your sleep disturbed by indigestion. In any other case, it was nothing but sheer obstinacy for a wife to go against her husband's wishes as mine had done(kang,15). This was the thought going in the mind of Chong when he saw his wife's act.

This thought of Mr.Cheong describes how difficult it was for Yeong-hye to stand for her vegetarianism which in turn shows more of Yeong-hye's tough times to make her decision clear to her husband and family. Mr.Cheong becomes frustrated day by day with Yeong-hye's ignorance. Here more than Yeong-hye's personal preference of being a vegetarian is not the matter but her quest for her own space and autonomy, which was attributed by Mr.Cheong as madness, crazy, possessed, selfishness and obviously going against her husband. So being a vegetarian, Yeong-hye was attributed as a rebel to the social and gender norms eventhough, it was completely a personal choice.

Being under high influence of patriarchy she could not help to find space for herself. Even her decision of denning sex was not respected by her husband who forces her and rapes her. This is the working of patriarchy and lust shown in the novel “The Vegetarian”. This is even the instance of Yeong-hye losing her autonomy. Even the gathering Yeong-hye attended with her husband’s colleagues and family was indeed an important instances which Kang used to show the society’s notion where her vegetarianism was not accepted by none in the gathering and everyone ignored her and stops talking to her. Her identity as a vegetarian made her out from the group.

Not only Yeong-hye’s husband but her decision was not accepted by her family too. Her father and mother forcefully made her to eat meat and that made her cut her wrist out of resistance which in turn shows her violent reaction and resistance to the society’s compulsion. Though In-hye sprang at him and held him by the waist, in the instant that the force of the slap had knocked my wife’s mouth open he’d managed to jam the pork in. As soon as the strength in Yeong-hye’s arms was visibly exhausted, my wife growled and spat out the meat. An animal cry of distress burst from her lips (Kang, 28). This instance shows her frustrated resistance where just to stop everyone from forcing her to eat meat she was forced to cut down her wrist. Here too she was forced to injure herself to make her point and to assure her autonomy from the patriarchy of her father. The novel shows thus the control of every man over the woman characters in the novel. On contrary to In-hye and Yeong-hye’s mother Yeonge-hye was coming out from the norms of the control, but her mother who was completely under the control of patriarchy and the so called cultural norms felt it difficult to accept her daughter’s vegetarianism, but more than her being avoiding meat her ignorance to her husband’s decision made Yeong-hye’s mother desperate to make her daughter eat meat.

Eventhough Yeong-hye was abandoned by Mr. Cheong who felt Yeong-hye being mad. Even after freed by Mr. Cheong, Yeong-hye was not free. She was exploited by her Brother-in-Law. The second section of the novel “The Mongolian Mark” goes on with the lust being the fact that rejected Yeong-hye’s autonomy. Yeong-hye was used by her Brother-in-Law, who reaped her and recorded her videos which was again Yeong-hye’s losing her autonomy. She was free and naked in front of him who used her to satisfy his lust through his male gaze. Eventhough, Yeong-hye was initially submissive for the sexual encounter by her Brother-in-Law, later she was not but could not resist him using her body to gratify his lust. Here along with Yeong-hye the character of In-hye too is being resisted from her personal space and

choices. She was being cheated by her husband and was in a marriage where she was involved in just for the sake of her child. Here even In-hye was too under the influence of patriarchy and was controlled by her husband, she was too controlled by the patriarchy. She was forced to look after her sister and child as having her duty forefront by ignoring her emotions and dreams, which in turn is a symbolic of In-hye losing control over her life in front of duty.

The final part of the novel “The Vegetarian”, “The Flaming Trees” goes on with the complete transformation of Yeong-hye. Here Yeong-hye has completely considers her just like that of a tree which in fact shows her desire to involve with nature rather than being in the material world with restriction. Even though being completely away from the material world she was not able to thrive without the rules of the society. The last section of the novel shows how Yeong-hye has completely abandoned having food and was admitted to a hospital where she was forced to have food by the hospital staff and In-hye allow them to do so but later realized the real meaning and importance of body autonomy she herself asked her sister to be free from the world’s cruel norms, which is the real time where Yeong-hye attains her real freedom in the novel and In-hye realizes what her sister was trying to do and what she needed.

The Vegetarian is no way a derivative novel. Margaret Atwood’s “The Edible Woman”, a ground breaking work of feminist fiction, is an obvious comparison. Yeong-hye finds herself, like Atwood’s Marian McAlpin, unable to live within the restrictions of society, and like Marian she does not choose to protest — her body does it for her. But unlike in The Edible Woman, Yeong-hye’s problem cannot be reversed: Cheong divorces her and she lives on her own for a while, but repeatedly ends up in hospital, first for psychiatric care, and finally for intensive care when she refuses all nourishment and even an IV drip fails to revive her (Jamadar, 181).

The novel “The Vegetarian”, portrays the plot of a woman being in hunt for her bodily autonomy in the material world. Through the element of vegetarianism in the novel highlights the themes of bodily autonomy and how woman being controlled by a patriarchy it also generate different notions of food. The paper discuss on the major ideas of food and identity, personal space, relationship, gender etc. The novel brings out food and vegetarianism as an element that made the characters possibly realize their need to attain freedom and to fight so the novel shows vegetarianism as an act of resistance to the notion of what society put forward to act to an individual. It shows the rejection of social and cultural identity and the rejection of

patriarchal norms. Even food is a source of subjugation in society which is indeed makes a person slave to diets and beauty. This is infact a way of controlling the society.

Through the character of Yeong-hye in the novel “The Vegetarian”, it is being highlighted that food and its principle control a man and takeaway his liberty to act especially for woman. Here food even is portrayed in the novel as a power structure that is being used by the patriarchy to control the woman of the society and even the society to control an individual. Also the novel focuses on the importance of attaining bodily independence to onself. Yeong-hye’s vegetarianism can be in a way a primary step to her hunt to obtain her bodily autonomy which she gains at last.

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Rewriting Epics, Redrawing Margins: A Reading of S. Ramakrishnan's *Aravaan* and Karthika Nair's *The Capillaries of Cosmic Bodies*

Sneha Maria Mathew

Adrienne Rich defines revisioning as “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction... as an act of survival.” (18) Rich’s definition of writing as revision fits perfectly with the way Ramakrishnan and Nair have modelled *Aravaan* and *Ulupi*. Two characters who have tasted discrimination and ostracization in the epic, the authors take them to the forefront with agency to voice, fight, and criticize.

Aravaan gives voice to *Aravaan*, also known as *Iravan*, a “young man who falls problematically between the categories of royal and tribal” (Mckertich and Ishleen 133), a character rarely vocalized in the epic. He is the first-born of *Arjuna* but forever remains in this liminal position owing to his mother’s lineage and is denied acceptance and all privileges as a *Pandava*. He is a courageous and dutiful son and proves so when he is chosen as the war sacrifice for the *Pandava* victory in the *Mahabharata* war on the advice of *Krishna*. He becomes the ‘chosen one’ not because he gets accepted as one of them but because he fitted into “the spiritually and physically pure and valiant” (Mckertich and Ishleen 134) criteria required for the war sacrifice. *Arjuna* and *Krishna*, the other eligible candidates, were out of the question as they considered themselves integral to the victory of the war than the life of a mere “forest dweller” (Ramakrishnan 107). His body, never given value and recognition before as belonging to the *Pandavas*, becomes a weapon through which they ensure their victory.

Karthika Nair’s *The Capillaries of Cosmic Bodies* is a poem written from the perspective of *Ulupi*, *Aravaan*’s mother, “whom *Arjuna* married during one of his many travels across the worlds” (Mckertich and Ishleen 133). She is one of the forgotten women *Arjuna* married during his exile. Her voice, in the poem, is dominated by anger and accusation against the *Pandava* king as she belittles him and the human race by establishing her superiority as a *Naga* queen. She calls herself *Arjuna*’s tutor who gifted him the “mystic skills” (Nair) to remain invincible underwater. Her voice is filled with sharp criticism as she says, “men of *Kuru* enjoy a history of forgetting wives and lovers” (Nair). Considered only a fertile womb for *Pandava* scion” (Maitra and Saha 285), her anger transcends the gender dynamics between her and *Arjuna* and men in general. The pride she takes in her ancestry is in sharp contrast with the way the *pandavas* see her and her community. Though written from the perspective

of Ulupi, she talks about their son Aravaan and his decision to be the war sacrifice for the Pandavas. A reading of the poem complements the reading of the play as it gives a better understanding of the character of Aravaan and what he went through, before the sacrifice.

Ramakrishnan constantly addresses Aravaan as the war sacrifice, to the extent that it becomes his only identity, who is required to “spill his blood to prove his loyalty to the Pandavas” (Ramakrishnan 107) throughout the play. An ignored son who never got his due, Aravaan’s loyalty to Arjuna surprises even Ulupi as she says, “he embraced, to our surprise, his father’s blood with fiercer pride” (Nair). From Aravaan’s perspective, this provided him an opportunity to go ‘home’ to his father to earn his approval. He exhibits great power of will in doing so and ironically chooses death.

When the play is silent about Ulupi’s response to Aravaan’s choice, the poem brings out her discontentment as a woman and a mother. She says,

I knew the ache to belong
would send him here, to this crazed, dissonant swansong
of war – for sons will slash their lifelines for distant
fathers, to please kin who’ve disdained them all along
while mothers and lovers and life, in an instant,
are forsaken for combat (Nair).

The “drive to self-knowledge” (18), a significant element of revisioning recognised by Rich, is evident in the characters of Aravaan and Ulupi. Ulupi recognises Aravaan’s wish/ “ache” to belong, although Aravaan is also aware that “Whoever rules this country” he “will remain a forest-dweller, a Naga.” (Ramakrishnan 107). Aravaan at one point also says, “Till yesterday, I was shunned. Today, I am sought after. Only to be the war-sacrifice” (Ramakrishnan 108). Aravaan, who was considered an outcaste, gains significance only in the name of the sacrifice. He is well aware of this and uses the opportunity to prove himself loyal by dying a “dignified death” (Ramakrishnan 113) rather than being “secretly killed” (Ramakrishnan 113) by the Pandavas. He also wants him to be the last victim of the “bitter violence” (Ramakrishnan 113). In this sense, Aravaan becomes a martyr for all the tribal people.

Ulupi sees war as “crazed” and “dissonant” (Nair) similar to Aravaan who, realising Krishna tricked him, says “This is not a righteous war; not dharmyuddha, it’s a war of tricks.” (Ramakrishnan 113). The Mahabharata war, which has nothing to do with Ulupi and Aravaan, creates disharmony in their lives. It disrupts the mother-son bond as Aravaan chooses Arjuna over his mother becoming a ‘token’ for Pandavas’ advantage. Realising she can’t change Aravaan, Ulupi says to Arjuna,

Aravan deserves more,
as soldier, as being: I ask that you extend
to my son the courtesy, the care you’d outpour
on an ally; the candour you’d unveil before
equals. Do hold his filial trust unbetrayed, (Nair)

Ulupi who identifies Aravaan as ‘her’ son wants Arjuna to extend at least his sympathy to Aravaan as a human being if he can’t love him as a son, although her voice too goes unheard in the epic and Aravaan gets tricked and betrayed by the Pandavas.

When Pandavas consider themselves superior, Ulupi tells how she was reproached by the elders “for choosing an earthling” (Nair) as humans were considered second rated among the serpents. Ulupi’s voice also tells the readers how Aravaan was marginalised and looked down upon among the Nagas as a “half-breed and mutt” (Nair) since he was a child. In this light, Aravaan’s action becomes important more as a resistance than a sacrifice. This also shows how he had to face identity crisis from birth because of his association with the Pandavas.

Aravaan resents Krishna. He says, “I will raise my arms against his advisor Krishna” because Krishna recommended Aravaan to be sacrificed before the war. This resentment reaches its height when Aravaan realises that it was Krishna who slept with him in Mohini’s form when he expressed his desire to get married before the sacrifice. Although Aravaan’s wish is granted by Krishna by weeping for him as his widow, his masculinity is questioned here. Just like his ambiguous sense of home and belonging, his gender is also hanging in the air as he sleeps with a man.

The agency to question and criticise, denied to minor characters like Aravaan, is recognized by Ramakrishnan and Nair. By placing Aravaan at the centre of narration, without

any other character's voice interrupting his own, Ramakrishnan gives him the space to question the injustice of the Pandavas. The stage also belongs only to him, a space where he could belong. This space gives him the agency required to raise the question, "Why should I be sacrificed? Why should my blood moisten the battlefield?" (Ramakrishnan 107). Aravaan, here, echoes his own confusion regarding the sacrifice and injustice done to the tribal population in India, tracing its roots back to the epics.

Aravaan's use of his body is also significant in the play. In the beginning, it is claimed by the Pandavas for the sacrifice. Later Aravaan blindfolds himself unable to witness the horrors of the world mocking Dhritarashtra and others in power who turn a blind eye to the trials and tribulations of tribals/marginalised like him. In scene five, he addresses the audience carrying his severed head. Although unattached from his own body, he gets the agency to witness and comment on the war. He also affirms that he is not meant to be sacrificed, raising his voice against people in power and wanting to become Aravaan again. A willing participant in the beginning, Aravaan's transformation happens due to the revision as the original epic serves as "a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see- and therefore live afresh." (Rich 18) The new narrative offers the characters a better way of looking at themselves with worth and most importantly, as human.

Ramakrishnan and Nair take the perspectives of two different individuals who are related by blood and by ways they were mistreated by the dominant society. Nair traces the roots of Aravaan's marginalisation beginning with Ulupi, his mother and Ramakrishnan continues the tale from where Nair stops. Both texts give representation to the "minor characters (who) interrogate and challenge the dominant narrative by presenting their implicit points of view" (Panda 668). One text, therefore, helps in the understanding of the other filling each other's gaps and silences.

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Nujeen Displaced: Memories and Thoughts of a Disabled of the Two Places she Calls Home in *The Girl From Aleppo*

Fathima Begum

War and conflict have a significant impact on mental health, and the consequences affect the population as well as future generations (Carta, Moro, & Bass, 2015).

History explores a nation's past while heritage simplifies its past in order to provide residents with the energy to construct a national entity in the present. The global community is presently in the midst of a refugee crisis unlike anything seen since World War II.

Refugee experiences have always been well-documented and heartbreaking. A refugee is a dislocated individual who has been forced to cross national boundaries and who cannot return home safely. Unfortunately, Syrians represent the largest refugee group in the world. Syria, with Damascus as its capital, is one of the Third World countries with Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and Israel as its neighbours. Syria has been involved in the civil war since 2011, and since its beginning in 2012, more than 5.2 million Syrians have fled the country as refugees leaving millions more aimless within its border, with about half of these children. Syria has become the host of death and refugees on a maddened search for home.

At the height of the 2015 migrant crisis, Nujeen Mustafa's story attracted mainstream and alternative news media alike. Nujeen's memoir (Mustafa and Lamb 2016) was an explicit narrative of the psychological makeup of the ordinary people who are forced into horror, making one wonder, how a country can ever recover, and found its place in the Sunday Times 2016 books of the year (Patterson 2016). The ethnographic memoir, *Nujeen: One Girl's Incredible Journey from War-Torn Syria in a Wheelchair*, portrays the inspiring true story of the significant young hero, Nujeen Mustafa, a sixteen year old, born with cerebral palsy and her irking journey from war-torn Syria to Germany in a wheelchair in an unanticipated yarn of fortitude, grit and hope that adds another lens to the view of the greatest humanitarian issues of our time, the Syrian refugee crisis.

This ethnographic memoir of Christina Lamb with Nujeen Mustafa is a nonfiction text that has a first person or personal narrative of the unsettling account of the latter's refugee dislodgement and recounting the past experience of the horrific journey of Nujeen Mustafa, a 14 year old Kurdish girl, who decides to leave Syria in a wheelchair along with her sister in 2015, following the Civil War. The story narrates the perspective of Nujeen who embarked

on this arduous trek of traumatic displacement along with her sister Nasrine as they cross a sea and the European border together through a grueling sixteen month odyssey by foot, boat and bus that took them across Turkey and the Mediterranean to Greece, through Macedonia to Serbia and Hungary and finally to Germany, to safety and new life.

The journey of 3563 miles which began on 27 July 2012 for Nujeen Mustafa and her sister Nasrine came to a triumphant end on 22 September 2015 when they finally reached Germany and was reunited with her brother Bland who was already settled in Germany. Then on 15 October 2015 Nujeen she settled in her new home with her sister and brother. Nujeen's extraordinary optimism never flickered amidst the spiteful journey of miles; this book is a powerful and groundbreaking memoir that gives distinctive voice to the Syrian refugee crisis. In the face of war and political crisis, fleeing a country is the best alternative to get on with life as their earlier life was "desperate whether from hunger, discrimination, they didn't leave where they came from because life was so good for them. It wasn't. Whatever they had here was better" for their earlier life had been maimed in multiple ways.

Nobody leaves their home without a reason. Sometimes I wake in the middle of the night with nightmares about the bombing and reach for my mum and she is not there and I feel sad. But after two or three minutes I think Nujeen, you are still alive and far from bombing, everything is OK. Here in Germany, I feel safe. You can go for a walk and don't expect to be dead by morning. There's no bombing, no tanks, no army, no Daesh on the street (Mustafa 231).

Nujeen had accepted her displacement and her optimism verified her eagerness for new life like many other refugees who fantasized of a proper home and a peaceful life. Although in her new home, Nujeen also talks about the feeling of foreigners in the foreign land. Nujeen Mustafa's experience shows how they were not always hailed with open heart by the citizens of the host country. Nujeen talks about one major instance where for the first time she experienced the indifference in Germany. Her voice represents the plight of many refugees who try to blend with their new home crowd.

Their first home in Germany before moving to a permanent settlement was the ground floor of a house. She talks about the alienation that hit her out of nowhere as the new land promised new life like her name. "Since leaving Aleppo, we had travelled more than 3,500 miles across nine countries from war to peace-a-journey to new life, like my name" (Mustafa

215). The only black cloud over the new home was that the people upstairs didn't like them. They were a middle-aged German couple with a grown up son and as soon as Nujeen moved in with her two sisters Nasrine and Nahda along with her children the German couple complained to Social Services asking them why they have refugees downstairs. Once Nahda's children were playing and the woman came out screaming and called the police.

Nujeen also makes a point that not everyone are like that and gives some instance of people being friendly to them. She tells Germans were very friendly and welcoming almost like they want to make up for the Second World War. She recalls a rejoicing moment when during Christmas two people knocked at their door and handed out gifts. On return from a doctors' appointment Nujeen and Nasrine met one of their neighbours down the street who handed Nujeen a bag full of chocolates. Nujeen started liking her new home and showed great attachment to her new country Germany.

Many families experience traumatic experiences such as breakup, poverty, violence, cultural alienation, linguistic isolation and economic insecurity. The witnesses remember the events they had been through and also reconstruct their memories of what was their firsthand experience. Nujeen adopts quite a didactic tone to emphasize the richness of their culture and the hatred and victimization they have suffered throughout history (15–17). She explains their history, and how being a Kurd has both positive and negative effects. Kurds are, as the title of Chapter 1 in her memoir reads, "Foreigners in Our Own Land" (11).

In pages 13–21 of Nujeen Mustafa's memoir (Mustafa and Lamb 2017), the narrating "I" that asserts "The first fact to know about me is I'm a Kurd" (13) is mostly overcome by the collective consciousness of "we Kurds" (15). Thus, her Kurdish "I" is central to her identity. On the other hand, she insists they have been suffering at the hands of states for generations (15–17, 35–38, 53–58). Among all the oddities she mentions, is the fact that people have been imprisoned for using the Kurdish alphabet: "until not long ago you could be arrested there if you used the letters Q, W and X, which don't exist in the Turkish language. Imagine going to jail for a consonant!" (17).

Nujeen aims at dismantling stereotypes, for instance when she discusses so-called "Arab heroes" (16), who are, in fact, Kurd. Turkey, however, is worse, according to Nujeen: "Turkey is the hardest place to be a Kurd" (17). She denounces Syrian authorities forcing them to

speak Arabic and not issuing them ID cards, effectively depriving them of citizenship and thus of the right to ownership, to have a government job, to vote, or to attend high school (16).

The 'I' of the victimized girl aims to magnify empathy and disclose the hardships of the distressed and how the memoirists relive those painful moments of displacement in order to gain values that help them reconstruct themselves. Instead, Nujeen's 'I' is a political 'I' when she chooses which name to call the rebel terrorist group who has driven them from their home: "I refuse to call them Islamic State as who said they are a state? Can I just become Nujeen State? Of course not!" (117).

Her mocking tone is accompanied by an ethical call for awareness and bears some consideration on what (potentially damaging) effects the choice of a name, be that "ISIS" or "refugee," may have on other people. The refugee loses his or her individuality due to this permanent separation from home and recovers this sense of self by becoming advocates for refugees in their new countries. In nostalgic reminiscences, Nujeen narrates instances where she sometimes misses the familiarity of Syria.

I miss flatbread and still find it odd that everyone eats with a knife and fork instead of their hands. I miss the familiarity of Syria here I'm not familiar with anything and always worry that some of my behaviour might give the wrong impression even though it is normal in my country (Mustafa 234).

Nujeen indeed misses her life in Syria, her room in the fifth floor in Aleppo watching TV and her house filled with memories of her family together. She feels like an old Nujeen is being erased and a new one is generated.

"I miss my country, even the house with cats and dogs, and I miss the way the doors of our homes are always open. I miss the sound of the azaan the call for prayer that used to rise up to our balcony. I heard that some refugees have even put an app with the call on their phone. I feel guilty having left my homeland" (Mustafa 267).

Although the recalling of the past brings a guilty feeling to Nujeen, when she recalls the terror along with the happy memories, she is washed away of her guilt and is happy with her new home and new life. The sense of longing for the homeland is completely driven away when Nujeen recalls the trauma that persists in her once home country Syria. Although she misses her birthplace yet it is noticeable only during her time of reminiscence and that does not

upset her new life or daily routine. Thus, Nujeen, amidst missing her memories, strongly asserts that she does not miss Syria, her once homeland.

”I don’t miss Syria when I think how difficult my life was. When I remember how scared I was , how much danger we were in , I think Thank God we are here. Only God knows when this whole thing will be over , and the Syria we knew will never exist again . I long for the day when death will become abnormal again for me .” (Mustafa 267)

The complex emotions Nujeen shows, from enthusiasm to guilt and back, might be associated with the state of mind of a teenager. Some extracts read like stream of consciousness, such as the following on her conflicting thoughts and emotions pulling her in different directions at the same time: ”I was excited to see another country, even though I felt guilty ... and happy to see ...” (187).

Both Nujeen and Nasrine live happily in Germany with their families today and will never forget the traumatic experience of the war and what it did to them and how it forced them to move from city to city inside Syria and eventually become refugees who had to wander among the European Countries. Nujeen Mustafa is finally happy that she is able to attend school and lead a normal life. Although she misses her parents who are in Gaziantep and cannot travel to Germany as they are old, her everyday routine of new life keeps her busy.

Nujeen compiles in her memoir the exact figures relating to her sister’s and her own journey (Mustafa and Lamb 2017, 279–284). In the Appendix, she presents the data matter-of-factly: “Total distance 3593 miles, total travel cost 5045 euros (for me and my sister)” (279). Crucially, she includes the time she spent as an internally exiled person in Manbij, which makes for over two years (27 July 2012–Aug. 2014).

Images are placed in the middle pages (Mustafa and Lamb 2017, 162i–viii), combining pictures of her growing up and her family—as if taken from her family album—as well as others attained from various media outlets on the city of Aleppo and Syria as a whole. The affective power of these images is unquestionable. The captions that accompany Mustafa’s photographs use an eloquent, emphatic, and vivid style, capturing Mustafa’s voice and her vindications, as if one could hear her speak while reading: “an awful massacre” (Mustafa and

Lamb 2017, 162ii), “we had great hopes but they soon faded” (162iii), “Tired, bored and wanting to see my brother!” (162vi), “Reunited!” (162vii), “I miss them terribly” (162viii).

As is usual with all the human rights activists, emphasis is laid on key phrases and geared at rousing an emotional and ethical reaction from readers/audiences. Nujeen’s emphatic use of the exclamation mark in the extract above, reminds readers of her TEDx talks, which makes a solid call for attention. The prime specimen of young displacement memoir phenomena, Nujeen, shows the fading of humanity as she strongly asserts the position of refugees in any country and acts as a venue for identity negotiation. Nujeen, the 2019 Recipient of the Alison Des Forges Award for Extraordinary Activism (HRW 2019), has indeed optimistically accepted her displacement and is happy because she gets to enjoy a normal life of having proper food to eat, a roof above her, peaceful sleep, proper education, social life and home. This important award, the public recognition that comes with it, as well as the potential implementation of actual measures within the EU policy toward people with disabilities, is a significant step forward in Nujeen’s activism. Furthermore, it is proof that life writing, broadly understood, may shape people’s consciousness, encourage empathy, and so eventually lead to social justice.

It is an undeniable trend nowadays for major transnational agencies, news media, publishing houses, and other actors in the public sphere to both engage with and feature life writing by young women from the Global South who, in turn, become global activists. Coincidences are evident, signaling not just a development in how human rights activism works, but also how youth activism, feminist activism, and life writing work. They are enmeshed in contemporary culture, a culture of denunciation across borders and of multiplatform ubiquity (see Martínez García 2020). Hence, narratives of displacement become a theoretical lens on the restless journey of self-development by which displacement acts as a site of identity negotiation for many refugees and the victimized individuals claim agency to improve themselves.

Indeed, her advocacy campaign, mainly distributed online via videos shared on multiple platforms—NGO websites, YouTube, Twitter—has opened the door to policy changes in the European Union: In a unique partnership with Human Rights Watch, the European Disability Forum, and the Norwegian Refugee Council, Mustafa insisted senior policymakers in the European Union to re-evaluate their policies concerning people with disabilities in humanitarian predicaments. In the announcement, Human Rights Watch emphasizes her commitment to speak out for the rights of refugees and people with disabilities, so it fits the criteria of an award celebrating “the valor of people who put their lives on the line to protect the dignity and

rights of others” (HRW 2019). The EU commissioner for humanitarian assistance has announced new measures to ensure that the delivery of humanitarian aid meets the needs of people with infirmities. (HRW 2019)

Studies report that family ties and cultural traditions help in building resilience in families across generations. Notions of culture are closely related to ideas of homeland, although cultural traditions are not stable realities but historical inventions. Cultural traditions do not tolerate radical breaks in historical continuity or change, since history is a struggle to maintain and recreate one’s identity e.g., (Clifford 1988 :336-339) It is understandable that the displaced, whose connection to their homelands become even more blurred with the passage of time, tend to attach themselves to remembered or imagined homelands, which are necessary as culturally distinct places where they can inscribe their own memories (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:39)

In the case of immigrants and refugees, the added effects of exit circumstances and the potential mental health consequences of lost social supports and status, acculturative stress and displacement are to be considered. The testimonials by survivors indicate that they were subject to starvation, disease, war injury and bodily injury from employers and police. The plight of the displaced youth is still worse because they are viewed with suspicion and as ‘encroaching on sovereign assets’ and are subject to ‘contestation’ by politicians, civil servants, media and activists.

Women experience discrimination and decreased social opportunities in the host countries due to their minority status, acculturation difficulties, and the social disruption resulting from their experience as immigrants (Raj & Silverman, 2002; Sabri et al., 2018). ‘Government was tyranny. Government was officers who looked at you with the sense that they wanted to hate you or eliminate you. To me the policeman was someone who could cut my head off’.

Hence, such books allow an audience in the present to experience a retroactively remodeled past. As soon as they claim agency by producing life writings, they manage to come to accept an identity that is a mix of the personal with the circumstantial. (Adams 1999,8) “And now you have read my story I hope you see I am not just a number- none of us are.” (Mustafa 268). Thus, Nujeen becomes the voice of many refugees who wait hopefully to cross borders to attain a peaceful life, though always reminded of their past, in search of a home away from home.

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**A Cognitive Narratological Approach of David Herman to the Selected
texts based on Mahabharata- M T Vasudevan Nair's *Randamoozham*,
Pratibha Rai's *Yajnaseni*, Anand Neelakandan's *Rise of Kali* and Mani
Ratanam's *Thalapathy***

Thankam Jose

Narrating is a widespread and often unconscious spoken language activity that can be seen to include several different text types in addition to what we often think of as the prototypical kind of narrative, namely literary narratives as an art form (Fludernik 2009). A narrative is a semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected temporally and causally. Narratology studies the narrative aspects of many literary and non-literary genres such as lyrical poems, films, drama, history, and advertisement. Cognitive Narratology is a field of study with its roots in narratology which explores the cognitive processes involved in the creation and interpretation of narratives. Cognitive Narratology focuses on the mind – and how it plays a role in understanding narratology. It focuses not only on the structure of a text but also on the mind/human brain. Cognitive Narratology is an interdisciplinary field of study.

Approaches to the narrative that fall under the heading of cognitive narratology share a focus on the mental states, capacities, and dispositions that provide grounds for, or conversely, are grounded in narrative experiences (Huhn, 46). This theory relevantly addresses two broad questions as the center for research- 1. How do stories across the media interlock with the interpreter's mental states and processes, thus giving rise to narrative experiences?; 2. How (to what extent, in what specific ways) does narrative scaffold effort to make sense of experience itself (Huhn 46)? The first question focuses on the semiotic levels of interpretations and the second question constitutes the resources of interpretations providing a basis for understanding and characterizing the emotions, intentions, and goals of the characters. Thus, research on the mind-narrative nexus encompasses not only how stories can be used but also how such acts of narratives of world-making are themselves mind-extending (Huhn 46).

Still, as an emergent trend within the borderline of narratology, it focuses on the mind and its multiple methods of analysis and diverse corpora. Theorists working in this area have adopted descriptive as well as explanatory tools from a broad variety of disciplines because of the cross-disciplinary research of the mind/brain itself. Source disciplines include narratology, linguistics, semiotics, computer science, philosophy, psychology, and other domains (Huhn 48).

A number of key concerns cut across the various concerns can be linked to the broad lines of inquiry mentioned like 1. research on narrative as a target of interpretation. scholarship on stories as a resource for sense-making. Cognitive Narratology focuses its research on the spatial and temporal aspects of events, time, plot constructions, the connection between characters, and a working model of what it was like for these characters to express the more or less disruptive and non-canonical constituents of events which explains the course of narrative representations. The mind narrative nexus can thus be thought of as a problem space that opened up when earlier, structuralist models were brought into dialogue with disciplines falling under the umbrella field of cognitive sciences (Huhn 47).

Approaches to narrative and mind continue to emerge, evolve, and cut across and it is difficult to predict which of these approaches will be the most generative going forward, let alone what impact they will ultimately have on the broader field of narratology. Cognitive Narratology focuses on the inquiry of mental states of character inventory of a social world, cognitively inflected accounts of narrative perspectives or focalization in fictional and nonfiction texts, research on narrative suspense, curiosity, and surprise, research on characters and methods, psychological reasoning, and narrative ways of worldmaking.

Mahabharata, the great “*Ithihasa*” has produced many “hypertexts”. Authors through narration created a new outlook for each and every character from this great epic. Different authors created different narrative texts based on this great book changing the narrative patterns, characters, and events. As said by the author Vyasa himself the book is written as a “guide” for the human race and the book deals with numerous events and emotions that ultimately end in the victory of Dharma. the story is narrated through the events happening in the lives of Kuru princes- Pandavas and Kauravas. I attempt to study the narratology and cognitive sciences of texts based on *Mahabharata*. The works selected for the research are MT Vasudevan Nair’s *Randamoozham* (Language - Malayalam- fiction), Pratibha Ray’s *Yajnaseni* (Language - Oriya-Fiction), Anand Neelakandan’s *Rise of Kali* (language - English -Fiction) and Mani Ratnam’s *Dalapathi* (Language - Tamil - film).

In *Randamoozham*, the narration is done by Bhima-the second Pandava prince- and considered to be the strongest one among the five princes. Every character who was prominent in the *Mahabharata* is analyzed by the “mind/brain” of Bhima. New narration and interpretations are given in the text by the protagonist. My focus is on the mental as well as diverse corpora of the characters presented in the book. In *Yajnaseni*, the narration is from the point of view of

Draupadi, the most celebrated woman character in Mahabharata. The writer purposefully creates a mind for Draupadi and for her time. Each and every character is analyzed by the central character and new new interpretations are given. In *Rise of Kali*, the character Suyodhana becomes the narrator, first among hundred Kaurava Princes. In Mahabharata, the character of Suyodhana is portrayed with the absence of Dharma, but in this narration the author walks through the mental status of the principal characters as well as the other prominent characters. The character, Karna also had a significant presence in this book with strong interpretations.

In Thalpathi, the film adaptation of Mahabharata, the story of the friendship between Suyodhana and Karna was portrayed. The film is set in the background of the rivalry between two opposing leaders. The director brilliantly portrays the story of Mahabharata with a new narration in the current socio-cultural and political world. The above-mentioned texts utilize the story of *Mahabharata* and the writers made new narrations focusing on the cognitive aspects of the characters. These texts make the readers capable of new narrations and interpretations. Thus, the writer creates a new world full of interpretations so that the reader can select a 'mind' for themselves. The key concepts of cognitive narratology are "narrative comprehension and narrative empathy are well employed in selected texts.

David Herman is a prominent figure in the field of cognitive narratology. He has contributed extensively to the study of narrative comprehension, focusing on the cognitive processes involved in making sense of stories. His work explores how readers use their knowledge, expectations, and experiences to construct mental models of narratives. My research focuses on the theory proposed by David Herman and its application to the books based on Mahabharata, studies on the narrative structure, interpretations, and cognitive processes involved in storytelling. His studies explore how readers use their knowledge, experience, expectations, and experience to construct mental models of narratives.

While analyzing the narrative patterns of the selected texts, traces of similarities are present in their narration. And how the same story is told from different perspectives and evolves different interpretations with the help of different narration. The scope of this research is that we can create our own "dharma" and "truth" with different narrative patterns, the perspective of empathy is constantly changing when we deeply start to analyze each character individually. In trying to evolve a plan and methodology for this exploration of the different narration and mind of the same story, I have realized essentially the theory of cognitive

narratology of David Herman. The re-reading of Mahabharata is analyzed as how this great epic became a source for numerous new narrations and interpretations.

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Post-Colonial Perspectives on Trans cultural Encounters in *The Inheritance of Loss*

Tintu Titus

Culture is a complex as well as integral part of human condition that defines the words, deeds, actions, customs and tradition of people. Hybridity is the state of amalgamation of different cultures, languages and ideologies among people belonging to different ethnic groups. The subordinate groups have an admiration towards the dominant ideology and their ways of life. So, they try to adopt certain elements into their life deliberately or accidentally. Later this becomes a part of their culture. The *Inheritance of Loss* written by Kiran Desai portrays transcultural encounters between different characters and the influence of colonial ideologies. She has used the techniques of magical realism and socio-cultural realism in her novels. “What makes Desai’s fiction so fascinating is that the vast canvas of our contemporary society in which the themes of alienation, cultural clashes, displacement and exile are presented in the broad perspective of globalization” (Dash 269). Homi K Bhabha’s notion of hybridity occurs as result of colonizer/colonized relationship.

It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory, may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of cultures’ hybridity. (Bhabha 38) Mimicry means copying someone’s ways of speech expression, fashion, the way he talks, lives and the intention to become like that. Homi K Bhabha used it in a different aspect to characterize postcolonial condition. The term was coined by Lacan in the book *The Line and Light*. Bhabha borrowed this idea from Lacan. The book *The Line and Light* gives three dimensions of mimicry: Travesty, camouflage and intimidation. Bhabha explicitly details about hybridity and Mimicry in his essay, “Of Mimicry and Man the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse”. Mimicry expresses the ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. When the colonizer occupies and rules over a particular region, the colonized ones will have a tendency to imitate or mimic them, internalizing the fact that the culture of the colonizer is the dominant one. He says,

Mimicry does not only merely destroy narcissistic authority through the repetitious slippage of difference and desire. It is the process of the fixation of the colonial as a form of

cross -classificatory, discriminatory knowledge in the defiles of an interdictory discourse, and therefore necessarily raises the question of authorization of colonial representations. A question of authority that goes beyond the subject's lack of priority [castration]) to a historical crisis in the conceptuality of colonial man as an object of regulatory power, as the subject of racial, cultural, national representations. (131)

In the novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, most of the characters are striving hard to become English in culture and the way of life. Through the years of British subjugation, Indians internalized the norm that English culture is the only one that is universally accepted. Kiran Desai delineates the way in which English empire engraved their dominance and power into Indian blood. Jemubhai was sent to Cambridge University, London by his family to get English educated. When Jemu's school teacher informed his father about the ability of studies, the father immediately dreams of sending him abroad for his higher studies. This shows that Indians consider English education as something superior. So Jemu was sent abroad for pursuing his dreams. After reaching there, Jemu felt himself alienated from his surroundings. The language, culture and even the perceptions desolated him from his new settlement. The language and mannerisms of Jemubhai proved him to be an Indian. But he strived hard to become English. When he was interviewed for the admission, he failed to answer almost all questions asked from Indian context. But he recited an English poem without any anxiety. This shows the fascination of Indian natives for English literature. During his studies, Jemu was quite often teased by his friends for his Indianized pronunciations. Bengali slang influenced his pronunciation of words. But he worked hard to become an expert in English.

Thus, it was that the judge eventually took revenge on his early confusions, his embarrassments gloved in something called "keeping up standards" his accent behind a mask of quiet. He found he began to be mistaken for something he wasn't – a man of dignity. This accidental poise became more important than any other thing. He envied the English. He loathed Indians. He worked at being English with the passion of hatred and for what he would become; he would be despised by absolutely everyone, English and Indians, both. (Desai 119)

These lines highlight the efforts made by Jemu to become English. It was a sort of competent and envious mind that guided him rather than love for this foreign culture. Once the period of study is over, they are to swear their loyalty towards English officials. This portrays the everlasting desire of English people to dominate over others.

Once he returned here, he continued his English life style. He had brought foreign goods with him to keep up his standards including a jar of green salve, a hairbrush and comb set in silver and a poem with a loop of silk in a round container of powder. “He was a foreigner – a foreigner – every bit of him screamed” (Desai 167). He wanted his wife to grasp English language and mannerisms like him. He considered it as a matter of his pride. So, when he moved to a bungalow with his wife, he arranged a woman named Miss Enid Pot to train her in English. But she was reluctant to grasp the lessons and adapt to changes to become an Anglicized woman who suits her husband. There appear characters like Mrs. Singh who had become expert in civilized culture. They try to imitate westerners.

He abandoned his wife only for being unable to pace with foreign culture. He even denied meeting his child for the reason of being born from an uncivilized mother who is incapable to bring forth her in English stylistics. The gun which he had brought with him after his Cambridge studies is an important symbol of imperial power and foreign culture. Gun is an innovation of Westerners and they use it to control others by evoking fear in them. The judge uses this Western strategy throughout his life. He never bothered about the sufferings of people. He was always confined to his own world. The European model of thinking gives importance to one’s own private sphere. They rarely care for other’s matters. In this novel Kiran Desai portrays self-absorbed life of the judge in the comforts of his secure house when people in the state were suffering from starvation and death caused by the political turmoil. Naipul once criticized the self-absorbent nature of Indians. Moreover, his cruel behavior towards his wife can be seen as his imitation of his masters’ authoritative domination. Throughout his life the judge gives importance to Western ideologies and pattern of living. When he notices Sai following these civilized norms of living, it pleases him a lot. For him Indianness and nativity are something inferior.

Working and living abroad is considered as a part of success and dignity of life. The cook and his son also had this same perspective of life. Somehow the cook manages to send his son to New York to make a good fortune. The way he reaches there is explained in detail by the author. Initially Biju had a great admiration for American life. But right from his journey to the dream country, his beliefs underwent tremendous change. The airways treated white people and non-whites differently. They were so polite and gentle towards whites while they almost ignored the non-Europeans. He was made to work harder in his first workplace. In the second year, he moved to Pinocchio’s Italian Restaurant. There the owner’s wife complained

to her husband about the smell coming from Bijju. She hated the smell of the hair oil used by Bijju. So “the owner brought soap and toothpaste, toothbrush, shampoo plus conditioner, Q-tips, nail clippers, and most important of all, deodorant and told Bijju he had picked up something he might need” (Desai 48). This shows the way in which the native is forced to adopt European model of living.

Bijju seems to be unaffected by his appearance. But Westerners consider it as uncivilized and ugly. So, they take up the mission of civilizing the uncivilized people from the third world. In the winter season, the smell of snow suffocated Bijju. “He smelled the first of the snow and found it had the same pricking, difficult smell that existed inside the freezer; he felt the Thermocol scrunch of it underfoot” (51). Saeed is one of Bijju’s coworkers who often make remarks on the foreign life. He married a white woman to get green card. But he says that he would divorce her after few years and marry a black woman of his own class. Then Omar, another friend of Bijju says, “White women, they look good when they are young, but wait, they fall apart fast, by forty they look so ugly, hair falling out, lines everywhere and those spots and those veins...” (101).

Though everyone admires whites, still there exist some peculiarities that make the natives special. Bijju tried to acquire a green card in America. But the procedure is not an easy task. At times he was haunted by the nostalgic feeling caused by the thoughts of his motherland. He yearned to see the beauty of mountains, rivers, pastors, birds and so on. This shows the inner craving of a native to unite with his surroundings. He was forced to accept the terms set by host country. He becomes used to the new culture. He imitates and adapts to the new situation. When he decides to return as he finds it very difficult to survive in America, he purchased many foreign goods to present them to his relatives and dear ones. People always have high expectations regarding the people who work abroad. Hiding the miseries in his heart, he appears like a person who is civilized by his foreign exposure.

Gyan, the Mathematics tutor seems to be a man influenced by Western ideologies. When his lineage is traced back, it is understood that his great grandfather served British throne. His grandfather and his uncle had served English people. So naturally Gyan also was brought up providing English education. He processed Western knowledge. But he favored Swadeshi notions. When Gyan arrived to teach Sai, he was confused about the language difference.

Gyan was reluctant to imitate European life style. He valued Indianness. That's why he was easily moved on hearing a speech by the GNLRF revolutionaries on India for Indians. He tried to change the mind of Sai who was a typical hybrid of Indo-Anglican culture. He seems to accuse Indians for celebrating Christmas which is an immigrant festival for Indians. He questions the hybridization of festivals. He claims that Christmas arrived in Indian sub-continent with the arrival of British people. "Why do you celebrate Christmas? You are Hindus and you don't celebrate Id or Guru Nanak's birthday or even Durga Puja or Dussehra or Tibetan New Year... you are slaves, that's what you are, running after the West, embarrassing yourself. It's because of people like you we never get anywhere" (Desai 163) and again he continues in another situation, "Trying to be so westernized. They don't want you. Go there and see if they will welcome you with open arms. You will be trying to clean their toilets and even then, they won't want you" (174). These words depict his strong aversion to Western culture. Initially when Gyan was introduced to Sai, he faced a crisis to manage their communication since she spoke in English and he used Hindi.

When he was made to stay in her home due to the heavy rain, he noticed that Sai is English in all aspects as she was brought up in a convent school. "During the time they are together at Gopu's, Gyan had used his hands without a thought and Sai ate with the only implement on the table – a table spoon, rolling up her *roti* on the side and nudging the food onto the spoon with it. Noticing this difference, they had become embarrassed and put the observation aside" (140). But as they spoke further about their family roots, both of their grandparents had some connection with the abroad. This shows that they imitated or derived something from Western culture at some point of time.

Sai is the most important hybridized character that appears in the novel. She was sent to St Augustine's Convent school for education where her mother studied. There she was trained to become English in all aspects. Her language, culture, mannerisms and even the thought process resembles English mode. Sai recollects about her school days as the uniforms so heavy for a little girl, manly shouldered blazer and tie, black cow hoof shoes... The memories of "four years of learning the weight of humiliation and fear, the art of subterfuge, of being uncovered by black habited detectives and trembling before the rule of law that treated ordinary everyday slips and confusions with the seriousness of first -degree crime" (29). She says that the system taught them to adopt Western way of life style.

Actually, the formations of hybrid identities are taking place in this training given in schools. Native students are internalizing the norm that their native culture is something inferior to imposed colonial culture. They are taught to hate their own blood to live for master's ideologies. Tactful strategies of manipulations are incorporated into the curriculum of students to ingrain Western norms into young minds. Thus, it is noticed that whenever Gyan criticized Western ideologies, Sai couldn't bear it. She is in favor of everything done by English people.

According to the famous psychoanalyst Lacan, language is not innocent. It is highly biased. It is true that the strategy adopted by English people was to enter into the lives of people through English language. For this Macaulay's "Minutes" declared compulsory English education for all Indian students. This was done to bring about all Indians under one umbrella.

Mr. and Mrs. Mistry are products of English education. They were Sai's parents whom she has never met. Mrs. Mistry was brought up in St Augustine's Convent school as she lost her mother and she was abandoned by her father. She was an English girl and her husband wished to work in Space craft.

Their romance had allowed her to escape the sadness of her past and the tediousness of her current girlish life. There is a time when everyone wishes to be an adult, and she said yes. The pilot and the student, the Zoroastrian and the Hindu, emerged from the tomb of the Mughal prince knowing that nobody other than themselves would be impressed by their great secular romance. Still, they found themselves lucky to have found each other, each or empty with the same loneliness, each one fascinating as a foreigner to the other, but both educated with an eye of the West, and so they could sing along quite tunefully while stumming a guitar. They felt free and brave, part of a modern nation in a modern world. (Desai 26)

These lines depict that the couple had many factors in common. But they two belonged to two different religions. Celebration of hybridity is an important element in postcolonial perspective. Though they have different cultural backgrounds, they united in marriage. Lola and Noni are the judge's neighbors who are very much admired by Western way of living. Lola has her daughter working for BBC news. This is a matter of pride for them. They are in good relation with the judge's family as they share common interests. They made friendship with Sai as she was found to be English educated. They always share the news regarding Pixie to her. They try to imitate European mode of life. Once they saw an aristocratic lady called Mrs. Thondup, from an aristocratic Tibetan family, sitting out with her daughters Pem Pem in

jewel colored *bakus* and pale silk blouses. “What an elegant lady”. Lola and Noni always said when they saw her, for they liked peasants” (194). They always speak high of their daughter who works for English people. Lola goes to visit her daughter meanwhile and brings various foreign products like strawberries and cream. Noni mimics her sister for the admiration she exhibits these. Noni asked her, “As if you can’t get strawberries and cream in Kalimpong”. She said then. “And you can eat without having no mince your words and behave like a pig on high heels” (Desai 46). Lola’s suitcases were stuffed with Marmite, Oxo bouillon cubes, Knorr soup packets, after Eight, daffodil bulbs and renewed supplies of Boots cucumber lotion...etc. She advised Pixie long ago, “India is a sinking ship. Don’t want to be pushy, darling, sweetie, thinking of your happiness, but the doors won’t stay opened forever...” (47). These words express the attitude of Lola towards India. She likes everything that is Western and hates whatever it is Indian.

People belonging to the third world countries often strive hard to make themselves accepted in global scale by adapting to the tradition of West. The cook in the novel portrays the anxiety of a father to make his son settled in foreign land. He presents a downtrodden state. Though he is uneducated and lacks exposure, he considers life abroad as something luxurious. He dreamt his son in “fine suited and booted success”. Actually, he is promoting his son to mimic and imitate European life. He keeps the letters written by his son in the hope that one day he would return them to Biju so his son would have a record of his journey and feel a sense of pride and achievement. The experiences and memories of a foreign land is something auspicious for an ordinary man like him. He always considers India subordinate to all other Western countries. When Sai explained to him about day and night difference between India and America, he found it very strange to believe that India went first with the day. He found it funny back to front fact that didn’t seem mirrored by any other circumstance involving the two nations. When Sai and the cook spoke to each other, their friendship composed of shallow things conducted in a broken language, “for she was an English speaker and he was a Hindi speaker. The brokenness made it easier never to go deep, never to enter into anything that required an intricate vocabulary...” (Desai 19). This is the gap that is formed between those who assimilated to foreign culture and those didn’t. Even when he wrote back to his son, he did it with utmost care so that his son would not think badly of his less educated father.

According to Homi K Bhabha, when a person belonging to the third world country starts to mimic his master, there arouse an ambiguity as he can never become one like his

master. But he loses his true identity. He will remain in an ambiguous situation of losing his real self and not reaching his destined goal. This ambiguity is a postcolonial condition that every colonized experiences.

Mrs. Sen is one of their neighbors whose daughter is working as a news reporter in England. She always tries to prove England is a better place rather than America. She is also a hybrid of Indo-Anglican culture. Uncle Potty and Father Booty also share some hybrid characters. Uncle Potty was English educated while Father Booty had Swiss lineage. The latter was actually a Swiss priest who settled here with a dairy farm. Though he was a foreigner, he admired the work of cow keeping and running a farm. This made him to stay back here. This appears to be strange for Indians. When the Indian natives try to migrate from this country, here appears a man who wishes to stay back. This is a postcolonial trait of “going native”. As Kurtz became a savage in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Father Potty was also attracted to the exotic nature of East and he stood back. But towards the end of the story, he is forced to go back to his own country since he lacks required documents of citizenship. Actually, he was also a hybrid of foreign and Indian culture. He tried to mimic Indians as he was attracted to their exotic nature. He was attracted to the Indian landscape that enchanted his mind. Here the notion of Mimicry is subverted.

The judge and the cook are two different faces of Indian subcontinent. The judge stands for the powerful ones who are well equipped with education, wealth and power. On the other hand, the cook depicts poor, uneducated and weaker sections of the society. This proves that society is a hybrid of different sections of people. The culture and tradition of India were largely influenced and transformed by the imbibed notions of Western cultural superiority. So the native Indians gave up their cultural uniqueness and tried to fit themselves in the frames set by foreigners. So the native culture is subjugated and underestimated by both foreigners and the natives.

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Narratives of Ghosts: Voicing the Voiceless in an Age of Surface Reading

Rose Mary Palatty

Truly, I live in dark times!

The guileless word is folly...

Brecht, "To Those Born Later", (318).

Jeffrey J. Williams, in his article "The New Modesty in Literary Criticism" talks about a new modesty which appeared in literary criticism in the last decade. He includes methods like 'surface reading', 'thin description', 'the new formalism', 'book history', 'distant reading' and 'the new sociology' to describe the phrase called a new modesty. He says that the change has crystallized around surface reading. He is skeptical about this subdued method which gives less importance to grand speculation and more to empirical study and the use of statistics or other data.

Surface reading is a new mode of theoretical reading propounded by Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best. Sharon Marcus is a professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University and Stephen M. Best is an Associate Professor of English at the University of California at Berkeley. The term was first introduced by Marcus in her 2007 book, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire and Marriage in Victorian England* where she elaborates on her interest in depthless hermeneutics. Later on in the year 2009, a detailed article on surface reading appeared in a special issue of the journal *Representations: On the Way We Read Now*, titled "Surface Reading: An Introduction", which was co-authored by Marcus and Best.

Marcus and Best argue that surface doesn't mean the literal surface of texts. It also doesn't mean what symptomatic readers construe - as a layer that conceals, as clothing does skin: ... We take surface to mean what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts, what is neither hidden nor hiding; what, in the geometrical sense, has length and breadth but no thickness, and therefore covers no depth. A surface is what insists on being looked at rather than what we must train ourselves to see through. (9)

They suggest that surface reading is a method to attend to the surface of texts rather than to plumb their depths. Surface reading challenges symptomatic reading which is prevalent in contemporary criticisms like Marxism, Psychoanalysis, deconstruction and so on. The proponents of surface reading question Frederic Jameson's argument that only weak,

descriptive, empirical and ideologically complicit readers attend to the surface of the text as explicated in his 1981 work *The Political Unconscious*. Jameson talks about two kinds of meaning in a literary work - manifest and latent. For Jameson, interpretation is unmasking; it should seek a repressed, mystified, latent meaning behind a manifest one. But for the propagators of surface reading, the above mentioned interpretation is akin to activism and labour than leisure. For them it is just reading. For Marcus, “just reading sees ghosts as presences, not absences, and lets ghosts be ghosts, instead of saying what they are ghosts of” (13). They give importance to the self-reflexive nature of texts.

The question that occurs in the minds of even the common followers of literature is how such a new mode of reading is applicable to works produced from the marginalized sections of society. How is it possible for one to stick to a mere reading of highly political poems of Dalit writers and Black writers. To them, writing is a weapon to retrieve their lost history, pride and position. Their attempts echo the African proverb, “Until the lions have their own historians, the story of the hunt will glorify the hunter”. In Poykayil Appachan’s poem translated by Manoj K.B. and George K. Alex, it is impossible to restrict oneself to just reading or surface reading:

My husband Chothi

was sold to another lord

I don’t know the place

When a new owner

Came to buy me

I cried aloud hugging my children

I washed my children clean;

Gave them the last ball of rice;

And told the elder one

Eat O son eat.

O my dear elder son

Let me part:

Will you look after your younger ones?

(24)

Here, in the poem, the parting is not mere parting. It is placed in the context of the complex casteist Kerala society that existed before renaissance. The idea of family and individuality were unthinkable during those times. Casteism had dehumanized and depersonalized a group of people who worked for the benefits of the upper caste without receiving any benefits. They were treated as mere animals, sometimes even below the status of animals. The words 'sold' and 'buy' in the poem add multiple layers of meaning. If Appachan's poem talks about the past condition of Kerala, the contemporary Dalit poet, Chandramohan's poem talks about the present condition:

No newspaper carried a headline or a photo feature,

No youth were roused to protests,

No city's life came to a standstill,

No furore in the Parliament,

No nation's conscience was haunted,

No prime minister addressed the nation,

No TV Channel discussions,

No police officials were transferred or suspended,

No candle light marches,

No billion women rising,

A Dalit Girl was raped and murdered

Rape and Murder of a Dalit Girl

The rape and murder of a Dalit Girl go unnoticed even in 21st century India, because caste prejudices continue to dominate the psyche of Indians. When Dalit writers voice their humiliations, the main stream society sometimes ignore their honest attempts. Another Dalit

writer Aruna Gogulamanda has expressed her surprise over the reception of her poems when she changed her focus from charity, kindness, pain of poverty and women's woes to social realities. She confesses that such a shift in focus changed her readership. Upper caste readers liked her poems only when she wrote about love and sensual themes. Such a dilemma was expressed by Neruda a long time ago in his poem "I am explaining a few Things": You are going to ask: and where are the lilacs? and the poppy - petalled metaphysics? and the rain repeatedly spattering

... I'll tell you all the news...

Then he reveals all the issues that

happened in his country during Civil War.

Even then people ask him: ...

And you will ask :

why doesn't his poetry Speak of dreams and leaves and the great volcanoes of his native land? Come and see the blood in the streets. Come and see the blood in the streets. Come and see the blood in the streets! (2444-2446)

The poem traces his evolution from a poet of love themes to a poet of revolution, blood bath, crying mothers and children during the problems in his country. Here too it would be impossible to restrict oneself to surface reading. May be "Tonight I can write the Saddest Lines" come under the category of empirical understanding but the layers of meaning in "I am explaining a Few Things" is much more complicated. Brecht's poem "Literature will be Scrutinized" justifies the standpoints of Neruda and Aruna Gokulamanda. The poem voices the problems and concerns of the marginalized and the downtrodden. It dreams of a time when people who sit on golden chairs and write only about kings and queens will be questioned. The poem shares the idea that the words once used to please kings will be used to articulate the lives and realities of ordinary people:

... a time will come when

These clever and friendly men

These angry and hopeful men

Who sat on the bare ground to write

Who were surrounded by the lowly and the fighters
will be publicly praised. (345)

Attempts to define a meaningful identity which is independent of conventional expectations and prejudices are present in Maya Angelou. She is the classic example of a writer who surpassed the intersectionality of oppressions like class, race, sex and gender. Afro-American women were used for the pleasure and profit of the white capitalist society. She belongs to the race which suffered centuries of suppression, oppression, displacement and humiliation; and when she writes “Still I Rise”, a depthless hermeneutics is not at all possible:

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still like dust, I'll rise. (140)

She tries to nurture individual self-esteem in a hostile social climate. Black women had different appellations such as Matriarchs, Super Women, Jezebel, Mule of the world and so on. So when Angelou came out with an idea called phenomenal woman, she was actually creating a space for black women who were thrown into the margins by both black and white patriarchal hegemonies. Angelou expresses contempt for both hegemonies:

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise. (140)

The phrase ‘still, I rise’, which is reminiscent of the story of phoenix demands a plumbing of depths rather than a mere superficial reading. The depths reveal the story of a race who were uprooted from their own land, placed in an alien culture, denied voice and the freedom of one's body and forced to do back breaking labour.

For these poets, writing is a form of resistance. It has an emancipatory function. It's a highly political activity which is similar to activism. Surface reading which insists on an empirical understanding of literary work is actually suggesting that readers must be apolitical. It is a

strategy of the western capitalist societies to ignore the social realities engulfing the world. It is equal to a capitalist consumer culture notion that reception of a commodity is a brain numbing activity. So when proponents of surface reading insist on leisure reading, one is reminded of the warning of Adorno that ‘they’ are in fact attempting to take us back to dark ages. An anti-enlightenment strategy is working in this modesty, which completely negates the multi-layered meanings of a literary work. Superficial reading is an illogical and irrational process, which advises even the common readers to remain unenlightened because such a thing is required by the capitalist white society. A fear of the dark times suggested by Brecht is very much visible in the attempts of Marcus and Best. So, it’s important to take a critical stance towards surface reading. Brecht’s lines help one to understand such a strategy:

In the dark times

Will there also be singing?

Yes, there will also be singing

About the dark times. (320)

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A Postmodern Enquiry into the Traumatic Psyche of Gertrude and Ophelia

Tessa K. Subash

“If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing, and it is at this specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience and the language of literature meet” (Caruth 16). Psychology, a branch of science that deals with thoughts, feelings and behaviours, explores the conscious and unconscious realms of the human mind. It dives deep into the human mind and attempts to expose the conflicts and troubles of human beings unknown to themselves. According to Paul Valery, psychology gives an entirely different view of things we already know. It interprets and analyses the mind, its functions and how it responds in certain circumstances. Psychological studies are used to understand and explore the human mind traumatized by adversities of various kinds. It has now become a crucial field in literary studies, often used by scholars and critics to explore the unexplored territories of the human mind. It explains the mental tribulations or conflicts of literary characters, unexplained or left behind by the authors. It throws light on the repressed feelings and emotions of the seemingly insignificant literary characters.

The paper entitled “A Postmodern Enquiry into The Traumatic Psyche of Gertrude and Ophelia” explores the traumatic psyche of Gertrude and Ophelia, the two insignificant characters of the celebrated Shakespearean drama *Hamlet*. Shakespeare emphasizes the mental conflicts and psychological illness of his male characters but fails to provide this liberty to the female characters. Their concerns, feelings, emotions and thoughts are unnoticed and ignored therefore it is indispensable to give voice to these neglected women characters like Gertrude and Ophelia. In this postmodern world that celebrates hybridity and profusion, it is crucial to ensure that all voices are heard irrespective of gender, race and class. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse the psychology of these women characters to give them the space and representation they deserve to enjoy along with other celebrated literary characters of the canon.

The play *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare depicts the tragic life and death of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. Shakespeare points out the mental conflicts, troubles and tribulations of Prince Hamlet through numerous soliloquies but fails to provide this opportunity to the female characters, Gertrude and Ophelia, who are as traumatized as Hamlet. Shakespeare ignores

these female characters and portrays them as naive and gullible women who lack the courage and agency to express themselves. Hamlet holds a grudge against Gertrude and Ophelia even when they are not directly responsible for Hamlet's misery. Hamlet: Have you eyes?

Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,

And batten on this moor. (Act III Scene IV)

Here, Hamlet abuses his mother for marrying his uncle Claudius but fails to listen to his mother about her decision to marry Claudius. He judges his mother and considers her as a wicked whore. Here, Shakespeare denies Gertrude the right to defend her actions, whereas accords Hamlet full authority to abuse his mother even when he is unsure about the profanity of Gertrude's action. Gertrude has always remained the weak and insignificant character throughout the play. She never gets the chance to tell her story but remains a naive figure who allows the patriarchal society around her to make judgements about her. Gertrude neither challenges nor opposes the patriarchal system that depicted her as a whore, never steps out of the role given to her and never tries to defend her actions. Throughout the play, she lives for others and forgets to live for herself. Her overwhelming love for her son Hamlet made her drink the poison that Claudius had prepared for Hamlet. Until her last breath, she tried to save Hamlet, whereas Hamlet resented her without acknowledging her love and affection for him. Shakespeare, through his characterization of Gertrude, succeeded in making the readers believe Gertrude to be the most self-centred and gullible woman who committed incest by marrying her brother-in-law.

Ophelia, yet another female character in the play *Hamlet*, receives similar treatment as that of Gertrude. She is reduced to a woman of no thoughts and voice for herself; she merely follows the rules and norms laid down by the patriarchal society around her; she conforms to the norms and knowledge of the people around her and fails to challenge or oppose the societal rules that reduced her to a mere plaything. Ophelia frantically follows the advice of her father and her brother.

Ophelia: I think nothing my lord. (Act III Scene II) These words uttered by her prove her inability to think and make decisions for herself. When Laertes and Polonius become the controlling patriarchal figures to Ophelia, Hamlet becomes the one who uses Ophelia to relieve himself of his pain and suffering. He abuses her and makes her feel that she is not worthy enough to be in a meaningful relationship with him; Hamlet, rather than accepting his

faults uses Ophelia as a victim on whom he can cast all the blame for all the tragic events that happened in his life.

Hamlet: Get thee a nunnery, why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners. (Act III Scene I) These lines uttered by Hamlet reflect his disgust towards Ophelia and the people around him. Here, Shakespeare uses Ophelia as a woman on whom the patriarchal society can shower abuses when they face the bitter troubles of life. "Ophelia let others construct her is obvious" (Finkelstein). Instead of narrating her own story, Ophelia lets others construct her story; readers understand Ophelia to be a naive and gullible woman because the patriarchal society uses its power to convince the readers and constructs Ophelia how they want her to be. Ophelia conforms to these narratives and accepts the passive role that society frames for her by accepting everything that is about her. She understands herself through the words of others; she never tries to understand herself nor listens to her inner voice because she, an Elizabethan woman, is unaware of her rights as a human. She is ignorant of her right to express herself and her freedom to tell her story rather than being a character in a story told by someone else.

The patriarchal society has made Ophelia highly dependent upon them; this is evident when Ophelia turns mad after the death of her father Polonius, and the shattering of her relationship with Hamlet. Ophelia's life constructed by the men around her became meaningless when they disappeared; this ultimately led to her suicide. Her madness permitted her to express herself and to recollect the promises made by Hamlet. Ophelia was treated as a lunatic when she detached herself from the patriarchal authority and started to express herself. The general trend of treating a woman mad when she detaches from the patriarchal rules that controls her is well evident in Shakespeare's treatment of Ophelia. Ophelia resorted to madness to express herself and to free her from the strings of patriarchal authority. Shakespeare also was careful never to let Ophelia speak more of herself, so he killed Ophelia because a woman who speaks too much about herself without the agency of a male figure does not deserve to live was the belief held by the Elizabethans of his era. Shakespearean women never received fair treatment and were denied the right to express their feelings, troubles and fears. Instead of judging these female characters based on the statements made by the male figures, it is essential to initiate a study of these neglected female characters. If Shakespeare had given due emphasis to the thoughts, feelings and emotions of these women, if he had given them the liberty to narrate their lives, they would have been recognized and acknowledged just like Hamlet and

Laertes. In order to understand these women characters, it is essential to dive deep into the psychology of these neglected women; this will help to form an entirely different reading of the play *Hamlet*. “The traditional depiction of Gertrude is a false one because what her words and actions actually create is a soft, obedient, dependent, unimaginative woman” (Smith 243). Here, Smith challenges the depiction of Gertrude made by Shakespeare. Interpretations like these empower the neglected women characters by giving them a voice that speaks for themselves.

Gertrude and Ophelia were battling with their sufferings and insecurities; they were trying to live the life others wanted them to live whilst they tried to cope with their traumatic lives. They gave up their happiness and pleasures to be accepted and acknowledged; this made them victims of the male chauvinistic society. Just like Hamlet, Gertrude and Ophelia had their battles going inside them. For Gertrude, Hamlet was her only hope and happiness, but Shakespeare denied her the love of her beloved son that she desired the most by portraying her as a lustful woman who committed incest. Everyone lives with the desire to love and be loved; love is the water of life, as said by Rumi. These women craved love and recognition, and their desire to be loved made them submit themselves to the men around them. Ophelia submitted herself to Hamlet because she believed that Hamlet truly loved her, but the love Hamlet had for Ophelia was suspicious. Hamlet never expressed his love towards her until her death. He made her life miserable by denying her the love she deserved, by abusing her and by killing her beloved father. Ophelia is worried about Hamlet when she sees him slowly descending into madness.

Ophelia: o! what a noble mind is here o’erthrown: The courtier’s, soldier’s, scholar’s, eye, tongue, sword; (Act III Scene I) Here, she bemoans Hamlet’s insanity and is worried about Hamlet and his degradation but, Hamlet fails to reciprocate the love and concern Ophelia has for him. He is not at all concerned about how the death of Polonius affects Ophelia, even when he is the villain who killed her father. Ophelia’s love and longing for Hamlet made her take the wrong decision to be in a relationship with him but the patriarchal figures around her prevented her from continuing this relationship, for she would bring ill fame to the family. Ophelia follows Hamlet out of love and gives up her love for Hamlet out of her love towards her father and her brother. She remained obedient to Polonius and Laertes so they would not abandon her. She had been living her whole life fulfilling all the wishes of her brother and father, but they abandoned her when she needed them the most.

“Woe to him who saw no more sense in his life, no aim, no purpose and therefore no point in carrying on. He was soon lost” (Frankl 121). According to the Austrian psychiatrist Viktor E Frankl, there is no point in living if life ceases to be meaningful; a man who had lost the will to live, who finds life devoid of any purpose, will soon lose himself to death; this is true for both Ophelia and Gertrude, Ophelia never searched for the meaning of her life. She, surrounded by male figures who controlled her and advised her to act upon their whims and fancies, felt that their presence made her life meaningful. When suddenly these meaning makers deserted her, life turned to be meaningless. She failed to know her worth and the meaning of her life. When she reached this state of absolute meaninglessness, she made the decision to end her life. If she had been an independent woman who made decisions for herself and lived according to her desires, she would have lived even in the absence of the patriarchal society.

Gertrude, the Queen of Denmark, is denied the respect and recognition enjoyed by others of the court; she is deprived of all her rights and is denied the right to express herself, the right to make decisions for herself and the right to defend herself by depicting her as an adulterous woman. Her life was designed by the people in her immediate vicinity; she didn't had control over the decisions she made or the course of her actions. Her conformity to the norms laid by society made her a victim like Ophelia. Gertrude is looked at with contempt and disgust for marrying Claudius soon after the death of her husband. She loses the love of her most beloved son who often portrays Claudius in a better manner than Gertrude; he feels ashamed to be considered the son of a woman who committed incest. Here, Gertrude represents the condition of Elizabethan women who become prey to patriarchal authority; they were treated as seductresses who seduce poor innocent men. She lived in a society that considered adultery as a more serious crime than murder. Her very act of marrying Claudius made her the most wicked woman of the times. Society turned everything and everyone against her and made her life miserable and pathetic. Hamlet accuses his mother of committing incest but never tries to understand the situation that forced her to marry Claudius. During the Elizabethan era, women were not even allowed to perform on stage; they were considered insignificant and incapable of making decisions. Therefore, we can assume that Gertrude was forced into marrying Claudius rather than having chosen to wed him. Gertrude never in the play gets an opportunity to talk about herself and her life decisions; she is constantly accused by Hamlet of her marriage that was totally out of her control. Shakespeare included the play *The Murder of Gonzago* to prove the infidelity of Gertrude, but he never allows Gertrude to

speak of her infidelity. Gertrude becomes a victim of the cruel plot laid by Claudius, and he succeeds in creating a rift between mother and son by marrying her. Gertrude never speaks about her relationship with King Hamlet or Claudius; she never proclaims that she is having a happy married life with Claudius. But Hamlet assumes that his mother is happily married to Claudius and resents her for her actions. Not only the characters in the play but the readers are also made to view Gertrude as an adulteress woman who committed incest by denying her the right to speak for herself and justify her actions. If Gertrude was given the chance to speak for herself, she would have an entirely different story that tramples the fake constructs and narratives of the patriarchal society. Gertrude as well as Ophelia were deprived of the chance to tell their stories because it would demolish and deconstruct the false narratives and expose the cruelties of the patriarchal society.

“No man should judge unless he ask himself in absolute honesty whether, in a similar situation, he might not have done the same” (Frankl 75). It is easy to judge Ophelia and Gertrude and regard them as unsophisticated and unsuspecting women who merely followed the whims and fancies of men around them unless we try to understand the situations and traumas they underwent. Judging them by their weakness and limitations helps to promote the false representations and narratives held by the male-dominated society. Gertrude and Ophelia are women who were denied their opportunities for self-expression; their situations made them highly dependent on the men around them, and this dependence made them victims of a male chauvinistic society. They craved love despite being shunned by all around them. Gertrude lost her husband and her son; she was compelled to marry Claudius, whereas Ophelia, a motherless child, was only surrounded by male figures who defined her life and made decisions for her by making her believe in her incapacities to live a life of her own choice. When these women were surrounded by men who defined their lives, who made decisions for them, and who taught them how to act their lives, they lost themselves and their lives. They ended their lives because they couldn’t find the meaning of their lives that were controlled and designed by men. They were advised to live out other people’s dreams rather than to have their own. Ophelia and Gertrude ended their life not after fulfilling their desires but after living the life others wanted them to live. Even when they are treated as insignificant figures devoid of any representation, it is essential to understand the mental agonies and traumas of these women characters that they had suppressed until their deaths. The sudden and mysterious death of Ophelia soon after she reveals some facts about her relationship with

Hamlet is evidence of how women were suppressed when they tried to speak for themselves.

"Gertrude is not an utterly lecherous character, yet Hamlet magnifies the evilness of his mother's lechery, for he can only attain the status of a classical hero if moral turpitude and vice spread throughout the play from Claudius to Gertrude and then to Ophelia" (Charnes). Shakespeare highlights the vices of Gertrude and the passivity of Ophelia only to venerate Hamlet as the ultimate representation of patriarchy, as the upholder of all values and morals and as the patriarchal figure who fights and destroys the evil around him. Rather than changing himself and his attitude towards life, Hamlet criticizes and corrects others and makes their lives miserable by labelling them for being responsible for his tragedy; his narratives and assumptions make Gertrude and Ophelia insignificant and make them the evil doers when he is responsible for his misery. Thus, Ophelia and Gertrude become victims of Hamlet in his attempt to present himself as the ultimate upholder of morality by making others around him insignificant and passive.

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The Globalised Image and Reflection: An analytical study on the effects of Globalisation in India as portrayed in the, ‘*The White Tiger*’

Anupama Murali

The developments of technology and modern communication mechanisms have ensured that the world is viewed as an interconnected global village. What was once a huge number of countries with limited means of interactions with each other has become closely interlinked entities that remain different countries in name only. Each country is closely connected with a wide array of countries that have no apparent similarities to one another. People may belong to different cultures but increasingly exhibit similar aspirations and traits.

Globalisation has entered all aspects of our lives. From our eating habits to entertainment avenues to aspirations and lifestyle choices, each and every aspect of humanity is influenced by globalisation. So it is only natural that literature has been keenly influenced by globalisation. Literary outputs from different parts of the world have been greatly enriched due to globalisation and many iconic works of literature have ensued from it.

Indian literature in English is no stranger to this phenomenon. Many of the celebrated works in Indian literature in English have been a result of globalisation playing a key part in our lives. The most famous example of the globalised Indian English Novel would undoubtedly be Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight Children*. Rushdie evoked all the charm of India and intricately woven it into the inherent mysticism of our country to produce a novel that resonates with its beauty and paints a picture of a deeply flawed, yet intricately beautiful country that is both traditional and globalised at the same time.

Another example of a globalised Indian English Novel is Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*. Winner of the Man Booker Prize in 2008, this celebrated novel represents a picture of India to the global audience that conforms to the image that is commonly propagated in the international media. The effects of globalisation have been showcased in detail in this novel. Every Indian, irrespective of class and creed, is shown to be affected in some form by the different traits of globalisation.

The premise of *The White Tiger* is of a common man of India narrating the story of his life and how he has risen in life. The format of the novel is unique as it’s in the form of letters written by a common Indian man to the visiting Chinese Premier. This very aspect is a prime example of the effects of globalisation as an Indian is depicted as needing to communicate to

a Chinese leader to present the story of his life. The fact that the growing hegemony of China is recognised by a common Indian is in itself a commentary on the globalised nature of things.

The protagonist, Balram Halwai, was born in a village called Laxmangarh in the state of Bihar. His rickshaw puller father wanted him to be educated and live a better life. Therefore, he was sent to school where he was the brightest boy in his class. On a surprise visit by the school superintendent, Balram is the only student in class who impresses the superintendent with his answers. Balram stands out in class and is therefore compared to a white tiger.

In order to pay off debts from a cousin's marriage, Balram is forced to leave school and work in a tea shop. Balram does not enjoy his work and performs badly and hence gets thrown out from the teashop. He overhears that a job as a driver pays well and undergoes the training required to become a driver. Eventually he gets hired by the landlord of his village. Even though he is hired as the driver, Balram has to do all the menial jobs and function as a servant of the household.

A few weeks later, Balram comes to Delhi as the driver for the landlord's son, Mr Ashok and his wife, Pinky Madam. Mr Ashok has recently returned from US and tries to treat Balram with respect and pay him fairly. Balram stays in appalling conditions in the servant quarters with his bedside teeming with cockroaches. Mr Ashok conducts dealings in the coal business and pays bribes to people in the corridors of power to ensure his family business stays on track.

One day Balram is forced to watch as his employers get drunk and Pinky Madam takes control of the car. Under the influence of alcohol, Pinky Madam drives without paying attention to any rules and ultimately runs over a child. Balram is asked by his employers to take the blame for the accident and is made to sign a statement saying that he was alone in the car while this incident happened. But as nobody reported this accident, no case had been registered and the whole issue gets resolved quickly. Pinky Madam is repulsed by the lack of conscience shown by her family and leaves the house and walks out of the marriage.

These incidents lead to a rise in Balram's resentment towards his employers. He starts to cheat on Mr. Ashok. He inflates the bills for unwanted car repairs; siphons off petrol and earns extra cash by making the car a taxi and picking up paying customers. Balram is fed up of his way of life and decides to take things into his own hands.

Balram decides to kill Mr Ashok and starts making plans towards this end. He knows the ramifications of the murder and the fact that his family members will have to pay the price for his act. But Balram decides that he can no longer live the life of a servant and carefully plots his acts and kills Mr Ashok on the day he has seven lakh rupees with him in a red bag. In a secluded area, Balram tells Mr Asok that the car is not functioning properly and asks him to take a look at the tires. While the unsuspecting Mr Ashok inspects the tires, Balram hits his head with a bottle and dumps him in the bushes to die.

Balram chooses Bangalore as the place to start a new life and uses the money in the red bag to start a new business venture. He starts a taxi company that provides cab services to outsourcing companies. Thus the servant becomes the master with his own line of drivers. Life comes a full circle for him and he is shown as a part of the same elite class to whom he earlier had been a servant. Balram who always considered himself as a “white tiger” ends up naming his company as White Tiger Drivers. At the conclusion of the story, Balram is shown as wanting to move on and start new ventures and enjoy greater success in life.

The White Tiger through Balram showcases the different aspects of globalisation. Both the positive and negative traits of globalisation are highlighted in this book. Mr Ashok had come from US to India with the intention of going back in a few months. But once in India he feels that in the present scenario India offers as much opportunity as any other part of the world. This is a key aspect of globalisation whereby the opportunities open for a skilled person are the same all over the world.

Increased job creation is another key aspect of globalisation. The depiction of Bangalore towards the end of *The White Tiger* highlights the growth in our cities due to the advent of globalisation. In such cities, jobs are available for the enterprising and any person with the drive to succeed is bound to succeed. Balram’s success story in Bangalore is a key testament to this fact. He realises that the outsourcing companies in Bangalore are the primary factor behind the influx of money in the hands of the newly employed segment of the population. These companies cater to the needs of the people living in countries such as US. Thus Balram is an indirect beneficiary of the different avenues that globalisation has opened up for the common man to make a living.

Globalisation dehumanises human beings as they get caught up in the race to succeed. Balram represents this highly successful group of people who need to step over the shoulders

of their fellow citizens in order to reach higher levels of success. Balram needs to kill Mr Asok both due to his resentment and the fact that he needs a huge sum of money in order to start any business. In the drive to succeed, Globalisation makes people forget their feelings. Balram knows that the murder of Mr Ashok will result in great harm for the family members living in his own village. But the drive to succeed makes him forget the need to protect and care for his family members.

The loss of empathy in human beings can also be attributed to the effects of globalisation. The rich masters shown in the novel do not care for their drivers and their servants who live in inhuman conditions. The unprivileged is shown to be at the beck and call of the rich without any thought for their own comfort and needs. This clear class divide can be clearly seen in the novel. Mr Ashok and Pinky Madam find great enjoyment in the way Balram pronounces “pizza” and “mall”; this amusement highlights the class divide prevalent in our globalised society.

A great deal is made of the fact that Balram (the driver) is able to pick out the songs of Sting. While globalisation has made it seemingly okay for the rich people to enjoy the songs of Sting, the fact that a lowly driver even knows the name of Sting is a source of amusement for his masters. So while globalisation has increased the number of avenues and opportunities in front of an Indian, the traditional prejudices are shown as remaining the same.

One of the landmarks of globalisation is the vast number of malls that have come up in India. The fear that the inside of a mall brings initially out in Balram clearly shows the class divide brought on by globalisation. Balram steps inside a mall with the fear that his attire is not suited to the mall and the guards will surely throw him out. A lack of the sense of belonging can be clearly seen.

Corruption is closely interlinked to globalisation. The fact that corruption pays is omnipresent in *The White Tiger*. The very basis of business is shown as being built on corruption. US-returned Mr Ashok relocates to Delhi with the sole purpose of helping his family business grow by fixing deals with corrupt politicians and their henchmen. When Balram tries to set up his business with the outsourcing companies in Bangalore, he finds that he needs to bribe the corrupt policemen in Bangalore. Thus corruption and globalisation are shown to go hand in hand in India.

The fact that globalisation does not benefit everyone equally is clearly shown in *The White Tiger*. A vast section of our people is shown as living in filth while their occupation is to build the monoliths that are the bulwarks of globalisation. Even as *The White Tiger* focuses on the ills of our society and highlights the paradox that plagues India, we can read it as a critique of the effects of globalisation on India.

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Unburdening the Trauma: The Politics and Aesthetics of Herta Müller's *The Appointment*

Ramesh K. G

Romanian-born German Nobel laureate Herta Müller's *The Appointment* is an unusual yet rewarding novel set against the backdrop of the non-democratic regime of the totalitarian Nicolae Ceau'escu. Ceau'escu was the General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party from 1965 to 1989 and he was also the head of the state from 1967 to 1989. When he was in power, people and the media had minimum freedom of expression and no manifestation of dissidence was left unpunished. The whole state was under the constant surveillance of his brutal secret police force—the Securitate—and their undercover agents. *The Appointment* recounts the traumatic experiences of a young female clothing-factory worker who has been expelled from the factory for committing a “serious crime”. Even though the dictator is never mentioned, the novel is dissident as it lays bare the rampant corruption and immorality at the administrative level. Müller succeeds in adopting the most suitable narrative strategies to convey the trauma and helplessness of the protagonist. The study is an attempt to analyse the politics and aesthetics of this dissident novel.

Unlike the protagonist of Herta Müller's masterpiece *The Land of Green Plums*, the protagonist of *The Appointment* is not a well-educated intellectual. She is an expelled clothing factory worker. She has been expelled from the factory for a transgression which is dubbed by the investigating officer as “whoring”. Her transgression is the byproduct of her intense desire to escape from the suffocating regime of Nicolae Ceau'escu. After separating from her indifferent husband, she slips marriage proposals into the back pockets of men's suits bound for Italy. She says:

It was just after I had separated from my husband; white linen suits were being packed up for Italy. After we went on a ten-day business trip together, Nelu (her colleague) expected to keep on sleeping with me. But I'd made up my mind to marry a Westerner, and I slipped the same note into ten back pockets: Marry me, *ti aspetto*, signed with my name and address. The first Italian who replied would be accepted (46).

Her attempt fails because her notes have been discovered from the suits. In a meeting convened to judge her crime, the officials have termed it “prostitution in the workplace”. Annoyed by the notes, her colleague Nelu tries in vain to charge treason against her. However,

later he succeeds in expelling her from the factory by putting three notes in the trousers destined for Sweden. The notes say: “Best wishes from the dictatorship” (47).

The protagonist’s dissident wish to escape from the dictatorship drives her to the interrogation room of Major Albu. He frequently calls her to his office and subjects her to debilitating humiliations. Major Albu begins each of his questioning sessions with a wet indecent kiss on her hand. She says: “*Major Albu lifts my hand by the fingertips, squeezing my nails so hard I could scream. He presses one wet lip to my fingers, so he can keep the other free to speak. He always kisses my hand the exact same way. . .*” (3). After each interrogation session, she becomes disturbed and spends several nights sleepless. She takes at least two or three weeks to relearn how to sleep. On the days of interrogation, fear conquers her and she follows several superstitions to turn her meeting with Major Albu less humiliating. She says: “I got up, careful to place my right foot on the floor before my left, as I always do when I’ve been summoned. I can’t say for sure I really believe in it. . .” (14). Moreover, she attends all interrogation sessions wearing the same green blouse. One day she eats a walnut before her meeting with Major Albu. On that day Major Albu completes the interrogation faster. Then, she starts believing in nuts and eats a walnut before every interrogation. She thinks that these fallacious beliefs will somehow help her to overcome her fear. However, the routines that she follows on the days of interrogation only add to her fear.

Soon after discovering her notes from the suits, Albu summons the narrator on three consecutive days. Three days of humiliation drives her to the verge of insanity. She Says:

. . . when I was summoned for three days in a row, I couldn’t sleep a wink. My nerves were razor wire. My body shed weight, it was nothing but taut skin and hollow bones. . . . On the third day, as I was heading home from Albu, I found myself walking to the park. I lay with my face in the grass, unable to feel a thing. I couldn’t have cared less if I’d been lying below the grass, dead, I would have welcomed it and at the same time I liked living so damned much. I wanted to have a good cry and instead wound up laughing myself silly. Good thing the earth sounds so dull and hollow, I laughed until I was tired. (127) From her feelings, readers can infer the extent to which she has been humiliated. Wherever autocrats rule, fear is the constant companion of common people. Autocrats expect absolute loyalty from their subjects. No one is allowed to challenge their “unquestionable” authority. In order to keep their power intact, they devise various strategies and implement brutal mechanisms. Keeping people, especially rebels, in fear of the authority is the best strategy to ward off dissent. Under

Ceau'escu, the situation in Romania wasn't different. His secret police force, the Securitate was his most powerful apparatus to spread fear. In his text *Romania: An Illustrated History*, Nicolae Klepper says about this secret police force:

From early 1970s onward, it expanded into one of the world's most dreaded state police forces. By 1989 it employed an estimated 2,400 officers, and its agents and informers were to be found everywhere. Any information could be used at any time to have someone dismissed, blackmailed evicted from his home, or barred from higher education. (229) In the novel, Major Albu, one of the members of the Securitate is an adept in frightening the dissidents. In order to frighten the narrator, during one of the numerous interrogations, Albu secretly places a severed finger in her handbag. On her way back, when she rummages in her bag for her wallet, she feels a little package that doesn't belong to her. She says:

It was wrapped in yellow-gray paper, the ends were firmly twisted as if around a piece of candy, there was something hard inside. I opened the little packet and strained my eyes to see what it was. What I saw was not a cigarette or a twig, it wasn't a parsnip, and it wasn't a bird's claw, it was a finger with a bluish-black nail. (141) She recognizes what Albu is capable of. He succeeds in instilling fear of death in the protagonist.

Another strategy of the dictator was keeping suspects under surveillance. The Securitate had thousands of secret agents to spy on the suspects. Therefore everybody looked each other with suspicion. Fear of betrayal kept people isolated and close friends were very few. In *The Appointment*, the protagonist lives under the surveillance of her neighbour. With her second husband, she lives in the leaning tower. Old Micu and his insane wife live downstairs by the entrance. One day, Old Micu complains to the narrator that Albu has summoned him because of her. He adds that Albu has instructed him to keep an eye on her and he has already filled two school notebooks with his observations regarding her. Old Micu becomes annoyed and his attitude to the narrator changes because he thinks that he suffers only because of her fault. In the novel, the narrator and his husband suspect many others as undercover agents of the Securitate. This strategy of the Securitate turns friends into foes and everyone feels lonely and weak in the regime where anyone could betray anyone. The protagonist of the novel has trusted only two people—her best friend Lilli and her second husband Paul. To her dismay, towards the end of the novel, she recognizes that Paul has also succumbed to the threats and persuasions of the Securitate. He has been spying on her. She says: “The trick is not to go mad” (214). About Herta Müller's *The Appointment*, Brigid Haines quite aptly says: “Of all

Müller's novels it illustrates the power of the state to invade the private sphere and the near impossibility but absolute necessity of offering resistance. The individual is more than ever alone, more than ever penetrated in all aspects of her being by power. . ." (119).

The protagonist's best friend, Lilli belongs to the German minority in Romania. Even before her birth, Lilli's father dies on the battlefield. Her mother marries again. When Lilli grows into a beautiful woman, like many others, she wishes to flee from the insufferable regime. Owing to her charms, everyone falls under her spell. One of her many lovers is a sixty-six-year-old retired military officer. They decide to flee across the Hungarian border. But their attempt fails and tragedy ensues.

Lilli's officer was handcuffed, taken away to a tin hut, and guarded by the youth who had fired the shot, immersed in thoughts of his good fortune. Lilli lay where she had fallen. . . . Five dogs came running, their legs flying over the grass, which was as high as their throats. Trailing far behind, a number of hard-driven soldiers ran after them. By the time they reached Lilli, it was not only her that was in tatters. The dogs had torn Lilli's body to shreds. Under their muzzles Lilli lay red as a bed of poppies. (58) In Ceau'escu's Romania, the price of dissent, especially for the German minority, was nothing but death. To unburden the trauma of living in the Communist Romania, many characters in the novel are preoccupied with various obsessions and superstitions. The protagonist's second husband Paul and thousands of others in the regime are addicted to alcohol. The narrator says:

Just after four, the trucks begin delivering goods to the row of shops down below. . . . A few crates of bread, milk and vegetables, and large quantities of plum brandy. Whenever the food run out, the women and children manage to cope: the lines disperse, and all roads lead home. But when the brandy runs out, the men curse their lot and pull out their knives. (6)

The power holders know very well that addicted men won't take their knives for anything other than alcohol. Therefore, the state provides more alcohol than food. Lilli is obsessed with old men. She has made love with her stepfather, a hotel porter, a doctor, a dealer in leather goods, a photographer and a retired military officer, and all of them are much older than her. Narrator's first father-in-law has many extra-marital relations and, in her son's absence, he makes advances even towards the narrator. Many other characters in the novel, including the narrator and her father, attempt to find solace in illicit relations. However, these obsessions make them more and more insatiable.

Herta Müller adopts the most suitable narrative strategies to convey her protagonist's trauma. The entire novel is the stream of consciousness of the unnamed female protagonist. Her tram ride to the office of Major Albu becomes a ride down her memory lane. The narrator doesn't attempt to find order in her disordered world and therefore the events are not chronologically ordered. Time shifts between the present and the past. Events are portrayed as they pop up to the consciousness of the protagonist and therefore the narration is non-linear. Against the totalitarian setting, Müller has no pleasant tales to relate and, as it is ought to be, the narrative leaves its readers enervated and disturbed. Of course, like many other novels of Herta Müller, *The Appointment* is an alternative history of Ceau'escu's non-democratic Romania; a history written not from the centre, but from the periphery. *The Appointment* challenges and decentres the metanarratives of Romanian Communist Party by portraying the harsh experiences that an ordinary clothing factory worker endures during the Communist Regime. Without ever directly referring to the dictator, the implied author of the novel depicts the vicious presence and dehumanizing effects of his absolute power. The trauma and exhaustion of living under a tyrant and his watchful secret police cannot be better portrayed. In her essay "When Dictatorships Fail to Deprive of Dignity: Herta Müller's "Romanian Period"," Cristina Petrescu says: "... her writings are an invaluable source for those who want to understand how non-democratic regimes control individual" (71). Müller herself was a victim of the oppressive power of the totalitarian regime. Therefore, she re-presents Ceau'escu's Romania not only to articulate her dissent but also to unburden herself of her traumatic past.

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