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## **Tribes in Transition: A Reading of Acculturation and Enculturation of Naga Tribes in Easterine Kire's *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered***

***Kavitha Gopalakrishnan***

*Sky Is My Father* by Easterine Kire portrays the life of Naga indigenous people living amidst a naturally rich mountain-scape and the forced recruitment of Naga tribesmen as bonded labourers by the British. Britain's colonization has always brought deforestation and disruption of the habitat of indigenous people and native plant species. The tribal warriors of the Angami tribe try to resist and their fight is the collective fight of their community to save the land which they are deeply connected to from British invasion and subjugation.

Easterine Kire revitalizes the cultural practices that have been facing historical elision. She asserts the culturally constituted identity by reviving the vibrant cultural practices and tribal epistemologies through the characters, context, and plot of the novel which are politically conscious. The paper shall foreground the hegemonic British agenda of mentally deculturizing the Nagas, substantiating the invalidity of their traditional animism-inspired religious beliefs, and implanting the European Colonial Culture. This paper shall establish the incomparability of British regime-enforced Christianity to the traditionally abundant Naga religion. The paper also proposes to discuss how Naga life is inextricably woven with their traditions and tales and point out how the tribal world desires to establish the superiority of the traditional culture over the overbearing Western culture. The paper shows how the novel glorifies the social taboos, rituals, and festivals, abundantly evident in the Naga society and showcases the insecurities, fears, and troubles of Naga tribes in transition. In *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*, Easterine Kire attempts to retrieve the oral traditions and discuss how oral narratives shape the psyche and life of the Naga Community (*Tenyimia*) by revisiting the oral traditions, especially of Angami Nagas.

Traditions of a particular community offer the knowledge of the socio-cultural patterns of behaviour that are transmitted from one generation to the next. Oral narratives play a crucial role in every indigenous tradition to maintain its customs, rituals, beliefs, traditions, way of living, and way of being. They also construct their archetypal hero who bears the value, morality, and indigenous knowledge of his/her culture. They enable a particular community to recreate their history and offer them a sense of belonging to the ethnic identities to which they

originally belonged. The stories narrated in the various forms of folklore or oral traditions may not be historically accurate or even true. However, they provided the much-needed cultural cohesion amongst the particular tribe or community in which they were in vogue. Meeta Deka in her article “Folklore and Northeast Indian History” rightly concluded:

The very cultural heritage that gives indigenous peoples their identity, now far more than in the past, is under threat of extinction. This is particularly true of Northeast India, which is inhabited by over 200 of the 635 tribal groups in the country, and what is more striking is the fact that this region, plains and hills people included, geographically secluded as it is from the mainland shares greater affinity, besides the geographical, in terms of race, culture, and tradition to its eastern neighbours, viz. China, Tibet and Myanmar than with the mainland. Identity crises have grown exponentially in the last the six decades and more in post-Independence India, allowing a flourish of cultural diversity in the region as elsewhere, adding vibrancy to national identity on one hand, while the ever-widening contours of the economic world under the process of globalization, taking the shape of the Look-East Policy and other economic developments in Northeast India, have converted this region into one of South Asia’s hottest trouble spots, steeped in insurgency and secessionist movements. Ethnic identity crises have perforce drawn the attention of the various tribes to look for roots and invent a history, wherein folklore plays a remarkable role. (Deka 176)

In *Sky Is My Father* Easterine Kire writes about the life of Naga indigenous people living amidst naturally rich mountain scape and the forced recruitment of Naga tribesmen as bonded labourers by the British which tribal warriors of the Angami tribe try to resist. Their fight is the collective fight of their community to save the land which they are deeply connected to from British invasion and subjugation. The Battle of Khonoma was the first Naga resistance against the British government. After the battle ended, Christianity made advent into the hills taking over the whole indigenous faith of the Naga tribes. When the British came to India with hopes of colonizing the country, they would have to self-fashion Indians as racially inferior to preach that their race was superior. This process of otherization is an essential element of survival and domination. The West has its own beliefs and ideas of what it thinks of the word development, contrary to what might be the idea of development in any other Global South country. With the British invasion, Nagas came into contact with the rest of the country. In 1828 the British annexed Assam however the fierce nature of the Naga tribes compelled British forces to sign a non-aggression pact with the tribe chiefs. Nagaland consists of sixteen

tribes namely Angami, Ao, Chang, Chakhesang, Dimasa Kachari, Konyak, Khiamniungan, Kuki, Lotha, Pochury, Phom, Rengma, Sangtam, Sumi, Yimchunger, and Zeliang. Easterine Kire in her book *Walking The Roadless Road: Exploring The Tribes of Nagaland* thoroughly describes Naga tribes and their migration from Mongolia and how different tribes today live with diverse practices:

Land gives a Naga his identity. The Naga farmer lives very close to the natural world, using its rhythm to dictate the periods of his cultivation. He feels bonded to the forests and the valleys where he lives. The forest yields timber for his house and food in form of herbs and fish and wildlife (Kire 45).

The Naga tribes worship land that gives them food. Therefore, they must abide by its taboos as a symbol of respect for the soil that provides nourishment. Kire writes land disputes are settled between tribes by taking oaths. For example, while taking oaths regarding land disputes they swallow a lump of the earth while the oath ceremony. Governed by the idea of equitable cultivation and distribution the Nagas believed in sustainable development true to its spirit. When the British entered the Naga tribal territories it marked the introduction of a time of chaos.

*Sky Is My Father* written by Easterine Kire opens with a meeting taking place for an upcoming expedition of Khonoma warriors against their neighbouring Garipheju, one of the northern Angami Villages. Garipheju was also popular for their valiant tribal warriors because of which Khonoma warriors decided to attack the village for sport. However, the Khonoma warriors lost. The meeting talks about possible war tactics to be employed for avenging their loss to Garipheju in the next Khonoma expedition. The rest of the novel's narrative is set in the lives of Levi and Lato the two brothers and the rest of the Angami Village of Khonoma. These people live in sync with nature and believe firmly in indigenous rituals. They observe *gennaday* which means a day off from working in the field. Genna is observed to protect the crops from animals and pests. They observe Terhunyi which is a harvest day like other Indian communities. After Terhunyi they worship the Creator for abundance.

*Sky Is My Father* also combines history and fiction to narrate the simple life of Khonoma resided by the Angami tribe which is later lost after the Battle of Khonoma. After the Angami Nagas lose the battle to the British army, they are slowly devoured by Christianity and with it, they bid away from their indigenous rituals and customs which are so minutely described in the

novel and are the essence of belonging to a Naga tribe. This battle also marks the Naga's contact with the outside world. "Khonoma nestles amid mountains that are as high as 7,000 feet; a little village on a small hillock cradled by gaunt mountains that form a natural fortress." (Kirevii). However, after the Treaty of Yandabo with the King of Ava the British Government conducts expedition into the Naga Hills. Their basic objective was to build roads through Nagaland to connect their colony in Assam and Manipur. In the process, they were resisted by the Nagas. The Political Agent at Khonoma viewed Naga raids as a symbolic defiance of the Government. The novel describes instances of forcible tax collection often met with resistance. In a letter this agent writes:

The forcible collection of taxes he had undertaken had been met with strong resistance. It angered him enough to make him write: I would demand revenue from Khonoma and Jotsoma in the coming cold weather and in case of refusal realise it by force of arms; I believe the struggle must come sooner or later and it is to the interest of the whole district that the matter should not be deferred (Kire 88).

To extract revenue Mr. Damant and his troop was sent by the British administration to India. Easterine Kire writes in her introduction to the novel about Verrier Elwin's documentation of Damant who was given the prime responsibility on behalf of the British government to prevent "inter-tribal massacre" and "enforcement of fines and penalties on those villages which had been guilty of raiding in disobedience to his orders" along with a collection of tax (Kire, 2018, p. xi). It was resisted by the Naga warriors as a result of which Government official Damant was killed. This led to the Battle of Khonoma.

After the Battle of Khonoma, a peace treaty was signed between the Angami Nagas and the British Government in India. An annual tax of two rupees and an obligation to labour to the government were imposed as law upon the tribe. Postcolonial Ecocriticism exposes the tangled, invisible web of the western grand narrative of the word "development" which the West boastfully tries to preach in the East. Environmental Racism is defined by Deane Curtin as 'the connection, in theory, and practice, of race and the environment so that the oppression of one is connected to, and supported by, the oppression of the other' (Huggan and Tiffin). This form of racism can simply be understood as the injustices taking place concerning one's environment, particularly because of belonging to a certain race. For example, the British officials often refer to the Nagas as savage and their practices as barbaric which they as omnipotent figures think needs to be stopped. The Battle of Khonoma for instance displaces

the Angami tribe from the village because their village is wholly burnt by the British troops. The Angami Nagas who had previously not been open to the outside world are forcibly displaced after the battle.

Structurally, the novel can be divided into two sections, i.e., the first part is about the lost cultural past and practices that define the Naga communities' cultural rootedness and identity. The second part is about the narrative construction of colonial experiences. The first part leads towards the second part when the reader experiences political and cultural developments. As a result, the text becomes more of a postcolonial text depicting colonial domination, the effects of conversion, and the slow death of indigenous culture.

The male dormitories, a central social and cultural institution of the Naga community, are used to inculcate social behaviour and moral code among children to train them as socially responsible beings of the tribe. It is a communal place meant to help the young learn skills like hunting, crafting, building a house, etc., and the values of the tribe are passed on to the next generation. It provides a sense of security and a feeling of community that helps to ensure the longevity of the tribe and its culture. It brings the community together with a sense of relatedness. This place acts as a repository of collective and shared consciousness of the society that gets transferred among children of the tribe. The author shares one of the teachings of dormitories:

The key to right living- avoiding excess in anything- be content with your share of land and fields. People who move boundary stones bring death upon themselves. Every individual has a social obligation to the village. When you are older and your hearts are strong within you, you will take on the responsibility of guarding the village while others will go out to earn a great name for our village (Sky30).

Memories constitute dialogic processes in public spaces. It articulates some particular past and brings together two different spaces and times. Remembering a specific event from the past reprocesses a cultural past and its practices. It is through their struggle against time and forgetfulness in an oral environment that such strategies become essential to remember, learn, and carry forward. This process of remembering needs to be understood within the context of colonization and the erasure of the Naga culture at the time of the high point of cultural colonization.

In the second part of *Sky is My Father*, Kire politically locates the Naga tribe's colonial past in the heat of the anti-colonial struggle. It recounts historical events of the year 1879

when the Naga villagers countered the British invasion, and the war led to the burning of their Khonoma village, “the thatch roofs had burnt easily but the posts of houses took a long time to burn out completely. Finally, half-burnt posts and ashes were all that remained, blackening the whole site. This was the punishment of a proud people who had dared to control their destinies” (Sky 108). It depicts the heroic struggle of the Naga tribe against the British colonization and religious conversion that was initiated by missionaries like Dr. Sidney Rivenburg. However, some people also saw conversion to Christian identity as helping them to keep “apart from the mostly Hindu and Muslim population of the Indian heartland (and) has been partly an act of resistance that parallel the political and armed resistance.” (Baruah 110). This conversion to Christianity can be considered to be one of the most important historical events in the Naga imagination that fostered “a pan-Naga identity” (Baruah 106).

Kire also brings alive the everyday vignettes of Angami life – be it domestic living, market system, law and justice, rituals and crafts, superstitions, etc. These are the markers that signify the uniqueness of the Angami ethnicity that distinguishes them from the other tribes. In the first chapter, the themes of taboos are well expressed with the death of Kovi’s wife. Kovi lives with his wife and a daughter in the village of Khonoma. His wife dies with the delivery of another baby. In the death of his wife, Kovi cannot express his emotions through tears as it was taboo. “No, no mourning for a lashu death, it is taboo.... The strictest of taboos was upon the lashu death. No mourning of the dead” (Kire, 6). The word lashu refers to the death of women during delivery. The dead women are denied funeral rites as it was the strict taboo followed by Khonoma villagers in Nagaland. Kovi and his daughter deeply grieved over the death but they could not express their grief in public as it was taboo. Vipianore members that her father has said that if we break the taboos from our lives, then we are breaking ourselves from life:

If you break the taboos, you break yourself.... If you did not heed the taboos, you could live on unharmed for some years, but the day would soon come when the earth would open up to receive you before your time. And then, when that day struck, you went without the compassion of the village (Kire 14-15).

Here we can understand that the people of Khonoma are carefully observing the taboos as a part of life. The violation of taboos relates to the death of the individual and they do not receive compassion from the villagers. The genna day refers to the no-work days and it was

taboo to work on *Genna* days. “No one violates a genna day; so the genna was death to those who defied it but life to those who abided by it” (Kire 52). On the genna day, the villagers do not work in the agricultural fields and they take a rest from fieldwork. They believed that *Genna* Day would bring death to those who defy it and it gives life to the people who abide by it.

To put it in a nutshell, Kire’s novel is certainly an attempt to decolonize the narrative as it keeps the said tribe at its center, and everything about the outside world is dealt with from this center. Easterine Kire’s primary agenda is to revitalize cultural practices that have been facing “historical elision”. This elision threatens the poly-ethnic, culturally vibrant, and tribal cultures by constructing and presenting the northeastern region of India as a conflict-ridden space. Situated within this ontology of existence, reality, and becoming, Easterine Kire’s *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* revive and revitalize the folktales and cultural practices to assert the cultural economy of the Naga tribes. Her writings thus represent a politically conscious positionality of the characters and context to assert the culturally constituted identity through the revival of vibrant cultural practices and tribal epistemologies.

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## Identity in Flux: The Interplay between Narratives and Identity in Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle*

Ramesh K. G

Narratives are everywhere. All live in narratives. Everybody utters narratives and narratives disclose everybody. Roland Barthes in his "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" comments on the diverse manifestations and universality of narratives quite appropriately:

The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances—as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting (think of Carpaccio's *Saint Ursula*), stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself. (65)

Thus, it is quite impossible to keep away from narratives. Everyone is exposed to a lot of narratives every day and most of them never leave without imparting an influence upon the narratees. Certain narratives can transform people entirely. The narratives with which one confronts can change not only his character but also the way he narrates. Most often the way one narrates is not wholly his own.

Moreover, narratives are often considered the manufacturer of identities. According to the humanist perspective, each individual has an authentic core and an essential identity. But the postmodern conception of the self is entirely different. Postmodern theorists believe in the continual production of identity within specific historical and discursive contexts and according to them identity is often manifested through narratives. "Identity," says Jane Elliott, "is not to be found inside a person (like a kernel within a nutshell) but rather it is relational and inheres in

the interactions a person has with others” (124). The primary source that contributes to the production of one’s identity is his narratives. Mark Currie comments:

... Identity is not within us because it exists only as narrative. By this I mean two things: that the only way to explain who we are is to tell our own story, to select key events which characterise us and organize them according to the formal principles of narrative—to externalizes ourselves as if talking of someone else, and for the purposes of self-representation; but also that we learn how to self-narrate from the outside, from other stories, and particularly through the process of identification with other characters. (17)

But one is not manifested solely through his own narratives. Other people’s narratives on him also plays a vital role. Each human being is a bundle of mysteries; an undefinable entity. But to console oneself, each individual creates certain notions about those around him and shares these notions primarily with the assistance of narratives. Butor says: “Other people, for us, are not only what we have seen of them with our own eyes, but also what they have told us about themselves, or what others have told us about them. They are not only the people we have seen, but also all those we have been told about by others” (45). As mentioned earlier, one’s identity is revealed primarily through his own narratives. But the same narrative can be perceived differently by different narratees. Thus, identity is relative. One’s identity depends not only on him but also on the ideologies and knowledge of the narratees of his narratives. So, a narrator can get both praises and curses for the same narrative. Another complication is that, if one is an adept in the art of narration, instead of revealing his true essence through his narratives, he can conceal it for the cause of the production of a favourable identity.

Another intricacy between narratives and identity is the transient nature of identity and the role played by narratives in it. Time and experiences can change a person’s craft in the art of narration. Thus, a person may narrate differently as the time goes and will automatically get perceived differently at different moments of life. Hence, identity is in an eternal flux; an illusion created by narratives and there is ample scope for reconstruction. Up to a certain extent, one can change or reconstruct his identity just by narrating differently. Thus, narratives can construct, conceal and reconstruct identity. Alexander Georgakopoulou says: “Research on identities in narrative increasingly shares with the rest of discourse studies the view that identities are not given entities, static properties, or finished projects. Instead, they are practical accomplishments that are constructed—and even deconstructed . . .” (83). Thus, one’s identity is continually

under construction and even reconstruction rather than being a fixed set of characteristics or traits.

When one speaks about another person, the listeners can perceive a lot about the speaker too. So, even when one speaks about another, he is giving hints about himself. One's responses to a narrative can also indicate his traits. His perspectives and ideological stance are revealed through such responses. Of course, it is the age of globalization. But even in this globalized world, each nation has its own cultural identity. Contrary to the expectations of the advocates of globalization, it hasn't marked the end of territorial solidarities based on the nationality principle. Instead of eliminating nationhood, the rise of supra-territoriality strengthened it. J. Lull says: "We do not live in a global village where a mythic, all-encompassing, technology-based super society replaces outdated and unwanted local social systems and cultures. Despite technology's awesome reach, we have not, and will not, become one people" (41). Each individual of a nation gets and bears his nation's cultural identity as a legacy and it is often manifested through the narratives. Even though globalization hasn't yet wiped out national identities, it has the power to spread cultural hybridization. Along with industrial products and individuals, narratives cross the national boundaries and attack the cultural virginity of the nations and create hybridized entities. Because of these cultural exchanges, clashing elements enter into each and every culture ultimately to produce cultural schizophrenia. Jan Aart Scholte says: "More than homogenization, the overall impact of globalization on identity has been one of destabilization" (227). Thus, the relation between narratives and identity is multifold. All these intricacies of narratives and identity are explicitly portrayed in Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle*. The study attempts to analyse how *The White Castle* allegorically depicts Turkey's in-between state of anguish and dilemmas through the portrayal of narratives' ability to influence and transform people.

In *The White Castle*, the relationship between the Italian protagonist and his Turkish lookalike, the enigmatic Hoja starts and progresses demonstrating the captivating power of narratives. In the beginning of the novel, the Italian turns into a slave when the ship he travels is conquered by the Turkmen. The Turks take him to Istanbul and a pasha owns him. As per the advice of the pasha, he assists Hoja in creating a marvellous fire-work. While preparing for the fire-work, there are a lot of narrative exchanges between the Easterner and the Westerner. Hoja, an Eastern aspirant of Western knowledge finds himself highly vulnerable to the seductive and illuminating narratives of the Italian. Really, this spell that the Italian's narratives

exert upon Hoja transcends the Italian's imminent death. When the pasha decides to kill the Italian for his reluctance to accept the Islamic ways of life, Hoja comes and rescues him. Then the pasha gives the Italian to Hoja as his slave along with the right to kill him or set him free.

When they start living together, there are friction and fire as Hoja turns out to be highly egotistical. He always looks at the Italian with a sort of superiority complex and often tries to belittle him. But when they start sharing their learnings and insights the situation changes: "On the cold nights when the north wind blew down the chimney and under the doors we would sit downstairs talking till dawn. He no longer belittled me, or couldn't be bothered to act as if he did" (42). The Italian's narratives oil the rough and complex layers of their master-slave relationship.

After a few years, one day Hoja comes out with a quite philosophical conundrum: "Why am I what I am?" (48). When gets confronted with this query, the Italian says that only Hoja can resolve the issue. Then the powerful master orders his slave to demonstrate why he is what he is. Writing is a complex process in which one simultaneously affirms and loses identity. The Italian opts for it to affirm his identity. He starts writing about himself. Hoja gets lured by the autobiographical fragments of the Italian. He is completely insatiable and asks for more and more. Imitating the Italian, Hoja begins writing about himself and within two months the Italian learns more about Hoja than he could do in eleven years. But most often, instead of writing about himself, Hoja ends up exposing the wickedness of others. Then the Italian writes exaggerated versions of his own wickedness as a secret and powerful technique to force Hoja to narrate his own negatives. By narrating his own malice, the Italian was trying to acquaint Hoja with Hoja's vileness.

While Hoja sat across from me, waiting for me to write down this secret, I filled the sheets in front of me with stories exaggerating my own faults: I wrote with delight about the petty thefts of my childhood, the jealous lies, the way I schemed in order to make myself more loved than my brothers and sisters, the sexual indiscretions of my youth, stretching the truth more and more as I went along. The greedy curiosity with which Hoja read these tales, and the queer pleasure he derived from them, shocked me; afterwards he would become even more angry, intensifying the cruel treatment he had already let go beyond bounds. Perhaps it was because he could not tolerate the sins of a past he already sensed he would make his own. He began to beat me outright. After reading about one of my transgressions, he'd shout 'You rogue!' and bring his fist down upon my back with a vehemence that was only half in

jest; once or twice, unable to control himself, he slapped me in the face. . . . But the more he read about my sins and increased his petty, infantile punishments, the more I became wrapped in a peculiar sense of security: for the first time, I began to think I had him in the palm of my hand (56).

As it is obvious, it is an unnerving experience for Hoja and he takes a lot of time to adjust with the frankness and courage that the Italian shows while relating his own life. However, the powerful influence exerted by the personal narratives of the Italian forces the Turk to imitate the Italian. Hoja writes his weaknesses. But he is too diffident to reveal his confessions. He either keeps them secret or destroys them.

Hoja's hegemonic attempts to squeeze private secrets from the poor villagers, during Turkish army's ride to the White Castle, again confirm the strength of the impression that the Italian's narratives have left behind in his mind. Before the Sultan, Hoja persuades the poor villagers to disclose their shrouded wickedness and secrets and punishes them either for their reluctance or for their inability to conquer him with their narratives.

The villager however could not understand the question our translator kept on repeating, he sorrowfully pressed his hand upon his heart, at a loss for anything else to say. They took the old man away. When the next one they brought said the same things, Hoja flushed bright red. He told this second villager about my childhood transgressions, the lies I'd told . . . as if he were describing the crimes of an unnamed sinner, giving examples of wickedness and vice to prompt the villager . . . . When the last villager they brought forward, a cripple, confessed in a whisper that he had secretly spied on women bathing in the river, Hoja calmed down a bit (118).

From the narratives of the poor villagers, Hoja expects the same pleasure that he received from the narratives of the Italian.

As the Turk is under the spell of the Italian's narratives, the Italian too is spellbound by the stories of the Turk. It is, of course, a give and take relation. The Italian says: "I believe that those who read my story realize by now that I must have learned as much from Hoja as he learned from me!" (59-60).

In *The White Castle*, the confrontation between the Turk and the Italian can be interpreted on an allegorical level as the confrontation between the East and the West. The Italian embodies the West and the Turkish Hoja embodies the East. In an allegory like this,

Istanbul is the best place for an Easterner and Westerner to meet as it is the place where the East and the West geographically meet. When an Easterner and a Westerner meet with their different traditions, tastes and cultures, there are possibilities of initial conflict, clash and dissention. But if they start living under the same roof, like Hoja and the Italian, conflicts will start dissolving. Hoja's and Italian's narrative exchanges are allegorical cultural exchanges too. When Hoja and the Italian start living together, there are a lot of differences between them. But towards the middle of the novel, it is quite hard to differentiate them. The Italian narrates: "'Now I am like you,' he (Hoja) said. 'I know your fear. I have become you!' I understood what he was saying but tried to convince myself that this prophecy, half of which I now have no doubt is true, was silly and childish. He claimed he could see the world as I did . . ." (72). Thus, what makes the Easterner and the Westerner different is not the geographical divide but the mental divide. Later, again they become different, but in the most unexpected way. The Easterner becomes more Western and the Westerner more Eastern. At the end, it seems that they have exchanged their identities. Orhan Pamuk has always wished to bridge the gap between the East and the West. Through this novel, he tries to convey the absurdity of exaggerating the differences between the East and the West because if the Easterner and the Westerner start understanding each other, none of these differences will withstand. The fear of being influenced by the West is also illogical because if the East gets influenced by the West, the West too won't remain inert to the influence of the East. It is a give and take relation.

Of course, *The White Castle* affirms the transient nature of identity. The novel also conveys the influence exerted by the Other—especially the narratives of the Other—on one's identity. Turkey with its Eastern soul is in constant contact with its cultural Other, the West, and therefore its identity is under the perpetual threat of erasure and reconstruction. The implied author of the novel portrays this perennial plight of Turkey allegorically through the relationship between Hoja and the Venetian. In his article "'To dig a well with a needle': Orhan Pamuk's Poem of Comparative Globalization," Grant Farred says: ". . . the Hoja-Venetian relationship demonstrates how proximity and physiological similarity dissolves—or, disintegrates, perhaps—the Self into the Other . . ." (88). Even though the novel is set in 17th century Istanbul, the existential dilemmas of the Turks that it reflects are contemporary too.

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## Ecopoetics of Identity Reclamation: Garden as a Metaphor in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*

Roopa Jose & P. Asha

The natural world and the world of literature have always been inextricably linked. Ecocritics seek to study the different roles that nature plays in people's lives, history, and humanity. They investigate the instances where nature has been portrayed as an active entity taking part in the proceedings of peoples' lives as opposed to a passive force watching things happen. For instance, nature is active and prominent in Thomas Hardy's books, and it advances alongside the characters. Nature is a recurring theme in Wordsworth's writing, especially in *The Prelude*, where each time we read it, we glean something new about it.

In his 1974 essay "The Comedy of Survival," renowned human ecologist Joseph W. Meeker articulated the first foundational ecocritical philosophy as follows:

Human beings are the earth's only literary creatures ... If creation of literature is an important characteristic of the human species, it should be examined carefully and honestly to discover its influence upon human behavior and the natural environment – to determine what role, if any, it plays in the welfare and survival of mankind and what insight it offers into human relationships with other species and with the world around us. (197)

Indo-Caribbean-Canadian writer Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* with its discourse on the multiple and fluid nature of varied cultural identities, draws our attention to the scope of postcolonial ecocriticism. Using gardens as a metaphor, the book explores colonial and heteronormative hegemony. Its tentative celebration of the main characters' queer natures is of particular interest to us. Drawing upon the natural world to situate these fluid identities, Shani Mootoo offers all her major characters a respite from their varied crises. This paper investigates the variety of literal, metaphorical and symbolic roles that the natural world performs in the text.

An outdoor yet intimate space for many people, the garden symbolizes a return to one's roots, the promise of new life after exile, or even just a safe haven from the outside world – enclosed and open at the same time. In books like *The Dancing Other* by Suzanne Dracius (1989), *Morne Câpresse* by Gisèle Pineau (2008) and *My Garden* by Jamaica Kincaid,

it symbolizes a key issue of ecofeminism: women's liberation through a space and through an art connected with nature. In the garden, as well as in the forest, ecofeminism finds a model: the witch, a master of botanic knowledge, a protector of female practices and poetics of nature.

The novel, *The Vegetarian* by the South Korean novelist Han Kang, pits the natural world against the pervasive misogyny and sexual violence that permeates the society. In order to cope with or resist the violence, the protagonist retreats into a vegetative world. For ethical reasons, she resolves to stop eating meat. She doesn't want to take part in the metabolic process of animals. Towards the end of the book, she completely abstains from eating at all, thus removing herself from the body's metabolic process. Instead, she just yearns to photosynthesize. All she desires is to be one with the plants with which she empathizes so intensely and with whom she is likewise identified. Carno-capitalism treats animals, plants, and women all the same; her desire to transform into a plant, stems from that understanding.

In *Cereus Blooms*, on the island of Lantanacamara, the central untended garden is described as hiding traumatic violence from its fictional town named Paradise. Sarah Phillips Casteel, a critic of diaspora studies and Professor of English at Carleton University, dubs the eponymous cereus flower "emblematic of the instability of natural landscapes and the fluidity of sexual identities" (21). According to John Corr, the flower "signifies the establishment of a new and special network of relationships between the girls, their mother's lover, and their environment" (84).

The novel's themes are well-covered in each of these readings. For this reason, critics might use the cereus as a rich metaphor when discussing the connections between colonial history, botany, landscaping, and sexuality. However, this paper proposes that Mootoo's presentation of the natural world and botanical images serve to generate a place of refuge from the interstices that societal dictates force individuals to inhabit. Therefore, the use of landscape and botanical imagery in the novel will be interpreted as a space of societal resistance and the reclamation of individual identity as Mootoo frames the natural world to exist outside of social constructs.

The setting of Shani Mootoo's novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* is the imaginary Caribbean island of Lantanacamara, inhabited by the descendants of a society of indentured Indian labourers. The novel centres on the bond between Tyler, a male nurse who has just been back

from studying in the “Shivering Northern Wetlands” (i.e., Britain), and Mala, an elderly patient who formerly owned an enigmatic and very menacing garden at her house in the Hill Side. As Tyler takes care of Mala at the Paradise Alms House, he gradually learns about her traumatic early years, her mother’s departure, and her father’s abuse of her. As the young Mala retreats within the family home, which is rapidly engulfed by the bizarre flora that surround it, the garden serves as the focal point for the narrative action.

Mala is introduced as a “crazy old woman” when she first appears in the book, accused of a crime for which there were no witnesses and no “proof that a crime was ever committed” (8). Tyler, a nurse at the Paradise Alms Home where Mala will spend the rest of her days, is the only one who can look past Mala’s superficial appearance. Tyler notices her protruding bones and weak skin right away, but upon closer inspection, he describes her as having an “aroma resembling rich vegetable compost”(12) that permeates her entire body. Mala starts to speak in part by mimicking animal noises for Tyler’s amusement as she becomes used to her surroundings and her new friend. Tyler observes that she is alert to everything, while without speaking to anyone directly or acknowledging their existence. It is revealed that Mala had a past when she did engage with the world in a way that was socially acceptable.

Mala/Pohpoh and her younger sister Asha grew up living with their parents at the house on Hill Side. The kids were able to preserve a socially normal childhood even though Chandin Ramchandin and his wife Sarah had a rocky relationship. The return of Lavinia Thoroughly to Paradise changed the life of the Ramchandins forever. The reappearance of Lavinia, Chandin’s one and only love, gave him a vigour that neither of his children had ever witnessed in him. However, when Lavinia and Sarah fled together, Chandin’s fantasies and the lives of his daughters were both tainted. Following their escape, Chandin subjected the children to severe treatment and sexual torture. Early in her teen years, Asha also fled, leaving Pohpoh as Chandin’s only caregiver and victim. During these early years of maltreatment, Pohpoh starts to seek some sort of safety from her father and the outside world, in her gardens. She experiences a confidence and certainty about her natural surroundings on her solitary nightly adventures. She had this feeling of “being one with the trees, shrubs, weeds, fences, thorns, water, and mossy ground” (162). She crosses the lines of socially built, acceptable behaviour by entering the homes of other families with the aid of nature. She doesn’t participate in these late-night outings to commit crimes like burglaries or vandalism, but rather to “avenge” herself for the anguish of living as a “pitied yet reviled child” (Mootoo 99). In the natural environment, Pohpoh

takes her refuge. There is a conspiratorial and unspoken agreement between her and the eponymous cereus plant, which shields her from the prying eyes of the community that chose to ignore her father's sexual abuse

Ambrose Mohanty, a friend from her youth who had returned to Paradise, offered a chance for change, but her father also took this away from her. Mala killed her father after he physically raped her for interacting with Ambrose, the culmination of years of heinous torture. This act completely cut her off from society and furthered her seclusion into the wild world, alienating Ambrose from her at the same time. She stayed in this condition for several years during which she lost the ability to express her thoughts lexically; instead, she imitated animal sounds and interacted with the plants and animals in her garden. The natural world served as an insulator for Mala, allowing her to exist away from society, as she cut herself off from the world outside her fence. After being cut off from the outside world for so long, Mala started to resemble nature to the point where she was "sensitized in a way that words were unable to match or augment" (136). At the Paradise Alms House, Tyler runs into Mala in this situation. Mala's essence emanates from the natural world, smelling of "the sweet scent of yellow potatoes" and "the perfume of fresh young carrots" (84).

Besides the protagonist Mala, all of the novel's major characters frequently go outside expected social and spatial boundaries while navigating and overcoming conventionally "fixed" cultural divisions and identities, including those based on gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. At the same time, one of the overriding motifs regarding the characters in these novels is their overwhelming desire to belong. Queer characters like Tyler and Otoh are drawn to Mala because of her nature, which is viewed as being closely linked to the natural environment. Therefore, coming into contact with Mala is like coming into contact with the natural world. She then serves as a conduit for Tyler and Otoh to find a similar place of comfort in the natural world where she found safety and strength. She creates a realm in which the two characters are able to wrestle with and express their actual selves. Another character who seeks solace in nature is Aunt Lavinia, who adored the wildness and freedom in Sarah's garden. Sara, who is the victim of a cold marriage, reciprocates her admiration whenever the two of them could slip away to the beach and the outer natural world. Yet another person who develops a fresh perspective of gender and belonging is Hector, the gardener, who upon observing Mala, Tyler, and Otoh in his garden, understands his brother Raul, who doesn't fit into the heterosexual notion of gender, in a new light.

Shani Mootoo's complex metaphorical and ecocritical interlacing between the characters and nature is a finely spun web, just as the spiders' work in Mala's room at the Alms House. Ambrose Mohanty states the cohesiveness succinctly, "we all, man and nature, co-exist" (199). Janet I. Dwyer succinctly describes the book in her review as follows, "Awash in the sensuous world of the islands, with insects, snails, and rare night-blooming cereus as motifs, this novel is blunt in its dissection of gender and family, exquisite in its descriptive powers, and unforgettable in its stunning stories" (138). Frank Stewart, author of *A Natural History of Nature Writing*, examines this type of interconnectedness when he writes:

Nature writers have become increasingly important to us because they struggle, in memorable language, to resolve the deep issue of this in-betweenness, a resolution crucial to the physical and spiritual survival of our world. From their own direct experiences they are aware of the limits of both objectivity and subjectivity in giving accurate accounts of nature that will grip our emotional as well as rational understanding. (xv)

Thus, the garden in *Cereus Blooms at Night* serves as the focal point for the story's action, and the natural world's mutability mirrors the characters' fluid sexual identities as they participate in a variety of transgressive sexual activities. In the novel's concluding scene, Otoh tends to the cereus plant in the garden of the almshouse, stroking the ground at its base in a gesture that both honours the significance of the plant in Mala's life and underlines her bond with that soil (268). The cereus plant thus serves as a metaphor for identity that simultaneously alludes to hybridity and mutability.

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## **Evolving Gender Norms in Malayalam Movies**

*Bini P. Mathew & Alphonsa C. A.*

This paper is an attempt to analyse the role of Malayalam movies in representing gender. The portrayal of particular genders as weak and dependent is often considered as normal in such movies. One may find that this stereotyping of genders usually deal with the women and the third gender which sheds light to the male dominance of the society. Movies have always been a reflection of the society and it has been same in the case of gender representation too. One may get the glimpse of the prejudice on gender capabilities while taking a look at the movies.

A society which always considered women as the other of men and denied her opportunity for having a separate identity is often glorified in the Malayalam movies of the past decades “From *Vigatha Kumaran* (1928) to date, on screen, Kerala women have joyfully surrendered their independence and identity, too willingly to be putty in the hands of male desire and male gaze”(Pillai 140). Men who took an authoritative role coming to female relationships received much of the audience’s applause and was considered to be the heroic trait of men. “Unlike her male counterpart, then, the woman spectator is left in an invidious position, with her most obvious choice being masochistic identification with a passive female object of desire” (Dix 239). A typical woman was portrayed in movies as the one who is confined in the four walls of kitchen, busy with household chores and took her utmost care for the wellbeing of her husband, husband’s family and her children. These were considered as the mandatory duties which intended to make her the so-called complete woman. On the other hand, the woman who wanted a job and financial stability was portrayed as the one who caused the breaking of a joint family.

Third genders were often projected as abnormal characters in the movies of past decades. They were merely considered as human beings having a separate identity. Often they were portrayed to evoke laughter in the viewers. This type of representation clearly shows the hatred of the society towards third genders at that time. The changing attitude towards genders represented through the movies is analysed in this paper.

Movies of the past decades have celebrated toxic masculinity to a great extent. The movies which appealed to the minds of the audience serves the best example for this.

One may find the evidence for this in movies such as *Narasimham*, *Praja*, *Vazhunnoretc*. The proposal scene of *Narasimham* clearly portrays the role of woman according to the attitude of the society at that time. The hero Mohanlal says to the heroine Aishwarya that he needs a woman to abuse after returning home as a drunkard, to love according to his moods, as a procreating device to give birth for his children and to cry for him when he dies. This dialogue gives an idea about the duties or responsibilities that society have assigned to a woman to make her a good wife according to them.

In *Praja*, Mohanlal rebukes Aishwarya in front of a crowd even though she is characterised as an IPS officer. The hero twists the IPS officer's arm, drags her along, press her against a car, indicating a rape threat and later asking her to 'zip up' which is portrayed as a humorous element in the movie. One can analyse here that even though the heroine is an IPS officer she is abused and insulted only because she is a woman. It is pathetic to see that the achievements of women are discarded in the name of their gender identity.

The movie *Vazhunnor* celebrates masculinity by embarrassing the woman character. The role played by Suresh Gopi humiliates the heroine by belittling her intelligence and expresses his prejudice that her gender is not fit for that particular job. The support this movie has received is the reflection of the society's stereotyping of women.

In the movie *Chanthupottu*, the queer community is represented as hilarious and ridiculed to a great extent. Radhakrishnan [Dileep] is not a transgender but has feminine attributes as his grandmother wanted a girl child and raised him in such a way as a female child is raised. He is called Radha by his girlfriends. Later it creates ambiguity about the gender identity of the hero in the minds of people and he is ridiculed as the gender which do not fall into either categories that is male or female. After the release of this particular movie transgenders were often mocked by calling the name 'chanthupottu' as the title of the film suggests.

However, by analysing the movies of recent times one may notice that the representation of gender has a different dimension compared to the past decades. The movie *How old are you?* is a perfect example which focuses on the empowerment of a woman who hails from a typical Indian family? Nirupama, the role played by Manju Warrior lives the life of a typical woman while the second half takes a turn with Nirupama's empowerment. Nirupama exercises daily, leads a business, inspires social change and her hard work finally gives her the identity in

the society as well as in her house where her father-in-law prepares tea and food while she works. The movie portrays a woman who questions and challenges the usual roles of women and takes firm stands before those who attempted to expire her dreams.

*The Great Indian Kitchen* is a movie which led to a great controversy in recent times. Surprisingly the role played by the characters of Nimisha Sajayan and Suraj Venjaramood have got no name which indicates that they are the true representatives of the society. The movie revolves around the life of a husband and wife and it portrays the daily routine of the wife who is always busy in the kitchen. The movie pictures a patriarchal husband who thinks that the household chores are solely the duties of his wife and is irresponsible. The recurring shot in *The Great Indian Kitchen* is the hands of women as they cut, cook, grind, wipe, wash, and sweep. The hands do not have faces and the faces do not have names because this is a story of most households in our society. Towards the climax of the movie the wife decides that she cannot bear the oppression anymore and just leaves. She understands that no one is going to save her, and that men around her are not going to change. This film demands the realisation of women that only they themselves can become their saviours.

The movie *Uyare* deals with the story of Pallavi, the role played by Parvathi Thiruvoth who is stuck in a toxic relationship and is judged by her lover for everything she does. Govind (Asif Ali) blames Pallavi for her ways of dressing and the moves she makes to achieve her desired career. Pallavi misunderstood his over possessiveness as the act of love and endures the same until he slut shames her, then she decides to walk away from him. The toxic, male chauvinistic Govind throws acid on her face and leaves her on the way deadly injured. After this incident the movie portrays the resurrection of Pallavi who moves legally against Govind for the deadly act he has done to her. Towards the end of the movie one can see Pallavi achieving her dream of becoming a pilot only with her self-confidence. This movie truly serves as an eyeopener for the women who are the victims of male chauvinism and urges them to conquer the heights of their ambitions as the name of the movie suggests.

The movie *Njan Marykutty*, starring Jayasurya deals with the story of a transgender who faces prejudice from society but fights on. This film is a tale about a transwoman who faces gender stereotype, harassment and prejudice from the society, yet fights the good fights to make her dreams come true. In this movie Marykutty is denied opportunities and mocked at every place only because of her gender identity. The film acts as a good example for making the society aware of the rights of people who belong to the queer community by portraying

the life of Marykutty who ends up as a police officer and achieves her dream in spite of facing many barriers.

In this paper, “Representation of Genders in Malayalam Movies” we have attempted to analyse the changing definition of genders in accordance with the representation of the same in Malayalam Movies by taking a few movies as examples. The movies of the past decades which have the theme of patriarchy and the oppression of women have been discussed here by citing the examples of movies like *Narasimham* directed by Shaji Kailas starring Mohanlal and Aishwarya, *Praja* directed by Joshiy starring Mohanlal and Aishwarya and *Vazhunnor* directed by Joshiy starring Suresh Gopi and Sangeetha. The movie *Chanthupottu* directed by Lal Jose starring Dileep and Gopika which portrays the misrepresentation of queer community has also been discussed in this paper.

The change in attitude towards genders is also discussed in the light of representation of the same in the movies of recent times. The coming back of the oppressed genders is analysed through the movies like *How Old Are You?* directed by Rosshan Andrews starring Manju Warrior and Kunchako Boban, *The Great Indian Kitchen* directed by Jeo Baby starring Nimisha Sajayan and Suraj Venjaramood, *Uyare* directed by Manu Ashokan starring Parvathy Thiruvothu and Asif Ali and *Njan Marykutty* directed by Ranjith Sankar starring Jayasurya. Analysis of these movies have shown that the stereotypical attitude towards the genders has a significant change when compared to the past decades.

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## Transcending Boundaries: An Autobiographical Journey of A. Revathi

*Amitha P. Mani*

Queer theory addressed the gay community and also gave possibilities to gender binary identities. This critical discourse emerged in the 1990s in response to LGBT identity politics and aimed to deconstruct gender. Queer theorists view sexuality as a fluid and manipulated social construct as opposed to a fixed identity. Over 4,000 years of transgender history are recorded in classic Indian scriptures like *KamaSutra*, *Ramayana*, and *Mahabharata*.

Queer theory advocates sexuality and gender rights and also asks questions about social and economic discrimination in the society. Judith Butler wanted to destabilise the binary oppositions in the society like gay/straight by introducing the concept of perspectivism. According to queer theory, all sexual behavior—normal and deviant—is a product of the society, not natural.

Transgenders in India are facing physical violence, verbal abuse, and harassment because of their gender identification. Their health issues are not well understood and handled by many health care professionals, transgender patients lack access to specialised healthcare services, such as hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgery. Furthermore, they have difficulty getting an education and may quit school as a result of harassment and bullying. They frequently experience prejudice in jobs also, when it comes to recruiting, advancement, and workplace culture, which results in high rates of under employment and unemployment.

Lack of legal recognition makes it more difficult to obtain fundamental rights including housing, work, healthcare, and education. The transgender group was included in the 'other' category in the 2011 census. The Supreme Court of India rendered its decision in April 2014 to include transgenders as third gender. That was a decisive move that changed the destiny of transgenders in India.

Marginalisation exists in the society not only for transgenders, but also for all the minority groups. Gender is performative, as the American philosopher Judith Butler once stated. A child naturally possesses it, but diversions can happen.

A Revathi is a transgender writer and activist from Bengaluru who fights for the rights of sexual minorities. *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* is the autobiography of A Revathi, who battled against societal injustices from her family and community. It was V Geetha who

translated *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* from Tamil to English and published in 2010. This autobiographical narrative is the actual experiences that an individual has to face in order to change to a preferred gender and live a desired life.

She was a male by birth, but underwent a transformation and had to face much humiliation from her school and family. The autobiography that details her distinct viewpoint on how gender and society intertwine in India is the subject of this paper. The narrative here revolves around a transsexual woman's struggle to navigate a culture that frequently rejects her brutally.

In *The Truth About Me*, Revathy describes how she went from being raised as a man in a traditional home to being a woman after undergoing surgery to change her gender. Her experience serves as a reminder of the significant obstacles transgenders encounter while trying to obtain work, healthcare, and education. Revathy also demonstrates the strict enforcement of gender roles in Indian society, where men are supposed to be powerful and domineering and women to adhere to traditional standards of femininity.

She considers how her experiences of marginalisation, prejudice, and resilience are shaped by the intersections between her transgender identity and other facets of her identity. *Revathi* explores the intricate custom and tradition of hijras as well as the historical socio-political forces that have moulded their standing in Indian society. She also considers how modernization, globalisation, and colonialism have affected hijra groups.

It was after facing so many troubles; she underwent a surgery for gender change with the help of a Hijra community and was renamed as Revathi. Afterwards she realized the hardship of being a Hijra who had to face sexual assault and social exclusion.

Revathi is shown as a strong supporter of social justice and transgender rights throughout the narrative. She utilises her personal experience as a platform to campaign for increased acceptance, inclusion, and legal acknowledgment of transgender people in India as well as to bring attention to the challenges experienced by hijras. The story bravely recounts all her mishaps and struggles. The author subtly suggests that minority groups are also human beings with feelings and emotions, people should adopt a different perspective on them.

On seeing me, my mother wept and demanded to know where I had been for the past month. My elder brother brought a cricket bat down on my shoulders and asked, what happened to you? Did you go mad? We've been searching for you all over. Had you no

thought of us? He hit me again and tried to get an answer out of me. You wanted to go to tuition class and we sent you (Revathi 30).

The reader is made aware of the harsh realities of their lives by the honest depiction of their hardships and way of living vividly. The narrative follows her journey to find her true self. People are expected to exhibit certain features that are imposed by society. Gender typing exists in the society. Here, Revathi's battle to live authentically is depicted in great detail. Both readers and critics have given the book high marks for its integrity, bravery, and literary merit. Additionally, it has been crucial in influencing policy discussions and public conversation on transgender rights in India.

When she returned to Namakkal for the second time following the sex reassignment operation, both her family and society had the same reaction. All transgender conversations are rooted in the body. The physical transformation is a matter that people cannot tolerate. By collecting memories of abuse and humiliation and reproducing them through an esthetic writing, they attempt to reconstruct their identity. The Traumatic experiences are seen as an individual's response to a very painful and frightening situation, resulting in a loss of ability to cope with the situation with a sense of victimhood. By not conforming to gender diversity and the gender binary that society has constructed, transgender people face the risk of verbal attacks, internalized trans-phobia and many a times physical harm, since their bodies are not taken in to account.

As a child, when she experienced rejection from her family and peers, and later in life, she was subjected to harassment and violence from police and local gangs; she was subjected to psychological trauma. Throughout her autobiography, Revathi highlights the ways in which societal norms and gender roles impact not only the lives of transgender individuals, but also those who do not conform to traditional gender expectations.

Revathi doesn't want to accept her for who she is; they need that boy Doraisami, even though that they knew that was never possible. They could not believe the fact that she was previously Doraisami and was now changed to Revathi.

The narrative vividly portrayed that societal expectations and attitudes towards gender norms have a profound impact on the lives of transgender individuals. This autobiographies an important source of insight and serve to raise awareness about the experience of a marginalized community that is too often ignored or over looked by them a in stream society.

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The narrative shed light on violence faced by the transgender community in India, and the resilience and bravery of those who navigate these challenges. It challenges her own biases in order to promote greater understanding and justice for all individuals, regardless of gender identity. Ultimately, the novel reminds us of the power of personal testimony in building a more inclusive society. The narrative illustrates the hope that is evident in the language of resistance, provide insight into the strength of Hijra people, giving a voice to a community that was always in the periphery in India.

*The Truth About Me* is fundamentally a story about self-discovery. Readers embrace her identity as a transgender woman as the narrative progresses. The author here places her personal story in the larger historical and cultural framework of Indian hijra communities.

She provides insights on the historical marginalisation and persecution of hijras, as well as their unique cultural traditions. Throughout the story, Revathi becomes a strong voice for social justice and transgender rights. Using her own experience as a platform to spread awareness and call for change, she is refusing to stay silent in the face of injustice and discrimination.

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## The Global Expansion of Food Culture and Food Politics

*Sreelakshmi K. S. & Minnu James*

Curiosity, a quest for new tastes, and an attraction to the unusual soon drove the migration of cuisines between countries and continents. Each era from antiquity to the present has added its own distinctive commodities and increased the range of gastronomic alternatives. Food endures a crucial function in culture. The famous French chef Marie-Antoine Care me once said, “When we no longer have good cooking in the world, we will have no literature, nor high and sharp intelligence, nor friendly gatherings, no social harmony” (Galarzanpg.). In *Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams asserts:

The development of culture is perhaps the most striking among all the words named. It might be said, indeed, that the questions now concentrated in the meanings of the word culture are questions directly raised by the great historical changes which the changes in industry, democracy and class, in their own way, represent, and to which the changes in art are a closely related response. The development of the word culture is a record of a number of important and continuing reactions to these changes in our social, economic and political life, and may be seen, in itself, as a special kind of map by means of which the nature of the changes can be explored. (Williams 15)

Food culture is defined as the attitudes, activities, and values associated with the production and consumption of food. That may sound a little academic, but what it really means is that our relationship with food and the food systems that produce and supply it to us is rooted in food culture. Traditional meals and recipes are crucial to the development of our food culture because food plays such a significant role in our heritage and ethnicity. We are figuratively “breaking bread” with people when we sit down to eat a meal with them. Globally, the local environment and climate have an impact on food culture. They can therefore differ even within the same nation. For reference, the food in the northern region of Italy is frequently enhanced with butter obtained from the milk of nearby dairy cows, whereas in the olive-growing south of the nation, butter is rarely used and olive oil is preferred for cooking.

In accordance to the *Food, Culture, and Society* journal, “Furthermore, there are changes in taste with the availability of convenience foods and fast foods becoming preferred by parts of the population, whether due to convenience or taste or also linked to social status and notions of “tradition” and “modernity” (Baba tunde Owolodun et al.). This can be best

proved by analysing the travelogue of Vasco da Gama, who had changed the trajectory of history in 1498 during the Age of Discovery when he arrived in Calicut, India. With the opening of a different route to India by Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese briefly took control of the spice trade. Portugal's geographic and economic development were accelerated by the spice trade. By the year 1511, Ceylon's spice trade and the Malabar coast of India had been taken over by the Portuguese. Pipernigrum was valued at par with gold during the age of discovery. Therefore, a fundamental component of comprehending the evolution of food culture globally is the impact of colonisation and trade. Vasco da Gama's exploration of a maritime route to India affected the need for unusual spices, such as Peri-peri, a Brazilian spice introduced to the former African colonies and used to flavour chicken and shrimp, curry spices from Goa, which are typical seasonings, and others. In order to give foods a subtle flavour and depth, these spices are normally used very sparingly. It is true that British and Indian cultures have merged to create the Anglo-Indian civilization, which is also credited to the spice trade. Therefore, their delights incorporate flavours from each of these traditions.

Every country and its people have a unique cultural character that is greatly influenced by their gastronomic history and food preferences. By studying about the local cuisine and customary meals of a place, one might gain an understanding of its history, culture, and way of life. Culinary tourism unites people since people enjoy sharing a meal together. One can learn about the origins of the dishes and the contributions that each one has made by talking to the people. Additionally, it is essential to examine the development of global cuisine through travel writing and literature that highlights diverse culinary traditions. The best fictional works that provide an excellent introduction to culinary customs are Charles Lamb's *A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig* and Tetsuko Kuroyanagi's *Totto- Chan: The Little Girl at the Window*.

Apparently, Charles Lamb in the essay *A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig* made a descriptive statement about the popularity of roasted pig in the European cuisine which was assumed to be originated from China as:

There is no flavour comparable, I will contend, to that of the crisp, tawny, well-watched, not over-roasted, crackling, as it is well called — the very teeth are invited to their share of the pleasure at this banquet in overcoming the coy, brittle resistance — with the adhesive oleaginous — O call it not fat — but an indefinable sweetness growing up to it — the tender blossoming of fat — fat cropped in the bud — taken in — he shoot — in the first innocence — the cream and quintessence of the child-pig's yet pure food —

the lean, no lean, but a kind of animal manna — or, rather, fat and lean (if it must be so) so blended and running into each other, that both together make but one ambrosian result. or common substance. (Lamb 35)

*Totto-Chan: The Little Girl at the Window* accurately depicts a girl's time in school, which will alter preconceived notions about how women should be educated, educated, and lead their lives. No word can adequately capture the inspiration of this book. The enjoyment of escaping into those circumstances and reliving the excitement with the characters can only be obtained by reading the book. Tetsuko Kuroyanagi, a well-known television host in Japan and a UNICEF goodwill ambassador, has released this autobiographical biography. After being released in Japan in 1981, the book quickly rose to popularity. The subject of the book is the morals Tetsuko learned during her unorthodox education at Tomoe Gakuen, a Tokyo elementary school established by educator Sosaku Kobayashi during World War II. Tetsuko made the decision to write about her time at Tomoe Gakuen after learning about how some kids are defying their parents' wishes to send them to school. *Totto-Chan: The Little Girl at the Window*, Kuroyanagi's semi-autobiographical work, vividly captures the Japanese culinary culture "“Something from the ocean” meant sea food— things such as fish and tsukuda-ni (tiny crustaceans and the like boiled in soy sauce and sweet sake), while “something from the hills” meant food from the land—like vegetables, beef, pork, and chicken” (Kuroyanagi 13).

The authors offered a clear revelation of their ethnic cuisine in both of these writings. The knowledge that students get from these books will have an impact on the audience. Additionally, Charles Lamb told the tale of the English people's love for the Chinese delicacy roasted pig. This dish was launched in a really beautiful way by Lamb. The Totto-Chan's lunch included a variety of delicacies that showcased Japanese culture. The custom of chanting “Itadakimasu” before meals, which is considered to be a Japanese tradition, was also introduced by Totto-Chan. The popularity of these two clearly demonstrates the substantial role that literature has played in disseminating various culinary traditions around the world.

Food television has seen a significant transition during the past few decades. In addition to other segment kinds, discussion shows, travelogues, competition series, and documentaries have emerged from the “cook-with-me” instructional video model that gave origin to the genre. Food lovers now have a multitude of gastronomy-related material to view thanks to the growth of streaming platforms. This television genre has expanded, and with it has come more

in-depth information than in the past, educating viewers not just on how to cook but also on the customs, traditions, and way of life of people throughout the world.

Linda Civitello propounds the way food influence each nations culture in *Cuisine and Culture: A History of Food and People Second Edition*:

Identity—religious, national, ethnic—is intensely bound up with food. Every group thinks of itself as special and exceptional and uses food to show it. The French identity is connected to white bread, while southern Italians insist on tomato sauce. This identification can also take the form of a negative, in foods that are excluded: “We don’t eat that. They [religion, country, ethnic group] eat that.” Some examples are the Jewish and Muslim avoidance of pork, and the Buddhist taboo on beef. Food can be a political weapon. After the French objected to the United States invasion of Iraq, some Americans refused to eat French fries, but had no problem with Freedom fries—the same food, just renamed. Throughout history, people of one country have used food as a way—usually not complimentary—to refer to people of another country. When the British found that limes were a cure for the vitamin C deficiency, scurvy, they became “Limeys.” The French ate frog legs, so they were called “Frogs.” Germans’ love of cabbage branded them “Krauts”. (Civitello 14)

Famous television programmes like *Gordon Ramsay: Uncharted* and Lakshmi Menon’s *Flavours of India* have also examined the history of culinary culture. Chef Gordon Ramsay travels to some of the most incredible and distant places on Earth in the National Geographic series *Gordon Ramsay: Uncharted* in quest of culinary inspiration, epic adventures, and cultural experiences. In “Gordon Ramsay: Uncharted,” the roving celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay gives up a grand experience. He visits indigenous people all around the world to learn about their cuisine and cultures. He gathers fresh ingredients and tries out new meals in each site. He collaborates with local legends to prepare feasts to serve to the indigenous population. Ramsay runs through a jungle, scales a rock face, and rappels down a torrential waterfall as an Ironman competitor. He eats weaver ant eggs in Laos, uses his hands to catch eels in Hawaii, goes spear fishing in Peru, and hangs off a cliff in Hawaii in search of culinary inspiration.

The reality series *Flavours of India* explores the culinary cultures of India. It is hosted by Lakshmi Nair. She visits nearly every city in India, where she experiences the native way of life and cuisine. The most well-known sites in Kerala are visited by Lakshmi. She enjoys her

own unique view of the city in addition to the foods. Each state and city in India has its own distinct cultures, customs, and splendour. Visits to hotels, resorts, and eateries allow Lakshmi to learn about local history. This programme features recipes and dishes prepared by unidentified culinary masters. The traditional food preparation is also demonstrated in this episode. The show includes a lot of natural settings and effects as an additional. She speaks about the recipes' beginnings and development. Additionally, she solicits feedback from the general public regarding a specific location's food. She moves right into the kitchen to demonstrate the cooking process. The exhibition details the background of the creator, location, and restaurant or motel, to make it simple for individuals to try those foods if they go to that specific location. In addition to everything else, she can control the food's flavour and define its taste, aroma, and other attributes. Through this show, nearly all kinds and well-known dishes from all cities were tasted. These two television shows were both popular, which demonstrates the level of public interest they attracted. They exposed their audience to a variety of cultures and cuisines. These two shows gave their viewers an introduction to the global diversity in cuisine.

Social media has become one of the most important sources of knowledge and pleasure. Our feeds are filled with posts and stories that capture us for hours, and this social media platform is home to a wide range of influencers from many different categories that use a variety of content to touch our lives. One such popular category is food influencers. We are constantly influenced by these social media influencers and their material regarding where to eat as well as what to eat, whether consciously or unconsciously. People are quite likely to be influenced, either covertly or overtly, by the material on social media sites that are so widely used, like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook, which are hugely popular with teenagers. Food bloggers and Vloggers gain followers and establish themselves as social media influencers through their scrumptious food photographs, enticing food movies, and poetry blog posts about dining out.

With the development of information technology, we can now instantly share food-related information online. Social networking works well and provides a typical environment for creative cookery. Through a social media tip, a new recipe is created, posted on social media, and shared with an infinite number of people worldwide. We can say with certainty that social media is changing our global culinary culture even though there are problems with globalisation. It's clear that YouTube and Instagram are important for analysing how culinary

culture is changing. Food vlogging is the most popular and effective media medium for promoting food culture. As the majority of social media users, research indicates that young people are more likely to see the postings and be influenced. Social media users may occasionally become influenced by these posts or videos and decide what foods they want to eat as a result. These posts encourage readers to attend the specific café or restaurant that their favourite food influencer has been to.

Although the food bloggers or influencers don't have a detrimental impact on their readers or viewers, a trend known as "Mukbangers" is growing among them: omelettes and mountains of chicken biryani were gobbled while being streamed live online. The Korean term for these binge-eating films is "mukbang," which is short for "eating broadcast." Ever since Mukbang has evolved into live streaming or movies with people interacting with viewers while ingesting outrageous amounts of food. Food is frequently linked to happiness and joy. Because gluttony is often viewed as a negative and bad behaviour, some people love the competition component of seeing who can eat the most while others find it soothing. Viewing mukbang films helps many people develop a sense of community. Even those who don't consume meat or sweets might enjoy seeing others eat, which makes mukbang aspirational. The wastage of food has become common through these practises.

Ann Bedford Flood quoted on *LinkedIn*:

Social media platforms have also expanded our culinary horizons, enabling users to explore global flavours without leaving their local communities. This has given rise to phenomena like food tourism, where people travel to sample unique dishes and flavours they've discovered online. For instance, "Water Tok" on TikTok has introduced flavoured water creations using exotic ingredients like dragon fruit and açai, or unconventional additives like Nerds flavour powder and vanilla syrup. Gone are the days when food critics in newspapers and magazines were the sole authorities. Food influencer marketing will be skyrocketing to 42% by 2024. So today, a well-timed post from a food influencer can make or break a restaurant's reputation. (Flood) 21

Therefore, there are benefits and drawbacks to the globalisation of food. For instance, it is clear that there has been a dramatic increase in Indian restaurants serving cuisines from various cultures, such as Korean, Japanese, French, Arabic and Chinese. Like the recent introduction of Turkish dish Knafeh, which created a tremendous rise all over the world,

diasporic populations have played a significant part in the globalisation of food culture. Although research on this subject has mainly focused on how anadromous groups maintain their ethnic history, one's identification may influence their choice of eating habits in various civilizations.

Global food politics refers to the political and economic systems that shape how food is produced, distributed, and consumed around the world. These systems involve a wide range of actors, including governments, corporations, farmers, workers, and consumers. One of the key issues in global food politics is food security. Many countries struggle to produce enough food to feed their populations, while others have an abundance of food but struggle to distribute it equitably. This can lead to political tensions, as well as health and economic disparities. Another important issue is the impact of food production on the environment. Agriculture is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, and many farming practices can lead to soil degradation, deforestation, and other environmental problems. As a result, many policymakers and activists are calling for more sustainable and environmentally friendly approaches to food production.

The consumption of beef in India is a highly controversial issue due to cultural and religious factors. Hinduism, the dominant religion in India, regards cows as sacred animals, and many Indian states have laws that ban the slaughter and consumption of cows. There have been instances in India where individuals who are accused of consuming beef or involved in the trade of beef have been attacked or killed by vigilante groups. These incidents have been condemned by human rights organizations and activists as acts of violence and intimidation. Food is therefore employed as a tool to advance the goals of the governing party.

It is important to note that violence and vigilantism of any kind are not acceptable and go against the principles of a democratic and pluralistic society. The Indian government has a responsibility to ensure the safety and security of all citizens and to uphold the rule of law. Those who perpetrate such acts of violence should be held accountable and brought to justice through due process. It is also important to have open and respectful dialogues about cultural and religious differences, and to find ways to promote tolerance and understanding among different communities. This can be done through education, community outreach, and interfaith dialogue.

According to “Food politics and Development” of Melissa Leach and some other critics: Yet food is also a political matter, with questions of how food systems are constituted, how they change (or do not change), and who gains or loses implicating power relations of many kinds, between diverse actors. As modern food systems prove themselves neither sustainable nor equitable, with profound and intergenerational consequences for human wellbeing, health and prosperity, these politics have become highly charged. An intense politics of food is unfolding across the world, albeit in diverse ways. (Leach et al. 12)

Consequently, the aforementioned claims serve to spread knowledge about the history of the growth of food culture through the analysis of travelogues, books, digital media, and other sources, as well as the covert purpose of food politics.

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## Traps of Visibility: A Foucauldian Reading of *Poonachi*

Mariya Soman

Surveillance Studies is an emerging field in the academia that focuses on the myriad ways in which the personal details of individuals are collected and manipulated by government and other bodies of power. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines surveillance as a “close observation of a person or group, especially one under suspicion” (7189). A sacrifice of the liberties of citizens happens in the altar of national security and other paraphernalia as the world is becoming more and more digitized. Data has become the hottest commodity in the globalized world and the ruthless exploitation of personal information has enabled the government and other bodies to control individuals without their knowledge or consent.

The French philosopher Michel Foucault has elucidated through the example of Jeremy Bentham’s panoptical model of prison, how in a disciplinarian society, psychological punishment is meted out to prisoners to bring out desired behaviour. Psychological taming of individuals is what happens in a society in which individuals are under constant surveillance. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, he says, “the panopticon must not be understood as a dream building: it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form... it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use” (205). The government merely wants silent acquiescence from their citizens in all their policies and the so-called democratic government slowly becomes autocratic when surveillance becomes the tool to do that.

Perumal Murugan is an Indian author who declared his death as a writer after the heated protests that came out following the publication of his Tamil novel *One Part Woman*. In fact, his open declaration of a self-imposed literary exile in January 2015 was a form of protest against a society that placed no premium on the rights of an author for self-expression. *Poonachi* is Perumal Murugan’s first novel that came out after the declaration of his literary suicide and in the preface to this novel; Murugan mentions that anxious of writing about human beings and Gods, he decided to write about animals. Murugan’s literary exile read along the following lines reveals the effects of social surveillance:

This is how the gaze is capable of regulating bodies in space and time to act in accordance with specially prescribed norms and standards. The gaze carries a crippling effect on the individual who feels being watched. It triggers social conformity through a process

of continuous self-surveillance and monitoring. The gaze therefore operates by instilling fear of reprisals or consequences of non-conformity through an interiorizing process. It works by coercing individuals to surrender through social norms and standards voluntarily. (Mungwini 346)

The eponymous novel *Poonachi* tracks the oppressive life led by the black goat Poonachi in thoroughly stifling circumstances. The coming of age story of the black doe parallels the growth of a girl through childhood and puberty into sexual maturation and motherhood. Like the tribulations that a woman undergoes in life, Murugan's heroine is made stronger by the challenges she faces. When she falls desperately in love with the buck kid Poovan, the jealousy that she feels for Porumi is typical of human beings. Poonachi's longing cry for sexual union with Poovan ended in her mating with an old ram. From then on, reproducing younger ones became her lot like a typical woman and her death that turned her into a stone idol symbolizes the crystallization of the sufferings she underwent as a female.

Poonachi's whereabouts are unknown except the knowledge that she belonged to a lineage that delivered seven kids in a litter. The third line, "The birth of an ordinary life never leaves a trace, does it?" (Murugan 1) proves ironic. Foucault opines in *Discipline and Punish*, "surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action" (226). In a government that constantly tries to restrict its citizens and is forthright totalitarian, even though the birth of an individual remains untraceable, all of its movements henceforth should be with the consent of the government. In this complex psychodynamic environment, the effect is the unconscious deindividuation of individuals.

The giant who placed the one-day old baby, Poonachi in the hands of the old man was searching for a buyer with a kind heart. His reasons seem extremely appropriate: "The fellows will come, one by one, hold her jaw and look at her teeth. They'll clasp her waist with her fingers, pull at her udder and stroke her back. Haven't we seen the poor goats standing around like showpieces at market fairs?" (4). Commoditization of female bodies involves the maintaining of totalitarian principles through overarching patriarchal gazes. The arrogant gazes will give men the pleasure of demystifying the "tangible space of the body... that opaque mass in which secrets, invisible lesions, and the very mystery of origins lie hidden" (122), thereby helping to relegate her to the status of an object, says Foucault in *The Birth of the Clinic*.

“When a new creature was born anywhere in the territory controlled by the government, the authorities had to be informed immediately. All children and domestic animals had to get their ears pierced” (28). In fact, in the regime ear piercing was more important than birth in the sense that it granted individuals the freedom to live which birth itself could not offer them. Foucault has rightly said in his *The History of Sexuality*, “It was essential that the state know what was happening with its citizens’ sex, and the use he made of it. Between the state and the individual, sex became an issue, and a public issue no less; a whole web of discourses, special knowledges, analyses and injunctions settled upon it” (26).

In the regime, the worth of a goat to live was determined by checking whether it has pierced its ear or not. Within one month of the birth, human beings and animals need to get the ears of their new borne pierced. It is comparable to the compulsory Aadhaar card enrolment for the citizens of India. Kerala government made it mandatory to link Aadhaar card with the biometric punching systems in government offices that kept track of the attendance of its employees. Such a step stripped the individual rights of government employees in the name of surveillance for maintaining efficiency. Even though the biometric punching system was suspended temporarily in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, newer privacy threats has crept into the life of the people in Kerala.

The allegation raised against Kerala government that it tried to sell the health data of COVID-19 patients and people under quarantine to the US based IT Company Sprinklr provoked widespread opposition from all corners and the government was forced to withdraw from the contract before the completion of the trial period. Even though the state government has directed the tech firm to erase all of the data they received, we cannot be sure whether the sale of the data to the highest bidders will occur or not. Surveillance and data handling of that kind cause a lot of insecurity. The digital world has opened up newer vistas through which the subjection of individuals to a process of surveillance has made life all the more vulnerable.

One of the most powerful strategies of imperial dominance is that of surveillance, or observation, because it implies a viewer with an elevated vantage point, it suggests the power to process and understand that which is seen, and it objectifies and interpellates the colonized subject in a way that fixes its identity in relation to the surveyor.... the imperial gaze defines the identity of the subject, objectifies it within the identifying system of power relations and confirms its subalterneity and powerlessness. (Ashcroft et al 207)

The regime had its own ways of suppressing dissent and people who voiced against their dictatorial policies. “If he was in possession of a kid whose ears were not pierced, he might be an enemy of the regime” (30) was something the authorities would not fail to say. Poonachi whose whereabouts were unknown would provoke instant hostility from the government authorities due to her black skin also. “Since they could not be recognised in the dark when engaged in any criminal activity, the regime had, it was rumoured, deliberately wiped them out” (31). This was similar to the Oriental conception of the Arabs:

In the films and television the Arab is associated either with lechery or bloodthirsty dishonesty. He appears as an oversexed degenerate, capable, it is true, of cleverly devious intrigues, but essentially sadistic, treacherous, low.... No individuality, no personal characteristics or experiences. Most of the pictures represent mass rage and misery, or irrational (hence hopelessly eccentric) gestures. Lurking behind all of these images is the menace of *jihad*. Consequence: a fear that the Muslims (or Arabs) will take over the world. (Said 286-67)

In a regime that experiments to find newer strategies through which subjugation of individuals are possible, Poonachi stands as an emblem of resistance. Her black colour saved her from the surveillance gaze of the government. Existing as a black skinned female in a society that discriminates between individuals based on their skin colour, Poonachi presents herself as an image of unvanquishedness. The government deliberately annihilated black skinned goats like her but her precarious existence and survival even after denied mother’s milk in her infancy make her a warrior. Considering the fact that she had to feed on rice water, which is not, as white as goat milk, her relentless existential struggle moulds her as an advocate for the rights of black-skinned goats like her. Murugan’s politics is unravelled here.

People very well knew how to behave towards the regime. “They had mouths only to keep shut, hands only to make obeisance, knees only to bend and kneel, backs only to bend, and bodies only to shrink before the authorities” (35). In the novel, the long queues in which citizens stand in the scorching sun to get the ears of their animals pierced and the injustice meted out to them remain silenced due to fear of punishment and consequences. It was not the fear of a physically present power that made them disciplined. As Foucault says in his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*,

Disciplinary power, on the other hand, is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. In discipline, it is the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is this fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection. And the examination is the technique by which power, instead of emitting the signs of its potency, instead of imposing its mark on its subjects, holds them in a mechanism of objectification. (211-12)

With the installation of CCTV cameras in government and other offices, the privacy of individuals suffers a serious setback. These installations set up to ensure efficiency very often pry upon the personal space of citizens. Their effect is more negative than positive. Comparing the effectiveness of traditional regulatory mechanism in African cultures with modern day surveillance cameras, Pascual Mungwini articulates through his article “‘Surveillance and cultural Panopticism’: situating Foucault in African modernities”:

The strength of the moral censure resulting from the panoptic gaze exercised by one’s significant others whose relations are so crucial to one’s being can never compare to that posed by a machine manned by somebody almost unknown or unrelated to the perpetrator.... on those occasions when they are caught engaging in immoral or antisocial acts, individuals under the panoptic gaze of indigenous culture would experience arguably more shame and feel more annoyed at being caught rather than self-recrimination for personal moral failure. (350)

People in power effectively deploy ideology to meet their ends. The first way is through the legitimization of the dominant social order in which one group becomes dominant and the other becomes subordinate. Selfish motives of the ruling class become universal interests through a process of ideological legitimization. The second way is through the naturalisation of the existing social order as unalterable laws. In such a scenario, dissenting voices become challenges against the social order. This ideological manipulation defends repression and strengthens the dominant social order by generating consent for their actions.

In a totalitarian regime, the citizens are powerless. The mistake from the part of the authorities made it impossible to read the number embedded on the nanny goat’s ear. Nevertheless, the old woman had not the liberty to speak against them. “You are the

government. Why should I speak a single word against you?” (43). Foucault has rightly said in his *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, “There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (27).

The wound inflicted on Poonachi’s earlobes by the piercing officer’s mishandling was a punishment for the old woman’s resistance. The revealing of the double standards of the regime happens here. “It’s deaf only when we speak about our problems. When we talk about the regime, its ears are quite sharp” (39). In a totalitarian government, the institution of patriarchy finds many opportunities to reveal its tentacles. In sexualized violence, it is always women and the sexual minorities that bleed. The ear-piercing needle used on Poonachi by the officer is comparable to the application of phallus in sexual coercion. The ultimate goal of both the needle and the phallus in this case is to inflict injury upon the female body. When all else fail, patriarchy and totalitarian government resort to physical violence to tame women.

The policies of the repressive state targeted at obliterating even sexual desires place no value on the sexual rights of its citizens. Brutal punishment meted out to the transgressors is how government make citizens obey them. In *Poonachi*, the castration of the goat kid Kaduvayan occurs after he indulges in his lust with a doe. The reason offered by his oppressors seems ridiculous: “If he fucks a doe, he’ll lose control” (64). This reason is akin to that provided by the people who classify people into sane and insane and send the ones that break the boundaries of sanity to lunatic asylums. Foucault aptly says in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*:

The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the ‘social worker’-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements. (336)

Margaret Atwood’s dystopian novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* traces the experiences of the central character Offred in the Republic of Gilead that denies its citizens even sexual autonomy. The buck kid Kaduvayan’s fate is similar to that of Offred in a totalitarian regime. Offred belonged to a group known as “handmaids” who were assigned by the government to produce children for the ruling class of men, the commanders. However, even the government-approved copulation was not a private act in the sense that it took place in the presence of the

commander's wife. Life becomes oppressive for her when she falls in love with the commander, which is a punishable crime by the government. Kaduvayan's abandonment as a used vessel after mating with the doe equals him with the suffering of the handmaids whose function was only to breed as per the whims and fancies of the regime.

Article 21 of the Indian Constitution states that, "No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty, except according to procedure established by law." Sexual liberty comes under its purview and is violated and misused by authorities to ensure that the government holds absolute power over the life and liberty of its citizens. Kaduvayan's castration comes as a terrible blow to his sexual vitality and he is a representative of the crippled minorities that the state avidly creates. Kaduvayan's fate mirrors the trajectory of the events of mass surveillance and panoptic form of government that came into being in USA through the implementation of the PATRIOT Act after the threats on national security by terrorist uprisals. Taking cue from Foucault's words from *The History of Sexuality*, we can say that, "power is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to an ability to hide its own mechanisms" (86).

The scissors that cut the testicles of Kaduvayan is another patriarchal tool used to torture deviants who violate expected sexual conduct. As Laura Mulvey has opined in her well-known essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", "pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control, and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness" (64). The old man, well past his reproductive age considers Kaduvayan as a rival like the inefficient state machinery considers efficient government employees as a threat to their corruptive ways.

Poonachi's love for the buck kid Poovan suffered a harsh blow when the old woman decided to take her away from her daughter's home. "'Just look at the cheek of this worm', the old man said and asked one of his granddaughters to fetch a length of rope. And so that day, a rope was tied around Poonachi's neck for the first time; once tied, it was never undone" (91). Foucault rightly articulates in his *Discipline and Punish*:

Punishment had no doubt ceased to be centred on torture as a technique as a technique of pain; it assumed as its principal object loss of wealth or rights. But a punishment like forced labour or even imprisonment- mere loss of liberty- has never functioned without

a certain additional element of punishment that certainly concerns the body itself: rationing of food, sexual deprivation, corporal punishment, solitary confinement. (24)

The disappointment in love was just a beginning of the extreme frustrations that awaited Poonachi. Independence and sexual freedom became a non-entity for her. Motherhood and reproduction became her destiny. Encroaching even on her sexual liberty, the old couple's actions mirrors the apparatuses used by a repressive state that bound the citizens to compulsory acceptance of governmental policies through surveillance techniques. The novel thus is a polemic against all forms of state control and resistance as such.

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## **On the Margins of Life: A Subaltern Reading of the Women in the *U. S. A.* Trilogy**

***Sanil T. Sunny***

The notion of the subaltern was first referred to by Antonio Gramsci in “Notes on Italian History,” an article which appeared later in his most widely known work *Prison Notebooks*. He used the term ‘subaltern’ interchangeably with ‘subordinate’ to denote non hegemonic groups or classes. This account is further developed through context, time, and place in terms of class, caste, age, gender. ‘Woman’ is a category with its claim on the history of humiliation and suffering. This category is denied an authentic presence and imbued with refusals at all levels, be it social, cultural, sexual or personal.

Though the traditional institutional structures of the society did not galvanise mainstream intellectual discourses on the oppression of women in the society, to a certain extent, the modernist intervention provides a distinct ideological and institutional framework for them. This contemporary upsurge of women in the cultural and political mainstream not only challenges the existing socio-political definitions of women but also tries to provide new epistemological alternatives by bringing articulations from the margins to the core.

John Dos Passos, in his most celebrated *U. S. A.* trilogy, present women as objects of male profit and exploitation. His female characters signal a group in blind pursuit of wealth, power and pleasure at the expense of original American dreams of equal opportunity, dignity and happiness. The trilogy invokes the feminine as a means of disparagement and there is an aggravated dissonance between men and women. The tragic planes of Mary French, Eleanor Stoddard, Eveline Hutchins, Janey Williams, Margo Dowling and Anne Elizabeth Trent – the female fictional characters of the trilogy – illustrate how women continue to be the subaltern in a modernised society.

The present essay, acknowledging the seminal contribution of Subaltern Studies, traces the marginalization of women in the domains such as family, employment and politics based on the trilogy. It also addresses the women experience of emotional sterility by being the victims of calculating, but persuasive exploitation of the male sex. Though the term is of a wide range, in the present study ‘subaltern’ is used in the meaning ‘oppressed’ or ‘subordinated.’

Mary French is a victim in the male dominated society. The Vassar graduate has to work as counter girl at a cafeteria and at work she witnesses how the women are ill treated and how they are subjected to the abuse and harassment of the managers and other employers. Being a radical figure and an active participant in labour politics, Mary has to sacrifice her charm and youthfulness for the labour party. Each of her broken affairs takes off her individuality and greenness. She has to subordinate herself to her male fellow workers. It may not be a coincidence that the socialist leaders we meet in the fictional narratives of Mary are all men: “. . . the American man gives over to woman all the things he profoundly disinterested in, and keeps business and politics to himself” (Landsberg 3).

Eleanor Stoddard shows exceptional talent in interior settings and she is a valued asset in every workplace she enters. But it becomes readily apparent that she is not being paid fairly for the work that she performs. Eleanor earns twenty a week but comparing to her male colleague Eric Egstorm who earns fifty a week, it is seemingly low. Woman is thus an idea ready for service when called upon by socio-cultural commentators and critics. She is a passive muted victim or the epitome of unquestioning obedience. The real woman in her is lost somewhere in the process. Her hopes and wails are silenced forever and she continues to have a veiled existence.

Eveline is considered to be a sport by her lover Dirk, meaning that she doesn't play offense or defence. She acquiescently performs an idealized feminine role, and suffers loss upon loss throughout the course of her life. Dirk's response to her proposal emphasizes the derogatory statement concealed within this commonly used, cheerful-sounding term: “Eveline, you know I'm not the marrying kind . . . love 'em and leave 'em 's more like it. I can't help how I am” (Dos Passos *Nineteen Nineteen* 121).

Janey's relationship with Jerry Burnham and their late night outings smash up when Burnham tries to molest Janey in one of their late night drives. She has to push him off. After Janey knees Jerry Burnham he shouts at Janey that he finds no difference between her and any 'nigger' prostitute: “I can get what I want with any nigger prostitute down the street here . . .” (Dos Passos *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel* 161). Just like most of Dos Passos men Burnham also does not believe in the marriage system. What he wants from Janey is just bodily pleasure. Women's sexuality is perceived as passive; its role is to service men's sexual needs. In *Nineteen Nineteen* the identity of Janey is completely reduced to Miss Williams. She is defined by her

career. “She becomes a symbol of the “successful” pink-collar woman, but the price of her economic self-sufficiency is self-erasure” (Cope 23).

The lives of Eleanor, Eveline and Janey are persuaded by the deceitful warmth of public relations magnate J. W. Moorehouse. His gentlemanly manners give them a sense that he loves them but his inclusive gestures are ultimately false. All these women are denied any forms of love. Their bodies and emotions are dominated and made to conform that they are productive and useful.

Margo Dowling, because of the harassments and insecurities in and out of her family, takes many years to alter her inferior status. In her teenage, she gets raped by Frank, his stepfather. Later in her life she starts a relationship with Jerry Herman, an actor whom all the chorus actresses are scared of. Her friend Queenie warns her that “a beautiful white body’s about the cheapest thing there is in this town” (Dos Passos *Big Money* 261). This is a clear indication of the identity crisis women undergo in a modernised society. Among the people who circle around Charley Anderson’s posthumous estate eyeing on his wealth, Margo is subjected to humiliating stares and contempt. This is how the society frowns upon women more in an extramarital relationship.

Daughter is not at all happy when she comes back to Texas from New York to spend time with family as she realizes “Texas stifles her freedom” (Cope 16). But she very soon manages to come back to the old glory of her luxurious life. Dad offers her a new car if she stays on and she starts to play tennis and golf again. It seems that “Daughter is trapped in a state of perpetual childhood” (Cope 16). We should take a close look at the fact that she is “known by her relationship with her father with the name “Daughter,” having no individuality of her own but dependent on a male for her identity” (Cope 13). Though she gets an active social life, “Daddy’s onlyest sweetest little girl” (Passos *Nineteen Nineteen* 256) cannot go beyond the “traditional values dear” and is supposed to “believe wholeheartedly in the infallibility of God and country” (Cope 16). She is forced to accept domesticity.

Daughter’s agency in the novel is astounding, but even when it seems that she is in control of her life, in reality Dos Passos does not allow her to control the direction or the intensity at which she moves. The ultimate death of the young Texas-belle is clearly a result of her perpetual motion and speed, which culminate in an airplane crash. Her death is especially significant given the fact that she is carrying a child—the future generation. Daughter is at times

overtly feminine in a traditional sense, but she is also aggressive in her speed and restlessness (Cope 16).

The inequity a woman suffers in a reckless society is affirmed when she becomes pregnant with the child of Dick. She craves to be a wife and mother but realises that if she chooses to do so she will have to do it alone. With all her progressivism “she cannot endure the thought of motherhood without a husband” (Cope 19). Though the exploiter is a man when she is out with people Daughter has to carry all the disgrace.

Dos Passos’ women characters face sub-standard and humiliating working conditions and status in the society and his male characters try to have a “cultural superiority” (Moglen2) over them. As Janet Galligani Casey observes, in Dos Passos’ novels, “America is not only divisible into two economic nations... but also two gendered ones” (Moglen 2). Being at an uncertain cross road of oppression and helplessness, women in the trilogy occupy the lowest position in the social ladder. Their presence is only to enforce the superiority of the male counterpart or even not authenticated. They are neither granted economic autonomy nor involved in the creation governmental policies. The working class women are brutally subjugated. Even more pathetic is the fact that the dominant powers have so naturalized the subjugation of women that they often fail to recognize the pitfall that they are in. They are the prisoners of the patriarchy and unbelievably taken it as their ordained destiny. Thus they are the ‘other,’ they are the marginalised and they are the subaltern.

The predicament of the female subaltern is the most miserable of all oppressive states as it is circumvented by multiple forces of oppression – racism, classism, and most importantly, the subjugating ideology of patriarchy. The subaltern women in the trilogy are forced either to keep silent or to structure their reality, especially in terms of men’s reality. As a result, they are muted and the muted structures fail to be realized in the language of the dominant groups.

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## **Narratives of Resilience: The Educational and Cultural Tapestry of Sudha Murty's Storytelling**

*Liss Deepu*

Storytelling is an ancient practice that goes beyond simply reading stories from a book. It involves recounting tales from memory, allowing for flexibility and evolution with each telling. This tradition serves as a means of transmitting knowledge, values, and cultural heritage from one generation to the next. G. K. Chesterton once remarked, "Folk tales are more than true – not because they tell us dragons exist, but because they tell us dragons can be beaten." This emphasizes the empowering aspect of storytelling, teaching resilience and hope from an early age (Chesterton 97).

As Ursula K. Le Guin pointed out, stories are essential for understanding the depths of human emotion and spirituality. They offer insight into what it means to be human. In educational settings, storytelling has been utilized across various fields such as teacher education, early childhood education, and nursing education due to its simplicity and effectiveness. Muriel Rukeyser eloquently captured the essence of storytelling "The universe is made of stories, not of atoms." This quote underscores the significance of narratives in creating a fundamental human connection, beyond mere facts (Rukeyser 22).

Particularly, storytelling serves as a powerful tool for teaching indigenous cultures, imparting values, virtues, and historical lessons through myths, legends, and folktales. Sudha Murty, for example, uses these traditional narratives to engage children and in still moral virtues. By sharing these stories, families create bonds and encourage children to embody positive qualities in their interactions with others. Sudha Murty's approach aims to spark curiosity, entertain, and impart valuable life lessons. Isak Dinesen believed in the power of narratives, stating, "To be a person is to have a story to tell." This highlights the role of storytelling in preserving cultural heritage and shaping individual and collective identities (Dinesen 14).

Storytelling serves as a catalyst for creativity, intellectual exploration, and innovative thinking in humans. According to Brian Boyd, author of "On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction," narratives are regarded as essential cognitive tools that stimulate various mental processes. They facilitate alliance-building, pattern recognition, intelligence development, cooperation, and an understanding of others' beliefs. Religion, for instance, has been disseminated and upheld through storytelling across diverse cultures world wide. Tahir

Shah, in his exploration of tales, observed, “Stories are a communal currency of humanity.” This quote can be used to emphasize the universal nature of stories in sparking creativity and innovation across cultures (Shah 35).

Research in children’s literature delves deeply into not only cultural aspects but also psychological, ethical, religious, and social dimensions. In a recent study, the influence of myths, legends, fables, and folktales on Sudha Murty’s book “Grandparent’s Bag of Stories” was examined. This collection, a follow-up to her previous bestseller “Grandmother’s Bag of Stories,” features nineteen short stories narrated by grandparents to their grandchildren. It revives the tradition of oral storytelling, which had faded into the background with the rise of technology and alternative forms of entertainment. Through these storytelling sessions, children not only bond with their elders but also gain insight into their cultural heritage.

Albert Einstein famously said, “If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales.” In Sudha Murty’s collection of nineteen short stories, the narrative revolves around two grandparents, Ajji and Ajja, who share unheard tales with their grandchildren during the challenging times of quarantine amid a pandemic. Set in Shiggaon, the story portrays Ajji and Ajja’s efforts to alleviate the stress of lockdown for their grandchildren while also assisting those affected by it. Amidst daily chores and community support, the grandparents keep the children engaged with captivating stories passed down through generations.

These tales, steeped in age-old myths and legends, serve as a source of joy for the children, fostering compassion, wisdom, and resilience. The narrative evokes nostalgic memories of childhood holidays spent with grandparents, where magical stories held a special place in our hearts. Sudha Murty’s storytelling is described as charming and nostalgic, offering a glimpse into a world filled with gods, kings, animals, demons, princes, princesses, and wise individuals imparting invaluable life lessons. As the lockdown brought uncertainty into people’s lives, including children, Ajju and Ajji endeavored to ease their grandchildren’s difficulties by transporting them to a magical realm through storytelling.

The story begins with Grandparents Ajja and Ajji watching the news about the spread of the coronavirus in early March 2020. Concerned about the safety of their children and grandchildren living in Mumbai and Bangalore, they decide to bring them to their village, Shiggaon, for self-quarantine during the national lockdown. The grandchildren, Raghu, Meenu,

Krishna, and Anoushka, along with Aiji's sister Kamlu and her granddaughter Aditi, eagerly anticipate their stay at the grandparents' house, where they can be free from school and homework and enjoy playing together.

Upon their arrival, the children request Aiji to tell them a story before bedtime, a tradition she always upholds when they visit Shiggaon. Agreeing with a smile, Aiji begins narrating a story about rice, a staple food in their daily diet. As she recounts the tale, the quarantine period is formally declared by the Prime Minister of India.

In the story, Aiji explains the mythical journey of rice from heaven to earth, interweaving elements of gods and goddesses. Rice, considered the food of the gods, is stolen by a mortal named Madhav, who wishes to share its delicious taste with his people. However, this act angers Annapurna, the Goddess of grains. Madhav pleads for forgiveness, emphasizing his intention to benefit his community. Annapurna pardons him but decrees that mortals can no longer freely access heaven, only after they pass away.

Aiji's story blends mythology with moral lessons, captivating the children's imaginations and providing them with valuable insights into the origins of a staple food.

It's hard to resist the charm of a captivating story, especially when it's shared by grandparents. At the conclusion of the tale about the origins of rice, the children are left astonished by the newfound knowledge. Sudha Murty, in the footnotes of her book, highlights the tradition of offering the first produce of rice to Goddess Annapurna and other deities, emphasizing the significance of storytelling in cultural practices and faith. The essence of storytelling, as observed by Boyd, lies in its ability to serve a purpose rather than merely exist as an aesthetic representation. Sudha Murty demonstrates her prowess as a storyteller by skillfully capturing the reader's attention. Through her introductory narrative about the arrival of rice on earth, she not only engages the children but also establishes a connection with the current circumstances, making her stories relevant and relatable. Moreover, her stories effectively impart life values to children while keeping them entertained.

Through her simple yet captivating stories, Sudha Murty successfully acquaints children with cultural traditions that are deeply rooted in our cultural heritage. By narrating these stories, grandparents not only entertain the children but also impart knowledge about the legends and myths associated with the origins of their favorite festivals. After being mesmerized by Aiji's story about rice, the children eagerly request another tale before bedtime, this time from

KamluAjj, Ajja's sister. KamluAjj tells the story of wheat, introducing the serpent kingdom, which is terrorized by an eagle. A young boy named Arun comes to the kingdom's aid, defeating the eagle. As a token of gratitude, the serpent king offers Arun valuable treasures, but Arun declines, expressing his desire for wheat seeds instead, to help his fellow men.

Through this story, Kamlu Ajji teaches the children about the importance of gratitude, emphasizing that it is a fundamental aspect of civilization. The serpent kingdom's gesture of sharing their favorite food, wheat, with Arun demonstrates their gratitude for his timely assistance in freeing them from the terror of the giant eagle. Sudha Murty's narrative skill fully conveys moral lessons while keeping the children engrossed in the tale. It's crucial for younger generations to have an understanding of their past and cultural roots. Stories about gods and goddesses, magic, fairy tales, and fables contain deeply ingrained archetypal motifs that play a significant role in the growth and development of civilization.

During the lockdown, Ajja and Ajji ensure that the children remain active by assigning them household chores and involving them in helping the needy by making masks and food packets. Witnessing the adults' dedication to assisting others inspires the children to also contribute and learn the values of kindness, empathy, and generosity. The children take pride in their grandparents' belief that helping others holds greater importance than anything else. As a reward for their efforts, Ajji tells them a story about a beanstalk and magical bean seeds, teaching them the lesson of not being greedy and the importance of earning through hard work. In another story narrated by Ajja, titled "The Goddess of Luck," he emphasizes to the children the significance of lending a helping hand. The story illustrates how Mahesh, by selflessly asking for the well-being of others rather than for himself, earns the benevolence of the Goddess of Luck. Through his virtuous and pure-hearted actions, Mahesh is rewarded with two boxes full of diamonds and gold, highlighting the concept that helping others brings its own rewards.

Learning about the multitude of festivals and celebrations can indeed be overwhelming for those who are not natives of India. However, for Indians, these festivities are an integral part of life, regardless of where they reside globally. The memories of these celebrations hold a nostalgic significance, and elders often cherish passing down these traditions to their children and grandchildren through storytelling sessions, which in turn strengthen family bonds. Grandfather Ajja, while imparting knowledge to his grandchildren, always intertwines topics with stories. He explains this approach to Raghu, one of the grandchildren, by highlighting the ancient practice of using stories to teach various subjects and life skills. The underlying belief

is that children find it easier to comprehend concepts when they are presented through engaging narratives or anecdotes. Ajja references the origin of the Panchatantra, a collection of ancient Indian fables, to illustrate the effectiveness of this teaching method.

The book “Grandparent’s Bag of Stories” presents captivating narratives and compelling characters that in still values like sharing, resilience, and empathy in children. Myths, inherently communal in nature, serve to unite tribes or nations through shared psychological and spiritual experiences. In the Indian context, there is a rich tradition of stories based on myths, dating back to ancient times, including famous collections such as Panchatantra, Jataka tales, Kathayen, Betal Pachchisi, Vikram Betal, and others. Despite their ancient origins, these tales remain popular, with classics like the Panchatantra, written in Sanskrit around 200 B.C., still being widely read.

In India, the tradition of parents narrating stories based on Indian myths and legends to their children has endured through generations. While this practice continues in contemporary times, it has also evolved with the advent of information technology. Many mythical stories have been adapted into animated films, providing children with modern interpretations of these timeless tales.

One of the stories featured in Sudha Murty’s book revolves around the theme of sibling love, drawing from the myth of Naga Panchami. This festival, dedicated to the worship of snakes, is observed during two days in the rainy season, with a custom for sisters to visit their brothers’ homes during this time. Through this narrative, Murty showcases the enduring significance of traditional customs and familial bonds.”A Handful of Grains” recounts the tale of aiding small creatures like a mouse. It emphasizes the profound impact even a small gesture, such as providing a handful of rice, can have. This simple act can sustain a mouse for up to a week, highlighting the significance of compassion and generosity.

“The Mouse that Became a Mouse” narrates the story of a sage and a mouse. Driven by a desire for power, the mouse continuously seeks the sage’s assistance and undergoes transformations into various animals before realizing the true meaning of life. Ultimately, the sage imparts the wisdom that life is a journey filled with challenges, and one must learn to accept their circumstances.”A Word of Honour” depicts a king who honors his promise to a poor man residing in a small hut, despite the inconvenience it causes during the construction of

the king's new palace. This story underscores the importance of keeping one's word and demonstrates the king's integrity and sense of honor.

Across generations, humans pass down a legacy encompassing knowledge, lessons, habits, and traditions, which they take pride in. History serves as a shared pool of communal knowledge, allowing us to examine how our ancestors' decisions shape long-term consequences. This unique ability to learn from history provides us with insights into current challenges, an advantage not enjoyed by other species on Earth. Storytelling plays a pivotal role in this transmission of knowledge, making it one of the most vital traditions for the survival of the human species.

Folklore and tales offer profound insights into human learning, community socialization, and the transfer of cultural knowledge and values. According to Eder and Holyan (2010), myths, stories, and storytelling tap into deep psychological mechanisms, fostering not only self-awareness but also communal understanding among children. It is imperative to explore how stories are absorbed and transmitted through personal relationships, cultivated through both peer interactions and intergenerational mentoring. The telling and interpretation of stories enrich children's psychology and social development. Donna Eder's work, as illustrated in "Life Lessons through Storytelling," demonstrates how stories influence children's ethical perceptions and suggests the potential for developing curricula that foster ethical character development in children. This highlights the significance of storytelling in shaping children's ethical understanding and character growth.

Stories and the art of storytelling serve as a powerful vehicle for meaningful learning. Teaching, fundamentally, is a form of communication rooted in the ancient tribal practice of storytelling. Storytelling is intrinsic to human existence—it's how we think, connect, and convey our experiences. Myths, legends, and folk tales have been integral to education in every culture, offering profound insights into the various dimensions of human life. These narratives teach us how to navigate the complexities of human existence, encouraging reflection and participation in cultural expressions such as community, art, religion, and adaptation to the natural environment. The myths we engage with actively shape and integrate our life experiences, guiding us through their symbols, images, and meanings.

Ultimately, stories derive their vitality from people. As human creations, they are not just messages but also vehicles for conscious reflection, sustained by the individuals who

share them through their thoughts, words, and actions. This collective sharing of stories enables humanity to progress and accumulate knowledge over time, ensuring that lessons learned are passed down through generations. Some tales are older than most nations, persisting long after the cultures and settings in which they originated have faded away. The book contains a plethora of amusing yet captivating stories that are certain to captivate children. Sudha Murty's work stands out among her collection of children's books for its entertaining nature, while also imparting valuable life lessons to young readers. Each story is artfully narrated, offering profound insights for life.

Myths and legends continue to be read today because they often convey timeless and universal themes, shedding light on the human experience and providing insights into the values and perspectives of past cultures. These stories offer glimpses into the way people lived and the societies they inhabited, highlighting both the differences and similarities between ancient and contemporary human life. Sudha Murty's writing style is simple yet beautiful, capable of bringing smiles even in the most challenging times. "Grandparents Bag of Stories" emphasizes the importance of family bonds, the value of helping others, and the significance of storytelling traditions between grandparents and grandchildren. The stories serve as thought-provoking and entertaining vehicles for teaching valuable lessons. They encourage empathy, offer insights into various traditions and values, and provide universal life experiences for children to contemplate.

Furthermore, the stories in the book serve various purposes beyond entertainment. They help children consider new ideas, explore cultural differences and commonalities, promote a sense of well-being and relaxation, encourage communication, foster active participation, stimulate imagination and creativity, and enhance listening skills.

India is a diverse country, characterized by a rich tapestry of cultures, climates, vegetation, and cuisines across its regions. Each state boasts its own unique culture, beliefs, and folklore, contributing to a sense of unity amidst diversity. Throughout history, India has experienced numerous invasions and rulers, including the Mughals and British, leading to cultural exchanges and migrations that have shaped the nation's identity. Even today, migration continues, driven by factors such as poverty, lack of basic amenities, employment opportunities, and social unrest. Migration fosters the intermingling of diverse cultures, resulting in the evolution of a composite culture and broadening of mental horizons. This blending of cultures can be observed throughout the nation, despite apparent differences. Literary works often reflect the culture

and peculiarities of specific regions, which may or may not resonate with readers' own experiences. However, cultural familiarity can enhance the appeal of literature, alongside factors such as plot, narrative technique, themes, and motifs. Sudha Murthy, a celebrated author, particularly resonates with Indian readers through her books, which span various genres including children's literature. "Grandma's Bag of Stories," written in English, offers readers insights into the culture and traditions of South Indian households, yet its themes of family values and bonding are universally relatable.

India's cultural diversity, historical influences, and ongoing migrations contribute to a rich tapestry of experiences reflected in literature, with authors like Sudha Murthy capturing the essence of Indian life and values in their works. The book revolves around the vacation experiences of four children – Raghu, Meenu, Anand, and Krishna – at their grandparents' home, where they delight in their grandma's captivating stories. Later, they are joined by Vishnu Kaka's grandchildren – Sharan, Suma, and Divya. Set in the small town of Shiggaon, which is the author's hometown in northern Karnataka, the narrative is infused with the author's fond recollections of her time spent with her grandmother and cousins. These personal memories lend a sense of familiarity to the stories, as they offer glimpses into the author's own childhood experiences. Despite the imaginative and didactic nature of the tales, the portrayal of familial bonds between Ajja, Ajji, Kakka, and the children resonates with realism. This depiction of family dynamics strikes a chord with many Indian readers, as it mirrors common practices in Indian households where grandparents indulge their grandchildren with stories and treats. While the joint family system remains prevalent in Indian culture, even as nuclear families emerge in urban areas, the importance of family values persists across religious and cultural backgrounds.

The author's intention of fostering an understanding of the unique relationships between generations is well-received by Indian readers, who appreciate the sweetness and significance of familial bonds depicted in the book. Throughout history, folktales have served both as entertainment and as vehicles for imparting moral values and life lessons. In India, stories from classics like *Hitopadesh* and Vishnu Sharma's *Panchtantra* have been cherished for generations, offering valuable insights into emotional and moral values essential for children's development. As Karin Lesnik-Oberstein notes, children's literature is fundamentally about nurturing emotional and moral values, a tradition deeply ingrained in Indian culture through storytelling.

Sudha Murthy's collection, "Grandma's Bag of Stories," comprises twenty-two tales, each intricately woven to impart moral values or life lessons in a captivating and entertaining manner. This practice of using stories to instill moral values and teach important life lessons is deeply ingrained in Indian homes, making Murthy's work resonate strongly with Indian readers. Through stories like "Doctor, Doctor," "Kavery and the Thief," "The Enchanted Scorpions," "What's in it for Me?" and "Fire on the Beard," Murthy effortlessly conveys lessons about the perils of greediness, the significance of wit and hard work, the virtue of honesty, the vice of selfishness, and the dangers of laziness, respectively.

In "Roopa's Great Escape," Vishnu Kaka becomes the voice of the author, narrating a story about a young girl who outsmarts her kidnapper through cleverness and alertness. This tale, along with Suma's example, underscores the importance of not trusting strangers and the necessity of maintaining composure to navigate challenging situations. The familiarity of the cultural milieu depicted in Murthy's stories adds another layer of appeal for readers. The use of Indian place names like Aruna Marg and character names such as Kavery, Roopa, Amrit, Chandan, Rani, and Ramu enhances the relatability of the narratives. For instance, in "A Treasure for Ramu," Murthy emphasizes the value of sincerity and prudent spending to invoke the blessings of the goddess of wealth, Laxmi. In "Roopa's Great Escape," the setting of a village festival and fair evokes fond memories for readers, drawing parallels to familiar experiences in various Indian locales.

Furthermore, Murthy incorporates cultural elements such as traditional festivals and culinary delights, making her stories resonate deeply with Indian readers. The mention of festivals like Chowpati, Janpath, Karaga, and Kallekai Parishe, as well as the description of dishes like payasam, kheer, and payesh, enhances the readers' connection to the narratives, evoking memories, experiences, and observations from their own lives. Overall, Murthy's storytelling style feels authentic and relatable to Indian readers, drawing them into a world that feels familiar and comforting.

In the modern era, children have access to a plethora of entertainment and educational sources, including television cartoons and superhero movies. However, these mediums often prioritize entertainment value over didactic purposes. While some TV shows and movies attempt to impart moral values through their content, their approach differs from that of books with similar intentions. Television shows and movies typically aim to captivate children's attention by offering excitement and visual appeal. In contrast, books designed for children strive to

convey life lessons or moral values in a subtle yet engaging manner, while also stimulating the reader's imagination. Canadian critic Michele Lands berg highlights the significance of books for children, stating that they can expand horizons, in still a sense of life's complexity, foster empathy, and enrich a child's mind with the symbols, patterns, depths, and possibilities of civilization Maya Angelou once expressed, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." This underscores the importance of storytelling in moral and ethical development, advocating for the expression and sharing of narratives for personal and communal growth (Angelou 196).

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## Testosterone Genre: Malayalam Cinema's Obsession with the Clash of Male Egos

*Joyal Basil & A. Y. Yeldhose*

Cinema is undoubtedly the most prominent component of popular culture. Since the medium exploits both visual and audio elements to form unified cinematic experience, it seeps into the subconscious of the audience at a rapid pace. How films reflect the social, economic, cultural and political milieu of the period in which it is set and are released (both may not be the same), is far more effective than any other means of pop culture, including literature and music. Cinema is believed to be the form of artistic expression that requires the least amount of heed and involvement from the part of its consumers.

Ever since India began to produce its own films, the Malayalam regional industry has been counted among the list of places that produce quality content. Along with Bengali cinema, the films produced in Kerala enjoyed critical acclaim for the thematically superior content they generated within the constraints of time and budget. In the span of the last ten to twelve years, the industry has undergone a rapid transformation to a superior realm; both in terms of thematic quality and in terms of technology updation. A film genre is a category that contains films with similar narrative elements or aesthetic approaches. A particular thematic or stylistic category called genre often contains films that produce the same kind of emotional responses. In the last few years, Malayalam filmmakers have taken a special interest in exploring shades of masculinity on screen hitherto unexplored.

In recent times, Malayalam cinema has shown an interest in studying the male ego rather than celebrating it at face value as was the practice. Though the industry's ageing superstars continue to make bombastic films where 'mass' is valued over the script, the younger generation is moving towards a brand of cinema that is exploring new shades to masculinity (Rajendran 12).

Observations like these lead this research to decipher the slow emergence of a new genre in Malayalam cinema within the time frame of the past eight years, starting from 2016; a genre that this study terms as the *Testosterone Genre*.

Steve Neale, a leading scholar of film studies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, who passed away in 2021 argues that "genre is, of course, an important ingredient in

any film's narrative image" (Neale 160). Narrative image is the answer fabricated by the promotional teams of films to the curious question of filmgoers as to what kind of film they should expect. This narrative image that transforms the essence of the genre can be found in the advertisements, stills, posters and reviews of the film concerned. This sets the target audience of the genre to an excitement to see the film. He also speaks about genres as processes. While these processes are dominated by repetition, they are also marked by difference, variation and change. He says "the process-like nature of genres manifests itself as an interaction between three levels: the level of expectation, the level of generic corpus and the level of the rules or norms that govern both" (Neale 165). Every new film in a genre contributes an addition to the existing generic corpus and involves a selection from the collection of generic elements available at any one point in time.

While some of these elements are included, others are excluded and some others are mutually exclusive.

Butterfly effect is the idea that a small occurrence can bring about a major change in a larger complex system. For instance, having a late breakfast can result in a man's divorce over a chain of interconnected events. Butterfly effect is a mathematical concept of which is a part of chaos theory. Edward Lawrence explains this concept using the example of a butterfly's wing flap. He proposes the possibility of causing or preventing a tornado in Texas by a butterfly's wing flap in Brazil. Technically speaking he says "the behaviour of the atmosphere is unstable with respect to perturbations of small amplitude" (Lawrence 92). This study appropriates butterfly effect to the discipline of film studies by applying the concept to study film narratives. This research examines a few Malayalam movies that have the male ego at their thematic centre along with the use of butterfly effect in varying degrees in their narratives, to classify it under a new genre.

*Maheshinte Prathikaaram*, the directorial debut of Dileesh Pothan is a sweet tale of revenge sprinkled with rib-tickling humour. Mahesh Bhavana, a photographer, is brutally beaten up by Jimson when he tries to calm down his friend Crispin and others involved in a petty street fight. This event was the result of a butterfly effect that began with a trivial argument between a panchayat member and another person at a funeral event. This is followed by a person's loss of his amla sack to some primary school students resulting in a domestic fight with his wife. The subsequent argument of his brother-in-law with the villain gang over who was the first customer in a shop, ends by Crispin complicating the fight and ultimately Mahesh

getting thrown into its middle only to be beaten up by Jimson at Prakash junction. As he is humiliated in front of his whole village, Mahesh's ego gets hurt more than his body and he pledges that he won't wear his slippers again until he beats up Jimson back. The film ends with Mahesh fulfilling his revenge in a direct combat with Jimson.

*Ishq* came out in 2019 with the theme of moral policing at its core. While Sachi and his girl friend Vasudha are out on a nightdrive, they are harassed by Alwin and Mukundan who pose to be police officers. They forcefully accompany them on their journey, torture them mentally and even demand money from them. After some time, Mukundan leaves but Alwin continues to harass and tries to sexually assault Vasudha when Sachi is away. Alwin leaves after some time but the wound cast by Alwin on them persists. The next morning, Sachi drops Vasudha at her hostel but rather than asking if she is alright he asks if Alwin has violated her. The protagonist's male ego is hurt and he takes revenge on Alwin's family in the same way realizing that Vasudha has actually retaliated. Although Sachi proposes to her the next morning, she rejects him as she realizes that he would have abandoned her if Alwin had violated her.

*Driving License* is another male ego-centred movie with good use of the butterfly effect in setting up its first act. The Lal Jr. directorial showcases the clash of a film star Hareendran and his ardent fan Kuruvila Joseph, a motor vehicle inspector over some misunderstandings during the process of issuing a driving license. *Ayyappanum Koshiyum* written and directed by late filmmaker Sachy (who also wrote *Driving License*) tells a similar tale where a sub-inspector Ayyappan Nair with a violent past gets into a high-octane action combat with a retired havildar, Koshy Kurian who is a man with severe superiority complex and is the product of a patriarchal father. Kaduva followed a similar ego war, this time between a rich businessman and planter Kaduvakkunel Kuriyachan and a police IG Joseph Chandy over a series of humiliating episodes on either side, all of which started with a trivial piano donation to the parish church by the latter's mother. The Shaji Kailas directorial was set in the 1990s Kottayam.

*Oru Thekkan Thallu Case* which came out in 2022 is the latest addition to the list of testosterone-boosted films. The film directed by Sreejith N, based on G. R Indugopan's short story is driven by the male ego between Ammini Pillai, a light house guard and Podiyan with his gang of friends set in the 1980s Thiruvananthapuram.

All the above-discussed works contain a plethora of recurring elements, making them eligible to be classified under a new genre coinage this study proposes, the Testosterone Genre. The repetitions found in them according to Steve Neale's idea of repetitions and differences, are the following. At first, the thematic similarity of the clash of male egos. Secondly, each of these films has two male figures warring with each other at its centre. Thirdly, the effective use of the butterfly effect in these narratives, that is, building the screenplay from an incident in the first act that may appear inconsequential but proves to have severe repercussions over the course of the story. Lastly, it is the theme of revenge that occupies the crux of all these films. All the protagonists mentioned above including Mahesh Bhavana, Sachi, Kuruvila Joseph, Ayyappan Nair, Kaduvakkunel Kuriyachan and Ammini Pillai are driven by the thirst to avenge their wrongdoers.

The differences as proposed by Neale, which is necessary for the economy of the genre while retaining its defining characteristics, are also quite evident in these movies. If the treatment of the subject is considered, *Maheshinte Prathikaaram* is a realistic film with subtle but rib-tickling humour. *Ishq* is a serious film that takes a hard-hitting political stance. *Driving License* is a light-hearted humour film that is way more cinematic than the previous two. *Ayyappanum Koshiyum* is a serious drama with raw action blocks. *Kaduva* is an out-and-out period action film with several stylised and well-choreographed action scenes that boost the machismo of its hero. *Oru Thekkan Thallu Case* is a period-action film like *Kaduva* but humour takes centre stage at many crucial points in the narrative. Besides the central theme of the male ego, each of these films has its own set of other themes. Mahesh avenged his foe to restore his lost pride, and so did Sachi; the only difference is his pride being associated with his partner's chastity. *Ishq* takes a strong political stance against moral policing and vocalises a feminist point of view towards males who still worry about the virginity of their partners. *Driving License* points out the ill effects of being a blind fan and the humane side of celebrities. Critics came up with observations like "... the women in their lives are typically on the sidelines- if Hareendran's soft spoken sophisticated wife hardly has a say here, Kuruvilla's wife is shown to craftily milk the unexpected spell of publicity that streamed into their lives" (Menon), pointing to the insignificance of female characters in the film's plot. In contrast, *Ayyappanum Koshiyum* discusses topics like toxic parenting, violent past and caste subjugation and their retaliation. The film also has the presence of strong female characters like Kannamma who fights against caste subjugation and Ruby who finally gathers the courage to speak up against patriarchy.

*Kaduvahas* dirty political games powered by money power that could even bring down the ruling cabinet as a prominent theme. Loss and gain of the so-called “masculinity” in front of their romantic or sexual partners is what pride means in the universe of *Oru Thekkan Thallu Case*. The film has strong female characters like Rukmini (Ammini Pillai’s wife) who are strongly opinionated. The settings of these films also differ widely. While Mahesh Bhavana lives in Prakash City near Kattappana in Idukki, Kuruvila Joseph and Sachi are Kochi natives. Ayyappan Nair lives among a dominant tribal population in Attapadi. *Kaduvais* set in the wealthy Christian backdrop of 1990s Pala, Kottayam where as Ammini Pillai and his opponents live in the 1980s Thiruvananthapuram.

In a nut shell, it can be concluded that a new genre has emerged in Malayalam cinema over the past eight years, which this study addresses with a new terminology, the *Testosterone Genre*. The coinage is justifiable as these movies are a celebration of the male hormones intended to pump adrenaline in the audience comprising every gender. Since films constitute the lion’s share of contemporary popular culture, the emergence of this novel film genre deserves some attention, with respect to the contemporary Malayalam cinema milieu.

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## ***Udalazham: Exploring the Life and Struggles of a Tribal Transgender***

***Naurin Rahim***

The impressive aerial shot of a dried river bed in the beginning heralds the alarming plight of a marginalised section as well as their never-ending struggles. The tribals have their huts in the middle of the 'dead' river. Life in these settlements is alarming and pathetic since they are deprived of their basic facilities. *Udalazham* (Body Deep), presented by director Ashiq Abu under the banner Doctors' Dilemma, dismantles the conventional showcase of tribal life in films and introduces an authentic portrayal of their life enacted by tribal people themselves.

In India, tribal-indigenous populations have been historically excluded from mainstream society, culture and civilization. Social exclusion, as the case of these tribes clearly exemplifies, is not simply about poor material living conditions; it regularly draws pejorative moral judgments about those marginalised that work against a favourable reception of their problems, making it more difficult to find appropriate solutions for them.

The economic and social condition of tribal communities is desperate. For instance, the average landholding has declined more rapidly among tribes than among any other social group in India. This reflects the alienation of tribes from their traditional lands largely due to displacement over infrastructure projects or fraudulent transactions. Numerous official reports identify tribes as the most excluded section of Indian society: their levels of literacy are lower than those affecting Scheduled Castes; and the same can be said of the former's poverty rates and health indicators. In contemporary India, tribes' living standards are adversely impacted by a series of factors such as money lending, land alienation, deforestation and agricultural displacement. All of these factors combine to produce high poverty rates among tribes. Further, tribes show the highest levels of victimization concerning the incidence of atrocious crimes. Hence, in spite of the significant economic growth that has characterised the Indian economy since the 1990s, the social condition of tribes remains markedly backwards.

*Udalazham* is a 2018 Indian Paniya Malayalam drama film written and directed by Unnikrishnan Avala. Produced by Dr. Manoj K. T., Dr. Rajesh Kumar M. P. and Dr. Sajish M. under the banner of Doctors' Dilemma, it is Avala's debut feature. The film premiered at 20th Mumbai Film Festival in October 2018 before doing rounds at the festival circuit including

the International Film Festival of Kerala and Indian Film Festival of Melbourne. The film presented by Ashiq Abu is released theatrically on 6 December 2019.

*Udalazham* is a beautiful piece of art that flawlessly brings out the reality of the tribals in Kerala. The film sends out a strong socio-political message by highlighting their alienation and other issues including deforestation, drought, poverty, addiction and social stigma. While the country continues to debate social exclusion and marginalisation of the third gender, the life and struggles of Kerala's only known tribal transgender, is now inspiring a feature film.

The two-hour-long Malayalam film, *Udalazham*, tells the story of A. Raju who was born and brought up in Theekkadi tribal settlement located deep inside the Nilambur valley forests. A member of Aranadan aborigine community, Raju's life was a constant battle against humiliation and abuse by a parochial racist society. Interestingly, Raju was part of the initial discussions of the cinema and wanted to be an integral part in its making. However, chronic ailments cut short his life at the age of 55. The film starring top Malayalam artists Indrans, Joy Mathew, Sajitha Madathil, and Anumol, has Wayanad's celebrated tribal actor Mani donning the lead role of Gulikan who represents Raju, who was brought up as a boy while possessing the body and soul of a girl.

Gulikan is someone who finds himself trapped helplessly in a male body. He suffers from a self-imposed suppression as well as the oppression by the society. Gulikan is trapped in a wrong body and Mathi is in her love for Gulikan. He flees from place to place in search of freedom. Gulikan, a young tribal is acutely aware of the paradox in his life but is tied in a marital knot to Mathi. He is upset about not living up to her expectations, not being able to give her a child or let go of her. On the other side, Mathi loves Gulikan sincerely but things go topsy turvy when Gulikan decides to leave the forest and flee to the city.

First-time writer-director Unnikrishnan Avala shows us a guilty-stricken Gulikan in a ramshackle hut where he's mentally preparing for becoming a trans person. His wife Maathi is upset with his change in personality. Gulikan faces abuses of every sort owing to his third gender personality. He gets solace from a classical dancer, played by Anumol, who understands his emotions better than others.

Though Gulikan and Maathi are the inhabitants in the tribal colony, they have their own individuality. Especially, Maathi shows self-esteem in her demeanour and it is the circumstances that make her draw towards the fish merchant. She finds the meaning of true love in that

relationship. Maathi finds sanctity in it and that's why she spurns the advances of Deputy Ranger in the forest. On the contrary, Gulikan faces the biggest conflict coupled with the stigma and scare of sexual abuse by the patriarchal group. Gulikan is a disturbed soul as he finds no place comfortable for him. His last resort with Moorthy also ends in vain.

Unnikrishnan translates exquisitely a quasi-documentary theme to a meaningful film that sheds light on the exploitation of nature and the under-privileged by a seemingly cultured group, called modern man. Set in the forest near Nilambur, the disturbing visuals of their life are devoid of cinematic fripperies, instead, they introduce a new way of life. The strength of the director is his dedicated and honest approach to such a theme that offers a unique viewing experience. Indeed, content is the king for *Udalazham* as it leaves a scar that will haunt the viewers while immersing in it. The word 'harsh reality' would be a trite usage, but it's really a burning truth once you witness the reality.

*Udalazham* tells the agonies of Gulikan. He cannot perform the duty of a husband due to the woman residing in him to Maathi. He is sexually abused by the villagers and very often raped. He falls in love with one of his male colleagues in a tile factory, but once when he was having sex with him, the other colleagues beat him up and drive him away. Thus he is not allowed to live peacefully, but tortured and insulted by all around him. He breaks down several times cursing God for making him the victim of his cruel sport. Gulikan's is a true story; the script was prepared by the director Unnikrishnan Avala after interviewing A Raju, the real person several times. So the director could imbibe his true emotions and translate them into celluloid. The story may be a product of the director's imagination, but the central character remains true to life. At the end, he is showed as being caught in an animal trap, crying out loudly for help which summarizes the true situation he is in. A woman's mind and spirit is trapped in a man's body.

Issues of tribal development, integration and autonomy have confronted the Indian society right from the British rule in India. Complexity of Indian tribal population made the task of integration and autonomy even difficult. Ethnic tribal sub nationalism posed serious challenges and hampered the progress of the communities over the time. Autonomy is desired so that development policies are evolved to suit the tribal culture and lifestyle. On the other hand leaving the tribal in their own state will deepen the developmental divide between the mainstream and the tribals even deeper. Post-independence the basic issue is that the integration is largely directed from above and not from below. Integration of tribes has neglected their

own needs and desires. Integration has been on the terms of the mainstream society and it is also accused of benefitting the mainstream society only. The government monopoly over forests continued. The exploitation of forests accelerated as most of the mineral resources fall in forest and tribal areas. The policy of capital-intensive industrialization adopted by the Indian government required mineral resources and power generation capacities that were concentrated in the tribal areas. Tribal lands were rapidly acquired for new mining and infrastructure projects. In the process tribals were displaced without any appropriate compensation or rehabilitation justified in the name of economic growth. These policies were often seen subjugating tribals and causing the degradation of the resources upon which they depended.

What's interesting about *Udalazham* is that it does not only focus on transgender issues even though it is the central plot of the film. From the mistreatment of tribals to how the society judges women who engage in infidelity to the taboos of homosexual relationships, the film attempts to provide a more wholesome perspective of the lives of people around Gulikan. It is hard to believe that Mani has not graced the big screen for over a decade since he looks extremely comfortable in his role. He plays the part with such conviction that it tugs at your heartstrings and only Remya Valsala can match up to his brilliant performance. Another highlight of the film is certainly the cinematography. Muhammad A has captured every shot in natural light and the visuals are simply breathtaking. It adds to Unnikrishnan Avala's raw and realistic treatment of the movie with simple background music by award-winning composer Bijibal. Everything comes together beautifully, giving us a film with a hard-hitting message that lands right. *Udalazham* brings to light an issue that is often ignored in cinema and does so unapologetically. It provides you with breathtaking visuals on one hand and then completely shifts your mood with its disturbing story of transgender reality.

Identity construction is one among the thrust areas where cultural discourse mainly focuses. Identity makes a call on the meaningful existence of an individual in the contemporary society. The individuals who are not able to establish a distinctive identity find it difficult to lead a comfortable life in the society. Raju's memoir *Vipareetham* also tries to put its focus on the problem of identity construction. Raju introduces himself as a person whose identity convictions are totally muddled. He exhibits his inability to fit his identity into the binary boxes of man or woman, the only two gender forms most probably he knows. In a country like India, where anything that falls out of the hetero normative system gets an anomalous treatment, it is a challenging task for the gender variants to build up and establish their identity. Being an intersex

and someone who is incognizant of the ambiguous biology of his physicality Raju fails miserably in the endeavors of identity establishment. When a male or female person attempts to create a space of his/her own in the society, the process gets the support of the society and it will be regarded under the title of mainstream identity construction. But, when the gender variants attempt the same, the society intervenes and raises many challenging hurdles to jump over to embrace their internal sense of self. People usually think only about the identity of man or woman and this classification has strong roots in the social construction of gender. But beyond this, there exists other gender forms which belong to the LGBTIQ groups. Thinking beyond this socially established identity pattern and exploring the identities of the differently gendered has become one of the significant aspects of gender writing in the postmodern era.

In the memoir, Raju reveals that he confronts all these challenges in its fullest level. But still, he cannot be successful in recognizing and establishing his identity. Raju was born and brought up as a male until he turned eighteen, the age at which he started to menstruate. After the medical examination, he understood the fact that he bears a uterus in his body. After this realization, his identity posed a big question mark before Raju. He is absolutely bewildered about his gender as he says: Neither a man nor a woman, in between these two. I am not at all clear. That's the difficulty in my mind (Raju and Unnikrishnan, 2012). If the person belongs to a socially and financially backward community, then the sufferings and the discriminations get multiplied several times. The social responses to people who are born with an uncharacteristic sex are often not so favourable. Raju experienced a series of sufferings throughout his life right from the beginning in the form of sexual abuse, social exclusion, alienation and physical and mental torture. But, after the matter of his ambiguous identity gets publicized, he was subjected to various kinds of sexual abuse even more frequently. Even in his hut inside the forest, he did not feel secured. Individuals of the so called 'cultured and civilized' society searched his hut frequently to get hold of him. Raju says: I was taken by people to lie with them the next day onwards I reached the hotel. It started from the hotel. After this information got publicized, every night, people would come and take me forcibly to satisfy them. I tried to resist at first. But it was in vain. Then I became used to it. People who used me included the rich and the anti-social miscreants (Raju and Unnikrishnan, 2012). Through these words, Raju expresses his helplessness in resisting the sexual and physical attack on him. His words indicate the attitude of the mainstream society to the people who belonged to the intersex community. Raju was absolutely helpless and became really shocked, when he heard the news that he is

neither a complete man nor a complete woman and cursed the gods for doing the injustice to him. As Raju says; I even couldn't cry as no sound came out of my throat (Raju and Unnikrishnan, 2012). Raju is a representative of the doubly marginalized. The social community to which he belongs is a marginalized one like his gender community. Though there are many categories like LGBTIQ under the term gender variants, the intersex people do not get much representation in the social, cultural and literary domains when compared to other categories. Finding the reasons behind this is a way to make more social and cultural interventions in the life of these people. In this perspective, Raju's *Vipareetham* has attained great significance.

A realistic and holistic approach to tribal development alone can produce good results. The tribals are generally considered as mere beneficiaries and are not been involved either in the decision-making procedure or in the implementation. As the anomalies of the tribals are unique, it is essential that they are actively involved in future in both the planning and implementation of welfare programmes. Both total and sectoral evaluation should be undertaken and they must remember the fact that although the Government policies and programmes for the tribals have helped to recover their living standard but still one third of them remain poor.

Tribal communities linger to be vulnerable till date, not only for the reason that they are poor, and illiterate in comparison to the general inhabitants but also because they are to convey and deal with the residual society. A little step in bureaucratic programs can do little to offset the pauperization, exploitation and crumbling of tribal communities. As a result of this, the tribals continue to suffer from a number of problems and issues which require immediate attention of the Government. Violation of civil and political rights, land estrangement, dislodgment and false hearing for repossessing minor forest produce are only some of these. As India's flourishing economy necessitates more resources, the indigenous peoples are continued to be seized, ensuing a robust sagacity of isolation amid them and further exacerbating social skirmishes. The laws meant at shielding indigenous peoples from frequent inadequacies but their execution is far-flung from pleasing. India has an elongated past of indigenous people fighting their rights.

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## Dismantling the Male Literary Convention: A Gynocritical Reading of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*

Ashna Thomas

“A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (Woolf5). Almost a century later, award-winning Houston novelist Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni understands that essential need for the female writer to have a room that is solely her own. In her description of her writing room, she admits it is nothing spectacular, “just books, books and more books, and a door I can shut on the world” (“Interview by Tarra Gaines”). This shows how crucial the space is for the female artist to create a literary world of her own. It is the lyrical quality of Divakaruni’s language that allows her readers to imagine the atmosphere of her characters’ lives and feel their myriad emotions.

Indian writers have often foregrounded their literary works on the narratives of the two famous Indian epics, namely the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* and the practice of retelling the epics is not a recent phenomenon in Indian literature. One can find in the Indian literary history numerous retellings of both the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. The act of retelling a story is the only way of communicating and transferring ideas through generations. It is assumed that the basic socio-cultural values in a civilization are derived from their respective religious scriptures. The genre of epic-retelling has great potential for epics do not have a narrow existence, but they operate at mass level in a culture. Nothing pleases and influences people more than these grand narratives. Myths articulate fundamental feelings common to the whole of humankind and also reflect the social structure. Epics are the means of narrative through which myths reach the readers. Myths facilitate all the writers of all time to revisit according to contemporary times. “The practice of rewriting epics can bring some major elementary shifts in culture because they themselves play a formative role in the construction of such cultural paradigms” (Sharma 156). Rewritings or retellings provide fresh insights to the mythological texts either by conforming and complying with the values and politics embedded in the texts or by interrogating and subverting them from various perspectives.

In her brilliant retelling of the *Ramayana*, Divakaruni places Sita at the centre. *The Forest of Enchantment* is Sita’s version of the *Ramayana* giving primacy to her thoughts and feelings and follows her story from her childhood in Mithila, her knowledge about herbs to cure diseases, her incognito training and mastery in martial arts, marriage with Rama, her

post-wedding days in the new family, the banishment along with her husband, her hard ships in the forest and thereafter in Lanka in Ravana's captivity, bravery by undergoing fire trial to prove her chastity, serving her duty towards the citizens of Ayodhya as its rightful queen, pain and heartbreak on hearing the news of her banishment, days in Valmiki's ashram performing the duty of a single mother with dignity and courage and her breath-taking act of uniting with the mother earth. This is not just Sita's story but also the story of the women in the epic who have been misunderstood and relegated to the margins: Kaikeyi, Surpanakha, Mandodari. Divakaruni says, "I wanted to reclaim Sita's humanity and make her more relatable to the present. It was the discovery of her voice that opened up her character for me" ("Interview by Somak Ghoshal"). Divakaruni's decision to present a first-person narrative serves the dual benefit of highlighting her struggle and exploring the intention of the other women who feature in the *Ramayana*. She is aware of the fact that most of these women have been pushed to the fringes and viciously maligned throughout history. She has made every attempt to depict them in an impartial and authentic manner.

Divakaruni states, "It is particularly important to re-examine characters such as Draupadi and Sita because they are already part of our national consciousness, but often they have been interpreted through a patriarchal lens. It is important now to see them cleanly and newly without that filter" ("Interview by Aishwarya Sahasrabudhe"). These women are timeless whom we, as modern women, can relate to and learn from. Misrepresentation of women in male-authored texts is the result of the andro-centric bias of the male literary canon.

*The Forest of Enchantments* is part of Divakaruni's feminist revisionist myth making. Alicia Ostriker suggests revisionist mythmaking as an effective strategy to evolve an alternative linguistic medium to make "corrections" to constructed "images of what women have collectively suffered" (216). In her *Thieves of Language*, Ostriker explains how and when re-vision comes to effect. Re-vision opens possibilities for multiple perspectives or views. Revisionist mythmaking makes an alternative reading possible by bringing woman to the centre or by shifting the perspective from the male to the female. Revisionists give voice to the silenced female by re-imaging characters or by re-interpreting the tale. Re-visioning, in Ostriker's view, is like filling an old vessel with new wine. The individual author, who engages in revisionist mythmaking, achieves the purpose, but the cultural perception is changed in the process:

...old stories are changed, changed utterly, by female knowledge of female experience, so that they can no longer stand as foundations of collective male fantasy. Instead...

they are corrections; they are representations of what women find divine and demonic in themselves; they are retrieved images of what women have collectively and historically suffered; in some cases they are instructions for survival. (215)

Revisionist mythmaking becomes a means of self-projection and self-exploration. It helps in undoing hierarchical injustice that benefits the male at the expense of the female.

Feminist re-vision has become an effective context to look back for a re-survey in literature and reconstruct the female literary culture. In her critical text, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Helene Cixous states that a feminine text is more than subversive designed to “smash everything, to shatter the frame work of institutions, to blow up the low, to break up the truth with laughter” (888). She also points out that the text is a poetic exhortation to women to bring into being a female language.

“Towards a Feminist Poetics” is an essay by Elaine Showalter, an American literary critic and feminist, in which she discusses the diversion of attention from “woman as reader” to “woman as writer” (216). In the essay, Showalter coined the term gynocriticism or gynocritics which refers to the historical study of women writers as a distinct literary tradition. Gynocriticism emerges in the context of the second feminist wave’s recognition of sexual difference and the specificity of women’s writing. It refers to a criticism that constructs “a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories” (217). Gynocriticism is the study of feminist literature written by female writers inclusive of the interrogation of female authorship, images, the feminine experience and ideology and the history and development of the female literary tradition. Gynocritics begins when “we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition and focus instead on the nearly visible world of female culture” (217).

Gynocriticism starts as a radical move to focus on female culture. Concentrating on the difference of women’s writing from men’s, it takes gender as a constituent social category and studies women writers as a distinct literary tradition and culture. Gynocriticism raises the issue of canons- of a mainstream or male literary canon and its blindness to gender, of women’s writing’s relationship to this canon, of dialectic between male and female canons and of the need for a female canon- as well as its own practices of inclusion or exclusion.

According to Show alter, gynocriticism is the study of not only the female as a gender status but also the internalized consciousness of the female. The uncovering of the female sub culture and exposition of a female model is the intention of gynocriticism.

Sita, the female lead in the *Ramayana*, is presented as the epitome of purity, fidelity, sacrifice and womanly virtues. She is a dutiful daughter, a faithful wife, an upright daughter-in-law and a courageous mother. Her character is celebrated as a silent bearer of injustice in the name of rules and culture. This image of a woman is acknowledged as an ideal woman in Indian society even to this day. In Valmiki's narrative, her sorrowful side is of greater significance than her valour and pride. He seems to be more charmed by the men in the story-either of Raghu clan or even Ravana family. Paula Richman, an eminent scholar of the *Ramayana*, in her book *Questioning Ramayanas* comments, "Seldom in Valmiki's telling do we hear Sita's voice without the mediation of males who surround and protect her" (15).

Valmiki has glorified the character of Rama and thrown Sita to the margins. Even if Sita is barely presented, she is only limited as a woman displaying her feminine virtues and discusses here it her as Rama's wife or a one-dimensional character not much to offer. Sita is a character of immense capability and strength. In the narrative, she is idealized as a faithful female counter part of a generous man. But there are few instances that display her might. The *Ramayana* is the story of Rama, Lakshmana, Ravana, Dasaratha as well as Sita, Urmila, Shurpanakha or kaikeyi etc. But the epic does not provide adequate space for the women characters to establish them as equal counterparts to the male characters. They are exiled like Sita, lulled to sleep like Urmila or vilified like Surpanakha or Kaikeyi but do not hold the central position in the epic. All the valour or wisdom has been most of the times credited to the male characters in the narrative. Characters like Surpanakha and Kaikeyi are always presented in negative light without being given chance to express their voice.

Divakaruni's Sita finds space to articulate herself and breaks the silence imposed on her by the male author. Divakaruni begins *The Forest of Enchantments* with a gripping prologue. As Sita reads the manuscript of the *Ramayana* handed over to her by sage Valmiki, she realizes that it is no doubt a poem that is superb with sublime descriptions and perfect rhythm. Even the title of the narrative composed by Valmiki is *Ramayan* which makes it the story of the glorious king Rama. Sita points out to the sage:

You've captured the histories of earth and heaven both, the adventures and the wars, the weddings and the deaths, the betrayals and the farewells, the palace and the forest. But... what occurred when I was alone in the darkness, under the sorrow tree, you don't know. You don't know my despair. You don't even know my exhilaration, how I felt... For you haven't understood a woman's life, the heartbreak at the core of her joys, her unexpected alliances and desires, her negotiations where, in the hope of keeping one treasure safe, she must give up another. (2)

This is when Valmiki asks Sita to write the story herself, only she knows it. Sita says:

I unplugged the ink pot and was startled to see the colour the sage had chosen for me. Red. But of course. How else could I write my story except in the colour of menstruation and childbirth, the colour of the marriage mark that changes women's lives, the colour of the flowers of the Ashoka tree under which I had spent my years of captivity?... (3-4)

This is how the *Sitayan* is born and Sita transforms herself from a reader to a writer and gives voice to the voiceless, marginalized women characters who have contributed in making the *Ramayana* the cosmic drama of good and evil. As a writer, Sita feels that it is her duty to give voice to the ostracized female characters in the great epic. Sita's narrative explores the muted or hidden narration of the female characters in the epic, namely Kaikeyi, Ahalya, Mandodari, Surpanakha and Urmila. Their roles have so far been analysed by Valmiki only from a singularly masculine perspective, but Sita rewrites their stories from a unique female perspective.

Kaikeyi, second queen of Ayodhya, who wrested our throne from us out of blind devotion to her son, only to be hated by him for it; Ahalya, her beauty turned to stone by a husband's jealous fury; Surpanakha, wild enchantress of the forest, whose gravest crime was to desire the wrong man; Mandodari, wife to the legendary demon king, forced to watch her kingdom fall into ruin and her beloved son perish because of her husband's possession with another woman; Urmila, my sweet sister, the forgotten one, the one I left behind as I set off with blithe ignorance on my forest adventure with my husband (4).

Sita emphatically states that the purpose of her writing is to challenge the foundational frame works that contaminate the discourse with patriarchal ideology which aims to keep the voices of the women suppressed. All these characters get a fair representation in Sita's narrative.

Sita speaks on behalf of all of them for they poignantly request her to write their stories as well, “Write our story, too. For always we’ve been pushed into corners, trivialized, misunderstood, blamed, forgotten or maligned and used as cautionary tales”(4).

At the beginning of her narrative, Sita talks of her mother Sunaina, “She was, in some ways, the real ruler of Mithila, sharp of intellect, clear of vision, balancing kindness with justice. Often, my father brought particularly thorny problems of state to her...But she never let anyone outside the immediate family know this” (9). Sunaina is symbolic of several artist mothers who have made indelible marks in spite of their limited circumstances. Sita says, “When the time came, I would have ruled the kingdom as well. I was confident of that because I’d observed my father in court and learned from his goodness. And, more importantly in our private chambers I’d listened to my mother advising him” (14).

This reminds us of Alice Walker’s statement in *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, “Guided by my heritage of a love of beauty and a respect for strength - in search of my mother’s garden, I found my own” (238). Sita is a stand-in for the modern female writer who considers a woman’s perspective very significant to reshape our personal and collective future. Moreover, Divakaruni’s Sita is not a Goddess unlike in the Valmiki version, but a common woman much like us who is emotionally vulnerable and succumbs to human emotions such as love, passion, frustration and heartbreak. She is brave enough to ask her mother why customs cannot be changed especially ones that don’t make sense. This can be seen as her desire to break with the male literary culture and to establish the female literary tradition.

Ahalya’s vow of silence is indeed painful and unique. Although she has accepted her fate as stoic resignation, she shows her protest by taking the oath of silence, not to speak with her husband and punish him for his hideous act. Sita says, “Meeting Ahalya had made me realize how starved I was for female companionship” (133). Sita tries to construct a female literary culture that is built on the premise of the strength and influence of female bonding.

Mandodari, Ravana’s wife, is forced to witness the down fall of Lankapuri, the death of her two sons and her husband. She tries to console and save Sita from Ravana’s wrath. She even tries to save her family, her people from the ensuing catastrophe which results in vain. She has a humane heart along with her rakshasi lineage. Sita recognizes Kaikeyi’s action as a mother’s love. Sita elaborates Koushalya’s agony about her husband’s ignorance and failing to retain son’s attention. Her accounts of Kaikeyi and Surpanakha portray them in different light against

the backdrop of widespread pejorative opinions about them. Both these women are endowed with humanly emotions, but are hugely misconstrued in articulating what their hearts desired and minds commanded.

In the *Sitayan*, Surpanakha enters into the scene as an exotic and enchantingly beautiful girl named Kaamarupini. Her language is full of endless possibilities, undertones of unrestrained sexuality, endless fantasies and a total disregard for any kind of patriarchal binaries. Even her way of dressing also violates the patriarchal standard of ideal female way of dressing, the highly iridescent pink sari “wound tight around her curves and reaching only to her knees” (144). She is presented as a highly confident maiden with a wild charm adding to her beauty in an exotic way, “she walked with confidence, swaying her hips in a clearly sexual way, without inhibition. . . But there was something innocent and natural in her movements, like a peacock preening itself in mating season. In her own way she was beautiful, with a wild scent about her that I could smell even from this distance, like musk or rain” (145). Sita’s narrative does not make an attempt to place Surpanakha either in the androcentric binaries of angel or demon. She makes it clear that there are shades of grey in between the binaries and does not appreciate the violence committed by the two male figures on a fellow female being in the name of protecting her. But such violent acts on the part of the male characters are often overlooked in Valmiki’s *Ramayana* for the sake of keeping them as the ideal central male characters of the narrative. Sita also points out the masculine sense of superiority that is inherent in Ram and Lakshman, “I could see the men wouldn’t change their minds. Their belief in the superiority of their own ways was too deeply ingrained in them” (151).

The foundation of *Sitayan* is laid on unravelling “the complexity of the female existence” (257). Divakaruni’s Sita is a symbol of endurance. It is not the endurance that is equated with a forced compromise.

In the dream, too, I lay in the forest, but now I was surrounded by women. They walked around me with soundless measured steps. They looked at me with wise and compassionate eyes, eyes that had known suffering. Some I recognized: Sunaina, Ahalya, Mandodari, Sarama, Kaikeyi. . . Why, even Surpanakha was among them, a rare calm veiling her mutilated face. Endure, they seemed to say. Endure as we do. Endure your challenges. . . I pondered the word endure, what it meant. It didn’t mean giving in. It didn’t mean being weak or accepting injustice. It meant taking the challenges thrown at

us and dealing with them as intelligently as we knew until we grew stronger than them.  
(322)

Sita's narrative deconstructs the binary-driven, rigid masculine narrative framework based on the oppressor's language. It reminds us of Cixous' exhortation:

Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reverse-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word "silence." (886)

"Re-vision- the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction- is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (Rich 18). Re-vision, for Adrienne Rich, is taking a second look from a different perspective. Texts in the male canon are re-read with a view to exposing the patriarchal or other unjust hierarchical practices and assumptions contained in them. Rich considers the re-visioning of the male-centred perspectives a question of survival rather than a consummate art. It is an essential act in a woman's "drive to self-knowledge" (18). Adrienne Rich observes that retelling is inevitable since the male ideology of female subordination and the patriarchal mode of socializing reflected in the male-centred texts are detrimental to the identity of women. She argues that in order to find their own voice, women need to be aware of the myth of the woman as represented in past literature and need to then subvert these representations, what she calls "re-vision."

Sita embarks on a quest to give voice to the muted female narrative in her writing when she first points out to Valmiki the limitations of his own individual perspective. Sita feels uncomfortable with Valmiki's language since it is steeped in the discursive framework of masculine ideology and is unable to address things which are feminine in spirit. The narration by a male author can push the woman subject into a position of passivity and ultimately death which is the position that Sita seeks to encounter as she dips her quill in the ink. Sita represents the woman writer who attempts to address the most intimate of details felt within her core of being which are normally overlooked in the male literary culture.

The most powerful of emotions that a woman feels are hardly ever addressed by the male writers who remain content in dealing with actions and events on a physical level. It tells the tales of kings and princes, their wins and defeats in battles wherein their female counterparts

exist only to help fulfill the masculine desire of the protagonist. Sita is aware that Valmiki's *Ramayan* is marked by a pointed phallic masculine framework in which women occupy the background as the passive and unwanted "other." Being the writer and a character in *Sitayan*, Sita refuses to be put herself on a pedestal as in the male narrative and has been successful in allowing all the female figures transcend the good-evil dichotomy. She is driven by a desire to subvert the long tradition identifying the author as a male who is primary and the female as his passive creation, a secondary object devoid of autonomy. She proves that the subculture of female literary endeavour is incomplete without the creative output by women themselves as writers of their own experiences. Divakaruni's Sita dismantles the male literary convention by making the "other" into the primary subject of her narrative and establishes the female literary tradition.

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## A Postcolonial Reading of the Master-Slave Dialectic in Chris Cleave's *Little Bee*

Merin Siby

This article is an attempt to trace the identity crisis evolved in a postcolonial context in the novel *Little Bee* by the British writer Chris Cleave. The dark impacts of colonialism govern the minds of the colonised nations even after the rulers have dismissed themselves from the colonies. The long suffering endured by the colonists give rise to a kind of submissive behaviour within them. They identify themselves as someone who must serve their white masters. *Little Bee* is one such novel discussing the bad impacts of colonialism. The novel was written at a time when there was a huge rush of people from certain Asian and African countries towards the European continent. The issue of migration continues even now. Wars, internal conflicts and terrorist attacks demand these helpless people to migrate to well developed nations like Britain, but the governments of these countries do not encourage it, as this kind of huge migrations affect their cultural system.

Every person in the world tries to attain a stable identity for them confining to the particular space provided for them. In the postcolonial era, the colonised tries to find out their identity as something distinguished from their masters. The novel *Little Bee* is one such work describing the lives of *Little Bee*, a Nigerian girl and Sarah, an English lady who lives in London. The people who are chained by mental, physical, social and situational colonisation s try to escape from that wretched world. The construction of identity is a huge task to be fulfilled. The failure to construct an identity for oneself causes a survival crisis for humans. The novel *Little Bee* portrays the mad search for identities by two women – Sarah and *Little Bee*.

In the novel *Little Bee*, Cleave discusses the issues of two worlds – the developed and the developing. Chris Cleave is a novelist and a columnist in *The Guardian* newspaper in London. Inspired by his childhood days in West Africa and by an accidental visit to a British concentration camp, Cleave wrote his second novel, *The Other Hand* in the year 2008 which is titled *Little Bee* in the US and Canada.

In his debut novel *Incendiary*, Cleave describes the tragic plight of a woman who writes a letter to Bin Laden after her family is killed by a massive suicide bomber. Following this, she plunges into deep depression. This novel is a stark reminder to the society against the widespread terrorist attacks. His second novel *Little Bee*, says Cleave, delivers a timely

challenge to reinvigorate our notions of civilise decency. Gold, his third novel focuses on the friendship and rivalry between two professional cyclists and the effects that come from the choices they make and the events that they cannot prevent. In his fourth novel *Everyone Brave is Forgiven* published in 2016, Cleave describes the lives of three individuals who are thrown together by war and love and their search for belonging in the ever changing landscape of World War II London. Cleave mainly discusses the themes of isolation, alienation, rootlessness, detachment, estrangement and indifference in his writings.

The main protagonists of the novel are *Little Bee* and Sarah O'Rourke. The novel uses alternating first person narrative to tell the stories of *Little Bee*, a Nigerian refugee and Sarah, a magazine editor from Surrey. Sarah and her husband, Andrew met *Little Bee* and her sister Nkiruka on a beach in Nigeria where they have come to spend their vacation. The girls were being pursued by the men of the oil company who invaded their lands. They pleaded Sarah and Andrew for help, but the men took them away. Nkiruka was brutalised and killed by those men, but *Little Bee* managed to escape, and stowed away in a cargo ship bound for England. Unfortunately, she was caught up by the officials and was detained in an immigration detention centre. After two years, she was illegally released from there, which finally led her to the house of Sarah and Andrew.

Sarah is a careless, silly woman working in a fashion magazine. She is not able to find value for her life. It is *Little Bee* who makes Sarah realize the true meaning of her life. Until then, Sarah was leading a careless life. She is not able to fix a place for herself in the world of her husband and son. She was not a person who cared for others. It is strange to see the same Sarah admitting a strange Nigerian girl in her house. *Little Bee*, on the other hand, was a very daring girl. She had witnessed brute cruelties before her, including the murder of her sister. But this did not make her weak. Rather, it accelerated her desire to find a safe place for her on earth.

Sarah's life becomes more challenging after *Little Bee* trespasses into her life. The absurdity of Sarah's life decreases with the arrival of *Little Bee*. Initially, Sarah was not sad when her husband Andrew died. But the same Sarah felt a void within herself when *Little Bee* was exported back to Nigeria. *Little Bee* had not done anything special to convert Sarah, but her presence made Sarah a new person. A sense of responsibility for imbibed in Sarah, which inspired her to care for *Little Bee*. Sarah's gloomy mind became powerful so that she decided

to quit her meaningless job and prepared herself to work for the refugee community who is left with nobody.

This work addresses the crisis experienced by both the developed world and the developing world. The people living in both the countries do face some kind of existential struggle which they find hard to overcome. This work shows how a strong bond of friendship between two persons, distinct in appearance, nationality and ethnicity, solves that crisis successfully.

Nigeria has been home to a number of ancient and immediate kingdoms over years. Nigeria was under British rule from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The country gained independence on October 1, 1960. The modern Nigerian state was formed by merging the Southern Nigerian Protectorate and the Northern Nigerian Protectorate in 1914. Nigeria is deemed as a multinational state inhabited by over two fifty ethnic groups, of which the largest are the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba tribes. These ethnic groups speak over five hundred distinct languages, and are identified with a wide variety of cultures. The official language of Nigeria is English, but different tribes have their own peculiar language systems.

The British occupation in Nigeria started in 1800. The European companies were engaged in slave trade of the Africans, popularly known as the Atlantic Slave Trade. The people exported as slaves were used to support the cultivation of agricultural products for the European industry. The Atlantic Slave Trade of Transatlantic Slave Trade involved the transportation of enslaved African people mainly to the American continent. The slave trade existed from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. The ship-owners regarded the slaves as cargo to be transported to their destination so quickly and cheaply as possible. The slaves are then sold out to work in coffee, tobacco, cocoa, sugar and cotton plantations, in gold and silver mines, in construction industry and so on. By the middle of the seventeenth century, slavery became rampant and the African slaves and their offspring became legal property of their owners.

After gaining independence, Nigeria experienced a civil war from 1967 to 1970. The country, thereafter alternated between democratically elected civilian governments and military dictatorships until it achieved a stable democracy in 1999. The 2011 presidential election is considered to be the first free and fair election in Nigeria.

Nigeria had to undergo conflicts in the Niger Delta between foreign oil corporation and the minority ethnic groups during the early nineties. Majority of the population in this area was

forced to abandon their traditional agricultural practices. The Nigerian ethnic groups like the Ogoni and the Ijaw felt that they were being exploited by the oil companies, which resulted in ethnic and political unrest. This further led to the militarisation of the entire region by ethnic militia groups, Nigerian military and the police force. Until 2011, the victims of the oil conflict were scared to seek justice for the atrocities they experienced because of the inefficiency of the judicial system to prosecute the perpetrators of these heinous crimes. Following such violence, thousands have fled to West from several African countries. This has created new problems like the refugee crisis, an important issue which addressed by the world today.

The reasons contributing to the migration of refugees are global inequalities, violence, outbreak of wars, economic instability, genocide etc. Excessive number of refugees also create problems like overcrowding, threats of diseases and other unpleasant conditions. The fact is that no government is interested in the welfare of the refugee community. There is no system to address the issues of the refugees. Sometimes, they are even denied basic humanitarian rights. The refugees have come to be seen as objects or problems rather than individuals with right. Many Western countries seek to deter asylum seekers and migrants. The measures and actions of many nationals in European countries have increasingly become xenophobic and hostile. The governments of these countries respond in such a way that shows that they are more concerned with Protecting their countries from the influx of immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees rather than protecting the human rights of these people.

The refugee communities face a lot of issues worldwide. They are most often denied even their basic human rights. Moreover, they do not have any adequate means for earning a livelihood and have to lead a confused life every time. They are in dire need of education, employment, opportunities and inclusion. They feel that they are isolated and marginalised by the society. They are in a constant sense of lack of security which forbids them from moving forward.

Multiculturalism is the co-existence of diverse cultures, where culture includes racial, religious or cultural groups and is manifested in cultural behaviours, cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking and communication styles of everyday usage, it is a synonym for ethnic pluralism. Ethnic pluralism or cultural pluralism is a state where different ethnic groups collaborate and enter into dialogue with each other without having to sacrifice their particular identities.

The Western world in the present century faces a kind of severe moral degradation. They experience of rootlessness and abhorrence in all the areas in which they are engaged in. They live a life without any kind of moral values which keeps them starving for spiritual enrichment. Sarah is person who lives a fragmented life. Sarah has a damaged psyche and a disillusioned mind, whereas *Little Bee* lives a tormented life. The spiritual thirst of Sarah is quenched by the presence of *Little Bee*. The modern people's desolate life style is devoid of any true essence of life. The people of the West lead a very mechanical life which is filled with emptiness and nothingness. This void human life is characterised by the life of Sarah. The mechanical world has devoured the ethical and religious aspects of the human mind. T.S. Eliot in his seminal work *The Waste Land* writes about this moral degradation of the humans. "Eliot has portrayed some grave unpleasant situations of human life including sexual abuse, lust, dishonesty, hypocrisy, aimless life style, hyper-reality and so on" (Haque 187). They earnestly try to get out from that wretched world, and for this they eagerly look to the East, just like Sarah embracing *Little Bee* into her life.

This article tries to view the work *Little Bee* in the light of the master-slave dialectic foregrounded by the German theorist William Hegel in the background of postcolonial circumstances. Also, it tries to analyse how the major characters are haunted by a sense of existential crisis which finally draws both the narrators of this work so close to each other. Again, it tries to view how the relation between Prospero and Caliban is reflected in the relationship between Sarah and *Little Bee* and how do they overcome their sense of loss of identity through the support of each other and also how do *Little Bee* and Sarah becomes prototypes of several other literary characters such as Lucky and Pozzo among others.

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## Voices of the Margins: Unveiling the Rich Tapestry of Narrative through *Aosenla's Story*

*Aparna Prasad*

Northeast India, a region often considered the “Land of Seven Sisters,” is a mosaic of diverse cultures, ethnicities, and landscapes. Exploring Northeast India through the lenses of social sciences and humanities unveils a multifaceted tapestry of culture, society, and politics. The literature often portrays political upheavals, underdevelopment, and bloodshed, providing a fragmented view of the region, with contemporary writers consciously addressing this one-dimensional portrayal. The huge body of emerging writings from the North-Eastern states in today's time brings out the various hitherto unexplored and, in several cases, unknown cultural practices, myths, beliefs and ways of life of the various tribal groups of the region.

TemsulaAo projects two paradoxical lives of Ao-Naga women in her works that are victors and victims. She also emphasises how ordinary women deal with extraordinary situations and how in due course of their life sacrifice and survive among struggle, for the sake of future generations. She also emphasises the idea that nature and women should be liberated, for they face many failures, disappointments, losses, and suppression, and struggle a lot to overcome that through their strong determination. Their determination and longings give them strength to fight for their self-identity and recognition. As a Naga woman, TemsulaAo is concerned for her region and the natural circumstances of land, forest, animals, hills, and mountains. She remembers the beauty of nature in the hands of women through her poems. In her short stories, she projects women as protectors of nature safeguarding the whole human habitation by her knowledge. In her writings, TemsulaAo represents women who tend to protect nature, who encompass individuality, who are brave enough to fight for their liberation and who have the intelligence to secure their men and village by their instinctive knowledge. Thus, TemsulaAo rebuilds the role of women in Ao-Naga society through her writings.

The paper titled Voices of the Margins: Unveiling the Rich Tapestry of Narrative Through *Aosenla's Story* is an attempt to explore the changes which have taken place in the Naga family in the present-day time in an urban locality to trace if such changes in the setting and time have altered the fate of the Naga women. The paper looks at the status of the Ao-Naga women in TemsulaAo's book, *Aosenla's Story* (2017) which brings out the condition of Ao-Naga women in their family and community. The study will be based on the framework of

well-known Feminist theories of Simone de Beauvoir's ideas on the 'married woman' and Nivedita Menon's stance on the 'family' concerning women. While projecting the status of the Ao-Naga women, emphasis will be particularly on the position of the girl child in the family, her education and her career, the woman's choice in marriage and her status in the marital relationship.

The Naga society is essentially patriarchal. The Naga woman has been the focal point of many research activities in the areas of social and cultural anthropology. Several scholars in the present-day time are engaged in the exploration of women's status in the Naga family, community and the larger society. Ao's collection of essays, short stories and poems plays a major role in the understanding of the various facets of the culture and identity of the Naga people. The roles assigned to women are "...strictly defined by this tradition which says that it is only men who can be decision-makers in important matters both in private and public affairs." (Ao, 2014) Several important aspects of the Naga life – education, religion, property, politics – are affected by gender-based regulations. It is the Naga male who is the decision-maker and he is responsible for providing for his family. The woman's role is centred on helping in the fields, household work and looking after her children. The Naga woman is never a part of the decision-making activities of the village council either. Those important roles are assigned only to the males. An insight into the Ao Naga Customary Laws on Women's Exclusion highlights that the Naga women are deprived of various rights and positions which are enjoyed by men on the assumption of the physical weakness of women.

The novel opens significantly with a wedding invitation, thereby immediately enabling the writer to create a space to examine the protagonist's marriage and thus propelling the narrative. Set in a modern context and an urban locality, *Aosenla's Story* portrays a similar patriarchal set-up in the Naga family. The book opens with the middle-aged Aosenla sitting in her verandah fanning herself as she ponders on the trajectory of her past life in her parents' home. Her father, much like other Ao fathers of her community, is a strict patriarch who arranges for her marriage to a much older man in the hope of upliftment of status in the clan without even informing her. Interesting to note in the story is the writer's description of the father-daughter relationship in a seemingly happy nuclear family. Before Aosenla's house arrest, her father put an end to her college education, she had never felt any difference in her parents' attitude towards her as compared to her brothers. It was she who was pampered more and showered with better gifts, leaving her brothers to complain that their father was partial to her.

However, as she starts delving into the past, what strikes her in this relationship is the lack of proper communication with her father. The absence of her father's direct approach to her makes Aosenla wonder – “Why doesn't he talk to me directly? Why doesn't he come to explain to me? why he has accepted the offer? Why does he treat me like a guest in this house? Why is he so formal? The moment she uttered the word formal, she knew for certain that it was the word that she had been searching for all this while. Her father was sheltering himself from her opposition to the marriage by creating a distance between them through this formality. But what she did not realize was that in their society, most fathers behaved similarly with their daughters.” (Ao, 2017). This formality in the relationship which Aosenla has experienced all her life but has never felt anything odd about is because she has seen all fathers behaving the same with their daughters. In such a situation, it becomes imperative to understand the position of the girl child in the Naga household.

Easterine Kire's novel *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2013) also represents the dubious status of the girl child. In the preface to the book, Kire states, “(w)hile the visible structure of the novel is patriarchal and seems focused on bringing out the misuse of the patriarchal system, the less visible under-structure is matriarchy and how it abuses the patriarchal structure resulting in gender abuse within the same gender.” (Kire, 2013). Ao too opines that Naga women's position in their society can be uplifted only when they start believing in their selves and understand that receiving their due is their birthright. Coming out of the one-sided view that women's inferior status is only due to the shackles of patriarchy, Ao looks at a larger possibility that any change in the current situation of women will be opposed at multiple levels. Analyzing the probability of such a situation, she says, “...the obvious opposition will be from men; but equally strong would be the opposition from a section of women who are themselves still traditionalists at heart and would like to continue in the state of, benevolent subordination rather than be involved in a struggle to reform the mind-set of men so strongly entrenched in their age-old belief in male superiority” (2014).

Aosenla, too, is caught in the quagmire of the girl-child feud, not so much as a victim herself in her parent's home but as the mother of two daughters. When she delivers her first daughter, she can see the disappointment written on the faces of her husband and in-laws but she is excused because she still has many more years of conceiving and birthing. The scenario, however, changes with the birth of her second daughter when even her father-in-law, the patriarch of the house, does not come to see the child and formally name her as per the

custom, but merely sends the name through his son-in-law. By the time Aosenla is pregnant for the third time, not only is the family already in a celebratory mood with the certainty of the birth of the much-awaited heir, but she also is seen fervently praying for a boy child who could liberate her from familial and social insults and humiliations. Aosenla's subsequent loss of the much-awaited boy child and heir to the family is unpardonable. Not considering her fragile state of body and mind, aggravated with the knowledge that she cannot get pregnant anymore, her husband is seen completely missing and visits her a couple of times in the hospital with his friends as a mere formality. Aosenla's sense of guilt is more than her pain at the loss of the child at birth; fearing the cruel and insensitive eyes and tongues of family members and visitors, she releases herself unceremoniously from the hospital on her own and returns home through the rear gate in the late evening. Nevertheless, her days from thereon are filled with cruel barbs from her mother-in-law and family friends who blame only her for this misfortune.

In addition to the status of a girl child in the family, Ao's book also represents the Community's attitude towards girls' education. Aosenla recollects her college days when for the first time in her life she felt that positive changes were taking place in her. Even though she was awkward in the company of more fortunate students in the initial days of her college life, she gained self-confidence gradually, started performing well in her studies and began to dream of a post-graduate degree and a career too. This positive change is reflected in the changed personality of Aosenla – "...this new sensation added a certain glow to her personality. The sad demeanour was gone; became livelier and began to take part in extra-curricular activities. Faculty and students alike noticed the subtle changes in her and began to look upon her transformation with interest and growing admiration" (2017). However, all her dreams are curtailed when in the second year of college, her father suddenly finds a match for her and her marriage is finalized even without any consultation with her. In Aosenla's sense of dejection and frustration, we perceive the fate of several such women whose dreams of a career are nipped in the bud.

Commenting on women's secondary status in the family and her supposedly limited or no career choice, Nivedita Menon says, "Whether, in their choice of career, or their ability to participate in politics (trade unions, elections), women learn when very young, to limit their ambitions. This self-limitation is what produces the so-called glass ceiling, the level above which professional women rarely rise; or the mommy track, the slower career track upwards, while women put aside some of the most productive years of their lives to look after children"

(2012). This limitation is seen in Aosenla's case too – deprivation which comes only because she is a woman. While recollecting the past, Aosenla can comprehend her formal relationship with her father who treated her at par with her brothers but put her on a separate platform altogether because she was a girl child. His difference in attitude toward the children's education is projected as "...while he made plans for the boys' college education, the father had secretly resolved that Aosenla would stop her studies after matriculation. It was not because he loved her less; his thinking was dictated by the fact she was a girl and had no need to study more because one day soon, she would be married off and would go away from his house to start life as a wife and daughter-in-law and set up another household" (2017).

These constricting views of the family and community have a great effect on the development of the girl child's mental health. Beauvoir's insight into the influence of gender roles on the male and female child: "...in thus accepting her passive role, the girl also agrees to submit unresistingly to a destiny that is going to be imposed upon her from without, and this calamity frightens her. The young boy, be he ambitious, thoughtless, or timid, looks towards an open future; he will be a seaman or an engineer, he will stay on the farm or go away to the city, he will see the world, he will get rich; he feels free, confronting a future in which the unexpected awaits him. The young girl will be a wife, mother, and grandmother; she will keep the house just as her mother did, she will give her children the same care she received when young – she is twelve years old and already her story is written in the heavens." (Beauvoir, 1997). This change in the mindset of the younger generation of the community is portrayed in the attitude of Aosenla towards her daughters's careers. Ready to put her foot down against the traditional views of her in-laws, she supports the career choices of her daughters, participates in the selection of appropriate colleges for them along with her husband and draws satisfaction when her elder daughter becomes a medical practitioner. Thus, Ao's book presents the gradual but welcome changes in terms of women's education and career visible in the Naga community.

A study of a woman's position in the Naga family is incomplete without taking into account her status in the marital relationship. It is in marriage that a woman's position in her family can be better understood. Commenting on how marriage is a different experience for men and women, Beauvoir says, "In such circumstances, the girl seems passive; she is married, *given* in marriage by her parents. Boys *get* married, they take a wife....He is the economic head of the joint enterprise, and hence he represents it in the view of society. She takes his name; she belongs to his religion, his class, his circle; she joins his family, she becomes his „half

. She follows wherever his work calls him and determines their place of residence; she breaks more or less decisively with her past, becoming attached to her husband's universe; she gives him her person, virginity and a rigorous fidelity being required.” (1997). This passive experience of the women in marriage can be seen in Aosenla's case as well.

Forced by her father to get married to a much older man, Aosenla sacrifices her dream of a career and higher education. Her marriage to Bendang is a real struggle as they are poles apart from each other. Bendang feels superior to her all the time as his wife belongs to a minor clan. His defensive attitude also stems from his understanding that his wife is well-educated and sophisticated in her manners and behaviour. Bendang sees that as a threat to his superior position as a husband and filled with apprehension that he may lose hold over his wife, he says, “...you know nothing about life except your pretensions based on book knowledge. Hah! Who cares for your phoney accomplishments; you are still my wife...” (2017). For Bendang, his wife's achievements are meaningless and of no consequence to him or his family; however, he does not hesitate to „use his wife to climb up the professional ladder. Aosenla is not only expected to dress up well and accompany Bendang to social gatherings but also dance, socialize and sweet talk with men who are of professional benefit to her husband. On one such occasion, when Aosenla fails to keep up to her husband's expectations and refuses to dance with an army major, a drunk and irate Bendang confronts her saying, “Do you know what he said? He said that my wife is snooty, thinks no end of herself and does not know how to behave in polite society. Mind you, if I do not get the army contract this year, it will be your fault.” (2017) The initial years of Aosenla's married life seem to be a saga of accusations of such kind. It is only when she fights back for her self-respect against false charges on her character that her husband and members of his family understand that they can't take her for granted.

With the elevated position that Aosenla seemed to have gained in her family, there is a marked change that can be seen in her husband as well. Bendang suddenly changed drastically – he became more attentive towards his wife, stayed away from gambling and drinking parties and curtailed his business trips to a bare minimum. Aosenla, even though surprised, basked in the glory of her success at last of having a happy married life. She too started taking care of herself, wore Western outfits and fashionable clothes, and socialized to such an extent that much to her family's chagrin she had become quite a popular figure in the small town. What, however, is worth noticing is TemsulaAo's dwelling on the improved physical relationship

between Aosenla and her husband. For Aosenla, it was the beginning of a self-fulfilling phase of her life, until she discovered she was pregnant with her third child. Then, her husband gets back to his normal self and all her delusions of romance and marital bliss vanish into thin air.

On retrospection, Aosenla realizes that her short-lived marital romance exposed the dangerously thin line which separated “sex-as-love and sex-as means” and she gets thoughtful about this “inherent dichotomy of love and sex between man and woman.” (Ao, 2017) She ultimately realizes the dangerous position that married women like her are in and this new knowledge brings a new perspective on marriage and marital sex. Reflecting on the fear of the patriarchal society about women’s supposedly insatiable sexual urges, Naomi Wolf comments: “Capable of multiple orgasm, continual orgasm, a sharp and breathtaking clitoral orgasm, an orgasm seemingly centered in the vagina that is emotionally overwhelming, orgasm from having the breasts stroked, and of endless variations of all those responses combined, women’s capacity for genital pleasure is theoretically inexhaustible” (1991).

It is this fear that drives men like Bendang to show women their true position. True to Aosenla’s realization, Bendang’s interest in his wife seems to evaporate once he can impregnate her and get his job done. With her growing maturity, Aosenla is also able to take the knowledge of her husband’s love affair before marriage and it is with a lot of difficulty and discretion that she can take care of the child who could have destroyed the reputation of her husband and the entire family. In keeping up to the expected patriarchal setup, we find Bendang’s attitude to his wife during the early days of marriage as domineering, something of a Torvald Helmer nature who assures Nora: “...you just lean on me, I shall give you all the advice and guidance you need. I wouldn’t be a proper man if I didn’t find a woman doubly attractive for being so obviously helpless...you know you are safe and sound under my wing” (1978). The role, however, changes as Aosenla takes a firm grip on her life, her household, her children and after a point of time, her husband’s welfare as well as that of the entire family. It takes a lot of time, no doubt, but she emerges as the self-reliant woman in charge of herself as well as one who is the ultimate protector of the family.

This study of Ao-Naga women’s position in the family and community as represented in Temsula Ao’s book *Aosenla’s Story* highlights the status of women in the patriarchal Naga society. The paper traces the assumed changes which have taken place in the Naga family and society in the present day, specifically in an urban locality, to trace if such changes in the setting and time have altered the fate of the Naga women. In Aosenla’s narrative, however, we find

that girl children are still not accepted wholeheartedly in the family and their education and career are deemed to be of no consequence. The choice of marriage too, for girls like Aosenla, is never their own. In marriage, she finds a hostile family and a husband who leaves no stone unturned to show her real status as his wife. However, *Aosenla's Story* is remarkable for projecting certain changes in the Ao community, wherein a better future for girl children can be seen. In the importance that Aosenla and her husband give to their children's education, their choices of career and ultimately, their daughter's choice of her husband, do we see the positive changes for women in society?

Towards the end of the novel, Aosenla's journey transports her beyond the realm of the domestic and the mundane. Amy Tan, in *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Wring Life* (2001) reminds us "We can choose what we should believe, we can choose what we should remember. This is what frees us, this choice frees us to hope". The narrative universe of *Aosenla's Story* is centred on this hope and gives voice to the subaltern existence and experience of the female who is threatened with silence and oblivion by the socio-cultural powers that be. The plot engages predominantly the spatial location of the individual within relationships and the society in the general context. Notions of identity, contested subjectivities and marginality – issues that reflect on the everyday realities of life – are negotiated with a sense of self-distancing. Aosenla can objectively comprehend her truths. The socio-cultural politics that underlie her experiences reaffirm and reiterate her selfhood through the strategic allocation of space, its contestation and exercise of power. The notion of the self operates at several levels – within the relationship shared between the protagonist and her parents, her husband, her in-laws and the society at large.

The individual's subjective reality at a microcosmic level is reflected primarily through Aosenla. Through her, Ao questions the predominant worldview regarding gendered conventions and the corresponding ideological notions that engender the self at every level of existence. Aosenla's resistance to the dominant practices of inclusion and exclusion may be seen as a reflection of her empowered self. In her exercise of decisive powers, she has been empowered to live her life as she chooses, overcoming the silence and passivity of her marginal status.

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## **The Representations of Dalit Women and the Tales of Retaliation in Select Malayalam Movies**

*Anupama Murali*

The term Dalit was first used by Jyotirao Phule for the tyrannized classes or untouchable gentries of the Hindu. At first, the Dalit movement was a kick movement aimed at bringing socio- political change to the Dalit community in India. Grounded on the popular ideals of liberty, equivalency, and social justice, the Dalit movement aims at social change and replaces India's age-old hierarchical society. Dalit literature first appeared in the Marathi language in the 1960s, and it snappily spread to Bangla, Hindi, Kannada, Punjabi, Sindhi, and Tamil. It took the form of autobiographies, runes, short stories, and other narratives that stood out for their foursquare delineations of reality and the Dalit political scène.

Literary descriptions of marginalized communities are of utmost significance at a time when mortal rights have taken centre stage. In Indian literature, the Dalit community is stressed for its demarcation, brutality and ostracization. The maturity has ignored the lived gests of the Dalit community members, who have been relegated to the fringe. Their stories have been supposed unworthy to be written about. Dalits are an important part of the Indian society. Their history is one of subjection by upper gentries since ancient times and the narratives of Dalit authors explain their repressed wrathfulness as well as once ill- treatment at the hands of those advanced up the social graduation. For times, Dalits have been forced into work considered inferior by the upper estate, like, butchering, leatherwork, cleaning of rubbish, homemade scavenging, etc. Dalits were kept disconnected and banned from engaging in popular culture. They weren't allowed access to collaborative places of deification and education.

Dalit literature speaks of revolutions, not passivity. It inspires progress despite all odds, not backwardness. Literature written by Dalits attempts to express unheard, implied opinions. It's the literature about the Dalit's, their mournings, anguish, gests and knowledge. As the story unfolds, the killers of society fight for liberty, honour, safety, and freedom from social intimidation.

Dalits are considered as the 'Other' – the marginalised sections of the postcolonial nations. Though the Dalits take birth like every other human being but they are treated differently, as the 'Other' by the high-caste Hindus. High-castes have assumed the role of colonizers and

Dalits have been reduced to exploited groups. In role playing, power play occurs when a person controls another person's life without their consent. People are distinguished in this form, which is dominant and vertical in character, according to social hierarchy. In role playing, power play happens when someone takes control of someone else's life without that person's agreement.

There are three stages to Indian feminism's development. First, when European colonialists arrived in India and began speaking out against numerous detestable traditions in Indian civilization and second, numerous independent women's organisations first appeared during the Indian national struggle, when leaders like Mahatma Gandhi combined the women's movement with the movement for independence. Third, when women began to push for equality with men in the workplace and at home during the post-independence era.

They did this while ignoring distinctions based on caste and class and universalizing the experience of women. They held the view that as all women undergo comparable physical and mental stress, they also have comparable experiences. They began to believe that all women's suffering was fundamentally the same as a result of this view. However, when feminists failed to acknowledge that a Dalit woman's experience is significantly different from an upper caste woman's experience, this progressively led to a split within the so-called dominant feminist thread. As a result, Dalit women's voices were either underrepresented or not represented at all. As pointed out by Sharmila Rege, "there was thus a masculinization of and a "savarnisation" of womanhood, leading to a classical exclusion of Dalit womanhood. When upper caste women discussed injustice, they compared Dalit women to themselves and discussed how all women were victims of oppression. Dalit women are doubly cursed because they are both Dalits and women. The idea of universalizing the experiences of women from various castes and social groups was rejected. This led to a focus on the Dalit woman's individual identity. In his work "Dalit women communicate differently," Gopal Guru makes the case that in order to comprehend the need for Dalit women to speak in a certain way, it is necessary to identify both the internal and external causes that have an impact on her constitution. Guru claims that Dalit women made the argument for speaking differently based on both internal and external concerns, such as non-Dalit forces homogenising the issue of Dalit women (patriarchal domination within the Dalits). It was difficult to bridge the gap between Dalit women and women from upper castes. Apart from Dalit women, and taking up the obvious social exclusion of women at various levels, the National Federation of Dalit Women

asserted that “Descent based discrimination based on caste results in the violent appropriation of and sexual control over Dalit women by men of the dominant castes, evident in the systematic rape of Dalit women and the perpetuation of forced prostitution in the name of religion through the Devadasi system”. The Dalit men’s thoughts were heavily influenced by patriarchal ideas, which mandated a second-class, servile position for women. The movement that was founded to combat racial prejudice soon began to serve primarily Dalit men’s interests. They depart from traditional female narratives that place the emphasis on women as mothers, wives, daughters, etc. While Dalit men suffer from casteism, Dalit women experience double oppression because they are both Dalits and women. Both males from the upper caste and men from their own group punish and abuse them. The writings of Dalit men plainly depict women’s inferior status and utter marginalisation.

In Malayalam, Dalit narratives are frequently presented from upper caste views. The viewpoint of Dalits has not yet been investigated. While recounted by non-Dalits, there are adequate Dalit portrayals in Malayalam films. The condition of Dalit women as depicted is insufficient. The suffering and humiliation are depicted but not experienced. While considering Malayalam movies one has to travel back to the history where the first heroine P K Rosy, the Dalit Malayalam actor who was driven away from the industry for playing the role of an upper caste woman. The Malayalam movie industry has all its prejudices in caste and colour if dived into the depths of the narratives and scripts. Caste is still an issue which most mainstream Malayalam film-makers shy away from, though there are brilliant exceptions such as that of *Neelakuyil*(1956), *Kammatipaddom* (2016) and *Kismath* (2016) which took the issue head on. Even in these movies which had a Dalit woman as the chief protagonist, the characters were not essayed by Dalit Malayalam actresses but by upper caste women, with dark complexioned heroines being almost absent from the Malayalam silver screen. Even ghost stories are no different. They were always capable of exciting and terrifying the audience. There were nights when those terrible beauties robbed the audience of their sleep. A chronicle of Malayalam ghost movies provides us with a range of ghosts, mostly women whom we get scared of, attracted to and empathise with. Right from *Bhargavinilayam* to *Chathurmugham*, those were all revenge stories, the restless spirits craving for human blood. But aren’t these deceptively simple? As we unfold the layers of class hierarchy and there emerges the subtle prejudices intricately woven onto the narratives.

It is found that taking revenge is a posthumous affair when it comes to a Dalit character, especially Dalit woman. In the patriarchal society of Kerala, Dalit women were considered as domestic help and their entire life was spent serving the masters. Mostly, these women were ill-treated and often sexually exploited. Those who resist the advances were silenced. If any of the male members fall in love with the lady, the woman will be chastised and put to death. This paper attempts a discussion on the portrayal of revenge of Dalit woman in the Malayalam movies. The movie in discussion are *Akashaganga* (1999) a horror-thriller film directed by Vinayan and *Indriyam* (2000) horror film directed by George Kithu discusses the plight revenge of two dalit women. In *Akashaganga*, when, Devan, a member of the Maanikesseri royal family, fell in love with Ganga, a 'dasi' (dalit servant) girl. When Devan's father gets to know about this, Thampuran demands him to know what is going on. Devan goes to have an audience with his father holding hands with Ganga and he admits that he loves Ganga and she is going to be the mother of his child. Enraged, the Thampuran slaps and beats Ganga and his goons throw Devan inside a room and lock him inside. The Thampuran slaps Ganga forcefully where she falls against a pillar and lose consciousness. Panicker, a loyal servant of the family, tries to revive her but fails. He concludes that Ganga may be dead. So Thampuran and Panicker decide to cremate Ganga, but while doing so, she regains consciousness, asking for water. The merciless Thampuran sets the pyre ablaze and burns her alive.

Later Ganga's soul becomes a Yakshi and starts haunting the family members. Devan kills himself too. Ganga gets hold of Thampuran and kills him. Fearing her wrath, the Maanikesseri family members hires an exorcist, Mepaddan (Rajan P. Dev), who successfully gets hold of the spirit and imprisons her in a Banyan tree. Meppaddan warns the family that the male members of the family should now lead a life of celibacy and that if the spirit is freed, then nobody, even Meppaddan himself, can't stop her.

In the movie *Indriyam*, a college group of anthropology students go to the remote forest area of Muthuvan Mala, under the oversight of Prof. Shankaranarayanan, in order to study the tribal life which had existed there. A student, Sunny, unknowingly unleashes the spirit of Neeli, who is a ghost seeking revenge against the Thripangod royal family, one of whom had killed her and her lover. Consequently, Neeli starts killing off the students one by one and the police summons for sorcerer Vadakkedath Namboothiri to imprison the spirit.

Both movies feature underprivileged women, Ganga and Neeli, who are exploited sexually and physically. When they tried to resist the atrocities against them, they were brutally

murdered. There is no scope for dissent and the dissent itself is considered as a crime. The patriarchal society considered it as a threat for their existence. So, they will go to any extent to silence every dissenting voice. The women who were subjected to these subjugations had no other option than accepting the fate. In these movies the two women raised their voice against the patriarchy and got killed. But they were given a chance to retaliate, but posthumously. When they were alive they couldn't revenge or react. The Dalit woman were allowed to take revenge or show their dislike on the existing societal conditions only after their death. When alive, they cannot express even the slightest dissatisfaction with their conditions. Ganga, the maid had committed a severe crime by falling in love with an upper caste man and she gets severely punished by the upper caste people. They burned her alive, none of her family members could rescue nor they can think of attempting so. Ganga, now, turned as a ghost returns to take revenge on her murderers, which she couldn't achieve, if she was alive. She needs to be a super natural force to retaliate. The same scenario can be perceived with the character Neeli. Both these women are vengeful, since they are Dalit women they face two layers of oppression and enduring these subjugations is the only choice during their life time. When the ghosts of these Dalit women wreak havoc, the lords feel threatened and they summon higher Brahmanical authorities to conjure the ghosts. The ghosts were eventually punished for eternity for their misdeeds, getting tacked to banyan trees.

Though these movies portray these women as vengeful and quite successfully retaliates, the 'real' issue was never addressed or challenged. After a few murders these ghosts were imprisoned by Brahmin sorcerers. Here the caste hierarchy is being reinstated and reinforced. Not even after death the Dalit women are not supposed to challenge the supremacy of caste and if they did, the hierarchy will assert their authority to reinstate the class position.

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## **Hegemonic Measures of Essentialising Alterity: A Critique of Female Friendly Endeavours – She Taxi and She Banking**

***Joby Mathew***

The dialectical dynamics of gender politics has always been a discursive arena ever since the gynocentric attempt of rereading cultural historiography. Gender critics were able to unearth the skewed and androcentric representation of women in all cultural discourses. Past the centuries, various layers of nuanced gender asymmetry have been questioned by feminist critics in their emancipatory attempt.

The overwhelming heterogeneity of female experiences across the world has led to the discursive plurality of feminist thought corresponding to racial, national, regional and ethnic diversities. Thus feminist criticism, though having an identical conceptual pivot, is pluralistic in its political application depending on the unique patriarchal apparatus specific to the cultural psyche of every region. This paper attempts to offer a critique of the segregated spatial distribution of the gender existence, taking two recent instances—She Taxi and She Banking – the former an initiative by the state government and the latter a national one.

The state of Kerala, formed in 1956, presents a perplexing gender matrix despite its elite cultural tag. This God's own country stands first in many respects in the diverse cultural spectrum of India. Kerala with its history of many liberation movements hasn't yet achieved gender equality. The bogus claims of gender equality are at times laid bare in various cultural representations. In spite of the material progress and high literacy rate, the cultural consciousness of Kerala is still patriarchal.

The patriarchal machinery of Kerala uses both placatory and repressive apparatuses to sustain its ideological grip on the gender psyche. The socialization of gendered bodies in Kerala is effected through various ways, as Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* points out:

Because of our social circumstances, male and female are really two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different—and this is cultural. Implicit in all gender identity development which takes place through childhood is the sum total of the parents', peers' and the culture's notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture and expression. Every moment of the child's life is a clue to how he or she must think and behave to attain or satisfy the

demands which gender places upon one. In adolescence, the merciless task of conformity grows to crisis proportions, generally cooling and settling in maturity. (Millet 31)

The socialized and patriarchy tainted gendered bodies can easily be politically manipulated in multiple nuanced ways. Since Kerala is a highly literate state, with women having access to higher education and critical thinking, the repressive patriarchal ideological apparatus may be out-rightly questioned and excoriated. Hence patriarchy often goes for disguised and subtle measures for maintaining its ideology. The internalization of the second status ( or 'special' status) of the female sex is achieved through narratives of 'fear', 'safety' and many other quasi religious and cultural discourses centering on sexed bodies in which the female body is the locus of discussion, whereas the male body escapes the primary sexual references and becomes a ground for transcendental discourses.

The hierarchically oriented compartmentalization is a traditional patriarchal method to essentialise gender roles into territorialized categories as Millet observes, "Sexual politics obtains consent through the "socialization" of both sexes to basic patriarchal politics with regard to temperament, role and status" (Millet 26). Patriarchy sustains the gender hiatus by bifurcating gender roles into essentialistic binary polarities in which male is often the cultural norm and female the other.

According to Simon de Beauvoir society is structured to perpetuate patriarchal ideology and women are interpellated into it. Hence it becomes difficult to see into the nuanced ways by which patriarchy functions. Women unknowingly play their part to perpetuate patriarchy, which is why it is able to continue.

Unless one is able to question the discursive framework which maintains the patriarchal social structuring, it is difficult to effect fundamental changes. Patriarchy in different ways tries to determine male or female identities because society has traditionally organized itself according to a sexual apartheid or segregation, rooted in men's and women's biological make up and reproductive roles.

Patriarchy traditionally tries to assimilate women to their body and sexed identity. As a result, women have been obliged to experience their body as "facticity" rather than contingency: this means that women do not 'choose' how they exist their bodies because their embodiment

has been pre defined by patriarchal society. Women's relationship to her body is essentially produced.

As a result the lived space that we inhabit in our everyday life has been compartmentalized between men and women. Men exist in a trans-physical realm and engage in cultural endeavours, where as patriarchy never allows a woman to escape her sense of herself primarily as a physical being. So whatever social or cultural activity she engages in, her physicality is always the primal ontological reality.

The attempts to essentialise gender roles may take us back to the humanist notion of the metaphysics of substance. The metaphysics of substance can be understood as a humanist conception of the subject as a substantive person who is the bearer of various attributes. The person in this regard is born with a substance or core with universal capacity for reason, moral deliberation and language. He is the seat of reason and thinking. This metaphysical substantial notion is crystallized in the Cartesian dictum: *Cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am).

The theoretical understanding of identity has dethroned the person (man) from his central position and subjected him to the dynamics of historicity or he became a cultural or discursive effect. Judith Butler in problematising the sex/gender categorization of a subject based on biological and cultural bifurcation argues:

The universal conception of the person ... is displaced as a point of departure for a social theory of gender by those historical and anthropological positions that understand gender as a relation among socially constituted subjects in specific contexts. This ... suggests that what the person "is" and indeed, what gender "is", is always relative to the constructed relations in which it is determined. As a shifting and contextual phenomenon, gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations. (Butler 14)

Thus the patriarchal attempt is to thrust socially constructed gender roles as a substantial essence on bodies that actually come into being only through discursive practices.

It was Judith Butler who radically questioned our innocent notion of sex as a biological fact and gender as a cultural category. In fact there is no notion of sex as a pre-discursive anatomical fact. So sex always has the notion of gender always along with it.

Patriarchy has never allowed a cultural mixing of the role, temperament and status of both sexes. Religion, anthropology and culture altogether have always resisted the deterritorialized mixing of both sexes by propagating narratives of sin, fear and purity. No positional fuzziness is allowed in patriarchal gender division. You either belong to this category or that; there is never a fluid notion of the subject's cultural position. The gender space has been clearly polarized to avoid a hybridization of gender existence and subject positions.

Special seating arrangements for boys and girls, separated gender space in religious rituals, special queues for men and women in every social gathering—all indicate a clear gender compartmentalization in our cultural psyche.

Kerala's gender consciousness has been severely tarnished by a new discursive paradigm practised by media in handling narratives of sex crimes and victimization. The narratives often revictimize the sufferer in visual and audio autopsy of the media, with a patriarchal consumerist scopophilia.

The sex crime narratives in Kerala are centered on two traditional weapons of patriarchy, culturally and historically remade according to the time—shame and fear. Thus the female psyche in Kerala is culturally conceived and constructed in an androphobic sensibility. Thus women, as Simone de Beauvoir argued, have been assimilated to their body and sexed identity and traditionally confined. In such an ambience the narratives of segregated safety and protection are perpetuated.

An all-woman taxi service, 'She Taxi', introduced by Gender Park was launched in the month of May 2014. Launching She Taxi Chief Minister Oommen Chandi said: "It has become a women empowerment model for countries across the globe to emulate". Manju Warriar is the brand ambassador of this new venture. Explicitly designed and developed to safeguard the 'safety' of women travellers, especially the working category, students, tourists visiting Kerala, etc. she Taxi ensures a safe, reliable and responsible alternative Travel Cab System for the women populace even while on the move.

The narrative of the She Taxi is centered on segregation and underpinned by the traditional gynocentric discourse of androphobia and fear factor. The designs on the she taxi with the butterfly connote the clichéd representation of modesty and femininity. If the government plans a He Taxi, sure, the pattern would be that of a tiger or a lion.

The previous UPA government had set up the first all-woman bank in November last year as a step towards empowerment of women. Incorporated under the Companies Act 1956, this new Bharatiya Mahila Bank was inaugurated on 19 November 2013 with the headquarters in New Delhi. It exclusively aims at addressing the financial needs and demands of Indian Women. It is also adulated as an attempt to empower women populace.

The newly elected BJP government is following the footsteps of the previous government. The initiative has been taken up by Union Minister for Women and Child Welfare Menaka Gandhi primarily to fulfill the financial requirements of women and ensure their empowerment.

These two are recent historical instances of segregatory apparatuses –a very ancient weapon of patriarchy. By adopting segregated gender existence, patriarchy is trying to essentialise the socially constructed gender status. In a culturally divided gender space, the patriarchal notions of masculinity and femininity are easy to get strengthened. Traditionally the mixing of sexes was not allowed for women were conceived as inferior beings unworthy to share the cultural space with men who represented the universal norm.

Today patriarchy is using it as a placatory mechanism and it may appear to be a female friendly measure to ‘save’ her from ‘dangers’. Here again the rationale is the ancient one, but disguised in a friendly mode. This segregatory mechanism sustains on the androcentric cultural discourse around female body as vulnerable and a site of contaminating cultural psyche, which is ultimately grounded on the traditional discourse of sin and corruption around the female body perpetuated by religious, anthropological and mythical discourses and they have been inculcating an extreme physical sense in women. Internalization of this physicality from the part of women gives an affirmative nod to patriarchal measures to compartmentalize gender space based on discourses of contamination.

Judith Butler in her seminal work *Gender Trouble* refers to Mary Douglas’ *Purity and Danger* and observes that the very contours of “the body” are established through markings that seek to establish specific codes of cultural coherence. Any discourse that establishes the boundaries of the body serves the purpose of instating and naturalizing certain taboos regarding the appropriate limits, postures and modes of exchange that define what it is that constitute bodies:

Ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by

exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female; with and against, that a semblance of order is created. (Butler 178)

The boundaries of the body become the limits of the coherence of a structured society. All social systems are vulnerable at their margins and accordingly considered dangerous. The naturalized notion of “the” body is itself a consequence of taboos that render the body discrete by maintaining strict and stable boundaries.

The many new measures introduced to ‘strengthen’ and ‘emancipate’ women are actually disguised discursive attempts to maintain the gender boundaries and sustain gender roles by performing (in the Butlerian sense) femininity and masculinity which will keep the social reality always under patriarchal discursive grip.

By narrating the culturally designated gender status, we are falling back on the traditional trick of patriarchy to separate gender spaces and slowly push the female sex to cultural corners of oblivion. This exclusive apparatus of patriarchy has to be questioned as Juliet Mitchell pointed out:

Under patriarchal order women are oppressed in their very psychologies of femininity; once this order is retained only in a highly contradictory manner this oppression manifests itself. Women have to organize themselves as a group to effect a change in the basic ideology of human society. (Mitchell 414)

So gender equality can be achieved in a deterritorialised cultural space without spreading a protective discourse for the ‘safety’ of women. The lived space of our everyday life has to be made gender neutral. Life should be redeciphered not as existing in separate blocks, but as a fluid every moment of becoming and flow in which socially constructed gender spaces should mix and get hybridized in mutuality and a complementary existence.

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## POET'S CORNER

### The Unrolling Expanse

*Valsa George*

Standing on a promontory, I watch  
The wobbling mass of water below

Before my eyes,  
The sea stretches far;  
An infinite scroll of chiffon  
Rolling and unrolling  
In shades of green and sapphire  
In its sedate hours of brooding silence  
A calm expanse with feeble waves  
As if seized by an uncanny lassitude.  
Lying in majesty, swirling in ecstasy

Within this mammoth silver submarine,  
How many mysterious live forms thrive!  
What curious-shaped corals, what all sea urchins!  
What wealth of fish, what gigantic mammals!

Between the blue sky above  
And the blue sea below, I see seagulls fly,  
The long-beaked pelicans' prey,  
Grampuses heaving their huge form,  
Above the calm surface and the milky spray  
Tossing shiny pearls  
Upon the stretching of naked strands

I can see a distant sail,  
And the hull of a ship,  
Gliding over undulating waves,  
Leaving a frothy trail of foam behind,  
With water churning and spiralling around,  
Where sharks and seals and dolphins swim.

Piles of silver clouds move above,  
And the golden sands stretch below,  
With periwinkles, crabs, and shells  
Scattered by the receding waves.

Splashing tides, dancing weeds  
Rising crescendo, falling rhythm

Oh! What a splendid scene  
In the rosy gleam of this evening!  
What delectable mélange  
Of tinkling sensory delights!

## THE PRICE OF PEACE

*Krishnanunni B.*

For the leaders, it's  
"Peace at all costs!"  
At all costs!  
Easily said;  
For they're not the ones  
paying the price!

## AN ODD ODE

*Dimple B. Theophilose*

Flesh I wore is  
an art of colours,  
even an odd ode  
to entire experimental art.

I swear while the hues;  
Blues, Blacks, Reds rule,  
I see some shades sink;  
Greens, Whites, Yellows.

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