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Wetlands in *Gift in Green*: A Liminal Space of Life, Culture, and Survival

Lijiyamol Thankachan

Abstract

The paper 'Wetlands in Gift in Green: A Liminal Space of Life, Culture, and Survival' examines the ecological, cultural, and spiritual significance of wetlands in Sarah Joseph's novel. Through the metaphor of Aathi's wetland, the narrative underscores the interconnectedness of land, water, and life, portraying wetlands as vital ecosystems that sustain both nature and humanity. The paper explores key quotes to illustrate how Joseph frames wetlands as liminal spaces, representing life, memory, and cultural identity. Ultimately, the novel reflects on the human–nature relationship and advocates for the preservation of wetlands and promotes ecological harmony and sustainability for future generations.

Keywords: Wetlands, *Gift in Green*, Ecocriticism, Aathi, Environmental Destruction, Cultural Identity, Liminal Spaces, Ecological Awareness, Preservation, Interconnectedness.

Ecocriticism, rooted in the advocacy for environmental awareness, positions literature as a vital tool for exploring and addressing ecological concerns. Wetlands, often portrayed in literary works as liminal spaces of life and transformation, hold immense ecological, cultural, and symbolic significance. These ecosystems function as carbon sinks, flood regulators, and biodiversity havens; yet, their portrayal in literature frequently highlights their fragility in the face of urbanisation, pollution, and climate change. By centring the beauty and degradation of wetlands, literary narratives evoke emotional and intellectual responses, fostering a deeper understanding of their ecological importance. Ecocritical readings amplify this engagement, encouraging readers to perceive wetlands not merely as settings but as integral to the narratives of survival and coexistence. In this way, literature becomes a bridge between human culture and ecological conservation, urging both reflection and action to protect these invaluable ecosystems against the forces that threaten their existence.

Wetlands, as unique ecosystems situated at the threshold between land and water, have long held a special place in literature and culture. These transitional zones, characterised by their ambiguity and fluidity, are sites of both tension and connection, reflecting the delicate interplay between nature and human activity. Often depicted as mysterious, liminal spaces,

wetlands are brimming with symbolic and ecological significance. From serving as metaphors for transition and transformation to representing the fragile balance of life, wetlands in literary texts reveal deep insights into human–nature relationships. Through ecocritical analysis, such representations are studied to uncover the layered meanings these spaces carry, as well as to explore humanity's perception of and interaction with these vital ecosystems. By delving into literary portrayals of wetlands, ecocriticism underscores their role not only as habitats for diverse life forms but also as cultural and symbolic sites that reflect environmental ethics and societal attitudes toward nature.

In Gift in Green, Sarah Joseph explores the intricate relationship between humanity and the natural world through the fictional wetland village of Aathi. The wetlands of Aathi, rich in biodiversity and cultural significance, are portrayed as lifelines for the community, embodying the delicate balance between ecological harmony and human sustenance. The evocative imagery in the novel portrays water as a gentle embrace, nourishing both the land and its people. This description elevates the wetlands beyond a mere geographical space, making them central to the emotional and symbolic essence of the narrative.

The novel explores the tensions between traditional ecological wisdom and the destructive forces of modernity, portraying wetlands as liminal spaces where the interplay between life and destruction is most visible. As urbanisation and pollution encroach upon Aathi's fragile ecosystem, *Gift in Green* interrogates themes of environmental degradation, sustainability, and the consequences of unchecked greed. The wetlands, once sanctuaries of life, become metaphors for resilience and vulnerability, reflecting the broader ecological crisis.

Rooted in the principles of wetland ecocriticism, the narrative bridges the gap between literature and environmental discourse. By focusing on Aathi's wetlands as cultural and ecological entities, *Gift in Green* underscores their symbolic and environmental value, inviting readers to reflect on their intrinsic worth. The novel challenges us to acknowledge the urgency of preserving these threatened ecosystems, weaving an enduring tale of environmental justice and cultural identity that resonates deeply with human responsibility to sustain and protect nature.

In *Gift in Green*, the wetland ecosystem of Aathi is not just a physical location; it represents a vital life force that sustains both the natural world and the people who live in its proximity. Through vivid imagery and symbolic language, the complex relationship between humans and wetlands is illustrated, emphasising their ecological, cultural, and spiritual

importance. Aathi, as portrayed in the novel, becomes a metaphor for the delicate balance between nature and human encroachment, and the consequences of disrupting that balance. Through the exploration of Aathi's significance, the novel calls attention to the need to protect and preserve wetlands for future generations.

Aathi's role in sustaining life is central to *Gift in Green*. Joseph describes the wetland as more than a body of water: "Aathi is not just water; it is life itself, flowing and sustaining everything it touches" (Joseph 45). This highlights the ecological importance of wetlands as habitats, water purifiers, and regulators of ecological balance. Wetlands are the lifeblood of ecosystems, nourishing both the natural environment and human communities.

Beyond ecology, the Aathi has profound cultural and spiritual value. The novelist writes, "The waters of Aathi are sacred; they carry the stories of our ancestors, the struggles of our people, and the prayers for a future unspoiled by greed" (Joseph 58), emphasising its role in shaping community identity and preserving collective memory.

Similar to all wetlands, Aathi is a liminal space that symbolises the interconnectedness of land, water, and life. The novelist reflects this, stating, "When the land and water lose their borders, Aathi becomes a living being, breathing and nurturing all in its embrace" (Joseph 72). This fluidity highlights wetlands' dynamic nature and their critical role in maintaining harmony, a balance the novel warns is at risk.

Gift in Green also explores the destructive consequences of human encroachment on wetlands. The novel critiques the unsustainable development that threatens the fragile ecosystem of Aathi: "The encroachment is like a knife cutting through Aathi's heart, draining its lifeblood for the sake of false progress" (Joseph 89). This vivid metaphor captures the violence of environmental destruction, likening it to a wound inflicted on the heart of the ecosystem. The term false progress critiques the emphasis on economic gain and industrial development at the expense of the environment's long-term health. This form of progress, which disregards ecological sustainability, ultimately leads to the degradation of vital ecosystems, such as wetlands.

The novel further emphasises the urgent need for ecological awareness and action. The novelist writes, "Every ripple in the water, every whisper of the wind, carries a warning: protect Aathi or lose yourself" (Joseph 94). This warning reflects the interconnectedness between human life and the environment. The health of the land and water directly impacts the survival and well-being of the people who depend on it. By framing the need to protect Aathi

as a matter of survival, the narrative urges readers to recognise the immediate consequences of environmental destruction and the importance of preserving natural ecosystems for the well-being of future generations.

The idea of interconnectedness is also evident in the portrayal of the relationship between the people and the wildlife that inhabit Aathi: "The fish, the birds, the reeds—they all belong to Aathi, just as we do. To harm it is to harm ourselves" (Joseph 102). This quote reveals that humans are not separate from the natural world but are deeply embedded within it. The destruction of wetlands, therefore, is not only an environmental issue but also a matter of human survival. By harming these ecosystems, humans are harming themselves and severing the vital link that sustains both nature and culture.

Gift in Green offers a vision of hope, suggesting that the restoration of Aathi is possible if humanity heeds its call: "Aathi's waters hold the memory of what was, and the hope of what can be, if only we listen to its quiet plea' (Joseph 110). This poignant reflection underscores the potential for ecological renewal and the restoration of cultural and spiritual ties between people and nature.

Through the portrayal of Aathi, Joseph highlights the ecological, cultural, and spiritual significance of wetlands. The novel critiques the destructive impact of industrialisation and calls for the protection of these fragile ecosystems. The narrative emphasises that harming wetlands ultimately harms humanity, highlighting their vital role in maintaining environmental balance and preserving cultural identity. *Gift in Green* ultimately advocates for ecological awareness and harmony, offering a hopeful vision of coexistence between humanity and nature.

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From Abundance to Absence: Rethinking Plenitude in David Hare's *Plenty*

Theresa John

Abstract

Plenty by David Hare, set in wartime France and post-war England, is a play about post-war disillusionment. 'Plenty' was a promise given by the people in power during the war, but it remained a fantasy. The inherent irony in the play's title suggests the impoverishment and absolute lack that defined life in England after the war. Thus, the promised 'plenty' proved to be a mirage to the masses. This study attempts to examine how the promised plenitude failed to materialise in post-second world war England.

Key words: Plenty, Lack, Desire, Utopia

In the second half of the twentieth century, 'revolution' was the word in the West. With the Paris students taking to the streets in massive demonstrations for more democracy in the universities, the protest against the Vietnam War just heating up, and the slowly dawning awareness that the promises of the postwar generations still had not materialised even after twenty years, the young men and women growing up in these tumultuous years felt that they had much to be angry about, and the public mood in Britain reflected a desire for social change. The incumbent milieu was one of deep political disenchantment, open cynicism, and social fragmentation.

David Hare is an avowedly socialist dramatist who, through his works, has shown that politics and dramatically accomplished theatre can go hand in hand. According to him, a playwright can "put people's sufferings in a historical context; and by doing that he can help to explain their pain" (*Writing Left-Handed* 34), and this belief becomes explicit in his plays. His play *Plenty* directly or indirectly examines how the postwar promise of 'plenty'—a utopian construction of a reconciled future society—did not materialise, as the unity against Hitler during the war failed to translate into unity in reconstruction during peace. Characters in Hare's drama seek something to which they can commit themselves even as they desperately stave off fears that their institutions are no longer worth the commitment. Neither the political right nor left offered a sense of mission shared across the class lines during the war. One of the characteristic features of the political landscape of Britain since 1945 has been a marked decline of trust in politicians and parliamentary politics, as Stavrakakis puts it, "a growing

suspicion of all grandiose political projects and meta-narratives" (Lacan *and the Political* 99). The period began with a determination on the part of the electorate to give a mandate for wholesale social and political change. Many intellectuals, including Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson, advocated a radical, socialist alternative to the postwar consensus that had failed to deliver on many of its aspirations and wanted to extend their ideological vision to the main social and cultural aspects of British life.

Power imperialism is the wish to dominate for the sake of dominating: the 'will to power," as Nietzsche called it. This passion underlies the lust for power, a mania and rage that moralists condemn. This feeling of" *amour-propre*, that is, active and personal egotism, may also be collective, which may be reinforced by and blended with a real craving for cruelty: imperial and imperious are the same thing. When this manifests itself not only in the individual but also in the collectivism, and more particularly in the nation, we have power imperialism or collective *amour-propre*.

Politics is all about power and its distribution. Deep within those who engage in war, the desire to hold power and rule acts as the driving force. Power is an intoxication; once you get the taste of it, you start craving for more. Susan, the central character of the play, is an English woman, who works undercover in the Nazi- occupied France. The people who risk their lives on the war front are under constant surveillance. Their actions are vigilantly observed by the eyes of powerful people who belong to the higher echelons of governance. They are not allowed to even reveal their identity to their colleagues. In the second act of the play, Lazar, another undercover, says: "Did you know… sound waves never die? Therefore, every noise we make goes into the sky. And there is a place somewhere in the corner of the universe where all the babble of the world is kept' (*Plenty*11).

Robin W. Winks in his *British Imperialism: Gold, God, Glory* says that those who enjoy power always arrange matters so as to give their tyranny an appearance of justice. Empire always seems to have mixed power, tyranny, and the desire for a just world in a way at once inextricable, confusing, and challenging. Imperialism is the extension of sovereignty or control, whether direct or indirect, political or economic, by one government, nation or society over another, together with the ideas justifying or opposing this process. Imperialism is essentially about power as both end and as means. Behind the stirring slogans, the national symbols, and the institutional facade of empire can be found superior military, economic, political, or moral

power. Underlying all forms of imperialism is the belief- at times unshakable- of the imperial agent or nation in an inherent right, based on moral superiority as well as material might, to impose its pre-eminent values and techniques on the 'inferior' indigenous nation or society.

One of the unexpected consequences of the Allied victory in the Second World War was the subsequent diminution of Britain's status as a leading world power, reflected in a gradually accelerating process of imperial decline. The seeds of that decline were evident much earlier in the twentieth century with the emergence of nationalist movements in many British colonies and imperial territories, such as India, Egypt, and the Caribbean, and the strains and pressures of the war served to emphasise fading imperialism. In the immediate aftermath of the war, priorities closer to home took precedence over imperial ambitions, and Britain concentrated on national reconstruction.

Interparty bickering and backstabbing became the defining characteristics of British politics in the postwar era. Having spent all his working life in the plush confines of the British embassy, Darwin had little or no grasp of the political realities surrounding him. He reduced all problems to a series of strategies designed to evade rather than confront any problems. For all Darwin's diplomatic skills, he and his kind are basically irrelevant to the post-1945 world.

The innate desire in people to hold power and dominate others is evident in the relationship between the Empire and its colonies, England's relationship with the Third World, and its attitude toward other nations. The term 'imperialism' is largely associated with Britain because she was successful in building a vast empire that blanketed the globe and stretched its height into every continent. The English justified their imperial advances by speaking of the 'white man's burden' and the 'civilising mission' entrusted upon the whites, as though it was a well-defined case of racial *noblesse oblige*, the responsibility of the privileged.

At the conclusion of the Second World War in 1945, the public mood in Britain reflected a desire for social change, including providing restitution for the sacrifices made by those on the home front as well as those in the armed forces. The British people had experienced the effects of war to a severe degree: sustained aerial bombardment had inflicted widespread damage on major cities; men were dispersed to various theatres of war; women moved out of the domestic sphere to support the war efforts on land, in factories, or in the services; and family units were evacuated to safer locations. The privations endured during wartime led to demands that social inequities and inequalities would be corrected in the future.

Planning for a fairer society had begun as early as 1942, with the publication of the Beveridge Report, which advocated the creation of a welfare state to improve healthcare and education, alleviate poverty, and enquire into 'the means of ending want and preventable disease in Great Britain"–a social security system for all British citizens, regardless of income, from the cradle to the grave. It offered protection for all against illness, poverty, unemployment, squalor, and ignorance by providing minimal social services, such as free medical aid, unemployment insurance, improved housing facilities, public education, and pensions. The report envisaged and the welfare government aimed at" the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number'. The welfare state stressed the importance of reconstruction and planning, and special committees were appointed to enquire into the social and economic problems of postwar England and to suggest remedial courses of action.

On the domestic front, despite the undoubted achievements of the Welfare Society, the promise of 'fairness for all' was far from fulfilled by the end of the 1950s. Public confidence in the political establishment, shaken by the Suez crisis, was further weakened by defections from the intelligence services. The postwar promise of "plenty" was thus proven false for most of England. There was an absolute lack in all spheres, and the country reeked with squalor and poverty. The promised abundance during the war failed to materialise in the country, as there was impoverishment in every sense of the word. For much of the early postwar years, austerity measures due to a shortage of essential goods and a general sense of postwar exhaustion cast a sense of disillusionment over many areas of British society.

In the play, Brock, the Embassy official and the husband of Susan, is the representative of the common man who was fooled to believe that the promised plenitude would become a reality in the near future. His optimistic attitude towards life even when living in the midst of utter chaos and disillusion sounds ironical. He does not realize that his wife has turned insane because the war has ravished her hopes for a better life. He assures Alice that "peace and plenty" (35) would define the days to come and that a year of prosperity is at hand:

Oh…I'm acclimatising, you know. (Smiles.) I think everyone is going to be rich very soon. Once we have gotten over the effects of the war. It is going to be coming out of everyone's years. Till I met Susan. The very day I met her, she showed me you must always do what you want. If you want something, you must get it. I think that is a wonderful way to live, don't you? (29)

However, as time passes, the truth slowly sinks in for Brock that his hopes for a better England were in vain. With his life in Iran, his attitude to life changes: "The sky. The desert. And of course, the poverty. Living among people who have to struggle so hard. It can make you see life differently" (69). The plenitude thus proved to be a fantasy for the English. The promises that the people in power offered remained a distant dream. Abundance was nowhere to be seen; instead, an absolute lack defined all spheres of life in England.

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Indigenous Resistance and Female Agency in Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill*: A Study of Land, Identity, and Eco Spirituality

Sunitha Mathew

Abstract

This study investigates indigenous resistance and female agency as depicted in Mamang Dai's historical novel, The Black Hill (2014), which is set amidst 19th-century colonial incursion in Arunachal Pradesh. Using feminist, postcolonial, and ecofeminist perspectives, the analysis probes how Dai centres the cultural, spiritual, and ecological identities of the Adi and Mishmi communities by tracing the layered connections between land, memory, and gender. The character of Gimur stands out for her spiritual connection to the land and her refusal to submit to patriarchal authority, establishing her as an emblem of ecofeminist consciousness closely tied to indigenous resistance against colonial dominance.

Dai's narrative treats land as far more than physical territory; it is presented as sacred, generative, and deeply linked with ancestral traditions, female agency, and collective survival. By framing indigenous worldviews alongside colonial ideologies of conquest and desacralisation, Dai critiques the marginalisation of tribal knowledge and the erasure of women's voices from mainstream history. Through the use of native myth, metaphor, and oral tradition, The Black Hill actively reclaims subaltern histories and positions characters like Gimur as custodians of culture, the environment, and resistance.

Keywords: Indigenous Resistance, Female Agency, Tribal Identity, and Land and Spirituality

Introduction

Mamang Dai is one of the most famous writers from Northeast India. She is known for her vivid descriptions of tribal life, indigenous customs, and environmental awareness. Dai is from the Adi tribe in Arunachal Pradesh. She uses modern literary forms and the oral storytelling traditions of her people. She is a journalist, poet, and novelist who has brought Northeast India's struggles and stories to the attention of the country and the world. Her award-winning poetry collections and novels, *The Black Hill* (2014), *Stupid Cupid* (2008), and *The Legends of Pensam* (2006), demonstrate a profound interest in memory, history, and the natural world.

Mamang Dai got the Sahitya Academy Award in 2017 for her writing in The Black Hill, which was a brilliant fusion of historical accuracy and cultural imagination.

In the context of British colonial expansion, Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* provides a sophisticated examination of indigenous resistance and ecofeminist identity in the tribal societies of 19th-century Arunachal Pradesh. To analyse the colonial encounters between the indigenous tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and the European missionaries, this paper uses the journey of the protagonist, Gimur, as a lens. It argues that Gimur's rejection of tribal traditions and her reclaiming of agency through a spiritual bond with the land subvert internal and external oppressive structures, drawing on feminist and postcolonial frameworks.

The novel is inspired by the real-life journey of the French missionary, Nicholas-Michel Krick, who attempted to establish a Christian mission in Tibet but was killed by a Mishmi tribal chief in 1854. Dai intertwines this historical narrative with the fictional love story of Gimur and Kajinsha. Gimur, a young Adi woman from the Mebo village, defies societal norms by eloping with Kajinsha, a Mishmi chief. Father Krick's arrival in the region coincides with Gimur's elopement. He is determined to spread Christianity and navigate a path to Tibet; however, his presence is met with hostility.

Mamang Dai's novel, *The Black Hill*, stands as a profound exploration of indigenous resistance in the context of Arunachal Pradesh during the mid-19th century. This paper asserts that the resistance depicted in the novel is not merely a political or territorial struggle but is deeply rooted in the Abor and Mishmi people's Eco spiritual connection to their land and their unwavering desire to preserve their traditional way of life and sovereignty against *the* intrusion of foreign invaders, referred to as *migluns*(British). Gimur believes that "Wherever the *migluns go*, they bring death and outrage! . . . They are armed with an evil wind that starts blowing the moment they set foot anywhere" (Dai 19).

The novel *The Black Hill* illuminates the deep-seated material and emotional bonds between indigenous people and their land. The novel captures the historical narratives of the Abor and Mishmi hills, offering insights into the transformative atmosphere of the pre-colonial and post-colonial periods. A central tenet of the novel and consequently this study is the sacred importance of land. For these tribal communities, land transcends its physical definition; it is a precious, sacred asset, a revered home, and the foundation of their identity, power, and recognition. This profound reverence for their ancestral territory was the primary impetus for defending it

against British attempts to seize what they erroneously perceived as unused or empty lands. Having lived autonomously and believing themselves capable of self-governance, the tribal people were resolute in their vow to protect their rich cultural heritage and lands at all costs, resisting colonialism with unwavering determination.

The novel sharply contrasts worldviews regarding land. The Abor and Mishmi people perceive nature—including forests, trees, rivers, and the sky—as intrinsically interrelated and treat it with profound respect. In their understanding, everything on the hill is a living being, and the voices of nature, such as rain, thunder, and lightning, are spirits from whom they learn. Their worldview is notably not anthropocentric, acknowledging a deep affinity between humans, nature, and celestial beings. They engage with the land respectfully, taking only what is necessary, and believe in harmonious co-existence and mutual support among humans, animals, and trees. Conversely, the colonisers viewed indigenous land as space occupied by uncivilised people that required civilising. They later saw it as something to be tamed and beautified for agricultural, industrial, and recreational purposes. The introduction of alien concepts such as private property and desacralisation by colonisers directly led to the dispossession of indigenous land rights and the erosion of their traditional beliefs and reverence for nature.

As a postcolonial writer, Mamang Dai employs native expressions, metaphors, symbols, and speeches to assert narrative control, convey indigenous stories, and articulate their distinctive culture, countering the colonisers' dominant narrative. The fundamental desire of the Abor and Mishmi people to live an autonomous life free from external interference underpins the essence of their resistance against the British. Tribal people vowed to protect their rich cultural heritage and land at all costs and resist colonialism because they believed they were capable of self-governance. It is clear when Kajinsha says, "no one wants the British to come into the hills. The elders have decided, and we, all the tribes, we are together in this" (Dai 24). The novel exemplifies indigenous language, beliefs, and narratives of superstitious beliefs, evil spirits, rituals, and dreams.

I. The Spiritual Foundation of Land and Identity

The indigenous resistance depicted in The Black Hill is inextricably linked to the profound spiritual connection of the Abor and Mishmi people to their land. For them, land is not merely a physical space but a precious, sacred asset, a home, and the very source of their identity, power, and recognition. This deep reverence forms the core of their Eco spirituality, in which

the land and its people are inseparably assembled to constitute the spiritual ecosystem of the region. Indeed, "the land is all they have and need, for they are spiritually related to it" (Rexlin and Latha, 2018, p.602). This sentiment is powerfully articulated when a shaman explains to Gimur that the land "belonged to the people and it carried the soul of their ancestors," (Sofiya, 2023, p.159) emphasising that survival is impossible without it. Kajinsha's father similarly articulated that land symbolises "ownership" and "rest."

Indigenous peoples' understanding of their environment is unique; they read the land as their book, believing that everything on the hill is a living being and that the voices of nature (rain, thunder, and lightning) are spirits from whom they gain knowledge. Kajinsha says to Krick:

We read the land. The land is our book. Everything here on this hill, such as the grass, rocks, and stones, is saying something. And what falls from the sky—rain, thunder, and lightning – are also the voices of spirits telling us something. We have learned what is good and what is sweet or bitter by living here and remembering what happens during the day and night, every day, for hundreds of years. (Dai 140)

Their perspective fundamentally challenges anthropocentrism and instead emphasises a deep interconnectedness among humans, nature, and celestial entities. They engage with the land thoughtfully, limiting its use to essential needs and upholding the conviction that humans, animals, and trees exist in a mutually supportive relationship. This comprehensive worldview illuminates why the possible destruction of sacred trees, rivers, and ancestral sites poses a substantial threat—not only to ecological stability but also to the rituals and cultural traditions intrinsically linked to the land.

II. Protest and Opposition to Colonial Invasion

Having lived independent lives, the Mishmi and Abor tribes protested against invading foreigners into their territories. This opposition is vividly portrayed through the experiences of Father Nicholas Krick, a French priest who faced strong opposition from the Mishmi people upon his attempts to enter their land. The tribal communities harboured deep suspicions that any upliftment offered by the *migrants* would inevitably lead to land occupation. Consequently, Krick's mission to spread the gospel was frequently thwarted by wary tribal people. The novel underscores that the heart of native or tribal resistance against the British was their profound desire to live an autonomous life without external interference. The Abor and Mishmi people are consistently depicted as sovereign individuals who fiercely opposed the presence

of *migrants* in their ancestral lands. Historically, the Black Hill marks the "advent of Christian spiritualism on the pagan soil". This denotes not only a physical invasion but also a spiritual clash, as the introduction of a new faith was perceived as a direct threat to the established "pagan faith or the tribal spiritualism of indigenous communities.

III. Embodiment of Resistance: Leaders and Actions

The theme of indigenous resistance is brought to life through the actions and sacrifices of key characters in The Black Hill. Kajinsha's father, a peace-loving man, exemplifies this spirit by prioritising his native land above all else. When some clans chose to collaborate with the *migluns,* he and his clan retaliated, even seeking help from their Tibetan neighbours to protect their territory. Kajinsha and Gimur are presented as true patriots of their land. They shared an unspoken pact to defend their land against enemies, ready to give their lives for the cause. Kajinsha's final, unfulfilled wish to return to the black hill, his home, powerfully signifies the deep connection from which he derived his beliefs and will to survive.

The novel's narrative takes a tragic turn as Kajinsha is wrongly accused of the priest's murder, a crime she did not commit, and is subsequently killed in prison, leaving Gimur with a profound sense of loss. This event underscores the brutal consequences of their resistance and the pervasive injustice inflicted by colonial power. Throughout the book, Gimur is frequently depicted contemplating nature and experiencing a profound oneness with the hill and forest. The novel's concluding pages vividly portray her Eco spiritual healing and spiritual stretching. Her eventual smile signifies a spiritual reunion with Kajinsha, transcending the physical realm. This powerful connection is further emphasised through a reference to the myth of the Sky and the Earth as creative principles: "The gods are bystanders. And I am earth and Kajinsha is the sky and we have looked at each other and will look at each other like this for a million years" (Dai 289). This mythical allusion highlights the enduring, almost cosmic, nature of their bond to each other and their land, suggesting that their connection and resistance persist beyond individual lives. The hill motif in The Black Hill thus embodies the inherent strength and resilience of their ancestral lands and beliefs, transforming the mundane into the divine.

IV. Challenges and Internal Divisions within Resistance

Despite widespread resistance, the novel realistically portrays that the attitude towards the *migluns* was not uniform and differed significantly among various clans. Efforts to effectively combat the *migluns* were largely unsuccessful due to prevalent internal conflicts within the indigenous communities. Some leaders, notably Marpa and Lamet, conspired with the *migluns* against their people, exacerbating inter-tribal conflict. This internal discord meant that not all Abor and Mishmi tribes shared a common objective of keeping their land intact; some self-centred people were ready to open the way of their land to the white men, which consequently led to enmity between clans, such as Chief Lamet and Kajinsha's clan. This fracturing of indigenous unity was compounded by the arrival of Christian spiritualism, which threatened to disrupt the pagan faith or the tribal spiritualism that formed the bedrock of their traditional societies and resistance.

V. Gimur as an Agent of Indigenous Resistance

The novel emphasises the importance of traditional ecological knowledge, particularly that preserved and transmitted by women, for maintaining environmental balance. Rituals and spiritual practices rooted in the land depend on specific trees, sacred spaces, and natural materials. The loss of these elements disrupts not only the ecosystem but also the cultural and religious fabric of the community. Through Gimur's journey, Mamang Dai portrays an ecofeminist consciousness in which the subjugation of women parallels the exploitation of nature. The land becomes both a symbol and a source of identity, healing, and resilience for indigenous people, particularly women, whose knowledge and spiritual ties to the environment are central to cultural survival.

Gimur's life in *The Black Hill* reflects this philosophy, as her journey symbolises both ecological consciousness and resistance against external forces. Gimur's movements, from Mebo to the Black Hill and later to Sommeu, represent not only physical displacement but also a deeper spiritual and ecological bond. In the novel, nature is not merely a backdrop but a character that influences the fate of its inhabitants. Dai describes the land as a living entity: "This was a place where the spirits dwelled, where the wind carried their voices, whispering in the trees and flowing water" (*Dai* 89).

At first, Gimur struggles to grasp the true significance of land. However, through the wisdom imparted by her mother, she gradually comes to recognise its profound value. Her mother's words, "the land was everything," resonate deeply with her, leading to an awakening in which

she perceives an inseparable bond between herself and the land. This intimate identification with nature not only gives her life a sense of meaning and purpose but also mirrors a maternal connection to the earth itself.

Gimur's elopement with Kajinsha defies patriarchal expectations and challenges gender norms in her society. Their union represents the merging of different tribal identities but also exposes the tensions within and between indigenous communities. Gimur's act of rebellion is not only personal but also political, as it symbolises indigenous women's struggle for agency. She asserts, "Women have always done this at different times throughout history" (Dai 112), demonstrating her awareness of historical patterns of female resistance. Maria Mies, in *Ecofeminism*, states that "women's resistance is tied to their refusal to be separated from their natural environments," a notion reflected in Gimur's choices.

The Black Hill, which should have been her home, becomes a space of longing and loss. After leaving Mebo, Gimur struggles with her identity as a woman in exile. The cultural differences between her Adi roots and Kajinsha's Mishmi traditions create a sense of isolation. She is neither fully accepted nor entirely at ease in her new surroundings. This struggle mirrors ecofeminist themes, in which women, like nature, are often uprooted and subjected to the desires of a patriarchal system.

Gimur endures profound losses—her child, husband, and sense of belonging. Gimur's relationships add complexity to her character, illustrating themes of love, loss, and resilience. Gimur's return to Mebo is marked by tragedy, as she loses her child while crossing a river. This loss intensifies her guilt, making her feel as though she is being punished for her transgressions. Yet, her suffering underscores the endurance of indigenous women. She states, "Loss does not end us. We live on, carrying the weight of what is gone" (Dai278), emphasising resilience in the face of historical and personal trauma. Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues that "Indigenous women's narratives disrupt dominant histories by centring their lived experiences" (*Feminism Without Borders* 2003).

The novel foregrounds the struggle of the Adi and Mishmi tribes against colonial incursions. While Kajinsha embodies direct rebellion, Gimur's resistance is more symbolic and represents the overlooked narratives of indigenous women. Gimur, as a fictional character, embodies stories erased from official records. While Kajinsha's execution is documented, Gimur's grief and survival remain unacknowledged. She reflects, "They will write about him, but they will

not write about us" (254). Unlike Kajinsha, Gimur's story is almost forgotten, reflecting the erasure of indigenous women from historical narratives. She laments, "No one will remember me, but I will know that I was here" (288). Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* noted that "the voices of indigenous women are often rendered inaudible in historical discourse", a reality that Dai's novel seeks to challenge. From her perspective, Dai restores indigenous women to historical memory. Through Dai's storytelling, Gimur's experiences are reclaimed, highlighting the role of indigenous women in cultural preservation.

Conclusion

Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* emerges as a significant literary work that intricately weaves together the struggles of indigenous identity, ecological awareness, and gendered resistance. Through the character of Gimur, Dai crafts a narrative that moves well beyond individual defiance; it becomes a form of cultural and spiritual resistance against colonial oppression and patriarchal limitations. The novel powerfully demonstrates that, for the Adi and Mishmi tribes, land is far from a mere physical territory; it is a sacred space saturated with collective memory, tradition, and spiritual meaning.

Dai gives voice to indigenous women, figures often silenced or pushed to the margins in mainstream literature and historical records. Gimur's journey, marked by displacement, grief, and an unwavering spiritual core, resonates as a broader symbol for tribal women, whose essential roles as cultural guardians and ecological caretakers have long gone unrecognised. By drawing on oral traditions, myths, and native symbolism, Dai not only revives these neglected narratives but also asserts a history rooted in indigenous perspectives.

Ultimately, *The Black Hill* delivers a pointed critique of the colonial and patriarchal forces that threaten tribal autonomy while simultaneously celebrating the enduring strength of land-based identity and feminine resilience. Dai's narrative does not simply resist erasure—it reclaims space, illuminating the profound connections among land, memory, and womanhood. This novel is an important literary contribution to the fields of postcolonial and ecofeminist studies, offering both a challenge to dominant ideologies and a testament to the power of indigenous worldviews.

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Alternate Pasts, Present Concerns: Temporality and Presentism in Alternate Histories

Dr. Jayalekshmi B.

Abstract: *Alternate history, as a genre, reimagines the past through speculative divergence and reflects contemporary concerns and ideologies. The present study explores the inherently presentist nature of alternate histories. It examines alternate histories that imagine what would have happened if the Axis powers had won the Second World War. Focusing on American and British alternate histories written after the Second World War, this study investigates how these narratives reflect the anxieties, desires, and political questions of their present moment.*

Key words: Alternate histories, Point of divergence, Presentism, Fantasy Scenarios, Nightmare Scenarios

The presence of the present is an undeniable factor that readers cannot avoid when reading a text. Presentism, though used as a pejorative for the fallacy of understanding a text in the present, becomes a theoretical approach to the interpretation of the past with present concerns. While historicism emphasises placing a text within its original historical context, presentism foregrounds the present experiences of a reader, viewer, or critic in experiencing any work of art. Historians believe that history is written according to the political, dogmatic, and personal norms. Consequently, David Hackett Fischer in his *Historian's Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historic Thought* (1970) identifies presentism as a fallacy, calling it 'nunc pro tunc' (135). Historians who focused on the understanding of the past in its own terms treated presentism as a term of opprobrium. However, Chandra L. Power, a scholar of historical fiction, identifies readerly and writerly presentism based on its application of values and perspectives (426). As Gabriel Egan asserts, "Objectivity is impossible. And the most honest approach is to be entirely explicit about this and declare that our interpretations are always utterly shaped by present concerns" (The Presentist Threat to Editions of Shakespeare).

Power argues that presentism manifests in two ways: writerly presentism and readerly presentism. While writerly presentism refers to the "imposition of a writer's modern values, beliefs, or awareness onto a past era," readerly presentism is "when the reader inputs his/her ideals of modern values, beliefs or awareness into the text" (425). Presentism, according to Carlos Spoerhase, a scholar who studies presentism from the perspective of a historian,

shares accuracy and clarity with a historian (49). Hence, presentism can be treated as a tool to read the impact of the present in the past.

Alternate history is a genre that reconstructs history with alternate or imagined realities. The genre attempts to answer the question, 'What if?" within a historical context. Edgar Vernon McKnight observes the genre as an acknowledgement to actual history (qtd. in Singles 20-21). It can also be considered as a genre that comes out of presentist notions, reflecting the period in which the alternate history is written. It also becomes an attempt to interpret the past through the lens of the present. As Gavriel Rosenfeld rightly observes,

Alternate history is inherently presentist. It explores the past less for its own sake than to utilise it instrumentally to comment on the state of the contemporary world. When the producers of alternate histories speculate on how the past might have been different, they invariably express their own highly subjective present-day hopes and fears. It is therefore no coincidence, therefore, that alternate histories typically come in the form of both fantasy and nightmare scenarios. (Rosenfeld 10-11)

By examining alternate histories that reconstruct history by imagining what would have happened if the Axis had won the Second World War, the present study attempts to demonstrate the nature of presentism in the selected alternate histories. It is an attempt to explore the factors that made them reconstruct history in such ways. As Rosenfeld asserts, there are two types of alternate histories: 'fantasy scenarios" and 'nightmare scenarios. He states that while fantasy scenario envisions the altered past as superior to the real past showing a sense of dissatisfaction with the present status, nightmare scenarios on the contrary depict the altered past as inferior to the real past with a sense of contentment with the contemporary status. This paper examines how alternate histories reflect the period in which the texts were written.

Alternate histories are subjective and presentist in nature. A study on the function of alternate histories clearly states that the alternate histories written in America, Great Britain, and Germany reveal the presentist nature of the genre. Alternate histories throughout the ages or in all processes of its growth clearly echoed the respective present status of these nations and thus affirmed the subjectivity and presentism of the genre. The presentism of the American and British alternate histories deserves special attention, since most alternate histories that appeared in these nations since World War II were shown in dystopian terms. There are

some alternate histories that go against this trend and show outrage toward the then status of society.

Concerns regarding the horrors of Nazism have been a recurrent theme in alternate histories of the first decades of the postwar period. These narratives delineate the horrors of Nazism and the catastrophic results of the German invasion over the nations. Alternate histories written in America during the war and postwar periods were used to convince the public of the horrors of the Nazi regime. It was also found that Americans had divided opinions in the beginning. Some supported intervention following Franklin D. Roosevelt who believed Nazism as a serious threat, the others who supported the isolationist politicians namely Burton Wheeler, Robert Taft, Gerald Nye, Charles Beard and Harry Elmer Barnes dismissed the threat.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, showed a paradigmatic shift in the function and goal of alternate histories written in America. Since this watershed event in American history, those who bore the tension and stress agreed with Roosevelt to intervene in the war. Hendrik Wilhelm Van Loon's novel *Invasion* and Fred Allhoff's serialized novel *Lightning in the Night* that appear in the magazine 'Liberty' in thirteen instalments between August 24, 1940 and November 16, 1940 embody this function. These novels warned the readers about the serious threats posed by the Nazis on the U.S. By dramatizing the dangers, it reminded the need for intervention. It was during this period that the novel *Swastika Night* (1937), published in Great Britain, this novel was written by Katherine Burdekin who wrote under the pseudonym Murray Constantine. The novel was the first one in Britain that depict Nazi victory. The novel too shared the people's anxiety and fear over the Nazi rule and thus reminded of the necessity of fighting against the Germans. The alternate histories that appeared in Britain and America during the war encouraged each nation's role in the war and hence shared the same experiences of horror under Nazi victory winning the support of the people there and imparted unity in the fight against Nazism. At the same time, it is worth to be noted that Britain used alternate histories as a way to criticize themselves in the early war years itself. *Loss of Eden: A Cautionary Tale* is a paradigm through which they drew the attention of the public with its subtle self- criticism at the disloyalty of some treasonous Britons. The novel is written by the British journalists Douglas Brown and Christopher Serpell. It was later republished in under the title *If Hitler Comes.* The novel neither portrayed the Britons as innocent nor heroic but unravels the internal betrayal as the sole reason for their defeat.

Alternate histories written during the early post war years exemplified the nature of presentism inherent in the genre. Despite the victory, few alternate histories appeared in America during this period. Cold war fears overwhelmed the Americans, and they were much concerned with communism and the Soviet Union. The alternate histories that appeared in Britain and America during the early decades of the post war period differed in their functions because of these reasons. While cold war fears and anxieties affected the US's jubilance, Britons were self-confident with their domestic achievements, such as social welfare programs and foreign policies, which made them content with the early postwar world. When the war time alternate histories of Britain cautioned the dangers of Nazi rule, their post war alternate histories valorised Britons and had a self-congratulatory tone. Noel Coward's play *Peace in Our Time* and John W. Wall's *The Sound of His Horn* were written with this purpose. Since the Americans were, at this time, pre occupied with their fears of communism the decade witnessed certain future narratives like *The World Aflame: The Russian- American War of 1950* by Leonard Engel and Emmanuel S; Cyril M. Kornblut's *Not This August* (1955), and Pat Frank's *Alas Babylon*. All these novels discussed the Russians attack on America with nuclear bombs that eventually led to a catastrophic Third World War.

Revived international interest toward the Third Reich and Germany's Nazi past shifted in the early 1960s. The unexpected appearance of neo-Nazi hooliganism in the Federal Republic in 1959 and the capture and subsequent trial of fugitive Nazi SS officer Adolf Eichmann in 1960–1961 revived interest in the Nazi past. Moreover, the eruption of the Berlin crisis and the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 escalated interest. At this time, alternate histories of America and Britain showed enthusiasm for vindicating their role in World War II. It was pursued with moral claims, mainly to preserve Nazi crimes in memory. The first attempt in America of this kind was by a science fiction writer; Cyril M. Kornbluth whose short story entitled "Two Dooms" (1958) served the function. According to this short story, America failed in World War II because it failed to develop the atomic bomb on time. The story begins with an American nuclear scientist named Edward Royland, who is painstakingly engaged in the task of developing a nuclear bomb. At one stage, he feels dissatisfied with his project and happens to see his old friend, a medicine man who provides him with some hallucinogenic mushrooms that send him off into an alternate future after 150 years in which the Nazis had won World War II. The novel focuses on America's effort to develop the atomic bomb and brings the horrors of life in the Japanese-occupied America than the brutalities of the German

occupation. The invaded places are shown as ravaged under the feudal samurai overlords, and the function of alternate histories in vindicating their intervention is justified. The novel reminds the necessity and tells that the invention of nuclear bombs saved the people of America from the brutalities of the Japanese invasion. Thus, it attempts to avoid the guilt of the nuclear holocaust. William L. Shirer's *If Hitler Had Won World War II* and *The Ultimate Solution* by Eric Nordenare attempts to vindicate the intervention. This period witnessed another watershed in the form of *The Man in the High Castle* by Philip K. Dick.

This justification shifted to the normalisation of the Nazi period in the following decade. That is, the congratulatory alternate histories of the past changed course to become self-critiquing alternate histories. This transition showed the anxieties and fears regarding that period. Normalisation and self-critiquing alternate fiction appeared in the entire history of America only in the 1970s and 1980s. The 1970s witnessed some unprecedented events in America, including economic decline and cultural despair, followed by the Watergate scandal and the expulsion of an American president from office. In addition, American citizens' repulsion toward the Vietnam War, economic malaise due to the oil crisis, and economic and social struggles fuelled discontent toward the system. Though the Vietnam War came to an end in1975 it sowed the seeds of social and environmental problems on the ground. The social, political, and economic crises and the failure of foreign policies instilled uncertainty and pessimism among the people. This social unrest and economic malaise manifested in the alternate histories of the period, leading the genre to a new tone and function–from valorisation to critique. With these alternate histories, critiquing and questioning intervention began. It conveyed a new observation that Germany has never posed a threat to the United States and began to normalise Nazi rule. The presentist nature of the genre is visible in the theme and tone of the narrative.

Alternate histories at the end of the Cold War in 1989 again shifted from this function by critiquing the real period. The fall of the Soviet Union and communism was, of course, a joyous event for Americans, and hence it encouraged a rather optimistic portrayal of their intervention, apart from those that appeared in the 1970s. The triumph of the U.S. again attracted many and bolstered patriotic feelings; therefore, there was a revival of depicting Nazi rule with all its hostilities, which was received well by readers. With the bestselling novels, such as Stephen Ambrose's *Band of Brothers* and Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation*, the glorification of their intervention retained its momentum. However, many displayed growing concerns about the present, which was suffering from the eruption of the Persian Gulf War

and the Yugoslav Civil War. However, it did not capture much attention because the expulsion of their traditional enemy was so pleasing and hopeful to them.

Thus, throughout the history of American alternate histories, the function, goals, and motives have played a significant role in its theme, depiction, and tone. When the wartime narratives attempted to gather support for the intervention by reminding the people about the treacherous effects of fanatical Nazism, postwar narratives valorised their intervention. In both narratives, we see a dystopian or nightmarish portrayal of the German occupation. However, when the Cold War fears engulfed the American people, they remained silent about the Nazi victory for a short while. Thus, for a short period, America did not see Nazi victory-oriented alternate histories. On the contrary, they began speculating about alternate histories in which Russians attacked America with their nuclear weapons. However, when America faced many setbacks along with communist fears, they, for the first time, started criticising their stance at World War II. This time, they perceived isolation would have been a better option because it would have made the Germans victorious, who would have defeated the Russians in turn. With the fall of the Soviet Union, American alternate histories again went back to the earlier track of viewing the Nazi victory as bringing evil to the earth. Thus, the presentism of the American and British alternate histories is very explicit in their different themes and portrayals.

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Beyond the Meal: Table Conversations and Family Dynamics in *Kumbalangi Nights* and *Dil Dhadakne Do*

Namitha Elsa Varghese

Abstract

Films are complex artistic texts that employ a multitude of elements to create meaning, evoke emotions, and portray the intricacies of human life. Among these elements, everyday objects and settings often hold deeper symbolic significance beyond their immediate utility. The dining table is one such setting that in many films becomes a site for revealing hidden emotions, asserting power structures, and exposing family dynamics. Dinner table conversations, in particular, transcend their mundane function of sharing meals to emerge as powerful narrative devices that shape relationships and drive the story forward. This article throws light on dinner table conversations in films, with a particular focus on Kumbalangi Nights (2019) and Dil Dhadakne Do (2015), to explore how these conversations alter the dynamics within a family or a group of people. By analysing these films, the article delves into the multifaceted role of dinner table conversations in cinema, examining how they not only shape relationships but also signify underlying dysfunctionality within families. It highlights how table conversations transcend the act of eating to become powerful narrative devices that reveal power structures, expose hidden tensions, and drive character transformation, thereby enriching the thematic and emotional depth of cinematic storytelling.

Keywords: Identity, power, space

Film is more than a sequence of moving images projected onto a screen; it is a powerful art form that integrates various macro and micro elements to transport viewers to different worlds, evoke complex emotions, and challenge existing perspectives. The interplay of these elements imbues a film with life and meaning. Objects from everyday life, in particular, acquire multifaceted functions within cinematic narratives. While they may serve merely as props within the mise-en-scène, they often transcend their utilitarian purpose to emerge as symbols that convey deeper thematic and emotional significances. "Objects are signs that represent ideas and ideals and translate intended meaning into a film." (Gambarato 106) They are specially chosen to translate a character's interior state of mind or the filmmaker's aesthetic or ethical commitment to narrative concepts. An object is more than its colour, shape, texture,

material, and functionality. It is reason, ideology, context, emotion, and sensation; above all, it is a vehicle for communicating several ideas. "Just as a story, an object is a text, a way of exhibiting shapes, and a vehicle for the transmission of meanings" (Glassie 46). For this reason, they provide an interpretative gaze to the film. One such object is the table and the activities surrounding it, which convey a variety of meanings.

Table conversations function as vital nutrients for any social structure or organisation, facilitating communication, negotiation, and relational bonding. Dinner table conversations, in particular, constitute a substantial component of the dynamics of a family or group of people. Historically, significant political decisions, such as India's independence, were deliberated upon in settings like the Round Table Conferences, highlighting the symbolic and practical importance of such conversational spaces. In cinematic narratives, conversations around a meal similarly serve to expose intricate family dynamics, romantic tensions, and underlying conflicts among characters. Table conversations thus hold significant narrative value in films, as they are employed not only for character analysis and exposition but also as an effective device to bring multiple characters into a single cohesive setting, thereby advancing the plot and deepening thematic exploration. Dinner table scenes are goldmines for filmmakers. The dinner table, a seemingly mundane setting in film, is transformed into a stage for powerful moments. Beyond the act of consuming food, conversations that unfold around the dinner table become microcosms of the characters lives, relationships, and the film's themes. Filmmakers leverage the intimacy and vulnerability inherent in shared meals to reveal character dynamics.

The film *Kumbalangi Nights*, directed by Madhu C. Narayanan, centres on a dysfunctional family comprising four brothers. In contrast, it also portrays another family that aligns with the accepted social constructs of domesticity and order. In contrast, the film also portrays another family that aligns with accepted social constructs of domesticity and order. The film traces the journeys of these two families, presenting all the elements characteristic of a happy family saga, while simultaneously offering a powerful subtextual critique of familial structures and masculinity. The film employs dining tables as significant narrative devices to symbolise the transformational journeys of its characters. In one of the opening scenes, a table is shown with cooked food kept unattended. The emptiness of the dining table in this scene reflects the emptiness of their brotherhood, underscoring their dysfunctional relationships. The emptiness of the dining table in this scene reflects the emptiness of their brotherhood,

underscoring their dysfunctional relationships. Though they share a common roof, they remain disconnected, devoid of familial bonds. Conversely, the character Shammi is introduced as a mysterious figure embodying the notions of "a complete man" within traditional societal expectations. He upholds a conventional domestic structure where men are seen as providers and heads of households, occupying positions of power and respect through stable jobs or businesses. Shammi perceives himself as the rightful patriarch in the family he marries into. This is evident in an early dining table scene where his wife's uncle, Baby, cooks his signature dish to welcome the newlyweds. When Uncle Baby fondly mentions their similarities, Shammi dismisses the comparison with visible contempt, taking pride in his ability to earn and mocking Baby's lack of stable employment. This scene clearly reveals Shammi's patriarchal ideology and disdain for non-conforming masculinities.

Furthermore, the film conveys power dynamics within the household through subtle yet powerful visual cues, particularly in the dining table scenes. In one such instance, Shammi, who lives in his in-laws' house, pulls out the chair and positions it at the head of the table and occupies it, asserting himself as "the man" of the house. This act symbolises his desire to claim authority and reinforce traditional gender hierarchies within the domestic space. His central position at the dining table visually manifests his need for dominance and control, thereby reinforcing his patriarchal worldview.

"Close observation of food-related scenes will reveal the material significance of food and its symbolic embodiment of power. Food's symbolic power assumes a mental force that dictates thought and action within social interactions." (Ferry 13) In Indian households, an often-unnoticed problem is the obsession with sitting positions. The patriarch usually occupies the central position. The woman, assuming the role of nurturer, takes up a position where she can feed everyone. In this narrative, Shammi secretly believes that he is the powerful patriarch taking care of the three women. When Shammi is newly married, he starts by sitting in one of the side chairs at his uncle's home and at his own home. However, after spending some time in the family and witnessing the danger of insubordination, he decides to make a symbolic move. The scene captures this shift at a relaxed pace, almost like a harmless move. The shift is not just from one sitting position to another but one that recrafts family dynamics. In one of the subsequent scenes, Shammi objects to the alliance between Baby and Bobby. He mocks Bobby's family status and labels him as unqualified to share a meal with him, ultimately depicting the family as his power sanctuary. Thus, these dinner-table conversations act as a juxtaposition

of Shammi being the man of the house and how he finally subverts the entire family balance with his psychotic behaviour. In this film, these dinner tables are silent witnesses to the changing dynamics of both families. The long-forgotten tea cups hidden on the shelves of Saji's house finally emerge. This signifies a heartwarming reversal. By the end of the film, the members of Saji's family gather for meals together, contrary to the initial frame of an empty table. The table is now brimming with people, conversations, and a positive disposition.

In Zoya Akhtar's film Dil Dhadakne Do, the positioning of characters around a meal table, the direction of their gaze, the camera angles, the use of space, symmetry, and objects become echoes of the relationship dynamics of the characters more effectively than dialogues. In the film, conversations often revolve around formalities and pleasantries rather than genuine emotional connections among the characters or family members. There are discussions in the film focusing on the extravagant itinerary of the cruise and superficial praise for the food, avoiding deeper issues. This suggests a lack of communication among family members, which is a sign of a dysfunctional family. Underneath the politeness, there are often veiled criticisms and jabs disguised as jokes in the film. For instance, the character Kamal makes a seemingly light-hearted comment about Kabir's lack of career success, despite his unwillingness toward family business. He often avoids dining with his wife Neelam, even after her compulsion, due to his attraction to another woman during their journey on the cruise. This hints at his extramarital relationships under the guise of business trips. His wife and children are aware of these relationships, which clearly portrays the dysfunctionality of the family hidden under the norms of a happy family in society.

"The individual's role in the family group comes to be clearly defined around the family table. Since the entire family is together, relationships between individual members are brought out into the open. Feuding members are seated on opposite sides of the table." (Bossard 297) The long dining table in the house of the Mehra family symbolises the distance and the communication gap between the family members. The finesse of the portrayal of the table is a clear representation of their family and the hollowness of the bond that they share. Kabir and his wife, Neelam, sit on opposite sides of the dining table. This clearly symbolises their failure to understand each other and the lack of a healthy communication. The mother-in-law of Ayesha sarcastically comments on Ayesha's job as an independent businesswoman during a conversation at the dinner table. Ayesha's mother-in-law wants her to be a typical housewife or a patriarchal woman. Even when Ayesha explains her need to get divorced from Manav,

her parents clearly warn her about their image in society rather than confronting the issue. These instances clearly highlight how the luxury setting of the dining table stands in stark contrast to the family dynamics and thought processes of Mehra as well as the Sangha household. There are even moments of awkward silence around the dining table that highlight the emotional distance between the family members. These silences can be more revealing than spoken words, showcasing a lack of ease and comfort in communication, as suggested by James H.S. Bossard. Bossard. Bossard. Bossard. "Even silences in table talk are an important part of its art." (297). Certain topics, like business failures or Ayesha's independent choices, spark heated arguments during meals. These arguments expose the simmering resentment and frustration within the family. This unevenness between the family members eventually leads to a number of events that make them rethink their family unity. By using dinner table conversations as a tool, *Dil Dhadakne Do* portrays a dysfunctional family that is struggling to communicate effectively and navigate their emotional baggage.

Dinner table conversations in films such as *Kumbalangi Nights* and *Dil Dhadakne Do* serve as powerful narrative devices that transcend the mundane act of eating. They become windows into the characters' souls, exposing hidden truths, igniting conflicts, facilitating healing, and driving the narrative forward. In *Kumbalangi Nights*, the dining table mirrors both the emptiness of familial bonds among the brothers and the patriarchal assertion of Shammi, ultimately symbolising the transformation of relationships and the reclamation of family unity. Conversely, in *Dil Dhadakne Do*, the dinner table epitomises emotional distance and dysfunctional communication beneath the polished veneer of a successful family.

Dinner-table conversations in films reveal the complexities of power, identity, and human connection within domestic spaces. By harnessing the power of shared meals, filmmakers create profound moments that resonate with audiences long after the credits roll. As a result, viewers' understanding and appreciation of films such as *Kumbalangi Nights* and *Dil Dhadakne Do* are significantly enhanced when they analyse seemingly insignificant elements, such as the table and the conversations surrounding it. These scenes, in their subtlety, become critical sites of meaning-making, offering deeper insights into the lived realities, tensions, and transformations of the characters portrayed.

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Nature as Narrative: Postcolonial Ecopoetics in Shani *Mootoo's He Drown She in the Sea*

Roopa Jose & Dr. P. Asha

Abstract

This study examines how Shani Mootoo's novel He Drown She in the Sea employs ecopoetic strategies to explore identity formation and cultural displacement in postcolonial Caribbean contexts. Through textual analysis, this study demonstrates how the natural elements presented in the text – gardens, seas, and island landscapes – function as active narrative agents rather than passive settings. The research reveals how Mootoo posits environmental spaces as repositories of memory and catalysts for character transformation. The findings suggest that ecopoetic approaches in Caribbean literature offer new frameworks for understanding the relationship between place, identity, and belonging in postcolonial contexts.

Keywords: Postcolonial ecocriticism, Caribbean literature, Identity formation, Environmental narrative, Place and belonging

Introduction

Shani Mootoo's, *He Drown She in the Sea* presents a narrative framework where environmental elements serve as primary mediators of identity and cultural memory. The novel chronicles Harry St. George's relationship with Rose Sangster against the backdrop of the fictional Caribbean Island of Guanagaspar, exploring how natural landscapes actively participate in character development and thematic expression. This study argues that Mootoo employs ecopoetic strategies to demonstrate how postcolonial subjects construct meaning through environmental relationships, challenging traditional boundaries between nature and culture.

The significance of this approach lies in its contribution to postcolonial ecocriticism, particularly in Caribbean literary contexts, where landscapes bear historical imprints of colonial transformation. Recent scholarship has increasingly recognized the importance of environmental perspectives in postcolonial literature, with scholars like Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin arguing that "postcolonial ecocriticism emerges from the recognition that environmental and colonial issues are inextricably linked" (Huggan and Tiffin 12). Similarly, Elizabeth DeLoughrey

and George Handley have noted that Caribbean environmental literature often uses "the environment as a means of recovering what has been lost or repressed in official histories" (DeLoughrey and Handley 23).

This study extends these discussions by examining how specific ecopoetic techniques function as narrative strategies for exploring displacement, memory, and identity formation. It employs close textual analysis to demonstrate how Mootoo integrates environmental consciousness with aesthetic expression, creating environmental storytelling that reveals the complex relationships between people and place in postcolonial Caribbean contexts.

Literature Review

Postcolonial ecocriticism has emerged as a significant theoretical framework for understanding how environmental and cultural concerns intersect in colonial and postcolonial contexts. The field recognises that nature is never neutral in postcolonial settings but carries traces of historical transformation and cultural memory (Huggan and Tiffin 5). This approach has proven particularly relevant for Caribbean literary studies in which landscapes have been fundamentally altered by colonial interventions.

Contemporary scholarship in Caribbean environmental literature has established several key frameworks for understanding how writers engage with transformed landscapes. DeLoughrey and Handley have observed that Caribbean writers often treat environmental spaces as "repositories of cultural memory, holding stories that might otherwise be forgotten" (DeLoughrey and Handley 45). This perspective aligns with broader developments in ecocriticism that emphasise the cultural construction of nature and the ways in which environmental spaces carry historical and social significance.

The concept of Ecopoetics, as developed by scholars such as Kate Rigby, involves writing practices that integrate environmental consciousness with aesthetic expression. Rigby argues that ecopoetic approaches allow writers to "explore how cultural histories are embedded in landscapes while simultaneously imagining new forms of environmental relationship" (Rigby 428). In post-colonial contexts, this becomes particularly significant as writers must navigate both the beauty and trauma of transformed landscapes.

Recent studies of Caribbean women writers have highlighted the function of environmental themes in their work. Sarah Phillips Casteel's research on "New World Pastoral" demonstrates

how Caribbean writers use garden imagery to explore questions of "emplacement" and cultural adaptation (Casteel 15). Similarly, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert's work on "Creole Religiosity" in Caribbean environmental literature reveals how natural spaces serve as sites for cultural memory and spiritual practice (Paravisini-Gebert 185).

The intersection of memory studies and environmental criticism has also proven relevant for understanding Caribbean literature. Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" provides a framework for understanding how environmental degradation affects communities over time, while also highlighting the ways writers can make invisible environmental impacts visible through literary representation (Nixon 2). This approach offers insights into how Caribbean writers address both historical and contemporary environmental challenges.

Specific scholarship on Shani Mootoo's work has begun to explore these environmental dimensions. Jeanie Warnock's analysis of trauma and witnessing in Mootoo's fiction provides a foundation for understanding how environmental elements function in her narrative strategies (Warnock 275). However, a sustained analysis of ecopoetic techniques in *He Drown She in the Sea* remains limited, creating space for the current study's contribution.

Discussion and Analysis

Mootoo's ecopoetic approach in *He Drown She in the Sea* operates through several key strategies that integrate environmental elements into the novel's exploration of identity and belonging. The most significant of these involve the treatment of island geography as a social text, the sea as an emotional repository, gardens as cultural practice, and natural spaces as witnesses to memory and trauma.

Mootoo establishes Guanapas's physical geography as inseparable from its social stratification, creating what might be termed environmental storytelling in which landscape features convey historical and social information. This approach aligns with what Donna Landry describes as "the politics of place" in postcolonial writing, where "landscapes function as archives of colonial violence and resistance" (Landry 67). The spatial arrangement of the Sangster estate above the town reflects colonial plantation hierarchies that continue to influence contemporary relationships. The novel's opening description positions the Sangster house as "sitting on a rise that seemed to float above the rest of the island, its white walls catching the light while the town below remained in shadow" (Mootoo 7). This spatial organisation

immediately establishes how elevation corresponds to social position, with the estate's elevated position reflecting the spatial organisation of the colonial plantation system.

The topography of the island becomes a readable text that reveals power structures and cultural relationships. When Harry navigates these spaces, his movement through the physical landscape simultaneously represents his negotiation of social boundaries and class limitations. The novel describes how "the hills were as beautiful as ever, covered in immortelle and poui, but Harry could not forget that these were the same hills he had been warned not to climb as a child, the same paths that led to houses where he was not welcome" (Mootoo 89). This passage reveals how natural beauty and social exclusion are intertwined in Harry's experience, making the landscape both aesthetically pleasing and emotionally painful.

The novel's treatment of botanical elements reinforces this environmental storytelling approach. References to specific Caribbean plants – immortelle, poui, bougainvillea, breadfruit, and mango – carry cultural significance beyond their decorative function. These plants serve as markers of place and memory, connecting characters to specific locations and experiences while also indicating the island's colonial and postcolonial transformations. For instance, the breadfruit tree behind Harry's childhood home represents not just nourishment but also maternal care and the security of home: "The breadfruit tree had been his mother's pride, its broad leaves providing shade for her laundry lines, its fruit feeding the family during the lean months" (Mootoo 134). As Glissant notes in Caribbean Discourse, such indigenous flora becomes "a marker of cultural authenticity and resistance to colonial impositions" (Glissant 123), serving as both practical and symbolic anchors for Caribbean identity.

The Caribbean Sea functions as the novel's central environmental character, serving multiple symbolic and practical functions that demonstrate Mootoo's ecopoetic approach. The novel's title, derived from Trinidadian dialect, suggests the sea's role as both a creative and destructive force, capable of overwhelming love and transformation. This linguistic ambiguity reflects the sea's complex significance in Caribbean cultural contexts, where it represents both connection and separation, beauty and trauma.

For Harry, the sea serves as a repository of personal and cultural memories, triggering involuntary memories through its sensory qualities. The novel describes how "the sound of the waves against the jetty was exactly as he remembered it from his childhood, the same rhythm that had lulled him to sleep as a boy, and the same salt spray that had dried on his skin after

long days of swimming. But now the sound carried other memories too – the whisper of Rose's voice as they lay on the hidden beach, the splash of her body as she dove into the water' (Mootoo 23). This passage demonstrates how environmental sounds function as powerful mnemonic devices that connect past and present experiences.

The sea also functions as a space for social transformation, temporarily dissolving the class hierarchies that structure island life. When Harry and Rose enter the water together, their differences temporarily dissolve: "In the water, the differences between them seemed to dissolve. Rose's expensive clothes lay forgotten on the beach, and Harry's consciousness of his place in the island's hierarchy disappeared beneath the waves. In the sea, they were simply two bodies moving through blue space, equal in their vulnerability to the current" (Mootoo 156). This temporary equality suggests the sea's capacity to create alternative social spaces outside normal hierarchical structures. Derek Walcott's concept of the "sea as democratic space" in Caribbean literature supports this reading, arguing that "the ocean provides a realm where colonial hierarchies dissolve into shared humanity" (Walcott 156).

The novel's treatment of swimming and diving further develops the role of the sea as an agent of transformation. For both characters, entering the sea represents a form of liberation from social constraints, enabling them to access different aspects of their identity. The sea has become a space where personal and cultural transformations can occur, reflecting broader themes about the possibility of change and adaptation in postcolonial contexts.

Mootoo presents gardening as a practice that connects characters to cultural heritage while enabling adaptation to new circumstances. The novel contrasts different gardening approaches to explore varying relationships between people and the environment, revealing how these practices reflect broader cultural values and social positions.

Harry's mother's practical garden integrates beauty with survival, combining "hot peppers and tomatoes alongside marigolds and four o'clock, the vegetables providing food for the table, the flowers offering colour and protection from insects. It was a garden that knew its purpose, every plant earning its place through usefulness or beauty" (Mootoo 45). This integration reflects a holistic worldview that refuses to separate aesthetic pleasure from practical necessity, suggesting an approach to environmental relationships that values both beauty and function.

In contrast, the Sangster estate's formal gardens represent colonial attitudes toward nature as something to be controlled and displayed. These gardens feature "elaborate beds of imported roses that required constant care, lawns that stayed green through the dry season only because of constant watering, hedges clipped into unnatural shapes that bore no resemblance to how plants grew in the wild' (Mootoo 78). The emphasis on imported plants and artificial forms suggests an aesthetic that values domination over cooperation with natural processes, reflecting broader colonial attitudes toward environmental control. This dichotomy resonates with Jamaica Kincaid's observation in My Garden (Book): that "the colonial garden becomes a site of power where European aesthetics impose themselves on tropical landscapes, creating artificial environments that deny local ecological wisdom' (Kincaid 78).

Harry's gardening practice in Toronto represents a third approach, involving the cultivation of tropical plants in northern climates. This transnational gardening reflects the challenges of cultural maintenance in diasporic contexts. The novel describes how, "in the Toronto greenhouse, Harry coaxed his tropical plants through the alien seasons, providing artificial heat and light to sustain species that had never known winter. The hibiscus bloomed, but the flowers were pale compared to their Guanagaspar counterparts, larger but somehow less intense, as if the Canadian soil had diluted their essential character" (Mootoo 189). This altered appearance mirrors the transformations that occur in cultural practices when transplanted to new environments.

The marigolds Harry cultivates "in memory of his mother" provide another example of how gardening serves as a cultural memory practice. These flowers "grew with startling vigour, producing blooms twice the size of their Caribbean cousins. But they smelled different – earthier, less sweet – as if the Canadian soil had changed their essential nature" (Mootoo 201). This transformation suggests that meaningful connections to place and culture can survive displacement, even if they take new forms.

The novel presents natural environments as repositories of human memory and experience, with specific locations charged with emotional significance. This approach demonstrates how Mootoo's ecopoetic strategies create spaces that hold traces of past events and continue to influence present circumstances.

The hidden beach where Harry and Rose conducted their teenage romance exemplifies this function: "The beach was exactly as he remembered it – the same curve of sand, the same

sea grapes hanging over the rocks, the same sense of being hidden from the world. But now it felt haunted, filled with the ghosts of their younger selves" (Mootoo 167). The beach's capacity to feel "haunted" reflects a worldview that sees nature and culture as deeply interconnected, in which human emotions and experiences become embedded in physical landscapes.

The novel also explores how environmental spaces can hold traumatic memories, particularly those related to colonial history. Descriptions of abandoned sugar estates reveal how landscapes bear witness to historical violence: "The sugar estate had been abandoned for decades, but its ruins still dominated the valley – the great house crumbling on its hill, the mill's stone wheel overgrown with vines, the workers' quarters collapsed into piles of stone and wood. The immortelle trees that had once provided shade for the cane fields now grew wild, their bright flowers a beautiful mask over the violence that had once occurred here" (Mootoo 156). The persistence of these ruins suggests that landscapes retain traces of past trauma, even when specific events are no longer visible.

This environmental witnessing function extends to more personal forms of memory. The breadfruit tree that witnesses Harry's mother's death continues to mark time through its seasonal cycles: "The breadfruit tree had been blooming when his mother died, its heavy flowers filling the air with their sweet scent. Now, returning to the tree years later, Harry could still smell that sweetness, still associate the tree's bloom with the particular grief of that time" (Mootoo 198). The tree's continued presence provides a form of continuity that human memory alone cannot sustain.

Conclusion

Shani Mootoo's, *He Drown She in the Sea* demonstrates how ecopoetic approaches can illuminate identity formation and cultural transformation in postcolonial contexts. By integrating environmental elements into the narrative structure, the novel reveals landscapes as active participants in human experience rather than passive backdrops. The treatment of island geography as a social text, the sea as an emotional repository, gardens as cultural practice, and natural spaces as witnesses to memory creates a narrative logic specific to Caribbean environments but broadly relevant to contemporary displacement and cultural change.

Mootoo's ecopoetic strategies make significant contributions to postcolonial literary studies by showing how environmental elements function as primary narrative agents with

both aesthetic and political significance. The novel reveals how postcolonial subjects construct meaning through environmental relationships, challenging traditional nature-culture boundaries and providing models for understanding cultural survival and transformation in diasporic contexts.

This analysis contributes to postcolonial ecocriticism by demonstrating how specific literary techniques integrate environmental and cultural concerns. The findings suggest that ecopoetic approaches offer valuable frameworks for understanding how postcolonial subjects navigate the relationships between place, memory, and belonging in increasingly globalised contexts. Future research could examine similar strategies in other Caribbean writers or explore how these techniques function in different postcolonial contexts.

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From Glory to Grace: The Evolution of Masculinity in Classical and Contemporary Patroclus

Dr. Sonia Sebastian and Aleena Praveen

Abstract

Mythology has long played a vital role in art and literature, and contemporary authors often reimagine ancient tales to challenge historical norms. A growing trend in modern literature is the reinterpretation of myths through feminist and queer perspectives. By retelling the Trojan War from the perspective of Patroclus – a marginal figure in Homer's Iliad – Miller, in her debut novel, The Song of Achilles critiques the patriarchal and exclusionary ideologies of the original epic and their lingering impact on modern society. This paper explores the emergence of a new masculinity embodied by Patroclus, one that redefines heroism and strength. Through close analysis of Patroclus, Achilles, Agamemnon, and Pyrrhus, and drawing on Lynne Segal's Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men, it examines the narrative's complex portrayal of evolving masculinities.

Key words: *New Masculinity, Hegemonic Masculinity, Queer, Counter Narrative, Myth Reappropriation*

In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in the portrayal of masculinity in literature, particularly in adaptations of mythological stories. Raewyn Connell highlights in her introduction to the third edition of Lynne Segal's *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* that in the 1990s there was a growing interest in exploring masculinity. Researchers were uncovering how economic and social influences were reshaping the concept of masculinity, revealing "images of 'softer' aspects of 'masculinity,' . . . alongside more positive backing for notions of new, more engaged fathering" (18). Segal's research examines the impact of popular culture on society, particularly in relation to masculinity, as most people considered this development a crisis. As Segal quotes in *Men after Feminism: What's Left to Say?* psychiatrist William Pollack argues that "men are 'in a desperate crisis' because they are still trying to conform to rigid, now outmoded, codes of traditional manhood" (19).

Traditionally, masculinity has been associated with traits such as physical strength, dominance, and aggression. However, with the redefinition of femininity, masculinity is viewed

in a new light. Contemporary literature challenges the old stereotypes related to masculinity by presenting a more nuanced representation of what it means to be a man. This chapter evaluates how the character of Patroclus from *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller offers a refined and complex adaptation of the original character from Homer's *Iliad* by embodying new masculine qualities.

Since the development of queer and gender studies and the emergence of the LGBTQ+ movement in the 1960s, which have widely influenced societal norms, modern writers have reimagined the hero of the *Iliad* in a fresh light. Madeline Miller is among these authors. In her novel, *The Song of Achilles*, she presents Patroclus, Achilles' closest friend and beloved companion, as the narrator of the story, revealing the hero's most sensible and vulnerable qualities. This perspective presents Achilles not only as the greatest of the Greeks but also as a loving partner.

The Song of Achilles is Miller's first novel, which was awarded the 2012 Orange Prize for Fiction. In her reimagining of Homer's *Iliad*, Miller goes beyond the war narrative to delve into Achilles' life before the conflict and his profound connection with Patroclus. While Patroclus is typically a minor character in the traditional *Iliad*, his relationship with Achilles is extremely passionate, as evidenced by his death being the greatest pain in Achilles' life. Miller explores this relationship in her novel through Patroclus' point of view. Through this resourceful change of perspective, Miller deepens the homoerotic relationship between Achilles and Patroclus.

Miller portrays Patroclus' challenges in conforming to the masculine standards of his time through his interactions with male characters, starting with his father. "Quickly, I became a disappointment: small, slight. I was not fast. I was not strong. I could not sing" (1). As McLean states, "Masculinity is often most clearly defined in terms of what it is not—what it is afraid of being—and what men most definitely are not is women. Men are men because they don't cry, don't feel, and don't need" (84). In the *Iliad*, Achilles compares Patroclus with a little girl who cries for her mother when the latter is crying for his fellow soldiers. "Why in tears, Patroclus? / Like a girl, a baby running after her mother" (Homer, bk. 16, line 7-8). Thus, in the *Iliad* as well as Miller's retelling, Patroclus' character does not fit the expected behaviour of a traditional male.

In the *Iliad*, there are only suggestions of Achilles' and Patroclus' mutual love or, rather, close friendship. In contrast, Miller portrays Achilles and Patroclus as inseparable companions whose bond shapes their existence. She has adapted not only the *Iliad* but also previous and following events chronicled by other ancient Greek literary sources to craft this romantic narrative that spans Achilles' and Patroclus' early years to their tragic end. Miller's narration is therefore a bit more extended than Homer's original work. She has also modified the myth and added new elements to the story. For example, Thetis displays a different personality from that in the *Iliad*. While she is a caring mother who will do anything for her son in the *Iliad,* she can be considered the antagonist of the star-crossed lovers in *The Song of Achilles.*

While Achilles, due to his sexuality and relationship with Patroclus, shows no interest in women and does not intervene when female slaves are exploited as 'war trophies,' Patroclus is disturbed by the sexual violence inflicted upon them. He reflects on the plight of these women throughout the novel, noting their subservient roles as "spear-wives and bed slaves" (214). Patroclus' attachment to slave girls is already present in Homer's original work. He presents himself in a much gentler manner toward them, and Briseis' is devastated by his death: "So now I mourn your death – I will never stop – /You were always kind" (Homer, bk. 19, lines 355-56). However, in the *Iliad*, Patroclus still did not go a step further to help them. In Miller's novel, he does take that step. He even attempts to protect them by suggesting that they be taken as war prizes by Achilles to shield them from the abuse by other soldiers, a gesture perceived as a sign of weakness by other male characters.

> At night, they served in other ways, and I cringed at the cries that reached even our corner of the camp. I tried not to think of their burnt villages and dead fathers, but it was difficult to banish. The raids were branded on every one of the girls' faces, large smears of grief that kept their eyes as wobbling and sloppy as the buckets that swung into their legs. And bruises too, from fists or elbows, and sometimes perfect circles—spear butts, to the forehead or temple. I could barely watch these girls as they stumbled into camp to be parcelled off. I sent Achilles out to ask for them, to seek as many as he could. (218-219)

In *The Song of Achilles*, Patroclus stands out as a character embodying reason and goodness amidst a backdrop of male characters driven by violence, anger, and revenge. Patroclus' kindness is particularly evident in his empathy toward Briseis and Deidameia, a sentiment lacking in other men, including Achilles. Achilles' and Briseis' dynamic in Miller's story differ significantly from the portrayal in the original poem. In the *Iliad*, Briseis is in love

with Achilles, who takes care of her and sleeps with her. But in Miller's retelling, Achilles does not harbour romantic feelings for Briseis, he rather feels indifferent towards her and it is Patroclus who persuades Achilles to care for her out of compassion and to shield her from potential harm. Briseis forms a close friendship with Patroclus and ultimately falls in love with him, not Achilles. Following Patroclus' death, Briseis expresses her disdain toward Achilles.

"You care more for him in death than in life." Her voice was bitter with grief. "How could you have let him go? You knew he could not fight!"

Achilles screams, and shatters a serving bowl. "Get out!"

Briséis does not flinch. "Kill me. It will not bring him back. He was worth ten of you. Ten! And you sent him to his death!" (323)

Achilles displays a similar indifferent attitude towards Princess Deidameia throughout his interaction with her, even after knowing she is bearing his child. Deidameia is devastated when Achilles is about to leave for the battle along with Patroclus, abandoning her. In anger and jealousy, she strikes Patroclus and attempts to humiliate him, blaming him for her misfortune. Patroclus, however, treats Deidameia with empathy and apologises to her, which causes her to break down into tears. He consoles her and eventually makes love to her as per her wish. "I'm sorry," I said again. I had nothing better to say. He did not love her; he never would. As if she heard my thoughts, her face crumpled. Her tears fell on the floor, turning the grey stone black, drop by drop. (137)

In Patroclus' narrative, a key theme is his perspective on war. In Homer's *Iliad*, all men are depicted as fierce warriors driven by the pursuit of honour and glory at any cost. However, in Miller's adaptation, the portrayal of war, particularly its aftermath, is seen through the eyes of someone who is not a warrior by nature or desire. Unlike in the *Iliad*, in Miller's version, Patroclus is not skilled in combat, which is made clear from a young age, as evidenced during his time with Chiron when he demonstrates his lack of prowess in fighting. The centaur tells him honestly, "'You will never gain fame from your fighting. Is this surprising to you?'" (85)

Throughout the story, Patroclus is repeatedly reminded of his combat shortcomings; however, even when he is presented with the opportunity to learn martial skills by Chiron, he refuses and instead opts to learn medicine, a choice reflective of his compassion and desire to aid others. Under Chiron's guidance, he hopes to develop his healing skills by utilising his

knowledge to tend to the wounds of the Achaeans in Troy. Through his skills in medicine, he gains respect from not only the soldiers but also kings.

It was not just the common soldiery; in time, I came to know the kings as well. Nestor with his throat syrup, honeyed and warmed, that he wanted at the end of a day; Menelaus and the opiate he took for his headaches; Ajax's acid stomach. It moved me to see how much they trusted me, turned hopeful faces toward me for comfort; I grew to like them, no matter how difficult they were in council. (247)

This emphasis on Patroclus' role as a healer rather than a warrior serves as a contrast to the traditional portrayal of heroes in the *Iliad*. Miller makes this contrast to emphasise Patroclus' compassion and his affection for Achilles. Despite his lack of combat skills, Patroclus ultimately chooses to fight for Achilles and his army, demonstrating his bravery. He frequently puts himself at risk for the well-being of others, such as when he injures himself to protect Briseis from Agamemnon. He ensures that Agamemnon will not touch Briseis by saying, "He [Achilles] let you take her. He knows you will not resist bedding her, and this will be your downfall. She is his, won through fair service. The men will turn on you if you violate her, and the gods as well." (276). This act of self-sacrifice showcases his courage and sets him apart from other soldiers who may be motivated by anger or revenge. Patroclus' ultimate sacrifice for Achilles and the Achaeans further underscores his unique qualities as a character, driven by love and empathy rather than a desire for glory or vengeance.

Miller's novel diverges from the *Iliad* at the moment when Patroclus wears Achilles' armour and goes out to fight. In Homer's poem, Patroclus is consistently portrayed as a soldier who reaches his peak during the battle. However, in *The Song of Achilles*, he only adopts the role of a soldier in this particular instance, as wearing Achilles' armour allows him to connect with Achilles on a deeper level. Although Achilles instructs him to simply present himself to deceive the Trojans into thinking he is Achilles and then to return to the camp, Patroclus feels compelled to join the fight and empathizes with Achilles' frustration, leading him to continue fighting. It is at this moment that he truly experiences the essence of being a soldier.

Perhaps it was the armour, moulding me. Perhaps it was the years of watching him. But the position my shoulder found was not the old wobbling awkwardness. It was higher, stronger,

and in perfect balance. Before I could think about what I did, I threw a long, straight spiral into the breast of a Trojan. (312)

When Patroclus takes on the role of fighting in Achilles' name, he becomes caught up in the excitement of battle and demonstrates his skill as a fighter, highlighting the significance of his choice to refrain from fighting until that moment. Patroclus' reluctance to engage in warfare is not due to his lack of combat ability but rather stems from his deep aversion to it. As a man without a title or a need to defend his honour or kingdom, war for Patroclus signifies only death. He understands the devastation caused by war, grieving for both his fellow soldiers and the fallen Trojans, recognising that all lives are of equal value. "No man is worth more than another, wherever he is from" (283). His sorrow for his dying comrades, especially when Achilles refuses to fight, compels him to find ways to persuade Achilles to return to battle. Ultimately, this same emotion leads him to enter the battlefield disguised as Achilles.

Miller's Patroclus epitomises courage and self-sacrifice until his death, serving as the moral compass guided by his heart and compassion while others pursue power and glory. Despite his noble intentions, Patroclus grapples with the harsh realities of war, witnessing the loss of comrades, the assault of women, and the tragic consequences of a conflict fuelled by pride. Ultimately, his compassion leads to his tragic demise. "And the last image I see is of Hector, leaning seriously over me, twisting his spear inside me as if he is stirring a pot. The last thing I think is: Achilles" (319).

Even in death, Patroclus continues to show his concern for others, particularly for the well-being of humanity as a whole, as he has always been troubled by the number of lives lost in war. However, in his final moments, he reserves his thoughts for Achilles. He feels regret and anguish as he recognises the consequences of Hector killing Achilles because he is aware of the prophecy that Hector's death will precede Achilles. He acknowledges the irony of his situation, having spent years trying to prevent Achilles from killing Hector, only to inadvertently set in motion the events that lead to both their deaths. Whether he is truly responsible for these deaths or if they are part of a larger plan orchestrated by the gods, Patroclus blames himself for giving in to the allure of war and embracing the darker aspects of his nature that crave the violence and destruction that define Achilles' world.

Even after his death, Patroclus continues to serve as the narrator of the story. As a ghost, he observes and oversees Achilles and Briseis until they depart from the mortal realm.

This omnipresent role attributed to Patroclus by Miller at the end of her book offers a realistic portrayal of the concluding events depicted in Homer's poem, as well as what unfolds in Miller's interpretation – the deaths of Achilles and Briseis, and the downfall of Troy. When Odysseus attempts to persuade Pyrrhus, Achilles' son, to include Patroclus' name on their shared grave, he articulates the following words about Patroclus: "Some men gain glory after they die, while others fade. What is admired in one generation is abhorred in another." (347). This statement encapsulates the significance of Patroclus serving as the narrator of the tale. As Miller points out, "most of us aren't Achilles—but we can still be Patroclus. What does it mean to try to be an ethical person in a violent world?" (Q & A).

Historical perspectives continue to evolve. In Homer's era, admiration was reserved for god-like heroes and skilled warriors, whereas today, those who demonstrate nobility and moral integrity are celebrated. This shift underscores the significance of the sensitivity expressed through Patroclus' narrative, prompting readers to scrutinise the assigned roles of characters based on gender. Each character faced societal expectations and norms dictated by their identity and relationships. However, Patroclus challenged entrenched ideologies by daring to defy societal standards for male respectability. His sensitivity toward others, rejection of unfair gender roles, and advocacy for equality, reminiscent of Lynne Segal's principles, reshape the interpretation of Homer's poem. Patroclus' courage to love openly in a society that scorned homosexual relationships, his pursuit of equality, and his humanistic outlook on society offer hope to readers who identify with characters outside the hero archetype. Moreover, Patroclus' character, which truly embodies traits such as empathy, inclusiveness, authenticity, self-awareness, and emotional intelligence, aligns more with the current definitions of masculinity than Achilles or any other heroes. Characters like him, historically relegated to victimhood, now find a voice in modern narratives advocating for their rights.

Significant progress has also been made in terms of societal acceptance and legal rights for LGBTQ+ individuals. However, homophobia still exists, and stereotypes and discrimination persist, affecting both straight and gay men. Straight men face pressure to conform to traditional masculine norms, whereas gay men encounter stereotypes that limit their expression of masculinity or femininity. Miller's novel takes a strong stance against homophobia, highlighting how many individuals still experience exclusion in what is perceived as a modern society. It is particularly intriguing that she crafted this narrative to showcase Achilles and Patroclus' relationship as an ideal form of love to aspire to, regardless of sexual orientation.

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Probing Lefebvre's Spatial Notions in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

Shilpa Mathew

Abstract

The purpose of the research paper entitled "Probing Lefebvre's Spatial Notions in Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" is to examine the concept of space propounded by Henri Lefebvre in Arundhati Roy's novel, published in 2017. Lefebvre underscored that in human society, a space is always social in nature. Therefore, each and every place can be construed as a social space, and hence, a social product. This social space embodies a hub of human life, thriving on social relationships. Lefebvre's conception of social space as an agency of life, control, and power, and his triad spatial model comprising perceived space, conceived space, and lived space, are examined in detail. In The Ministry of Utmost Happiness, the numerous characters belonging to different geographical locales across India imply their meaningful existence and express their individuality and identity through the spaces they inhabit. Thus, the spaces discussed in the novel become a medium for articulating the voices of dissent who have been excluded from the "normal" world.

Keywords – Social space, Perceived space, Conceived space, Lived space, Dissent.

"Space" can be defined as the physical and psychological area one needs within which to live. Ian Buchanan defines space as "At once the container of everyday life (i.e., where we live) and an active agent in it (a social-acting force). It can refer to either the physical environment (built and natural) on its own or the physical environment as it is inhabited by defined groups of people, or both" (445).

Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* invites the readers for a journey across India, the most populous democracy in the world. The story unfolds in succession from the overcrowded localities of Old Delhi into the flourishing metropolis and farther, to the Valley of Kashmir and the forests of Central India. These are the primary spaces explored in the novel. The secondary spaces include the city graveyard, Khwabgah, Jannat Guest House, Jantar Mantar, Shiraz, Martyr's graveyard, and Dandakaranya.

The French Marxist sociologist Henri Lefebvre is arguably the most dominant theorist of space in the 20th century. He is best known for familiarising the thought of the conception of social space. David Emile Durkheim, the French sociologist coined the term "social space". Lefebvre emphasized that in human society, each and every space is social, which means, passing on relatively assumed places to social relations, thereby making social space, a social product. Thus, social space signifies social (human) life and embodies social relationships. It is a complex space of requirements, duties, restraints, affections, negotiations, and expectations to meet communal standards.

Lefebvre believed that social space can also function as a tool for thought and action. This produced space can perform as an agent of control and, hence, power, depending on the group of people who occupy the space. An individual can either uplift the social space into a "heaven" or degrade it into a "hades," thereby becoming the sole author of adding a purpose to the production of that space and enriching it with a meaning that defines the ambience and person.

In his magnum opus, *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre claims that "space is a social product, or an intricate social structure (based on values and the social production of meanings) which affects spatial practices and perceptions" (56). This social space, which is the outcome of social practices, interactions, activities, material conditions, norms, and regulations, plays a significant role in unveiling human experience and emotions. "The processes of its production; the embrace of the multiplicity of spaces that are socially produced and made productive in social practices; and the focus on the contradictory, conflictual and ultimately, political character of the processes of production of space" (Stanek ix) should be carefully studied to understand social (human) life.

According to Lefebvre, space should be seen as the site of ongoing social relations, rather than merely the result of such interactions; it is a process of production, not a product. Consequently, Lefebvre's triad spatial model–the perceived space, conceived space, and lived space–is proposed as an analytical tool for comprehending the concept of the production of social space. (Thrift 98)

"As Lefebvre states, perceived space represents the practical basis of the perception of the outside world" (Ernste 91). It defines the physical space out there, such as a particular location in society. "The conceived space is produced by planners to create exchange values.

It is the space of scientists, urbanists and architects" (Mee 420). Mankind plunders nature and builds up skyscrapers, thereby deforming the natural (physical) space according to their interests. "The lived space is appropriated by citizens for use values. It is also called the space of representations" (Zhang 219). It is the space where social relations take place, where we live enjoying personal freedom, and where we actively experience warmth and happiness in everyday life.

Lefebvre's distinction between perceived space, conceived space, and lived space – that is, space as we see it (but also touch it, feel it, and so on), space as we design and build it, and space as something we relate to in an emotional and effective way–captures the principal ways in which space has been conceived in the 20th century. (Buchanan 445)

"She lived in the graveyard like a tree" (3). Anjum, the protagonist of the novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, is a Hijra, a transwoman, whose individuality persuades her to build a life for herself on the margins of society (as an outcast). She chooses an unlikely place, such as a city graveyard behind a government hospital. The graveyard can be interpreted as a space we perceive and define–an isolated area, a dwelling for the dead, an abandoned place, and so on. Ziauddin, a blind imam (an abandoned soul like Anjum) befriends her and visits her often in the graveyard. Anjum's friend, Mr. D. D. Gupta, aids her in constructing a shed. Soon, she receives other visitors (her loved ones) in the graveyard, thereby changing the meaning of the space from a dwelling for the dead to an abode of the living, where people are welcomed and happiness blossoms. "Anjum's tin shack scaled up. It grew first into a hut that could accommodate a bed, and then into a small house with a little kitchen…she put in a sandstone roof supported on iron girders, which gave her a terrace on which, in the winter, she would put out a plastic chair…she surveyed the dominion of the dead." (66-67)

Anjum thus transforms the graveyard into a conceived space, the space as we design and build it. "Over time Anjum began to enclose the graves of her relatives and build rooms around them…She built a separate bathhouse and a toilet with its own septic tank. For water she used the public handpump" (67). The imam becomes a permanent guest, and she rents two rooms to destitute travellers. Thus, the graveyard is converted into the Jannat Guest House, which is a paradise for the inmates at least, when compared to the callous *duniya* (world) outside. The strange residence becomes a shelter for hijras and others who had fallen out of the "normal world"–the home of mankind where conventional norms, corruption, violence, and biases are celebrated as normalcy. Anjum, along with other hijras, earlier stayed in

"Khwabgah" (the house of dreams), where "special" people came with their dreams that could not be realised in the *duniya*; eventually, unacceptable norms practiced in that space too, smothered Anjum, and so she leaves in quest of personal freedom (a space where she can be herself) and ends up in the graveyard.

Along with another inmate of Jannat guest house- Saddam Hussain, Anjum helps Anwar Bhai, a brothel owner, in performing the funeral rites of a sex worker, Rubina, as "he could not find a bathhouse to bathe Rubina's body, a graveyard to bury her in, or an imam to say the prayers" (78) because of Rubina's nature of work, which is paradoxically, a forbidden sin and at the same time, a normalcy in *duniya*. Thus, the graveyard once again evolves into a fruitful space for the needy outcasts (living and dead alike) by functioning as a funeral parlour. Thus, the city graveyard blooms into a lived space, a space where we can connect ourselves in an emotive and effective way. "Anjum looked back at Jannat Guest House with a sense of contentment and accomplishment" (438) as she succeeded in producing a meaningful purpose in her life (despite being an outcast) and in others' as well, who were ill-treated in *duniya*. Thus, Anjum, the Hijra, creates a unique social space that is not demarcated by any differences. Anjum observes, "I am a gathering. Of everybody and nobody, of everything and nothing…Everyone's invited." (4)

"She was on the concrete pavement, in a crib of litter" (95). Another neglected human being is born into this cruel *duniya*, abandoned, disregarded, and naked. "She was wide awake, but perfectly quiet, unusual for someone so tiny. Perhaps, in those first short months of her life, she had already learned that tears, *her* tears at least, were futile" (96). Around the tiny creature, the city stretched out for miles like a ruthless gigantic monster, marked by the disastrous consequences of industrialisation. "The foggy lanes with its everyday humdrumness, its vulgarity, its unfortunate inequities, its donkeys and its minor cruelties" (147) characterise the plush boulevards of the city.

The metropolis forms the conceived space–the space as the materialistic man designed and built it for the city residents, by destroying the physical space for their vanity, gluttony, and assertion of power. "Skyscrapers and steel factories sprang up where forests used to be, rivers were bottled and sold in supermarkets, fish were tinned, mountains mined and turned into shining missiles. Massive dams lit up the cities like Christmas trees." (98).

The grim picture of the city manifests the endless battle between the powerful and powerless sections of society, for conquering more space. The poor and weaker sections are shipped out of the city, denied their rightful space in this *duniya*. Homeless people are ill-treated, fired from their jobs, and relocated to the city's industrial outskirts (perceived space), where the air is chemical and the water is poisonous–the space as the hapless perceive it, touch it, and feel it. Even though those responsible for this misfortune can perceive the pathetic condition of the poor souls in this space, they disregard it, as they are comfortable in their conceived space.

The baby is found near the old observatory (Jantar Mantar), which is located in the modern city of New Delhi. The area is occupied by "Communists, seditionists, secessionists, revolutionaries, dreamers, idlers, crackheads, crackpots, all manner of freelancers, and wise men" (101). This space is their stage, where they raise their voices "the only place in the city where they were allowed to gather" (101)–and hold fasts and hunger strikes against privatisation and corporatisation, like organising a second freedom struggle for a better world, for a corruption-free India, for a new happy *duniya*, which is a deprived common man's dream.

Jantar Mantar has become a space for the common people to associate with themselves emotionally and operationally. Thus, it serves as the lived space for individual fighters and several different groups, such as old Gandhian, "seven men with shaved heads" (110), representatives of the victims of the Union Carbide gas leak in Bhopal, waste recyclers and sewage workers, "Manipuri nationalists" (114), "Tibetan refugees" (114), "the Association of Mothers of the Disappeared" (114), and Dr. Azad Bhartiya. They represent the "other"–the neglected and homeless people, the poor peasants, tribal members, Dalits, abandoned men, women, and children, and handicapped people of Indian society. Thus, the destitute have rehabilitated themselves in this space, which is their home, where they fight for their survival.

"Curfew had been declared. Srinagar was locked down" (218). The Valley of Kashmir has been gravely wounded for decades, and this space can be rechristened as the Valley of Death. S. Tilottama, another central character of the novel is detained in the interrogation centre, Shiraz, which was earlier a cinema theatre. It is situated in the Rainawari area of Srinagar and was invaded by Indian security forces. The space, which was once a recreation hall, has deformed into a bloody chamber of unspeakable and unimaginable terror and pain. Amrik Singh (Major Sahib), Ashfaq Mir (a Kashmiri Deputy Commandant in the Indian Army) and ACP Pinky represent the cruel despots, in charge of the torture chamber, who

enjoyed practising brutal interrogative methods and murdering innocent civilians (framed as terrorists) of Kashmir.

The Shiraz Cinema was the centrepiece of an enclave of barracks and officers' quarters, cordoned off by the elaborate trappings of paranoia: two concentric rings of barbed wire sandwiching a shallow, sandy moat; the fourth and innermost ring was a high boundary wall topped with jagged shards of broken glass. The corrugated-metal gates had watchtowers on either side, manned by soldiers with machine guns. (330)

Shiraz is seen by the outside world as an official space (perceived space**)** which promises security and freedom, vigilant always, functioning for the welfare of the civilians. However, in reality, this assumed safe haven becomes a hell and a nightmare for captives such as Aijaz, Gulrez, Tilo, and other innocent beings, who are electrocuted, shaved, mercilessly beaten, and killed. Thus, this space becomes a conceived space for the inhumane officers who have modified the former hall of entertainment into a notorious chamber of secrets unknown to the *duniya*.

Mazar-e-Shohadda, the Martyrs' Graveyard in Kashmir, is paradoxically, a lived space for the dead civilians and for those alive because, according to Musa Yeswi (a staunch freedom fighter for Kashmir) and others, only the dead are free in Kashmir, as they are laid to rest in peace, far away from the violent setting in Kashmir, in which the living are constantly harassed (mentally and physically), thereby making them yearn for the final escape from this *duniya* and enjoy peace in its wholeness in the graveyard, unscathed.

Death was everywhere. Death was everything. Career. Desire. Dream. Poetry. Love. Youth itself. Dying became just another way of living. Graveyards sprang up in parks and meadows, by streams and rivers, in fields and forest glades. Tombstones grew out of the ground like young children's teeth. Every village and locality had its own graveyard. (314)

The space is aptly referred to as the martyrs' graveyard for the "cast-iron signboard that arched over the main gate said: *We Gave Our Todays for Your Tomorrows*" (310). The dead live in the hearts of the living and create new lives for them (despite being buried and remaining passive), thus converting the graveyard into a space replete with hope for a better tomorrow. A decent life, bestowed with peace, dignity, and happiness, remains a dream for the inhabitants of Kashmir, a space that was once a paradise on earth.

"She was born in Dandakaranya forest during sunrise" (417). The baby who was abandoned in Jantar Mantar was born miles away in a troubled forest. The story of Udaya Jebeen (the baby) and her mother, Revathy (Comrade Maase), unfolds in a letter given to Dr. Azad Bhartiya by a stranger from the Bastar Forest. Azad visits Tilo (his friend) in the Jannat guest house and gives Anjum an idea about Bastar Forest (an unheard space): "about Bastar, the Adivasi tribes that lived there, the mining companies that wanted their land, and the Maoist guerrillas who were waging a war against the security forces that were trying to clear the land for the companies" (416).

The space, when seen casually, seems to be the serene abode of Adivasi tribes (perceived space). However, the inhabitants of the Jannat guest house soon hear the alarming news of the police brutality against women, Operation Green Hunt (war against people), funded by the government, and police and paramilitary forces conquering the forest, killing the people, and burning the villages to gratify the interests of the government stakeholders. Thus, the space owned by the aborigines is usurped and reformed into the conceived space by the mining companies. "No Adivasi can stay in her house or their village. They sleep in the forest outside at night because at night, police come…They take everything, burn everything, steal everything. They want the aborigines to vacate forest so they can make a steel township and mining" (421).

Comrade Maase went into the forest for arms training and also did some outside work; however, once, she was captured, detained, and gang-raped by six policemen and eventually, after facing countless adversities, gave birth to Udaya in the forest. She left the baby in Jantar Mantar (where she visited once and believed was a space uplifted as a platform for making protests and raising voices for the ignored sections of the society) as she did not want the baby to suffer like the doomed women in the forest and to start a new beginning for both of them. For Comrade Maase, her lived space always remained the troubled forest, where she could identify herself in an emotional and effective way, perform her duties despite being trampled down savagely by the authorities, fight relentlessly for the welfare of "Adivasi" tribes (as she possessed an indomitable spirit), and rest forever in her cherished space (where she belongs to and can connect to as herself), the forest. "Outside there is you people to fight and take up issues. But inside there is us only. So I am returned to Dandakaranya to live and die by my gun" (426).

For Tilo, "The baby was the beginning of something…she would turn the tide. There was hope yet, for the Evil Weevil World." (215). The social space (*duniya*), which expressed the meaning of social (human) life, will definitely turn over a new leaf, for, everything had to turn out all right in the end: "They would, because they had to. Because Miss Jebeen, Miss Udaya Jebeen, was come" (438). With this optimistic note, Roy's novel ends.

Henri Lefebvre's idea of the production of social space and his clear-cut distinction of perceived space, conceived space and lived space have been meticulously scrutinized in Arundhati Roy's novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by examining the primary and secondary spaces discussed in the novel.

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The Ethnocentric Hypervisibility of Black Bodies as a Cultural Scheme to Aestheticise the White 'Ideals': An Analysis of Select Hollywood Films

T. Nishad

An Abstract

The American cultural industry is significant for its ever-pervasive body ideal that marginalises and frowns upon overweight-coloured bodies. Such ethnocentric stereotyping foregrounds the belief that bodies that deviate from the so-called 'American ideals' will be deemed grotesque under a standard social gaze. In the American film industry, the visual representation of the overweight Black body and its cultural connotations act as a cultural tool to foreground and aestheticise the slim white embodiment. In many films, Black bulky characters have been presented in striking contrast to their white slim counterparts in such a way that the overweight Black physique has been utilised as a trope to foreground their culturally coded and normative beauty ideals and the widely internalised standards of behaviour in society. Thus, as a social being, one is informed in invisible ways to adhere to American societal expectations of embodiment. The interplay of body politics and its plurisignant associations can be traced from the depiction of contemporary Hollywood film characters. Through the paper titled, 'The Ethnocentric Hypervisibility of Black Bodies as a Cultural Scheme to Aestheticise the White 'Ideals': An analysis of Select Hollywood Films', the researcher analyses the two American films, Norbit and Nutty Professor II: The Klumps, to examine how American ethnocentrism on body ideals act as a tool to label the overweight Black corporeality as 'the other' and the struggle for resistance confronted by the Black 'deviant' in order to cope up with the society where only white thin bodies are deemed worthy of being seen.

Keywords: ethnocentrism, hypervisibility, cultural scheme, embodiment, social gaze, biopolitics, biopower

In this global scenario in which cultural pluralism is in practice, different ethnic groups co-exist by preserving one's own culture and accommodating other ethnic groups. This approach has led to the concept of a global culture or the homogenisation of multiple cultures, in which the diffusion of information, values, ideas, and consciousness is shared globally for

the common benefit of all. The formation of such cultural identities is instrumental in the contemporary global scenario because it hampers the possibility of the menace of cultural imperialism by a particular ethnic community over the rest. All literary creations, including popular media, play a pivotal role in the universal dissemination of such cultural imprints in such a way that they act as agents of a new cultural revolution.

Diversity is always regarded as a great virtue because it contributes to the accommodation of various perspectives and experiences. Since the European colonisation and occupation of America in the 16th and 17th centuries, the U.S. has been hailed as a country that has evolved from diverse ethnicities. Currently, it stands supreme as a nest that houses many ethnic minorities around the globe. However, in the present-day global context, the U.S. cultural landscape is also significant for an ever-pervasive cultural hegemony and ethnocentric hypervisibility that have permeated the national psyche. Everyday interactions with other racial-cultural minorities are shrouded in meaningful discourses. All such ethnocentric temperaments result in the marginalisation and subjugation of those racial minorities that stand outside their ethnic community as the 'Other'. This has paved the way for recent literary and critical deliberations in the diverse field of academia.

Literature, rather than depicting unreal or imaginary stories and characters, acts as a catalyst in moulding the societal ethos of any country by depicting the fundamental socio-political issues and perspectives of that time. The Hollywood film industry, especially those from the U.S. cultural setting, is now preoccupied with appropriating fat black bodies as a trope for the big screen to reinstate the white 'ideal' values and attitudes through a fat-phobic lens. That is, just as the renowned Marisa Meltzer in the magazine, *Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop. Culture*, puts it, "Fat (black) people are now America's favourite celluloid punchlines"1 by perceiving their overweight black corporeality through the barometer of the thin white 'ideal'. **'**The attitude "white thin is inherently beautiful and the black fat is extremely ugly" can be traced from the depiction of contemporary Hollywood film characters.

All media representations play a vital role in informing innumerable ways the politics of seeing and being seen in a culturally coded environment. A microscopic penetration of recent mainstream films in the light of Foucauldian paradigms of 'biopolitics', 'biopower', "and 'panopticism' brings to light the ethnocentric hypervisibility of plus-sized Black bodies in the vicinity of the American cultural industry. The term 'panopticism' refers to surveillance and

social control, in which people alter their behaviour owing to the feeling that they are being constantly observed and judged by the social eyes around them. Power saturates the self and invades every minutia of existence. Although the term" panopticon' referred to only crime or sexuality (Foucault, 1977, 1978), it can also be applied to the depiction of fat Black bodies in the popular media, which, in turn, acts as a controlling and self-disciplining agent to evoke a new world order. Viewing the portrayal of such bodies as grotesque for a standard social gaze impels people to alter their behaviour in an effort to thrive in a society where only thin bodies are 'fit' to be seen.

The development of a typical fat-phobic sentiment in the American psyche can be traced back to the beginning of the 19th century, when the eminent diet practitioner, William Banting, published his celebrated book, *A Letter on Corpulence Addressed to the Public* in 1863. Here, he exhorts people to bring their bodies back to 'normalcy' by enumerating and prescribing very stringent dietary practices. The Americans hailed it as a monumental work, as it had been very instrumental in evoking a slender consciousness in the American psyche. Consequently, thinness has been acknowledged as synonymous with virtue, and a string of adjectives, such as uncontrollable, lazy, stupid, and ugly, have been attached to its fat black counterpart. Thus, the thin elite white folk began to cast a demonic look on the other ethnic minorities around them in terms of their embodiment. As such, those bodies that fail to possess the so-called American ideal were relegated to being the wretched deviant human mass unworthy of any social or cultural significance. Thus, being hyper visible to such 'deviant corporeality', conscious attempts have been made by the mainstream film industry to aestheticise slim white bodies and reinstate their position at the centre by marginalising other ethnic groups in terms of their body image.

A parallel can be drawn from the depiction of a fat black body in contemporary American films. The film, *Norbit* is an American comedy directed by Brian Robbins and scripted, co-produced and starred by Eddie Murphie in lead roles, and co-starred by Cuba Gooding Jr., Charlie Murphy, Eddie Griffin, Katt Williams, Marlon Wayans, Thandie Newton and Terry Crews. Eddie Murphy handles multiple roles in the film both as the eponymous character Norbit and his female counterpart Rusputia who is portrayed to be an overweight, abusive and cantankerous wife to him. The story centres on the life of Norbit Albert Rice, who lives as an orphan at The Golden Wonton, which serves as an orphanage as well as a Chinese restaurant

run by Mr. Hangten Wong. Norbit had a childhood friend named Kate Thomas, and they secretly play-marry each other with Ring Pops. As the film progresses, Norbit feels insecure and lonely in the orphanage because his playmate Kate Thomas is adopted by a childless couple. To fill this vacuum, the overweight female protagonist, Rasputia Lattimore, makes her appearance as a saviour from the playground bullies and eventually becomes his girlfriend. The sudden sweeping of the depiction of Rusputia as a source of solace and comfort to Norbit to the lady with a 'demonic' figure and 'gorilla' who makes his life a hell evokes much laughter among the spectators. Both marry as adults, and Rusputia grows to be an arrogant and tyrannical lady, insulting and controlling him in every possible way. Norbit is appointed as the bookkeeper in the Lattimore Construction Company run by Rasputia's three older brothers–Big Black Jack, Blue, and Earl–who belittle Norbit every now and then.

Just as a cosmetic panopticon, the film engages in constant surveillance and social control over the question of embodiment, such that the delineation of characters, their clothing, body size, and movements are all veiled in interpretive suggestions. In other words, a paradigmatic ethnocentric hypervisibility of the so-called ideal white folk can be traced from the very first shot of the film, when the typical white character, Mr. Hengten Wong, emerges from his orphanage, listening to the cry of an infant in the courtyard. The film clearly projects forth in close-up the sudden transitional changes of his face from a sympathetic one to a disdainful gaze since the infant in his hand turns out to be a black one. He says, "You ugly black one here too. You be here longtime. Nobody ever comes and says, "Give me the ugly black one. You are a very ugly baby, the ugliest baby I have ever seen. '" The word 'ugly' is repeated umpteenth times to foreground the widely internalised white cultural stance that a coloured body always fails to grab a long, lingering positive gaze from society. The juxtaposition of the black baby in the hands of the white man and his bewilderment at looking at the child's countenance strikes the keynote of the film, as it informs the viewers what is in store for them in the narrative that is about to unfold.

The film portrays the overweight protagonist Rasputia as an antithesis to the typical American female ideal. Her 'uncontrollable' fat body and domineering behaviour toward her husband, Norbit, are employed as the main sources of humour in the film. The film projects her as a negative stereotype, suggesting that a woman should be thin, small, and take up only a little space in society to win approval from the white patriarchy around her. Since Rasputia

in the film transgresses such norms of behaviour, she is labelled the 'deviant social untouchable," as evidenced by the words of Mr. Hangten Wog, the white foster father of her black fiancé, Norbit. While referring to Norbit's dream, he quotes, "One day I find the girl of my dream" and then you marry a gorilla. Overburdened with her bulky frame and arrogant gestures, even her husband Norbit calls her names like "the queen of whores." Here, by presenting Rasputia as aggressive, hypersexual, domineering, and monster-looking 'gorilla', the film engages in a constant quest for the 'symbolic annihilation' of her woman body, which reduces the very existence of a bulky black woman body to a string of adjectives unworthy of having any positive vigour or vitality.

The interplay of body politics and fat stigma can be traced in numerous ways by analysing U.S. mainstream popular culture and cinema. The culturally coded hyper visible lens of the main-stream films not only casts its eyes to the black fat women bodies, but it also engages in a strict surveillance on the overweight male body as well. Ethnocentric belief systems and practices that exist in the American societal ethos desexualise, demonise, and pathologise the black fat male body as it fails to conform to the thin Western ideal. The film *Nutty Professor II: The Klumps*, released in 2000, is a sequel to the 1996 American Sci-fi comedy starring Janet Jackson and Eddie Murphy in the lead roles. Directed by peter Segel, the film centres on the unsuccessful attempts made by the Black fat character Professor Sherman (Eddie Murphie) to win the love of the white svelte queen, Denise Gaines (Janet Jackson). Denise is presented as a DNA researcher who is researching the extraction and isolation of genetic materials. Sherman's 'id' alter ego Buddy Love also makes his appearance and later, he takes control over Sherman's body. Every time Sherman tries to court Denise, Buddy Love appears in front of him with disgusting comments, thus reminding him of his overweight 'ugly' physique.

This film also engages in the symbolic annihilation of Sherman's black fat body because his body transgresses the rules set down by the so-called "culturally polished" white elites around him. Since Prof. Sherman's subconscious constantly reminds him of his failure to possess the macho-sexual appeal of popular taste, he is coerced into researching and finding a new de-aging DNA formula. Prof. Sherman hopes that with the newly discovered youth formula, he will be able to possess a slim body of the Western ideal, resulting in the fruition of his love for Denise Gaines. However, the film takes another discursive turn when the Pheeler Pharmaceutical Company bids $150 million for the youth formula, Buddy Love steals the offer letter from Sherman and negotiates it with Pheeler's for $149 million. This puts Sherman

in a chaotic situation from where he desperately wants to get an exit and, thereby, devices a strategy to use Denise's methodology of removing the DNA from his own body, where his alter ego, Buddy Love, has been manifested. However, the experiment triggers alterations to the chemical balance of his body and consequently his memory and intelligence begin to fail gradually.

The film foregrounds American ethnocentric belief systems that place only the prominent one on the abode of all creations and the juxtaposition of the black fat body with the white slender one in the film merely acts as a trope to establish a cultural autonomy over the other ethnic minorities around them. A typical example of this can be traced from the remark by Sherman's university associate Richmond, who is portrayed in the film as a white, thin man of 'standard' appearance. Pointing to his black, bulky frame, Richmond comments, "I've been looking forward to saying something to you for 12 years. And here it is. You are fat! And dumb"5, which makes Sherman think, "Somewhere along the line, I used to be alone. 6 Thus, in the film, the protagonist's attempts to alter the very chemistry of his physical appearance are not of his own making, but he is impelled by the disgusting remarks and meaningful gaze around the 'ideal' thin folk around him.

The burgeoning business of American mainstream films uses a fat Black body, both male and female, in an effort to appropriate as well as trivialise the expectations and experiences of the ethnic minorities in the country. The quite dismaying fact about their depiction is that marketing the overweight Black bodies of the marginalised group, both the films, *Norbit* and *Nutty Professor II: The Klumps,* grossed a box office success worth $159 million against the production budget of mere $60 million and $166.3 million against $84 million, respectively. This points to the fact that the American film industry plays a crucial role in 'backgrounding' the less privileged Black minorities as the ones who are caught in a state of false consciousness and thereby foregrounding the white ideals that are worthy of being followed.

Popular media acts as a visual sphere in which norms of appearance are obeyed. In the contemporary Hollywood film industry, the presentation and representation of black bodies through an ethnocentric hyper-visible lens functions as a cultural scheme to aestheticise white ideals. That is, fat black bodies are often vastly underrepresented and poorly treated in popular literature and films. Conscious efforts must be made to address and resolve the problematising issues of embodiment in any cultural setting, and serious critical deliberations should be made

by the academic community worldwide to redefine one's right to embodiment and recapture one's lost sense of pride in being and becoming unique in any society where only thin white bodies are 'fit' to be seen.

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Tralfamadore and Eastern Philosophies: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Buddhist and Taoist Parallels in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*

S. Abhilash Mathew

Abstract

Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five deploys the fictional alien planet Tralfamadore as a philosophical construct that offers protagonist Billy Pilgrim a radical reorientation toward time and fatalism, encapsulated in the recurring phrase "So it goes." This study argues that Tralfamadore's philosophical paradigm— emphasising the simultaneity of all moments and acceptance of life's inevitabilities—establishes profound parallels with Eastern philosophical frameworks, particularly Buddhism's doctrines of impermanence (anicca) and non-self (anatta), and Taoism's concepts of naturalness (ziran) and non-action (wuwei). These parallels acquire special significance when contextualised within 1960s American counterculture, which embraced Eastern philosophies as alternative meaning-making systems during the Vietnam War's moral crisis. Through examination of philosophical texts, historical analysis, and close literary reading, this study situates Tralfamadore within the novel's broader postmodern framework, characterised by ontological ambiguity and rejection of linear progress narratives. While Tralfamadore's satirical presentation introduces irony absent from earnest spiritual traditions, its resonance with Eastern philosophies underscores its significance as both a postmodern war critique and a meditation on human agency amid seemingly predetermined suffering.

Keywords: Buddhism, Taoism, Postmodernism, Counterculture, Trauma, Eastern Philosophy.

Introduction

Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five, or The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death* stands as a watershed moment in American postmodern literature, interweaving war memoir, science fiction, and metafiction to critique warfare's senselessness, particularly the Dresden firebombing that claimed about a hundred thousand civilian lives. At the novel's core lies Billy Pilgrim, a passive protagonist who becomes "unstuck in time" and claims abduction by aliens from the planet Tralfamadore, who perceive all temporal moments simultaneously. These beings impart a fatalistic philosophy encapsulated in the novel's recurring refrain, "So it goes," following each mention of death, regardless of magnitude.

This study explores Tralfamadore as a philosophical construct in *Slaughterhouse-Five* by drawing parallels with Eastern traditions, specifically Buddhism's doctrine of impermanence and Taoism's concept of natural flow. This investigation centres on the 1960s American counterculture's embrace of Eastern frameworks amid the moral crisis of the Vietnam War, creating a real-world parallel to Tralfamadore's role as an interpretive lens for processing war trauma. The analysis connects Tralfamadore's philosophical function to the novel's broader postmodern characteristics while focusing on the subtitle's significance: *"The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death."* This subtitle evokes both the futile sacrifice of young people in war and the cyclical nature of human suffering, providing an essential framework for understanding Tralfamadore's role in the novel's complex philosophical architecture.

Tralfamadore's Philosophical Paradigm and Eastern Traditions

Billy Pilgrim firmly believes that he was abducted by aliens from Tralfamadorian 1967. He was subsequently placed in a zoo-like exhibit with the pornographic film star Montana Wildhack. Central to the Tralfamadorian worldview is their distinctive time perception—not linear progression from past to future, but simultaneous, eternal moments. As one Tralfamadorian explains: "All moments, past, present, and future, always have existed, always will exist. The Tralfamadorians can look at all the different moments just like we can look at a stretch of the Rocky Mountains" (Vonnegut 34).

This alien perspective fundamentally reshapes Billy's relationship to time and causality, allowing him to conceptualise traumatic experiences—particularly Dresden survival—within a framework that neutralises conventional notions of meaning, purpose, and moral responsibility. The Tralfamadorians reject human "why" questions regarding war or suffering, asserting simply, "There is no why" (Vonnegut 88). Their philosophy treats death not as an ending but as one fixed moment in eternal existence; hence, "So it goes" follows each narrative death.

This framework provides Billy with cognitive mechanisms for emotional detachment from Dresden trauma. By adopting a Tralfamadorian perspective, Billy views all life moments—horror, joy, banality—as equally valid, simultaneously existing timeline points, diminishing any single traumatic event's psychological impact. Billy's "unstuck in time" condition mirrors Tralfamadorian temporal simultaneity. He internalised the alien lens as a means of coping with trauma.

Buddhism and Taoism, ancient Eastern traditions dating back over two millennia, offer remarkably similar frameworks to Tralfamadore's fatalism and simultaneity. Buddhism, founded by Siddhartha Gautama in the 5th century BCE, centres on four noble truths that identify suffering (*dukkha*) as an inherent aspect of existence. Central to Buddhist philosophy is impermanence (*anicca*) doctrine, teaching that all phenomena-life, emotions, events-are transient, constantly arising and passing away. This extends to the self-concept through *anatta* (non-self), which posits that perceived stable identity is actually constantly changing physical and mental processes without a permanent essence (Rahula 51–66). Buddhism encourages detachment from clinging to outcomes or fixed identities, suggesting that suffering stems from attachment to impermanent things.

Zen Buddhism's meditation practices, such as *zazen*, foster present-moment awareness that transcends linear time conceptions. Through koan meditation–contemplating paradoxical statements–Zen practitioners aim for *satori*, sudden enlightenment that transcends dualistic thinking (Suzuki 45–58).

Tralfamadore's framework exhibits striking Buddhist parallels. Tralfamadorian time perception as simultaneous moments rather than linear progression resonates with Buddhism's present-moment emphasis and the ultimately illusory nature of time. "So it goes," repeated after each death, parallels Buddhist impermanence acknowledgement, accepting death not as a final ending but as one transient eternal cycle moment.

Taoism, attributed to Laozi and his *Tao Te Ching* (6th century BCE), emphasizes living harmoniously with Tao-the ineffable source underlying all existence. The *wuwei* concept, translated as "non-action" or "effortless action," advocates moving with the natural event flow rather than forcing outcomes through wilful striving (Watts 75–92). This encourages acceptance rather than resistance to circumstances, aligning actions with the universe's natural patterns.

Taoist cosmology views time cyclically, with events unfolding in eternal present transcending conventional past/present/future boundaries. This perspective captures Taoist *ziran* (naturalness), emphasizing spontaneity and accepting things as they are without imposing human order concepts.

The Tralfamadorian framework exhibits clear Taoist parallels. Their simultaneous, rather than sequential, time perception aligns with Taoist cyclical time views and the present moment, containing all reality. Their dismissal of the question "why" There is no why"-echoes Taoist

emphasis on accepting, rather than questioning, the natural order, as expressed in *the Tao Te Ching*, chapter 73: "The Tao of Heaven does not strive, yet it overcomes everything" (Laozi 73).

While Buddhism and Taoism share philosophical commonalities that illuminate Tralfamadore's function-emphasizing acceptance over resistance, challenging linear time conceptions, and offering suffering-navigation frameworks through detachment, significant differences exist. Buddhism emphasises compassion (*karuna*) as a central virtue, encouraging the alleviation of others' suffering while recognising impermanence. Taoism encourages skilful navigation of circumstances rather than pure passivity. Conversely, Tralfamadore's philosophy lacks ethical dimensions, offering Billy an acceptance framework without a corresponding imperative for compassionate action.

This ethical distinction reflects fundamental purpose differences: while Buddhism and Taoism developed as comprehensive virtuous living systems within the reality of impermanence, Tralfamadore's philosophy functions primarily as a trauma relief mechanism. As literary critic Peter Freese observes, "Tralfamadore offers Billy a cosmology that allows him to accept his role as a victim without protest" (Freese 218).

Historical Context: The 1960s Counterculture and Eastern Philosophy

The 1960s American counterculture, developing against the backdrop of the escalating Vietnam War, provides a crucial historical parallel to Tralfamadore's philosophical function. This turbulent period witnessed mounting disillusionment with American militarism and conventional social values, creating fertile ground for the novel's anti-war critique and philosophical explorations.

The Vietnam War, eventually claiming over 58,000 American lives and millions of Vietnamese casualties, generated profound moral and existential crises for Americans, particularly young men, facing the draft. Nightly television combat footage brought the horrors of war into American living rooms with unprecedented immediacy, creating what Marshall McLuhan described as a "global village," where distant violence became immediate and inescapable. This mediated war experience resonates with Billy Pilgrim's dislocated trauma relationship, as he simultaneously experiences Dresden firebombing and other life moments.

As war intensified and opposition grew, particularly following the 1968 Tet Offensive, many young Americans sought alternative frameworks for understanding existence beyond

traditional Western paradigms. Eastern philosophical traditions, particularly Zen Buddhism and Taoism, offered compelling alternatives that emphasised acceptance, awareness of the present moment, and detachment from rigid notions of progress–conceptual tools for navigating moral ambiguity and shattered illusions.

Zen Buddhism gained American cultural traction through figures like D.T. The counterculture embraced Zen practices, such as meditation (zazen) and paradoxical koans, as techniques for transcending the rational mind and achieving direct reality insight beyond conventional categories. The counterculture embraced Zen practices like meditation (*zazen*) and paradoxical koans as techniques for transcending rational mind and achieving direct reality insight beyond conventional categories. Meditation centres emerged nationwide, including San Francisco Zen Centre founded by Shunryu Suzuki in 1962. The 1967 "Human Be-In" at Golden Gate Park exemplified Eastern spirituality fusion with anti-war activism, featuring political speeches and meditation sessions led by figures like Alan Watts and Allen Ginsberg.

Zen's appeal stemmed partly from emphasising immediate experience over abstract theory, offering meaning through direct present-moment engagement rather than intellectual frameworks. For young Americans grappling with Vietnam's moral complexities, Zen's rejection of dualistic thinking–good versus evil, victory versus defeat–provided cognitive tools for navigating ethical ambiguity.

Taoism gained countercultural popularity through *translations of Tao Te Ching* and lectures by Alan Watts on Taoist principles. The *wuwei* concept–non-action or flowing with natural circumstances–resonated with counterculture's rejection of mainstream American striving, including Timothy Leary's "dropout" ethos. This Taoist influence manifested in emerging ecological consciousness, as environmentalists drew on harmony-with-nature principles to critique industrial capitalism's resource exploitation. The First Earth Day in 1970, shortly after the publication of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, reflected the synthesis of Eastern philosophical principles with Western environmental activism.

The 1969 Woodstock Festival embodied countercultural Taoist principles, creating a temporary community characterised by spontaneity, natural living, and flow rather than rigid planning. This gathering, months after the publication of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, represented the counterculture's attempt to create timeless harmony space amid the chaos of Vietnam, a real-world parallel to Tralfamadore's zoo exhibit, where Billy and Montana exist in suspended time.

Slaughterhouse-Five appeared when the counterculture reached its zenith and Vietnam War opposition became mainstream rather than radical. The novel's fatalistic warfare perspective resonated with a generation increasingly questioning the purpose of conflict and meaning, much as Zen Buddhism and Taoism offered frameworks for navigating Vietnam's moral ambiguities. The novel's remarkable commercial success–reaching number one on the New York Times Best Seller list and selling over one million copies in two years–attests to its cultural resonance. Its accessibility, blending science fiction with an anti-war critique and philosophical depth, paralleled the counterculture's fusion of popular culture with spiritual exploration and political protest.

Postmodern Elements and Critical Perspectives

Tralfamadore's philosophical parallels with Buddhism and Taoism align with *Slaughterhouse Five*'s broader postmodern characteristics, enhancing the novel's critique of conventional Western narratives about war, progress, and human agency. As Linda Hutcheon notes, postmodernism is characterised by the "questioning of what reality can mean and how we can come to know it", applying equally to Tralfamadore's ontological uncertainty and Buddhist scepticism about conventional reality (Hutcheon 32).

Postmodernism fundamentally challenges grand narratives or metanarratives, overarching explanatory frameworks that claim universal meaning and coherence. Jean-François Lyotard defined postmodernism as "incredulity toward metanarratives," scepticism directed particularly at Western historical progress, scientific objectivity, and notions of moral certainty. *Slaughterhouse-Five* embodies this postmodern scepticism by rejecting conventional war narratives that frame conflict as a necessary sacrifice for future progress.

Tralfamadore's philosophical perspective, viewing all moments as simultaneously existing rather than progressing linearly, represents the novel's rejection of explicit linear causality. By presenting time as a fixed dimension rather than past-to-future flow, the Tralfamadorian view undermines the possibility of progress, as no moment can be "improved upon"–all moments simply exist, eternally and simultaneously. This aligns with Buddhism's present-moment emphasis as the only reality and Taoism's cyclical time view, both challenging Western conceptions of linear historical progress.

The novel's nonlinear structure, jumping between Dresden, Tralfamadore, and Billy's suburban life without chronological consistency, formally embodies this rejection of linearity.

As Brian McHale observes, this "ontological instability" characterizes postmodern fiction, foregrounding questions about the nature of reality rather than epistemological questions about knowing (McHale 9–10). This approach challenges readers' narrative coherence expectations, mirroring how Zen koans challenge logical understanding through paradox and contradiction.

Postmodernism frequently blends high and low cultural forms, challenging traditional taste and value hierarchies. *Slaughterhouse-Five* exemplifies this by fusing literary fiction with science fiction elements, philosophical enquiry with pulp narrative conventions, and historical testimony with absurdist humour. The titular character, Tralfamadore, represents this cultural blending, combining science fiction's alien encounter trope with profound philosophical questions about time, fate, and free will.

Postmodern literature often embraces ontological ambiguity, or uncertainty regarding the nature of reality, as a central aesthetic principle. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the ambiguous ontological status of Tralfamadore, whether it is an alien reality or a psychological delusion, exemplifies this postmodern indeterminacy. The text deliberately refuses to resolve whether Billy's Tralfamadorian experiences are "real" within the narrative universe or merely trauma-induced fantasy, maintaining productive ambiguity and challenging the readers' desire for definitive interpretation.

However, Tralfamadore's presentation through satirical science fiction introduces irony, which is largely absent from earnest spiritual traditions. The Tralfamadorians' whimsical physical description– "two feet high, and green, and shaped like plumber's friends" (Vonnegut 26)– and Billy's deliberately pulpy experience with Montana Wildhack create ironic distance, undercutting the seriousness of philosophical content. This irony, characteristic of postmodern fiction, allows Vonnegut to explore profound questions about fate, free will, and the nature of time while maintaining a critical stance toward totalising philosophical systems.

The parallels between Tralfamadore's philosophical function and Eastern traditions offer profound insights into the thematic concerns and cultural impact of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, but raise important questions about representation, appropriation, and the ethical implications of fatalism in postmodern literature. While philosophical depth enriches the novel's existential enquiry by providing coherent frameworks for understanding Billy's trauma response, and cultural blending exemplifies postmodern tendencies combining disparate elements that challenge

conventional categorisation, satirical framing risks trivialising depicted suffering, particularly the Dresden firebombing, which forms the novel's historical core.

The fatalistic perspective of the Tralfamadorians raises troubling ethical questions about human agency and moral responsibility. By presenting events as predetermined and unchangeable, Tralfamadorian philosophy potentially undermines the moral imperatives to prevent or resist atrocities. The countercultural adoption of Eastern philosophical traditions, while reflecting genuine spiritual seeking, often simplifies complex concepts detached from cultural and historical contexts, risking participation in this simplification by reducing comprehensive spiritual traditions to isolated concepts without fully engaging with their ethical dimensions.

Implications and Broader Literary Connections

The parallels between Tralfamadore and Eastern philosophical traditions enrich the understanding of *Slaughterhouse-Five* in several important dimensions. Philosophically, the parallel underscores the novel's engagement with universal human questions about finding meaning amid suffering and chaos. By creating in Tralfamadore a philosophical framework resonating with Buddhism's impermanence emphasis and Taoism's natural flow, Vonnegut situates Billy Pilgrim's journey within broader human quest for acceptance and understanding. The novel becomes not merely an anti-war statement but also a meditation on how humans across cultures have developed conceptual tools to navigate trauma and loss.

Historically, recognising parallels between Tralfamadore and Eastern philosophies situates the novel firmly within the immediate historical context of 1960s counterculture and the Vietnam War. Counterculture's turn toward spiritual frameworks, such as Zen Buddhism and Taoism, represented collective attempts to find alternatives to dominant Western paradigms, leading to two World Wars and the ongoing Vietnam conflict. Tralfamadore functions as a literary reflection of this historical moment, capturing widespread disillusionment with conventional Western narratives about progress, heroism, and national purpose.

Literarily, the parallel reinforces the understanding of *Slaughterhouse-Five* as quintessentially a postmodern text characterised by ontological uncertainty, cultural hybridity, and ironic distance. Tralfamadore's resonance with Eastern philosophical traditions exemplifies postmodernism's tendency to blend diverse cultural elements and challenge conventional boundaries. The novel's fragmented, nonlinear structure formally embodies Tralfamadorian/

Buddhist/Taoist rejection of linear progress narratives, creating a text that enacts the very philosophical principles it explores.

These dimensions are unified by the novel's subtitle, "The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death," which encapsulates both a critique of the senseless sacrifice of youth and the acceptance of cyclical mortality, characterising the Tralfamadorian perspective. The subtitle frames the entire novel as simultaneously a scathing indictment of war futility and a meditation on how humans construct meaning in the face of seemingly predetermined suffering.

The philosophical function of Tralfamadore connects the novel to other postmodern works that employ fictional constructs to explore existential frameworks. Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1972) uses imaginary cities as philosophical lenses for viewing human condition, similar to Tralfamadore's function as alien perspective on human existence. Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) shares engagement with World War II's traumatic legacy and scepticism toward totalizing explanatory systems.

What distinguishes *Slaughterhouse-Five* from later postmodern works is its accessibility and direct engagement with specific historical moments —the Vietnam War and the late 1960s counterculture. While maintaining the philosophical complexity and formal experimentation characteristic of postmodern literature, Vonnegut's novel connects more immediately with readers through humour, straightforward prose, and a science fiction framework. Moreover, Tralfamadore's specific resonance with Eastern philosophical traditions connects the novel to actual spiritual mechanisms that humans have developed across cultures and throughout history, making it psychological realism despite its science fiction elements.

Conclusion

The fictional planet Tralfamadore in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* functions as a philosophical construct offering striking parallels to Eastern philosophical traditions, particularly Buddhism's doctrine of impermanence and Taoism's concept of flow. This parallel acquires special significance when viewed through the lens of 1960s American counterculture, which embraced Eastern traditions as alternative frameworks for making meaning amid the chaos of the Vietnam War. Tralfamadore provides the protagonist Billy Pilgrim with a similar conceptual tool for processing traumatic World War II experiences, particularly the Dresden firebombing, which forms the novel's historical core.

The Tralfamadorian perspective resonates with Buddhism's teaching that all phenomena are impermanent and that suffering arises from attachment to fixed outcomes. Similarly, it echoes Taoism's emphasis on flowing with rather than against the natural order and accepting rather than resisting circumstances. These philosophical parallels enhance our understanding of the novel's broader postmodern characteristics: the rejection of a linear progress narrative, ontological ambiguity, and ironic distance from content.

The novel's subtitle, "The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death," provides an essential interpretive framework for understanding Tralfamadore's philosophical function. The reference to "The Children's Crusade" evokes the naive sacrifice of youth to war machinery, while "Duty-Dance with Death" suggests both the acceptance of ritualistic mortality characterising the Tralfamadorian perspective and the choreographed absurdity of warfare. This duality—critique and acceptance—defines the novel's complex stance toward subject matter, functioning simultaneously as an anti-war statement and a meditation on how humans construct meaning in the face of seemingly senseless suffering.

While Tralfamadore's satirical presentation introduces irony largely absent from earnest spiritual traditions like Buddhism and Taoism, raising concerns about trivialising trauma or promoting passive fatalism, its link with ancient philosophical frameworks underscores significance beyond mere science fiction invention. It represents a literary exploration of the universal human quest for frameworks that allow the navigation of the chaos of existence and suffering—a quest transcending cultural and historical boundaries.

In conclusion, Tralfamadore serves as a pivotal element in *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s enduring power as both a war critique and a profound meditation on human agency facing seemingly predetermined suffering. By creating a philosophical construct resonating with actual spiritual traditions while maintaining ironic distance through science fiction tropes, Vonnegut produced a work that speaks to both the specific historical moment of the Vietnam War era and the timeless human struggle to find meaning amid chaos. The novel's continued relevance and popularity attest to its successful navigation of the balance between historical specificity and universal significance, making it a cornerstone of postmodern literature and a compelling exploration of how fiction can help process the traumas of reality.

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Testimonial Voices, Gender Dynamics, and Collective Memory in *In the Time of the Butterflies*: Reclaiming History Through the Mirabal Sisters' Narrative

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Abstract

This article explores Julia Alvarez's In the Time of the Butterflies as a powerful example of the testimonial novel, blending fiction and historical reality to recount the lives and resistance of Mirabal sisters under Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship in the Dominican Republic (1930–1961). Through a multifaceted narrative, Alvarez humanises sisters, portraying them not as idealised martyrs, but as complex, relatable individuals navigating the intersecting oppressions of dictatorship, patriarchy, and religion. By engaging theoretical frameworks such as those of Foucault, Hayden White, and John Beverley, this article examines testimonio as a genre that privileges marginalised voices and critiques official historiographies. Alvarez's work challenges traditional, male-centric narratives and highlights the collective memory of trauma as a source of empowerment and resistance. Writing in English, Alvarez broadens the reach of Dominican history to international audiences, fostering solidarity and empathy through a personal yet politically charged account. The article argues that In the Time of the Butterflies exemplifies the potential of testimonio as a tool for collective mourning, healing, and action against human rights abuse.

Keywords: dictatorship, testimonial literature, Latin American history, gender and resistance, collective memory, human rights, and trauma.

In Julia Alvarez's most acclaimed novel *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Dominican-American Julia Alvarez explores the Trujillato, the terrible chapter in the history of the Dominican Republic when dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo held absolute power over the country during both his official presidency and unofficial rule that together lasted from 1930 until his assassination in 1961. Trujillo shaped his own 'era' by modelling the spirit and identity of the Dominican Republic around his vanity, fantasies of dominion, and obsessions with the notion of a homogenous Dominican nation. The Trujillo era, characterised by innumerable episodes of violence, including the massacre of approximately 30,000 Haitians in 1937 to secure the border with Haiti, created an atmosphere of sheer terror. This terror, which haunts Dominicans

long after the official end of the Trujillo era, problematises both lived experiences and narratives of the nation.

The enduring impact of the Trujillato continues to resonate across generations of Dominicans, particularly those whose families fled persecution as dissenters under Rafael Trujillo's authoritarian regime. Many descendants of these exiled individuals live beyond the borders of Hispaniola, often carrying a complex legacy shaped by forced migration and displacement. While the circumstances surrounding their families' escapes may have been unclear to them at the time, these Dominicans represent a living testament to that turbulent historical era. Julia Alvarez, born in New York in 1950 to Dominican parents who briefly returned to the island before fleeing permanently to the United States, embodies the trajectory of this generation of involuntary expatriates. Her literary work, deeply informed by her personal history, explores themes of power and authority, offering a critical counter-narrative to the official historiography of the Dominican Republic. In doing so, Alvarez's writing serves as both a reflection on and a challenge to the complex dynamics of nationhood and identity shaped by the Trujillato.

The United Nations General Assembly designated 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women through Resolution 55/218 to raise awareness of the issue. This date commemorates the assassination of Patria, Maria Teresa, and Minerva Mirabal, Dominican political activists known as "Las Mariposas" (Butterflies), who were killed on the orders of dictator Rafael Trujillo. Their activism inspired resistance across the country, and their deaths became a turning point in the fight against Trujillo's regime, symbolising both popular and feminist resistance.

Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* is a historical novel about the Mirabal sisters, symbols of the Dominican struggle for justice after their assassination. The story fictionalizes the lives of Patria, Minerva, and Maria Teresa, who resisted General Rafael Trujillo's tyrannical regime. On November 25, 1960, after visiting their jailed husbands, the sisters and their driver, Rufino de la Cruz, were ambushed and killed by a government death squad. Set against a backdrop of persecution, the novel blends fact and fiction to explore the contradictions faced by women under both dictatorships and patriarchal societies.

In 1960, Julia Alvarez and her family fled the Dominican Republic to escape Rafael Leonidas Trujillo's repressive dictatorship (1930–1961), under which her father had been

involved in clandestine efforts to overthrow the regime. This opposition informs her second novel, *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994), which chronicles the lives of the Mirabal sisters—Minerva, Maria Teresa, Patria, and Dede. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from Foucault, Hayden White, and Linda Hutcheon, this article argues that the novel revises the official history of the Mirabal sisters by humanising their narratives and deconstructing the myths surrounding them. It further explores how the text engages with Dominican history and memory, amplifies the voices of victims of terror, and provides them with agency to narrate their experiences.

The novel is structured in three sections and an epilogue to recount the lives of the Mirabal sisters—Minerva, Maria Teresa, Patria, and Dede. Each sister contributes to shaping her own character, with the narrative capturing the different stages of their lives. Trujillo's oppressive regime looms throughout, influencing their journeys from childhood to their role as defenders of their nation. Dede, the sole survivor, frames each section by reflecting on past events through decades of memory and introspection. The epilogue interweaves her reflections with various accounts of the sisters' assassination, offering a multifaceted retelling of their tragic end.

The writer was deeply affected by the story of the Mirabal sisters from a young age, growing up under Trujillo's regime, which was characterised by a pervasive personality cult and societal control. The Cuban Revolution of 1959 inspired many Dominicans, including the Mirabals, to join the anti-Trujillo Movimiento Revolucionario 14 de Junio (MR1J4), led by Minerva's husband, Manolo Tavárez. After an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Trujillo in 1960, the sisters and their husbands were imprisoned and tortured but were later released. Allegedly on Trujillo's orders, the sisters were assassinated on November 25, 1960, after visiting their jailed husbands. Their bodies, along with those of their driver, were staged in a jeep pushed off a cliff and falsely reported as an accident. However, the Dominican people recognised the truth, and the murders became a catalyst for rebellion, contributing to Trujillo's downfall. The Mirabal sisters were posthumously celebrated as martyrs, feminist icons, and revolutionary symbols, with monuments, street names, schools, and their family home, now a museum, honouring their legacy.

I also propose reading Alvarez's novel as testimonio, a relatively new genre in Latin American literature (17). George Yudice defines it as "an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g. war, oppression, revolution, etc.)" (17). He explains: "... the testimonialista gives his or her personal testimony "directly," addressing

a specific interlocutor" (15). According to Yudice, in testimonio, "truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising and setting aright official history" (17). In the case of *In the Time of the Butterflies*, the surviving Dede tells the story of her sisters' lives and their active opposition and resistance to the notorious regime of Rafael Trujillo. She tells her story to a Dominican gringa, who is the author's alter ego. The author's interest in Las Mariposas triggers Dede's memories, and through her recollections the reader travels back into the past to learn the story of Patria, Minerva and Maria Teresa.

Testimonio, as a genre, is notoriously fluid and difficult to categorise because the word "testimonio" can describe anything written by a first-person witness who wishes to tell their story of trauma. John Beverley, an expert on testimonial literature, defines it as a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a life or a significant life experience. (31)

Linda J. Craft adds to this definition additional characteristics. She claims that a testimonio may include all categories considered conventional literature, such as autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, nonfiction novel, or "factographic" literature (22). The definition of testimonio of the Cuban cultural centre Casa de las Americas reads:

Testimonios must document some aspect of Latin American or Caribbean reality from a direct source. A direct source is understood as the knowledge of the facts by the author or their compilation of narratives or evidence obtained from the individuals involved or qualified witnesses. (Beverley 103)

The production of a testimonio typically involves the collaboration between a witness—often someone illiterate or, if literate, not a professional writer—and an intellectual interlocutor, such as a journalist or writer. This process generally includes the taping, transcription, and editing of the oral account. Scholars, such as George Yudice and John Beverley, have emphasised the non-literary purity of the testimonio, arguing that its authenticity stems from its resistance to conventional literary aesthetics. However, critics, such as Hayden White, have highlighted that few narrative texts, including testimonios, can entirely evade the influence of literary

construction. As Emery notes, this insistence on purity narrows the boundaries of the genre, raising questions about the extent to which testimonios can be truly distinguished from other narrative forms (17). This tension reflects the complex interplay between oral history, literary mediation, and the politics of representation inherent in the genre.

In the testimonio, the writer aims to depict 'Las Mariposas' as real, flesh-and-blood women, not idealised heroines, but flawed individuals with fears, insecurities, marital issues, and other human vulnerabilities. This portrayal fosters a connection between the characters and the reader, establishing a "readerly intimacy." As Beverley notes, testimonio compels the reader to respond, to engage with the stories and struggles presented: "We may act or not on that obligation, we may resent or welcome it, but we cannot ignore it" (1). This sense of obligation extends beyond empathy; it calls for political action and solidarity with liberation movements and human rights causes, urging a response to the injustices recounted.

While Alvarez's focus is primarily on the Mirabal sisters, the broader context of the Dominican Republic's collective memory is evoked throughout her narrative. The events described in the novel had a profound impact on a significant portion of the population, marking a shared history of fear and resistance. Alon Confino's broader conception of collective memory encompasses how successive generations shape and represent the past through various cultural channels, such as books, films, and commemorations. In Alvarez's work, individual memories merge into a collective consciousness, where personal experiences are absorbed into the larger historical narrative of a nation's trauma. The narrative structure of *In the Time of the Butterflies* incorporates multiple perspectives, narrated by the Mirabal sisters, with the dead sisters speaking in the first person. This chronological structure spans from 1938 to 1994 and centres primarily on the oppressive Trujillo regime. Through these voices, Alvarez crafts a multifaceted depiction of life under a dictatorship, combining personal stories of political awakening, resistance, and martyrdom.

The story unfolds during Trujillo's brutal regime against a background of persecution and oppression. As young girls, at the Inmaculada Concepcion boarding school, the sisters experience eye-opening events connected with the injustices rampant in their country and the evils of Trujillo. One of Minerva's friends, Sinita, told her a story of how Trujillo killed the members of her family. At first, Minerva could not believe her words in the face of the dictator's deification and overwhelming propaganda.

"Bad things?" I interrupted. "Trujillo was doing bad things?" It was as if I had just heard that Jesus had slapped a baby or that Our Blessed Mother had not conceived him in the immaculate conception way. "That can't be true," I said, but in my heart, I felt a crack in my faith. . . .. The country people around the farm say that until the nail is hit, it does not believe in the hammer. Everything Sinita said I filed away as a terrible mistake that would not happen again. Then, the hammer came down hard, right in our school, right on Lina Lovaton's head. (Alvarez 20)

In Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Trujillo's ruthless exercise of masculine entitlement and systemic abuse highlight the intersection of political tyranny and machismo as foundational elements of Latin American dictatorship. The case of Lina Lovaton exemplifies the pervasive use of sexual harassment as a psychological tool of oppression under the Trujillo regime, impacting not only women but also their families, such as the Mirabal sisters. Trujillo's notorious exploitation of young women epitomised his unchecked power; families often concealed their daughters during his visits to avoid his predation. Trujillo's rape of the fourteen-year-old Lina, tacitly condoned by nuns at her school, serves as a pivotal moment for Minerva Mirabal, symbolising her confrontation with systemic injustices. This traumatic event coincides with the onset of Minerva's menstruation—euphemistically termed "complications" by the nuns—which metaphorically marks her loss of innocence and the beginning of her activism: "I lifted the covers, and for a moment, I couldn't make sense of the dark stains on the bottom sheet. Then I brought up my hand from checking myself. Sure enough, my complications had started" (Alvarez 20). Minerva's growing political consciousness catalyses her family's involvement in the underground resistance, culminating in the imprisonment of the sisters and their spouses alongside other resistance leaders.

Although Alvarez's narrative foregrounds the cruelty and authoritarianism of Trujillo, his appearances are strategically minimal. Trujillo's presence functions as a thematic leitmotif rather than a conventional character role; his shadow looms over Dominican society, exemplifying the pervasive terror of a totalitarian state. The parallels drawn between Trujillo's dictatorship and patriarchal structures deepen the novel's critique. Minerva's father, a figure embodying male privilege, perpetuates gender hierarchies within the domestic sphere, opposing Minerva's aspirations for higher education and romantic autonomy. As Paulo Freire's concept of the "sub-oppressor" elucidates, individuals like the Mirabal father perpetuate systemic oppression through complicity (Freire 45). When the sisters discover their father's infidelity

and hidden family, their disillusionment amplifies. Minerva's eventual equating of her father's duplicity with Trujillo's tyranny underscores a rebellion not just against dictatorship but also against the broader structures of machismo and patriarchy.

Catholicism has emerged as another instrument of oppression, reinforcing rigid gender roles and norms within a patriarchal society. Women in provincial Dominican culture are socialised into the roles of motherhood and marital subservience rather than intellectual or political agency (Fregoso, 10–11). Alvarez situates the Mirabal sisters' rebellion within this broader socio-religious context, portraying their activism as resistance to both totalitarianism and gender-based subjugation.

Alvarez's narrative approach humanizes "The Butterflies," ensuring their portrayal avoids mythologization. She emphasises the sisters' quotidian lives, integrating their struggles and triumphs to retain their authenticity. As Alvarez asserts, transforming the sisters into icons risks undermining the gravity of their sacrifice (Sievert 35). By focusing on their personal experiences, Alvarez fosters a political response in readers, resonating with the tenets of testimonio. The novel reclaims space in literature for silenced voices, particularly Latin American women, challenging traditionally male-centric historiographies and presenting them as agents of historical and political change (Behar 6). Furthermore, the novel rejects reductive victimhood narratives, portraying Latina women as active participants in resistance rather than passive subjects of patriarchy (Bados Ciria 311).

By writing in English, Alvarez renders this pivotal chapter of Dominican history accessible to a global audience, extending its impact beyond Latin America. The testimonial novel serves as both documentation and activism, providing critical evidence of human rights violations and a call to action for the international community. Through its deliberate blurring of the personal and the political, testimonio amplifies the voices of marginalised individuals, offering a platform for the historically silenced to engage with the written word as a tool of agency. Such narratives not only provide representation to victims of political violence and psychological oppression but also play an integral role in collective mourning and healing. By fostering solidarity among disaffected groups and cultivating empathy in broader audiences, testimonio emerges as a vital medium for both resistance and reconciliation.

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Samskara as a Reverberation of the Caste System in the Society

Dr. Salini L.R.

Abstract

The caste system has existed in India for at least 3,000 years. It is a social hierarchy that is passed down through families and can dictate people's professions and social status. However, the evils of the caste system disrupt the lives of millions of people in India every year. Superstitious beliefs, discrimination, marginalisation, untouchability, greed, exploitation, and selfishness play a major role in the caste system in distracting society. The novel Samskara highlights the problems arising from caste-based discrimination in society and how people are marginalised and categorised as untouchables by the dominant sections of society.

Keywords: discrimination, marginalisation, and untouchability.

Samskara A rite of Dead Man, a classic of modern literature, is an intense exploration of subaltern issues such as the caste system, inequality, untouchability, patriarchy, Orthodoxy of Brahminism, and marginalisation. As an insider's account of life in a community that practised these issues, the novel assumes even greater significance. The book offers a scathing critique of the caste system. U R Ananthamurthy lived in a society in which the caste system was very critical. Therefore, his experience and intense opposition are visible in the novel. He is a famous Kannada writer and critic who strongly opposed Brahmanism and traditional blind beliefs. Most of Ananthamurthy's literary works deal with the psychological aspects of people in different situations, times, and circumstances. His writings supposedly analyse aspects ranging from the challenges and changes faced by Brahmin families in Karnataka to the bureaucrats and political turmoil in their lives.

Samskara: The Rite of the Dead Man was translated by AK Ramanujan. He was born on March 16, 1929. He was an Indian poet and scholar of Indian literature and linguistics. Ramanujan was also a professor of linguistics at the University of Chicago. He was a poet, scholar, linguist, philologist, folklorist, translator, and playwright. His academic research ranged across five languages: English, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, and Sanskrit. He published works on both classical and modern variants of this literature and strongly argued for giving local, non-standard dialects their due. Although he wrote widely in numerous genres, Ramanujan's poems

are remembered as enigmatic works of startling originality, sophistication, and moving artistry. He was awarded the Sahitya Academy Award posthumously in 1999 for The Collected Poems.

The central theme of the novel is the death of an anti-Brahmin and the problems associated with his cremation. One of the main characters is Narayanappa, a Brahmin by birth who rejected the set rules of Brahminism by eating meat and keeping the company of a prostitute named Chandri. Narayanappa and his friends caught a sacred fish in the temple tank, cooked, and ate it. This caused the Brahmins in the villages to rise up against him. They approached Praneshacharya to throw him out of the village. Praneshacharya decided against taking this extreme step and believed that Narayanappa could be convinced to abandon his immoral acts. Narayanappa visited Shimoga and returned to Duravasapura with a high fever and died. The Brahmins were left in a piquant situation because, according to Brahmin principles, a person who dies should be cremated as early as possible. None of the Brahmins wanted to cremate the body; they felt that by cremating Narayanappa's body, they would become polluted as he was against Brahmin principles during his life. However, Brahmin principles also stipulate that a non-Brahmin cannot cremate the body of a Brahmin. Praneshacharya, being the leader, was responsible for finding a solution to this difficult problem. Ananthamurthy was unafraid to criticise the lifestyle of the Brahmins. The stupid insistence on adhering to religious commandments caused Narayanappa's body to decay. Rats and vultures were drawn in by the nauseating odour, making life in the agrahara intolerable. The community valued ceremony above a dead man's entitlement to a good funeral. Naranappa, the anti-Brahmin against the most-Brahmin Praneshacharya and Brahmanism itself, was the most intriguing figure in the book. Although Naranappa died in the first scene, he was constantly present throughout the entire book. He was honest despite his coarse behaviour. Compared with the Brahmins' false behaviour, this honesty caused Praneshacharya to question whether Naranappa would reach God first. In short, even a dead man became a victim of marginalisation because of casteism. The depiction of women and lower castes was realistic and miserable. Women were treated as mere sexual objects.

Gayatri Spivak's outstanding article *Can the Subaltern Speak?* scrutinises the subaltern concept from a theoretical perspective. According to Spivak, a subaltern cannot speak. She argues that the subaltern does not have a voice. In her essay*, she writes*, "The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists, with women being pious. The representation has not withered away. The female intellectual has a circumscribed task that

she must not disown with a flourish" (Spivak 104). This is also true in the case of samskara. After the death of Naranappa, his mistress Chandri comes to the Brahmin for the cremation of the body and the arguments take place among the Brahmins about his funeral, but Chandri has no voice in that time. Even in the case of the cremation of his husband, she remains silent and helpless because the subaltern cannot speak or make decisions in front of the mainstream society. If they speak, the upper-class men should be polluted. "If the Praneshacharya talked to her, he would be polluted; he would have to bathe again before his meal" (2). This is the rule of the Brahmin, as mentioned in the novel Samskara. They do not allow people to speak. Here, Chandri is doubly marginalised as a lower-caste woman. She is suppressed by men and the upper-class society.

Ananthamurthy's brilliant depictions of characters can be seen throughout the novel. It presents the aftermath of the caste system and social inequalities. Each of the characters is representative of the social system. Through their traits and ideologies, the author raises several questions against the superstitions that are followed in society.

Samskara celebrated three major themes: the caste system, self-discovery, and transformation and greed. Chandra's gold changed the attitude of Brahmins regarding the cremation of Naranappa. The people who refused to cremate Naranappa came forward to cremate him in front of gold.

In summary, by emphasising the need for an egalitarian society devoid of superstitions, Samskara seems to promote a new paradigm. It focuses on the social questions of the caste system and highlights the cognitive dissonance created in the minds of its followers. Samskara means the funeral that is given to a dead person but in another sense, it is transformation and purification of mind-set. Thus, Samskara can purify the minds of society members by realising the dogma of the caste system. It is a potent story about a caste system that challenges its ardent adherents and successfully demonstrates that it has no place in contemporary society. It is rich in metaphor. Although it was written about 60 years ago, it remains relevant today. It highlights the need to resolve the problems of caste-based discrimination to build an egalitarian society.

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Narrating the Self: A Reading of Sita's Recounting of the Ramayana in Chitra Banerji Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*

Revathy S.

Abstract

Myths and legends are genres of folklore that narrate human deeds, in which the main characters are often gods or supernatural beings. Legends mainly depict human actions that are believed to have taken place in human history. The Ramayana, which narrates the life of the legendary prince of the Kosala kingdom, Lord Rama, is one of the two major epics of ancient India. There are many versions of the Ramayana in different languages, and the present study examines Sita's account of the epic as portrayed in Chitra Banerji Divakaruni's The Forest of Enchantments. The novel talks about Sitayana; that is, it portrays Sita's journey.

Keywords: Myths, Patriarchy, Marginalization, Womanhood

Myths and legends are genres of folklore that narrate human deeds, in which the main characters are often gods or supernatural beings. Legends mainly picture human actions that are believed to have taken place in human history. *The Ramayana*, which narrates the life of the legendary prince of the Kosala kingdom, Lord Rama, is one of the two major epics of ancient India. Many versions of the *Ramayana* are available in various languages; like Valmiki Ramayana, Kamba Ramayana, Adbhuta Ramayana together with many other folk songs addressing Ramaand depicting his compassion, valour and courage, in different ways. The epic *Ramayana* narrates the journey of Lord Rama and the poem concentrates chiefly on the central character, Rama. However, in the novel *The Forest of Enchantments,* Divakaruni retells the story by placing Sita as the narrator and narrates it from Sita's perspective and experiences. And hence the novel is about Sitayana, "the journey of Sita." The novel also gives space to other women characters in the epic who are disregarded, neglected, silenced, misunderstood, and often portrayed in a negative light.

In the author's note, Divakaruni clarifies how Sita in *The Forest of Enchantments* differs from the female protagonists of her other novels. The author states some of her concerns by raising certain questions: "was not she, after all, good and meek and long-suffering, bearing her misfortunes with silent stoicism the way the perfect Indian woman was supposed to? Was

n' t that why, when our elders blessed us, they said, may you be like Sita? And wasn't that why that statement always angered me?" (Divakarunivii). The author feels that writing Sita's story is not that simple and realises that the most challenging aspect of her project will be to tackle what she already knows.

Sita's story haunted the author for a long time and she discerned a lacuna between the experiences of Sita and the way the common public thought of her. This encouraged her to write Sita's version of the *Ramayana* by placing her at the centre. From her own readings of the different versions of the *Ramayana*, Divakaruni understood that Ram and Sita, believed to be the incarnations of the lord Vishnu and the goddess Lakshmi respectively, are human beings with all their human flaws and imperfections. The epic is filled with many instances revealing their love and anger, but we get the picture of Lord Ram as caught between his love for Sita on one side and his disposition to be the ideal king on the other side.

Divakaruni points out that Sita's preferences, choices, and responses, often misunderstood as meekness, actually stem from her courage, which is often quiet. "It is the courage of endurance, of moving forward, in spite of obstacles, of never giving in. It is the courage that has been reflected for centuries in the lives of women. Hers is the courage that speaks its mind at vital points in her journey, no matter what the cost–just as Indian women are now doing. In the final amazing and heartbreaking moments of her life, Sita demonstrates this courage that refuses to compromise, no matter how much is at stake" (ix). Even though the novel retells the story of the Ramayana from Sita's perspective, it doesn't place Ramon the darker side but instead presents Ramasa complex being of modesty, nobility, solemnity, and devotion, who was "forced to choose between his public role of king and his private role of husband and lover" (Divakaruni ix).

Sage Valmiki handed over his great work, *The Ramayana*, the story of the glorious king Lord Rama, to Sita for her approval, saying, "After all it's your story too" and "I would like you to be the first to read it before I give it your son for reading" (Divakaruni2). Sita praised the sage for the sublime and perfect poetry, which captures "the histories of both earth and heaven, the adventures and the wars, the weddings and the deaths, the betrayals and the farewells, the palace and the forest" (2). However, with an angry tone, she raises some of her arguments:

What occurred when I was alone in the darkness under the sorrow tree, you do not know. You do not know my despair. You do not even know my exhilaration, how it felt–first in the forest and then in Ayodhya – when I was the most beloved woman in creation. For you have not understood a woman's life, the heartbreak at the core of her joys, her unexpected alliances and desires, her negotiations, in which, in the hope of keeping one treasure safe, she must give up another (2).

As per the sage's advice of writing her version of the story, as she is the only one who knows it, Sita starts her "Sitayana" but some unheard voices, often marginalised and misunderstood, seek their place in the story" some clamouring, some tentative, some whispering" (4). Kaikeyi, the second queen of Ayodhya and mother of Bharata, seized the throne of Ayodhya, out of her affection and admiration to her son, only to be despised by her own son for the same, Ahalya who was turned in to a stone by the curse of her enraged husband Gautam, Surpanakha, who expressed her desire to Ram, Mandodari, the wife of Ravan, who was forced to witness the fall of her kingdom and who lost her beloved son due to her husband's way of life and Urmila, Lakshman's wife, the neglected one, who was left behind by her husband as he accompanied Ram to the forest; are some of the unheard voices in the epic. According to Divakaruni, without portraying these unheard voices relegated to the periphery, Sitayana will remain incomplete (4).

Thoughts like who am I? or what am I? lead to the notion of the self. According to David Hume, what 'I' am is a bundle of sensations; hence, the idea of the self emerges from a body's ability to perceive sensations and undergo experiences. Furthermore, for Hume, the self is a type of interpretation of these experiences *(A Treatise of Human Nature)*. The female characters in the novel are found entangled within the confines of tradition, struggling to retain their voice and determination in a system that predominantly caters to and is designed for men.

Ahalya, a creation of Brahma, married Gautam, an ascetic. She sincerely took care of her husband and performed all the" dharma" s of a" devoted wife." However, when she fell prey to the trickery of Lord Indra, who was enchanted by the beauty of Ahalya and approached her in the guise of Gautam, she was misunderstood and accused by her husband, who suspected her chastity and virtue. The furious Gautam cursed her, "for betraying the sacred marital vows for the sake of bodily pleasure and turned her into a stone' (114). Here, Ahalya was not given a chance to explain her innocence and when she restored her life after Ram's touch, she took

a vow of silence. Gautam interpreted this as a means of attaining spiritual merit without understanding Ahalya's suffering due to cruel mistreatment.

Surpanakha, the sister of the demon king Ravana, was enchanted by the beauty of Rama. She adopted the form of a beautiful young woman and approached Rama while he was seated with Sita and Lakshman. She expressed her passionate feelings toward him and proposed to marry him: "I really like you so I am asking you to be my mate" (146). Surpanakha became an object of mockery in front of Rama and Lakshman, and finally, her nose and ears were chopped off by the arrows of Lakshman. Urmila, who wished to accompany her husband to the forest, was denied her rights by her husband himself by exerting his power upon her as a patriarchal lord by saying, "Your duty is to obey me" (116). Mandodari, the chief queen of Ravan, was also a courageous woman who stood with fortitude amidst the atrocities unleashed against her because of the deeds of her husband. Sita felt sorrow for these women characters who stood loyal to their male counterparts and had experienced bitterness in their life for being loyal.

Sita, known as the warrior of Mithila, is an embodiment of an ideal woman and wife, loyal to her husband and obedient to him without any inhibitions, even though she is bold and courageous enough to fight against all the oddities by herself. There are several instances in the novel that resonate with the hold of the patriarchal system. Right from her childhood, Sita listens to her mother Sunaina's words upholding traditional values, and even from her own experiences, Sita realises that Ram and Janak "do not toy with the deep-rooted beliefs of their people. Not for the sake of personal happiness. Not even to prove a point" (14).

Rama, known for his righteousness, failed to keep his word to his wife for the sake of his subjects. Angered by the disfigurement of his sister Shurpanakha, Ravana decided to wreak vengeance by abducting Sita. While captive, Sita remained chaste without getting submissive to the compulsions of Ravana. Whenever Ravana approached Sita to request her to become his queen, she replied, "Rama is my entire universe. I have given him my heart, all of it, forever. Even if I wanted to, I could never enjoy another person, man or god or asura" (202).

After the war, when Sita was rescued from captivity, Rama said," Now we have slain Ravan, and set you free. This ended my duty and responsibility. Go where you will to live out there" (242). Rama doubts her virtue, rejects her because of his subject, and insults her by

suggesting that she take another husband. Having been hurt by her husband, Sita decided to undergo a purificatory ordeal to prove her chastity. Rama's words make it clear that he was sure of her faithfulness, but even then, he asked her to prove her chastity, "I knew that your emaciated body was clear proof of your faithfulness' (261). Here, we get the impression that being a loyal wife, she was ready to obey her husband without questioning, and she was ready to forgive him for all insulting remarks.

After completing fourteen years of exile, Rama returned to Ayodhya with his retinue, and he had broken the tradition and insisted that Sita's place was beside him and not behind. But being a duty-bound king, he was forced to desert his wife at Valmiki's as harm to avoid the rumours that spread across Ayodhya about Sita's chastity." How did Rama know that Sita was trapped by Ravan, or worse, did not give in to his persuasions? She was with him in Lanka for a long time. How do we know that there really was a trial by fire?... and the child he is carrying-how do we know it's Ram's?" (314). When such doubts began to creep into the minds of his subjects, he ignored the rights of his wife and banished her from his life. Sita, on the other hand, was an ideal wife who had been loyal and faithful to him throughout her life. Her words explain the pain she underwent: " My husband, whom I trusted from the very moment my father put my hand in his. My husband, whom I believed in through the darkest nights of my despair in Lanka. My husband, whom I forgave even after his harsh words on the battlefield in Lanka, gave me no choice but to throw myself into a fire. My husband, to whom the gods themselves proclaimed my innocence, that husband has now discarded me like an old sandal" (317).

Amidst all these trials and tribulations, Sita courageously cared for her twin sons. Instead of Sage Valmiki's *Ramayan* which narrates the story of Ram's adventures as hero and king, Lav and Kush took the manuscript of Sitayan and performed it in the court of Ayodhya during the yagna and Ram received it with ears. After accepting his children, Lord Rama, who is known for his righteousness, asked his wife to undergo the fire ordeal once again to prove her chastity in front of his subjects. Ram's words pierced the heart of Sita: "… but there is one thing you must do first–you must go through a test by fire here in the courtroom, so that the sages and attending kings and ministers of the court can witness the fire-god vouching for your innocence and purity" (355).

Sita accepted Ram's priorities; however, she was not ready to agree with his idea of sacrificing her private life for a public one. She denied his demand to prove her innocence to

get back into his life and boldly replied," … and that is why, O King Ram, I must reject your kind offer to allow me to prove my innocence again. Because this is one of those times when a woman must stand up and say, No more!" (357).

The significant place held by the epic *Ramayana* in Indian mythology poses a significant challenge to a writer who endeavours to retell it from an alternative perspective. Sita is always portrayed as an embodiment of Indian womanhood, and girls are advised to strive to become like her. Through *The Forest of Enchantments, Divakaruni* raises several questions that unsettle the reader and prompts a re-examination of the roles women play in society and in the family. Through the women characters in the ancient epic, Divakaruni examines how women are treated within families and in relationships when she addresses the gulf between what women expect and what they usually receive. The expectations and concerns that patriarchal society holds for women lead the latter to identity crises and a loss of self-regard. The life of women becomes an endless ordeal as they attempt to fit into the framework that society has moulded for them. Divakaruni's Sita, however, determines to listen to her "self" as she takes a strong decision and says, 'enough is enough'.

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Lajja: Tracing the Silenced Histories of Religious Nationalism in Bangladesh

Dr. Jasmine Jose

> Apparently, peace is the ultimate goal of all religions but even at the end of this century we continue to see how religion is the cause of much strife, bloodshed and disgrace among human beings (Nasrin 50)

Introduction to Religious Politics in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, religion is not an autonomous sphere that can be studied separately from politics and vice versa. Many intersections and underlying relations between overtly religious and supposedly non-religious entities are plain truths. Gender politics, economic politics, governmental and authoritarian issues are all interconnected and directly linked to religion in a country where religious nationalism is a major concern. Literature often reflects such events in our society. When the government does not support the marginalised, it supports hooligans and thereby indirectly or unofficially promotes their double-dealing. In an article titled "The Political Theology of Conservative Postmodern Democracies: Fascism by Stealth," David Kindon analyses how when religion combines with politics, it produces a variant of fascism. He further observes that in such a nation, "legal principles are often challenged through criticism of the judiciary or by legislative change to legitimise previously illegal actions" (Kindon, 2014, p.11). This attitude makes minorities the scapegoats, as they are demonised and declared enemies of the nation and God, with the help of the holy book and the judiciary. *Lajja*, a novel that has had a profound impact and has faced several challenges, is based on the first-hand experience of the author as a Bangladeshi citizen. Although she does not belong to the minority community, she is a cultural insider who has found it irresistible to write about the injustices that occur. However, this has brought immense trouble to Nasrin's personal life.

Lajja: An Overview

The backdrop of the novel is the tumultuous period in the history of Bangladesh, the time when the country reacted to the demolition of the Babri Masjid in India. The generic emotion of the community is reflected through the life of the Datta family in Dhaka. The family, consisting of four members, represents a typical Hindu family amid communal violence. The experiences of a father and husband are portrayed through Sudhamoy; that of a son and a

brother of a young woman are reflected through the character Suronjon; that of a mother of a young daughter and a son, and that of a wife are portrayed through Kiranmoyee; and finally, Maya represents many young women born into the Hindu community in Bangladesh during that time who have been exploited by fanatics in the name of religion. The family has witnessed several such violences but still refuses to migrate as they expect that the leaders will one day realise their contributions to the nation and the importance of equality in a multi-religious nation. The situations have worsened day by day, and they have been subjected to trials and tribulations. Finding a place to hide has become one of the things they have been forced to do. First, their land is taken away from them using forged documents by Muslim neighbours. Later, Sudhamoy finds that everyone who has joined along with him got a promotion when his career remained stagnant; eventually, he loses his job, and they even have no freedom to walk freely on the streets. One day, leaving the family in utter pain, Maya goes missing, like many other Hindu women of her age. The work recounts several incidents and moments in the Datta family that reflect their dire condition.

A Background of Religious Politics in Bangladesh

The factors that possibly unite the people of a particular nation include shared history, religion, language, and food habits. It is desirable to consider only one of the above, that is, shared history or the past, which is also a determinant of all other constituents, to analyse the possibilities of establishing equality and unity within a nation-state. The significance of the shared history of a nation is vital for any community, and it binds the people of the nation. However, if this history represents only a few or neglects a few, it leads to further complications and divisions within that society.

If not appropriately controlled, there is a tempting relationship between politics and religion, a fusion of violence, power and manipulation and the sacred, sanctified and divine. This is an absolute combination that can have incredible control over the thoughts and actions of the masses. This, in fact, confuses the public and lures them into a trap. Being blinded by the ideologies of those in power, the ordinary public starts acting with extraordinary potential by embracing violence, as it is justified in the name of the divine. Once they achieve their goal, the primary objective is to retain power and control by supervising the public effectively. This is made possible by continually spreading their ideologies, as Althusser has analysed, through ideological state apparatuses. The process of writing the nation or narrating it is a major task.

The ideal step is to supervise the narration by selecting the appropriate content, omitting the unfavourable, and using the perfect language to make it appealing. Exploitation and corruption often remain dormant under the guise of religion and politics, and any mistakes by the authorities are repeatedly distorted through all possible means.

The formation of the Bangladesh nation-state has been an inclusive as well as liberating force for the Bengalis. It has proclaimed the liberation of the people from imperial and colonial rule and has united and connected them under a nation. The history, politics, and religion of Bangladesh, a country that was formed during the post-colonial era, cannot be read in isolation, as all these are connected with the history, politics, religion, and culture of its neighbouring countries, India and Pakistan. Religious preoccupation has consumed the lives of many people in all three countries. Leaders have demanded partition in the name of language and religion. In the case of Bangladesh, the partition has been for language, which has sacrificed the lives of several people of both languages; but when the religious leaders have started poisoning the minds of the people in both the countries, it has again taken the lives of an innumerable number of people. Both times, they have acted like puppets in the hands of political and religious leaders. Many have become refugees, many have lost their close ones, and many others have lost their lands. Fundamentalism, the cradle of fanaticism, has slowly started creeping into the nation and has pushed the nation into a communal madness during the early 1990s. The complex relationship between these countries has affected the lives of citizens in different ways. Hindus and Muslims have waited to counterblow for the murder of one from their religion. Most of the time, the leaders of all these countries have misused it as a part of their vote bank policies, and they have cultivated rivalry, extremism, and fanaticism to divide the people and thereby to manipulate the voters. In an extremist country, the condition of the marginals would be under continuous danger. Taslima Nasrin is an audacious writer from Bangladesh who has shown the courage to challenge the religious fanaticism in her community and has challenged the cultivated version of history by recording an alternate version in her novel. She has attempted to be an essential catalyst for an equitable and fair society. However, soon after the authorities realised that her writings are not just fantasy but are powerful testimonials, her attempts have been declared profane and anti-national.

When Pakistan was declared a Muslim nation, India and Bangladesh remained secular countries with more liberal ideologies. Slowly, the cancerous thoughts of fanaticism have crept into the minds of the people in both countries. Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority

Bangladesh have started responding to fanatic stimuli from each country. Whenever news of Muslim torture occurred in India, it reached Bangladesh, and the Hindu people there faced the consequences, and vice versa. Many anti-Hindu riots have occurred in Bangladesh, and in turn, many anti-Muslim riots have occurred in India. It is in this backdrop Taslima Nasrin has written her most controversial novel Lajja. The power of religion to split people rather than bind them and impart peace is clearly portrayed in the novel. Since the setting is Bangladesh, the life and dire conditions of the members of a Hindu family and the role of Muslim leaders, authorities, and even neighbours in the plight of the Hindu people are delineated in the novel. When historians have intentionally or forcefully forgotten to record the details of the violent reaction of Muslim extremists in Bangladesh to the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992 in India by Hindu fundamentalists, Nasrin has shown remarkable courage to record the bloody past through her novel, against the wishes of the leaders in Bangladesh. As a result, she has faced many vehement reactions from the authorities, and the resentful leaders have banned the book in Bangladesh, claiming that it is an anti-Islamic fiction, whereas it has nothing to do with Islamic beliefs but is a criticism of the violence committed against the Hindu minority. At the same time, between the lines, the sensible metaphors speak of another historical moment in India, the destruction of the mosque and further tension between Muslims and Hindus.

The developmental issues of a nation like Bangladesh also mainly sprout from internal problems within the nation. The concept of the nation-state itself becomes a failure if the nation fails to assimilate all its people. Cultural contestations rarely occur in such a society. Inquisitive research on this topic is detailed in Homi K Bhabha's book, *Nation and Narration*.

Negotiating Identity: Non-Islamic Believers in Bangladesh During Turmoil

All fundamental rights are expected to guarantee smooth interactions between people and thereby the well-being of the subjects, which would result in the establishment of the identity of the citizens in the nation. If an individual is not treated as a part of the society, the equation of identity as a product of cultural artefacts cannot be expanded to its fullest. Submitting one's desires and dreams to become tools in the hands of the controllers annihilates identity, and only the collective identity bestowed upon them by the leaders would remain; singularity or individuality is lost when being a part of such a society. The concept of identifying a person with place can be traced in an article by Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila titled "Building an Identity: Place as an Image of Self in Classical Arabic Literature." When religion acts as a rigid institution, the self-expression of individuals is at stake.

The novel discusses even minute details and presents the overall outcome of these seemingly simple actions. Nasrin rightly points out that all administrative roles are assigned to Muslims, while Hindus are expected to do menial jobs. Once they have owned lands, they have practiced medicine, they have worked as professors. Once they own land, practice medicine, or work as professors, their positions slowly start deteriorating; they cannot get promotions and are forced to retire from their jobs, giving up their lands and education, and everything that could bring development in their lives. They have been forced to pay it as a cost for the religious fanaticism prevailing in the nation.

No individual would be able to express or establish his or her true potential and identity during the time of a calamity. Reading between the lines of the novel helps one understand the dangerous death of the identity of several minorities, which makes them physically inactive and socially idle and apathetic. Suranjon, Sudhamoy, Romesh Chondro, who has been forcibly converted into a Muslim, Sudir Baidya, who has received threats to his life after his wife was raped by Sultan, a policeman, are all best examples to analyse this issue that affects the functioning of the whole society. Suronjon, as a direct victim of the calamity, is unable to realise his potential and remains sluggish throughout the day. Their religion determines their identity in the country; their other shared elements, including the language, food habits, or geographical area, are treated as of zero value, and their status is reduced as mere Hindu minorities. This is again reflected in Sudhamoy's thoughts, where he contemplates, "I am not safe in this country in spite of the fact that I am a citizen and have been part of the language movement and been to war to chase the Pakistanis out and liberate this country" (Nasrin, 1993, p.240). Sudhamoy's identity as a doctor is completely effaced, and now he is a helpless man who is unable to do anything for society or his family.

Ecclesiastical rape is also portrayed in the work, which causes the people to lose trust in religion. Maya, the daughter of the Datta family, is the daughter of every Hindu family in Bangladesh, who is always at risk of being raped, and even the men from their community are helpless. Many women are missing, and the law or rules never care about their rights and protection. This makes the Hindu people out of place and unwanted in the nation; as they are missing from the official records, they are also missing from every other record of the nation. Sudhamoy's friend's reaction also shows that Maya is not being valued in a Muslim-majority nation; her missing is not a loss for the society as she has no identity other than that of a Hindu girl.

Collective and individual recognition are essential for the full growth of identity. Therefore, the society in which one belongs also plays a significant role in the expansion of one's identity. In the novel, many Hindus are forcibly converted into Muslims, and their names are also changed. The complete change in their identity and loss of self are thus reflected through these actions. "A drunk Romesh…was forcibly made to change his religion" (Nasrin 67). His wife and older brother have also been pressurised to convert, and when she complains, the leaders threaten her, and she runs away for her life. The question of identity in such a situation is never raised, and they are wholly left without any other choice. Their life is totally unpredictable, as it is entirely under the control of others. They have no right to decide their future or destiny; every attempt they make ends up being futile. That is the reason why there are many unemployed youngsters in the Hindu community and many unlearned and unintelligent youngsters of the Muslim community in different official positions of the nation. Therefore, the status of Muslims is high, and the image projected is also perfect for them. In various parts of the novel, Suronjon wishes that he were a cat, as it has more freedom than him and has no worries about its caste or creed, but just food.

Self-Esteem and social interest are two major components lacking in Hindus, especially among young people, because the situations are not favourable for them. Developmental contextualism is as important as personality traits, and if the former is not favourable for an individual, it affects the latter and completely alters the personality and determines the identity of an individual. Daniel Hart and M. Kyle Matsuba in their book chapter titled "Urban Neighbourhoods as Contexts for Moral Identity Development" analyse the importance of opportunity for action as one among many other elements that determine the moral identity of people. "It appears as if the large population of youth, combined with a lack of resources, may overwhelm a community's ability to provide opportunity for development. Moreover, high child saturation may be associated with youth valuing independence over community" (Hart & Matsuba 226). This shows that opportunity automatically comes with the protection of freedom and rights. As seen in the novel, when this does not happen, it eventually affects the identity and personality of individuals considerably.

The Political Instrumentalization of Religion in *Lajja*

Religion is a tricky and delicate affair, and a little spark could flare up and engulf the whole community. The Bengali liberation war of 1971 resulted in the deaths of many civilians,

and the strife at that time was mainly between those who spoke Urdu and those who spoke Bengali. Leaders of the nation have misused and inflamed this situation and exercised their tactics to retain their footing in the administrative realm. History has repeatedly proven that people in the governing sector use religion, language, caste, creed, race, and everything possible to divide people so that they can have control over them. Religious nationalism is an idea inculcated in the minds of the public by a set of religious leaders with a hidden agenda, political interests, and the wish to have absolute control over the public. Thus says Salman Rushdie, "Throughout human history, the apostles of purity, those who have claimed to possess a total explanation, have wrought havoc among mere mixed-up human beings" (Ghosh, T. K., & Bhattacharyya 12). Historiography has the power to magnify or diminish major political events.

Extremist theocratic societies are mostly caught in the nexus of power relations, in which two different institutions, religion and politics, are entangled and overlap in sharing power. A more surprising fact is that although everyone knows about the role religion plays in a political society, it is hardly discussed openly by any leaders. Reza Aslan, an Iranian-American author and activist, observes that religion is not something that holds people together in a geographical space. Nevertheless, leaders nurture fundamentalism, believing that it will be under their control, whereas it is a beast that cannot be caged but would devour the whole nation. This has been proven time and again throughout history. Minority religious communities in every country desire a secular nation, whereas the majority does not want to relinquish their power and superior position in the nation. This has been further fuelled and manipulated by political leaders. Extremists and fundamentalists consider secular humanism to be dangerous. The story narrates Bangladesh's reaction to the annihilation of the Babri Masjid in India. The Hindu community suddenly feels unsafe in their country, and many have started migrating to neighbouring India. The shocking stand taken by the country has paralysed many Hindus who have contributed everything for the nation once. Sudhamoy is one such civilian who has believed in patriotism and has dedicated his youth to the country's liberation from Pakistan. The price he has to pay for being a Hindu and a patriot who refused to migrate is too high for him as a helpless father and husband. Although he has patiently waited, expecting the nation's mercy, the nation has clearly been divided, and things have started to lose one by one, beginning with his job, land, own house, right to wear a dress of his choice, and finally, his own daughter, Maya. They have been tortured through violence, scathing attacks, and words. Sudhamoy is the best instance of wilful suspension of disbelief; he even tries to convey the same idea to his

family members and fellow Hindus. Suranjon finally realises that what his father believes in will never happen, and they are simply treated as abominable people. The state fails to protect the individuals of its nation equally. Initially, their Muslim friends treated them well and tried to protect them. Hindu fundamentalists in India provoke Muslim fundamentalists in Bangladesh, and in turn, Hindus in Bangladesh have become the scapegoats for religious politics. Maya, like many other young girls, has been taken away by ruffians who have received the licence to do what they have been waiting for. This makes their life a burden for themselves.

The religious leaders' phenomenal control over the minds of the people and their ability to make people think that peace can be attained through violence are very high in an extremist society. Their commanding power, which exploits the inner weaknesses, such as the fear of others, fear of the life after death, and fear of the wrath that awaits if one does not work for God, helps give birth to a mass that can act violently and mercilessly. The Hindu people in India and the Muslim people in Bangladesh have been victims of these follies during the time of partition. The novel begins with "Suronjon's friends were largely Muslim" (Nasrin, 1993, p.35). The friends, belonging to different religions, suddenly become conscious about their religion and start forgetting that the nation was formed from diversity. As Whitford, A., Yates, J., & Ochs, H. Observe in their study "State citizen ideology is a much more complex story. In this case, extremism increases participation, and the effect is higher in the case of liberal extremism" (Whitford, Yates & Ochs 47).

The change in the attitude of the closed neighbours and friends is also because of liberal extremism, in which they are allowed or expected to be extremists. The moment the Muslims and Hindus of the country have started thinking the way the authorities wanted, the peace of the country has begun to be at stake. Eventually, things get worse, and he is left without any friends but only enemies. It is not because of any of his character flaws, but the nation has decided so, to construct a Muslim nation-state, where no Muslim would be a friend of a Hindu but only a fellow Muslim. A man like Sudhamoy, who has been a part of all the major movements of the nation, including the people's movement and language movement, has suddenly become a secondary citizen of the nation. Sudhamoy remembers "Alamgir Monsur Mintu was shot by the police and Sudhamoy was one of those who carried the corpse on his shoulders and marched through the streets of Mymensingh" (Nasrin 11) The incidents of Bangladesh in recent history are also on par with these. The only qualification the authorities have considered before appointing an official has been complete loyalty to the religion.

People have started becoming conscious of their religion and started forgetting easily that it is their common language that has united them as a nation. They have also forgotten that Hindus also shed an equal amount of blood to form a separate nation for Bengalis, those who speak the Bangla language. The nation's own history proves that neither language nor religion can hold them together as far as the leaders have a great control on their thought processes, until they start thinking independently.

An article titled "Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja*: A Shame on Religion and Politics" provides a detailed analysis of the novel as a representation of the political situations in Bangladesh. The article discusses how favourable conditions are "misused by the shrewd politicians and the fanatics." It discloses that rather than religious sentiments, the ultimate motive of the plunderers is the complete exploitation of the Hindu people, the weaker community. Thus, the author states, "*Lajja* addresses the dark realities of the violence which is not a spontaneous outburst against a community, but has, along with it, the ulterior motives of gratifying the greedy desires of property, money, and women" (Singh 1).

Taslima Nasrin as a Literary Dissident: The Cost of Speaking Truth to Power

As previously discussed, in the absence of anyone to represent their cause, Taslima Nasrin gave voice to it through her novel Lajja. This act of resistance has unsettled the authorities, who had not faced any significant opposition until now, even from within the Hindu religious community. Consequently, they have found it difficult to accept this dissent. To draw attention to the cause, Taslima Nasrin narrates the story from the perspective of a victimised family. State-sponsored violence is not easily addressed, as those in power often choose to remain blind to such atrocities. Although the novel may not bring about sweeping changes, it has the potential to shift the perspective of at least a few readers and policymakers. Furthermore, it may serve as a valuable resource for future historians, especially when official records and government-sanctioned narratives fail to document these events. Lajja, therefore, offers an alternative and necessary perspective on the socio-political realities of the time.

Some women readers have found it a courageous feminist novel, Islamic religious leaders have found in it elements of blasphemy, and Hindu religious leaders have found the aspects of humanity and portrayal of atrocities against the Hindu people in Bangladesh. The condition of a vulnerable man and masculinity in the novel has also become a focus of study. In an article titled "Masculinity in Crisis: Nasreen's Lajja and the Minority Man in Postcolonial South

Asia," Debali Mookerjea-Leonard focuses on "the way in which forces of violence during a political crisis take as their favoured expression the masculine assertion of will and capacity to violate, mutilate, and deform the bodies of the vulnerable; in this case, of vulnerable me.". No history book opens such a wide range of freedom and opportunities for readers to deliver their perspectives; instead, it delivers a perspective that is either the historian's own or that of the power that controls the historian. Although each perspective is different, they all find the elements of exploitation of different sections of weak by strong using power in society, and this is why every version should be duly considered as a part of history. Maya is the representative of all women of the Hindu community; Sudhamoy and Suronjon are representatives of hapless Hindu men and helpless brothers and fathers of the Hindu community. They are not physically weak, but their basic weakness is their religion.

There are rules that authorise the government to forfeit copies of any book or printed material or any media that violates specific guidelines in every country. These rules can be effortlessly manipulated and used against any documents that do not support the existing history constructed by the appointed historians. Notwithstanding the statements on freedom of expression and religion, Bangladesh is a land where speaking against the authority is rigidly prohibited. Lajja is one of the most challenged works as the religious authorities claim it as anti-Islamic, where Nasrin herself is from the Islamic religion. The novel stands as a voice, perhaps the only voice, of the Hindu minorities and apparently says nothing against the Islamic religion or its core religious text, the Quran; whereas it exposes the plight of the minority people in a nation corrupted by religious extremism and fundamentalism. The authorities who have a command over most of the public services have used every possible method as their ideological state apparatuses, the tool for them to promote their ideologies. The only threat they have is the dissidents who are ready to jeopardise their lives and families for a just and righteous cause. When they are determined to speak out, the authorities have no other choice but to ensure that it does not reach the public. Undoubtedly, they use repressive state apparatuses, both soft and hard power, to domesticate them, if not to push them out or to completely liquidate them along with their voices. There are different means through which the authority does this, and using censorship rules is one such effective method. When the authorities claim that a work disturbs the communal harmony of the nation, it is censored. Others include persecution, legal barriers, and different monitoring committees appointed by the in-charges.

In the introduction to an interview with Nasrin, Suvojit Bagchi, a journalist for The Hindu, unfolds the truth about the violation of laws protecting freedom of expression in Bangladesh. He says,

Her country (Bangladesh) has, in recent times, seen many intellectuals expelled or killed. Ahmed Rajib Haider, an atheist blogger who wrote under the name Thaba Baba, was hacked to death after the Shahbag protests in 2013. In February this year, atheist blogger Avijit Roy was killed in Dhaka by extremist groups for his writings on the Bangla blog Mukto-Mona (Free Thinker) that he founded (Bagchi & Nasrin 1).

These are the issues that were discussed, and many such incidents remain buried and unacknowledged. The use of a pseudonym is not an innovative idea. Many dissidents, including many women and men from different marginalised groups, have used this technique to avoid persecution by the authorities. Even then, writers such as Ahmed Rajib Haider were killed and persecuted mercilessly. The risks they take are beyond imagination, and they have to be altruistic to carry the weight of the entire community. This brings trouble not only to the writer but also to their family members and close friends. To paralyse them both physically and mentally, the leaders use all violent methods. They have to be selfless to become the "superheroes" who can speak for the right cause. Mostly, they are banished from the land, are not allowed to publish their work, are deceived, and even declared terrorists, blasphemers, and anti-nationalists. She has become an enemy of her own country when she has shown her mettle. Within five months of the publication, approximately 60,000 copies of the book were sold, and after realising the potential danger of the book to act against their current policies, the authorities immediately banned the book, and a fatwa was announced against Nasrin (Singh, 2). She has been exiled from the country and again shuttled from India to Sweden and again to India, France, and the US. Her passport was soon revoked, and she is no longer considered a citizen of Bangladesh ("Why Taslima Nasreen wants to return to Bangladesh"). This shows that the fanatics do not limit themselves to religion but also interfere in business, politics, and other aspects that can control the people.

Minorities are tamed and, therefore, are afraid to take a public stance because they are denied promotions in their jobs and dismissed if they question, and are urged to perform the least wanted jobs in the nation. Often, they are provoked so that they can be brought before the law and thereby face charges. Nasrin's realisation of this pathetic situation of the Hindus

has made her a champion of their cause. She says that through her character Suranjon "A Muslim could loudly proclaim that Hindus were suffering injustice but it was not possible for Hindus to say so with equal fervour." (Nasrin 305). Although she has faced unimaginable torture from her fellow believers, she has shown the courage to go ahead with her decision, as she is aware that no Hindu would be able to speak or write like this for their rights. Thus, she has tried her level best to think from the perspective of a victim and bring the most out of that. Lajja, therefore, acts as a source material for the history of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh written from the perspective of Hindu people by a Muslim writer who has witnessed the torture and misery faced by these people. It also stands as a powerful documentation of the events that would otherwise be ignored and buried with the permission of those in power. The people consider it as something that should not be talked about as it affects the reputation of the nation as well as the political and religious system of the country.

In Lajja, Taslima Nasrin reveals the cracks in religious harmony by exposing the deeply rooted political and social fractures that marginalise non-Islamic communities in Bangladesh. Her narrative serves not only as a fictional account of communal violence but also as a searing indictment of the state's complicity in the erosion of secular ideals. By centring the lived experiences of a persecuted Hindu family, Nasrin gives voice to identities systematically silenced by dominant religious nationalism. Her work underscores the dangers of politicising faith and the human cost of ideological extremism. As a literary dissident, Nasrin bears the personal and professional consequences of challenging power; yet, her defiance also affirms literature's enduring role as a tool of resistance. Lajja emerges as both a political document and a courageous act of testimony, reminding us of the urgency to protect pluralism, dissent, and the right to belong.

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Whispering Oceans: A Blue Ecocritical Reading of Wyl Menmuir's *The Many*

Ms. Kavitha Kaladharan and Dr. Deepa R.

Abstract

Wyl Menmuir's Booker-nominated novel The Many (2016), is an enigmatic portrayal of contemporary seascapes. In addition to the thematic exploration of marine pollution and species degradation, the narrative dexterously deals with power dynamics and environmental racism in a global context. The multifaceted dimensions of contemporary political discourse including nationalism, geopolitical concerns, and ecological consciousness are progressively elucidated in the novel. The author draws the reader's attention to the challenges faced by fishing communities in an era of modernisation. The indigenous fishing communities, who play a central role in the narrative, share their anxieties regarding the existence of marine culture, coastline fishing, and marine species. Reading the narrative through the critical lenses of Blue Ecocriticism, Oceanic Humanities, and Blue Cultural Studies shed light upon the socio-cultural life of vulnerable fishing villages and the intricate relationship between humans and the sea. The transmuting seascapes in the narrative urge humanity to establish a synergistic relationship for a better planet.

Keywords: Maritime Literature, Oceanic Humanities, Blue Ecocriticism, Environmental Racism, Blue Humanities

Introduction

In the domain of contemporary maritime literature, Wyl Menmuir is well known for his celebrated novel, *The Many*, published in 2016. The Booker-nominated novel navigates the complex terrains of the ongoing marine crisis in a global context, providing a subtle exploration of the impacts of climate change on coastal culture. The present study probes into the heterogeneous elements in the narrative, ranging from the deteriorating status of marine ecosystems in the Anthropocene, the weathering of the human–nature nexus, and the outcomes of industrialisation.

In *"The Many,"* the interplay between environmental dynamics in indigenous coastal communities and the bureaucracy is skilfully presented. A critical analysis of the narrative

engages with the emergent fields of Blue Cultural Studies, Oceanic Humanities, Blue Ecocriticism, and Neoliberal Hydro Criticism, providing a platform for exploring the entangled relationships between human and ocean entities. Within these theoretical frameworks, the novel probes radical issues of environmental racism, dissecting the cultural and ecological implications of defective fishing policies and the marginalisation of coastal communities. The challenges of reducing fishing stocks in global oceans discussed in the novel open critical discussions on the environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic dimensions of coastal communities.

Waning Seascapes in the Anthropocene

Wyl Menmuir's *'The Many',* set in a secluded fishing village opens with the arrival of the protagonist Timothy Buchanan, and the locale confronts a profound state of ecological crisis and the looming threat of human-driven species extinction. The ports and beaches in the once prolific biome, which immensely contributed to the economic and cultural life, are imminently menacing. This ecological collapse unveils the unusual presence of deformed fishing stocks and the decline of peculiar fish species due to reduced water quality and marine contamination. Menmuir writes:

> They don't play in the water anymore. There's no playing or
>
> swimming in the water, not if you don't want to end up sick, or
>
> sterile. A profusion of biological agents and contaminants is
>
> how the Department for Fisheries and Aquaculture described it
>
> In one of their many communications. (32-33)

The recurrent thematic element of marine degradation draws the reader's attention to the ongoing ecological shift, which requires comprehensive solutions to sustain all of humanity.

The narrative, which belongs to the genre of environmental fiction, opens the possibility of applied storytelling, which effectively draws the reader's attention to the findings of the scientific research community. According to Michael F. Dahlstorm, a famous academician and scholar in science communication, the potentialities of narratives that deal with crucial environmental crises can convey scientific information to the public to evoke ecological consciousness that leads to environmental solutions (Dahlstorm,13614–13620). Here, Wyl Menmuir presents this research-oriented marine novel as a cautionary tale on adopting

sustainable fishing to address biodiversity loss that may lead to grave climatic changes. In this context, the critical perspective of Blue Humanities turns toward the consequences of reckless human power play on a delicate ecosystem, underscoring the vitality of sustainable fishing practices.

Blooming Jellies of Climate Change

Throughout the narratorial arc, we hear the authorial voice through the fisherman character Ethan, who is anxious about the livelihood of the coastal community and the future of marine health. Ethan painfully accepts the fact that in the imminent future, their sea may turn arid without any true fish, including both big and small ones, and without shrimp or sharks, the only creatures left in the water will be jellyfish (34).

In the novel, the metaphorical presence of a jellyfish bloom reveals the desperate state of the oceans, in which climatic issues originate, and threatens the entire planet. Pollution-induced sudden jellyfish blooming in global oceans alters the carbon cycle in the marine ecosystem and affects the marine microbes, which are the basis of the entire food chain. Jennah Williams, a marine biologist, who conducted scientific research on this peculiar fishing species, reveals its immense impact on the ecosystem:

Investigations have shown that increased human activities such as overfishing, global warming, eutrophication, translocation, and habitat modification are the main reasons for the sudden global outbreak of jellyfish, suggesting that with the recent increase in the human population, the situation is potentially worsening. The jellyfish epidemic is creating irreversible disturbances in the ecosystem. (Williams,102)

When the writer presents the chaotic fishing expeditions of Ethan, along with Rab, Tomas, and Jory ends with jellyfish-laden catch it implies the ongoing species degradation and biodiversity loss due to unsustainable practices in seascapes. Menmuir details "the dogfish in their catch with burned-like features and lesions" (35), reflecting the mutations hitting the marine species due to water contamination in coastal zones. Moreover, the novel advocates the need for the generational responsibility of all humanity to entrust natural resources to future generations. Menmuir presents the children in the village who are ignorant about the catastrophic situation when they gather around a large jellyfish stranded on the rocks. "They throw stones at the jellyfish and challenge each other to physically contact its body" (32). This scene

metaphorically presents the need for an obligation that generations should keep each other for the sustenance of the planet itself.

Resilient Littorals of Marine Heritage

The novel reflects the paradigm shift in neoliberal hydroculture rooted in the dynamics of new materialist practices. The narrative is set in a seaside village that was once intricately connected to the sea and its resources. Now, it faces not only an economic recession but also cultural erosion due to the commercialisation of traditional fishing practices. From a blue cultural perspective, the imminent execution of unconventional fishing methods in coastal zones accelerates the depletion of cultural heritage.

The community is disturbed about the enigmatic presence of these ships anchored near the shore. "The arrival of the unmoving container ships, tied to their positions by miles of red tape issued and reissued endlessly by a faceless, disembodied authority," (34) and these ships represent the unknown authorities attempting to implement defective fishing policies for huge economic profits.

Furthermore, the novel reminds readers that the current transition of the global economy into a blue economy will undoubtedly shape the developmental future of global countries. The ethical utilisation of nonhuman entities and ensuring the participation of marginalised indigenous communities in coastal zones will indeed decide the foundation of a blue economy grounded in the utilisation of fishing stocks. However, in the novel, the writer presents a realistic portrayal of totalitarian bureaucracy that subjugates communities that stand ardently for nature. While Ethan asks about the sale of jellyfish:

He wondered who would buy this half-dead catch that the sea had thrown up. Two men were standing by a silver van parked beside it, and several white industrial boxes were stacked beneath the shuttered hatch on the side. The two men were watched by a woman dressed in a long grey coat, and they exchanged words. The three of them looked out of place in the village (36).

Here, the corporate presence in the coastal village unveils the possibility of unethical utilisation of marine resources for huge monetary profits. The apparent arrival of a silver van with industrial boxes in a rural coastal village suggests the evident presence of technocratic modern people for resource extraction.

Conclusion

The narrative compels readers to focus on global issues, such as declining fishing stocks, loss of biodiversity, impacts of modernisation on cultural heritage, and the role of traditional knowledge in environmental sustenance endeavours. The village depicted in the novel is the epitome of a diminishing littoral zone, with its nuanced cultural ramifications due to the inconsiderate behaviour of the modern generation. Wyl Menmuir, the novelist, adopts a transdisciplinary mode of narration and explores the need to promote resilience among coastal communities. Hence, this research-oriented maritime narrative resonates profoundly in the contemporary literary landscape.

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Colonial Hegemony and English Studies in Post-Independent India: Embracing Indian Perspectives

Dr. Alvin Joseph

Abstract

This study explores the historical context and contemporary necessity of decolonising English studies in India. It discusses the introduction of English education during British colonial rule, which aimed to instil anglophilia among educated Indians through canonical English literary texts. In post-independent India, the persistence of colonial structures necessitates a re-evaluation of academic curricula to include Indian writers in English, fostering a balanced and culturally relevant approach. This paper argues for the integration of Indian perspectives in English studies to decolonise the Indian psyche and promote broad, unbiased, and inclusive literary education.

Key Words: Decolonisation, Curriculum, English Studies, Western

Introduction

India's prolonged subjugation under British colonial rule had a lasting and profound impact on its educational framework. The British introduced English education primarily as a tool to serve their imperial interests, aiming to create a class of Indians who were "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, opinions, morals, and intellect," as articulated by Lord Macaulay in his infamous Minute on Indian Education. The education system focused on canonical English literary texts, reinforcing the supremacy of Western knowledge and culture, and instilling a sense of Anglophilia among the educated elite. This approach deliberately marginalised indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and cultural narratives, creating an enduring legacy of cultural and intellectual subjugation. In the post-independence era, the remnants of this colonial framework persisted, influencing not only the curriculum but also the mindset of academia and society. Despite efforts to nationalise education, the deep-seated biases inherited from the colonial past remain entrenched. The glorification of Western literary canons, coupled with the marginalisation of Indian authors and intellectuals, continues to perpetuate a form of cultural hegemony. Moreover, the dominance of English as a medium of education often places speakers of regional languages at a disadvantage, further stratifying societies along different linguistic lines. To truly decolonise academia, it is imperative to dismantle

these colonial structures and adopt a more inclusive and culturally resonant approach to education. This involves re-evaluating and reformulating curricula to incorporate Indian perspectives, histories, and literatures. By integrating works from diverse Indian authors, philosophers, and thinkers, and highlighting regional and vernacular traditions, academia can foster a sense of cultural pride and intellectual independence. Additionally, critical engagement with colonial texts can be reframed to examine their historical context and ideological underpinnings, enabling students to develop a nuanced understanding rather than uncritical admiration.

Historical Context of English Education in Colonial India

The British colonial administration's introduction of English education in India was a calculated move to further their imperial agenda. The primary objective was to create a class of English-educated Indians who would function as intermediaries, facilitating the administration and governance of a vast and diverse colony. These individuals were envisioned as a bridge between the colonial rulers and the local population, serving the British Empire's economic and political interests while maintaining their allegiance to their colonial masters. This policy was crystallised with the infamous Minute on Indian Education written by Thomas Babington Macaulay in 1835. Macaulay openly dismissed the value of India's rich and diverse literary, scientific, and philosophical traditions, proclaiming that a single shelf of European literature held more value than all the native literature of India and Arabia combined. This statement exemplified the Eurocentric worldview of the colonial administration, which sought to impose Western ideals and knowledge systems as superior and civilising forces. Under Macaulay's influence, English was positioned as the language of higher education, administration, and economic opportunity, effectively marginalising indigenous languages such as Sanskrit, Persian, and regional vernaculars. The curriculum emphasised canonical English texts, aligning education with Western values and eroding pride in indigenous cultural and intellectual heritage. This deliberate sidelining of local knowledge systems ensured that future generations of Indians would internalise a sense of cultural inferiority, making them more amenable to British rule. The establishment of institutions such as the Universities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras in 1857 further cemented this policy. These institutions followed a curriculum modelled on British universities, prioritising liberal arts and Western sciences over subjects rooted in Indian traditions. The British also leveraged education as a tool to cultivate a bureaucratic workforce to support the colonial administration, ensuring a steady supply of clerks, translators, and low-level officials.

While this system succeeded in creating a class of educated Indians who contributed to the administrative machinery, it also had unintended consequences. The exposure to the English language and Western political thought sowed the seeds of nationalist movements and led to the emergence of influential leaders who eventually challenged British colonial rule. Figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Subhas Chandra Bose, though educated in the English system, harnessed their knowledge to fight for India's independence. In hindsight, the British educational policies in India were deeply paradoxical—while they served as instruments of colonial control, they also inadvertently laid the groundwork for intellectual resistance against imperial domination. The legacy of these policies continues to shape modern India's educational system, necessitating a critical re-evaluation to align it with the nation's cultural and intellectual aspirations.

Impact on Indian Psyche and Identity

The British emphasis on English literary texts and culture significantly impacted the Indian psyche and identity, creating a cultural hierarchy that elevated Western ideals above indigenous traditions. This approach systematically alienated Indians from their linguistic, cultural, and intellectual roots, and fostered a sense of inferiority regarding their rich heritage. By positioning English literature as the pinnacle of intellectual and cultural achievement, the colonial educational system effectively diminished the value of regional languages, literatures, and knowledge systems. The introduction of English education served as a tool to create a class of Indians who were, in Macaulay's words, "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, opinions, morals, and intellect." This group, largely composed of elites, became culturally and intellectually aligned with British values, often at the cost of their connection to their own traditions. The deep internalisation of British cultural superiority led to the suppression of regional pride and uncritical admiration for Western norms and ideologies. Indigenous languages bore the brunt of this marginalisation. Once the vehicles of rich literary, scientific, and philosophical traditions, these languages were relegated to the status of "vernaculars", considered unfit for higher education or intellectual discourse. Over time, this eroded linguistic diversity and contributed to the loss of many oral and written traditions. English became a marker of social prestige and economic opportunity, creating sharp divisions between those who had access to English education and those who did not. This cultural alienation had far-reaching consequences on identity formation.

Many educated Indians began to perceive their own cultural practices, beliefs, and art forms as backward or inferior, leading to a crisis in their self-perception. The glorification of Western literature and philosophy overshadowed the contributions of Indian thinkers and writers, further entrenching colonial narratives on India's supposed lack of intellectual and cultural refinement. However, the imposition of English education had unintended consequences. While it alienated many from its roots, it provided a platform for Indian leaders and intellectuals to critically engage with Western ideas, ultimately turning them into tools of resistance. Thinkers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, and Rabindranath Tagore, while educated in the colonial system, used their knowledge to reclaim Indian cultural pride and challenge colonial ideologies. In post-independence India, the lingering impact of the colonial framework remains evident. The prestige associated with English persists, influencing social mobility and reinforcing class distinctions. To address this legacy, there is a growing need to promote linguistic and cultural inclusivity. Reviving and celebrating India's indigenous literature and philosophies, alongside a critical engagement with English, can help restore a sense of pride and balance in Indian identity.

The Post-Independence Academic Scenario

Historical Roots of Colonial Academia

During British rule, education systems were deliberately designed to serve colonial administrative needs and propagate Western cultural superiority. Institutions prioritised English-language instruction and British canonical texts, creating a legacy that has persisted even after independence. This entrenched system concerned not only what was taught but also how it was taught:

Cultural Alienation: Students were often disconnected from their own cultural and historical contexts as the focus remained on Western ideologies and literature.

Standardised syllabi: English literary works have become the benchmark for academic rigor, often sidelining Indian contributions.

Contemporary Curricula Challenges

Even today, Indian higher education institutions frequently place British literature at the core of the syllabi. Texts such as those by Milton, Shakespeare, and Wordsworth retain an almost sacred status in many universities, with limited integration of Indian literature into English or regional languages. This has several implications.

1. Lack of Representation: Indian voices and experiences are underrepresented, thus failing to reflect the country's rich literary diversity.
2. Imbalance of knowledge systems**:** Western frameworks dominate teaching methodologies, thereby ignoring local knowledge systems and narratives.
3. Medium of Instruction**:** The primacy of English as the medium of instruction marginalises India's regional languages, perpetuating a linguistic hierarchy.

Psychological and Cultural Impacts

The belief in the superiority of Western knowledge has not only influenced academia but also shaped societal attitudes. English proficiency is often equated with intelligence and success, creating a gap between urban and rural education systems. This mindset contributes to:

Cultural Inferiority Complex among Students Who Do Not Excel in English

Lack of exploration and appreciation of India's own literary and philosophical traditions.

Reshaping English Studies in India: The Call for Decolonization

Revisiting the Goals of English Studies

Decolonising English studies seeks to create an academic curriculum that is inclusive, culturally relevant, and reflective of India's diversity. The aim is not to discard Western literature but to bring Indian voices and narratives to the forefront, ensuring a more balanced representation. This process involves re-evaluating not only the content but also the approaches and perspectives that underpin English studies in India.

Broadening the Canon

1. Inclusion of Indian Writers: Indian authors writing in English, such as R.K. Narayan, Kamala Das, Salman Rushdie, and Arundhati Roy, have enriched global literature with their unique perspectives. Their works explore themes deeply rooted in Indian culture, history, and identity, making them essential for understanding India's place in the global literary landscape.
2. Diversifying Perspectives

   In addition to well-known Indian authors, voices from marginalised communities and regional literature in translation must be incorporated. Dalit writers like Bama and

Omprakash Valmiki or tribal voices like Mahasweta Devi's offer critical insights into social realities often overlooked in traditional curricula.

Incorporating these perspectives helps challenge monolithic representations and foster an appreciation for India's layered and complex identity.

Reimagining Pedagogy

Decolonisation is about teaching methods as much as it is about content:

1. Contextual Analysis: Encouraging students to study texts within the socio-cultural and historical contexts of their creation rather than relying on Eurocentric critical theories.
2. Pluralistic Frameworks: Drawing on indigenous knowledge systems, postcolonial theory, and subaltern studies to analyse texts on terms relevant to the Indian context.
3. Multidisciplinary Approach: Integrating history, sociology, and cultural studies with literature to provide richer interpretations of texts and their impact on society.

Elevating Regional and Indigenous Literatures

A decolonised curriculum must also focus on India's linguistic diversity:

Translating Regional Works: Regional literature, such as the writings of Malayalam poet Sugathakumari, Tamil author Kalki Krishnamurthy, or Assamese novelist Indira Goswami, should find their rightful place in English syllabi through high-quality translations.

Revitalising Indigenous Narratives: Indigenous stories, oral traditions, and folk literature should be studied to preserve and celebrate India's heritage.

Re-examining Western Literature

Western texts should remain a part of the curriculum, but with critical engagement.

Understanding their colonial context and role in shaping narratives of power and dominance.

Promoting comparative analyses between Western and Indian texts to highlight universal themes and diverse storytelling techniques.

Empowering Future Generation

Decolonising English studies is not only about revising syllabi; it is also about empowering students.

Promote critical thinking and the ability to question dominant narratives

Instilling pride in India's cultural and literary achievements, while fostering global awareness and sensitivity.

By creating a balanced curriculum, Indian academia can provide students with an education that celebrates their heritage while preparing them for a globalised world. This approach strengthens cultural identity, nurtures intellectual independence, and ensures that diverse voices are heard and valued.

The Need for Indian Perspectives in English Studies: Relevance and Representation: The Importance of Indian Perspectives in English Studies

Representing Indian Voices

Indian authors' writing in English brings unique cultural, historical, and social insights that resonate deeply with the Indian experience. Their work offers narratives that reflect the challenges, triumphs, and diversity of life in India. For example:

R.K. Narayan's timeless stories capture the essence of everyday Indian life, blending simplicity with profound social commentary.

Anita Desai's evocative prose explores themes of individuality, family dynamics, and the evolving roles of women in Indian society.

Salman Rushdie's ground-breaking works, such as *Midnight's Children*, interweave historical and personal narratives, offering rich tapestry of post-independence India.

Arundhati Roy's powerful storytelling, especially in *The God of Small Things*, delves into issues of caste, gender, and socio-political realities.

These authors articulate Indian experiences that are often neglected in traditional English curricula, fostering a deeper connection between students and their cultural identity.

Enriching Academic Relevance

Including Indian perspectives enhances the relevance of English studies by

Connecting with Local Contexts: Indian students gain a sense of belonging when they see their histories, cultures, and communities represented in the curriculum.

Encouraging Critical Engagement: Studying Indian texts allows students to critically analyse social and political structures within their own contexts, empowering them to challenge inequalities and advocate for change.

Broadening Horizons: The inclusion of Indian authors helps bridge the gap between regional and global narratives, enabling students to appreciate the universality of human experiences.

Addressing Diversity

India's cultural and linguistic diversity is unparalleled, and this richness must be celebrated in English studies. When regional voices, Dalit literature, and indigenous narratives are incorporated, they provide a more inclusive literary landscape. For instance:

Mahasweta Devi's compelling works highlight the struggles of marginalized communities, offering a counter-narrative to dominant discourses.

Regional authors, such as Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, bring localised realities into the broader English literary canon through translation.

While Western literature will always hold value, incorporating Indian texts ensures a balanced approach that values both local and global perspectives. It enables students to engage with literature that speaks to their identities while fostering a global outlook.

Challenging the Canon

Moving away from an Anglocentric curriculum involves questioning the canon and its applicability in the Indian context. The literary canon has traditionally been dominated by works from the UK and the US, often marginalising voices from other parts of the world. By including Indian authors in English studies, educators can challenge this dominance and highlight the global nature of English literature. This does not imply completely discarding English canonical texts, but rather balancing them with works by Indian authors to provide a more comprehensive literary education.

A Balanced Approach to English Studies Integrating Indian and Western Texts

A balanced curriculum should include both Western and Indian literary texts. This integration promotes a holistic understanding of the literature, is free from prejudices, and encourages critical thinking among students. For example, a syllabus might pair Shakespeare's

plays with modern Indian dramas by Girish Karnad or Mahesh Dattani, allowing students to explore themes of power, identity, and colonialism from multiple perspectives.

Judicious Selection of Literary Texts

The selection of literary texts should be need-based and contextually relevant. Texts that resonate with Indian cultural, social, and historical contexts should be prioritised to make literary studies more meaningful for students. Educators should aim to select works that offer diverse perspectives and address contemporary issues in Indian society. This might include texts dealing with themes such as partitions, postcolonialism, globalisation, and social justice.

The Role of English in Contemporary India

English as a Global Language

English continues to play a significant role in contemporary India as a global language of communication, commerce, and academia. Proficiency in English is often associated with social mobility and economic opportunities. Therefore, it is important to teach English in a manner that equips students with the skills needed to succeed in a globalised world while fostering an appreciation for their own cultural heritage.

Moving Beyond Binary Approaches

The study of English literature should embrace the richness of diverse literary traditions without privileging one over the other. This involves adopting a holistic approach that avoids reducing literature to "Western" versus "Eastern" categories. Instead, the focus should be on the universal and distinct qualities of each piece of work, creating opportunities for nuanced critical engagement.

Recognizing the Value of Western and Indian Traditions

1. Western literary traditions

Western authors such as Shakespeare, Austen, and Woolf have contributed profoundly to the development of literary forms, themes, and narratives. Their works explore universal human experiences, providing valuable insights into philosophy, politics, and culture. Teaching Western texts in Indian academia offers the opportunity to engage with global ideas; however, these texts should not overshadow non-Western views. Instead, they should be critically analysed in the context of colonial and global dynamics.

2. Indian Literary Traditions

Indian authors, whether writing in English or regional languages, offer compelling narratives that capture the complexities of India's cultural, historical, and socio-political realities. Works by Tagore, Kamala Das, and Amitav Ghosh, among others, expand the horizons of English literature and demonstrate the richness of Indian storytelling. Including these voices not only ensures representation but also provides students with literary works that reflect their own contexts and identities, fostering a sense of relevance and pride.

Creating an Inclusive Curriculum

An inclusive curriculum seeks to integrate diverse perspectives and encourage critical thought.

1. Balance in Representation:

Academic syllabi should feature an equitable mix of Western, Indian, and global texts, emphasising diversity in authorship, themes, and styles. This fosters a deeper appreciation of the interconnectedness of literary traditions.

Works from underrepresented regions, such as African, Caribbean, and Southeast Asian literature, can further enrich English studies.

2. Critical Engagement:

Students should be encouraged to analyse texts from multiple viewpoints and question the cultural biases and ideological assumptions embedded within the literature. This helps to develop independent and well-rounded perspectives.

Comparative studies can highlight shared human experiences and unique cultural expressions found across literary traditions.

3. Contextualising the literature

Texts should be studied within their historical, cultural, and philosophical contexts. For example, colonial-era Western literature can be critically examined for its perspectives on imperialism, whereas Indian texts can be explored for their narratives of resistance and identity.

Encouraging Cross-Cultural Dialogues

English studies can serve as a bridge between cultures, fostering global understanding.

Themes of Universality: Universal themes, such as love, loss, and justice, transcend cultural boundaries. Exploring these themes across Western and Indian texts creates opportunities for cross-cultural empathy.

Distinct Voices: Distinct voices from both traditions highlight the uniqueness of their cultural experiences, enriching students' appreciation of literary diversity.

Strategies for Decolonizing English Studies

Curriculum Reform: Reimagining Academic Syllabi

1. Incorporating Indian Authors:

   Expand the representation of Indian authors in syllabi to ensure the voices of writers like R.K. Narayan, Kamala Das, and Arundhati Roy are prominently featured alongside British texts.

   Include regional literature in English translation to highlight India's linguistic and cultural diversity. Texts by authors such as Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, Premchand, and Mahasweta Devi can provide valuable insights into Indian society.

2. Balancing text selection:

   Reduce the dominance of British canonical texts and include works from non-Western traditions, such as African, Caribbean, and Southeast Asian literatures.

   Ensure inclusivity by selecting works from marginalised communities and underrepresented groups within Indian society.

3. Contextualising Western Texts:

   It is important to retain Western literature but study it critically, examining colonial legacies, cultural biases, and the implications of its global reach. Comparative analyses of Indian texts can enrich the curriculum.

4. Relevance and Representation

   Design syllabi that reflect the sociopolitical realities of contemporary India, addressing themes such as caste, gender, globalisation, and environmental concerns.

5. Developing Decolonised Pedagogical Approaches

Create training modules to equip teachers to approach literature critically, emphasising decolonial theories and frameworks, such as postcolonial theory and subaltern studies.

Discuss the legacy of colonialism and its impact on literature and culture.

6. Building cultural sensitivity

Train teachers to facilitate conversations about diverse perspectives while respecting students' cultural backgrounds and addressing biases embedded in traditional curricula.

6. Promoting active learning:

Guide educators to adopt interactive teaching methods such as debates, group analyses, and interdisciplinary approaches to enable students to engage more deeply with texts.

Encouraging Critical Thinking: Empowering Students

1. Questioning Assumptions and Biases

Encourage students to interrogate the cultural and ideological biases inherent in canonical texts, fostering an independent perspective on literature.

Enable students to critique texts for representation, power dynamics, and historical narratives.

2. Analysing Contexts:

Teach students to study literature within its socio-historical context and understand the factors that influence its creation and reception. For example, colonial-era British texts can be analysed alongside postcolonial Indian literature to understand shifts in perspective.

3. Exploring Alternative Perspectives

Integrating diverse voices and narratives to challenge the dominance of a single worldview in English studies

Comparative studies of Western and Indian texts can deepen students' understanding of literary traditions and cultural exchanges.

4. Emphasising interdisciplinary approaches

Integrate literary studies with disciplines such as history, sociology, and philosophy to provide a more comprehensive understanding of texts and their implications.

Creating a Sustainable Framework

1. Regular curriculum updates

   Institutions should periodically review and revise syllabi to reflect changing social realities and emerging literary voices.

   Invite feedback from students and educators to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant and inclusive.

2. Collaboration and Networking

   Collaborate with scholars, writers, and translators to promote the inclusion of regional and marginalised literature in English studies.

Case Studies of Decolonized Curricula

1. Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU)

   Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi is at the forefront of curriculum reform in English studies. The university has introduced courses that focus on Indian writing in English, postcolonial literature, and regional literature in translation. These courses aim to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of Indian literary traditions and promote critical engagement with colonialism, identity, and cultural representation.

2. University of Hyderabad

   The University of Hyderabad has also made significant strides in decolonising its English curriculum. The university's Department of English offers courses on contemporary Indian literature, Dalit literature, and literature from the Global South. These courses emphasise the importance of diverse perspectives and aim to challenge the dominance of Western literary traditions in English studies.

3. The Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS)

   The Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in Mumbai has integrated decolonising strategies into its English curriculum by including a wide range of texts by Indian authors and promoting interdisciplinary approaches to literary studies. Courses at TISS encourage students to explore the intersections of literature with sociology, history, and political science, fostering a holistic understanding of literary texts and their cultural contexts.

Conclusion: Reimagining English Studies for a Postcolonial Era

Decolonising English studies in India is an imperative step toward dismantling the enduring colonial frameworks that have shaped the country's academic landscape. It is a conscious effort to affirm India's cultural, linguistic, and intellectual diversity and to create an educational system that resonates with the lived realities of Indian students.

By integrating Indian perspectives into the curriculum, we not only honour the voices and narratives that reflect the country's heritage but also challenge the entrenched hierarchy that privileges Western literary traditions. This balanced approach bridges the gap between local and global knowledge, cultivating a more comprehensive understanding of the literature and its relevance. It allows students to engage with a spectrum of voices, fostering a deep appreciation of their own identity while embracing global literary discourses.

Decolonisation can be achieved through curriculum reform that prioritises inclusivity and representation, teacher training that equips educators to guide meaningful discussions, and the promotion of critical thinking as a core competency. These strategies ensure that English studies become a platform for empowerment, enabling students to question, analyse, and engage with texts from diverse perspectives.

Ultimately, decolonising English studies is not merely about reconfiguring syllabi; it is about redefining the purpose of education itself—to inspire intellectual independence, cultural pride, and a nuanced understanding of the world. By taking these steps, Indian academia can create a more inclusive and equitable approach to English studies that reflects the nation's unique identity while remaining connected to the broader global literary tradition.

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Napikwans in the Plains: Colonial Trauma and Resilience in James Welch's *Fools Crow*

Kiran Jose

Abstract

James Welch's Fools Crow presents a nuanced counter-narrative to the dominant Euro-American portrayal of the American West, focusing on the experiences of the Pikuni (Blackfeet) Nation during the tumultuous period of American westward expansion. This novel intricately explores the colonial trauma inflicted by white settlers, referred to as "Napikwans", and highlights the multifaceted resilience of the Pikuni community in the face of dispossession and violence. Through rich storytelling that emphasises the cultural, spiritual, and physical landscapes of the Pikuni people, Welch reclaims a historical moment often overshadowed by narratives of exploration and adventure. By adopting a perspective rooted in indigenous experiences, Fools Crow not only illustrates the devastating impact of colonisation, but also celebrates the adaptive strategies employed by the Pikuni to preserve their identity. The narrative confronts the complexities of American identity, intertwining themes of loss with a powerful testament to survival, ultimately redefining the historical discourse surrounding Indigenous experiences in the American West.

The American West is frequently depicted as a land of limitless potential and heroic exploration, embodying the spirit of adventure and the promise of new beginnings. However, beneath this romanticised Euro-American narrative lies a complex and troubling history marked by colonial violence and the systematic dispossession of Indigenous peoples. As white settlers moved westward, driven by their expansionist visions and belief in the superiority of American institutions, they encountered diverse Indigenous nations who had lived and thrived on these lands for thousands of years. The clash of cultures was not merely a meeting of two worlds; it was a collision that often led to violent confrontations, broken treaties, and forced relocations. This darker and usually hidden chapter of American history reveals the profound impact of colonisation on the Indigenous population. The influx of white settlers disrupted ecosystems, obliterated traditional ways of life, and resulted in the loss of ancestral lands for Indigenous communities. The American West is not simply a backdrop for tales of adventure and exploration; it serves as a poignant reminder of the complexities of American identity, where dreams of prosperity are intertwined with legacies of injustice and suffering.

Among the many violent atrocities committed by white settlers was the Marias Massacre, which occurred on January 23, 1870. Also known as the Baker Massacre, this tragic event involved the U.S. Army forces under Major Eugene Mortimer Baker attacking and massacring the Blackfeet people as part of the Indian Wars. Rather than targeting Mountain Chief's band of Blackfeet, the U.S. Army assaulted a different group led by Chief Heavy Runner, who had previously been promised protection by the United States government. This attack sparked public outrage and prompted a significant shift toward a "Peace Policy" by the Federal Government, a change President Ulysses S. Grant advocated. In response to this incident, James Welch's 1986 novel *Fools Crow* provides an essential counter-narrative, immersing readers in the Pikuni (Blackfeet) world on the eve of the Marias Massacre in 1870.

Against the backdrop of the historical event, James Welch's novel *Fools Crow* explores the multifaceted ways in which Indigenous communities, specifically the Pikuni (Blackfeet) Nation, navigated and endured dislocation and dispossession brought about by the American westward expansion of the 19th century. The novel is a poignant literary excavation of the period and illuminates the devastating impact of colonial violence on Native American spiritual, cultural, and physical landscapes. The novel is not just a chronicle of suffering; it is a narrative of the resilience and adaptive strategies employed by the Pikuni people to survive in the face of existential threats.

Welch's novel is not a simplistic tale of conquest. It, "… recreates the period of first contact between Blackfeet tribes and Euro-Americans to illuminate the alliances and conflicts, the treaties and wars, and the cultural exchanges and political inequities that nearly destroyed a way of life over 130 years ago." (Coulombe 1) The novel meticulously portrays the multifaceted colonial trauma inflicted by the "Napikwans" – Blackfeet term for White settlers – on the indigenous inhabitants, particularly the Blackfeet/Pikuni people, of the plains. As one critic argues, "It is the re-cognition of a specific moment in Blackfeet history, and the figuring of its tensions so as to arrest the homogeneous narrative of American history, that Welch seeks in *Fools Crow*." (Martin 93) While presenting the traumatic experiences of the Pikuni people as they faced the ever-increasing presence of white settlers who sought to drive them from their land and livelihood, the novel also describes how the Pikuni resisted colonialist transgressions. The novel describes the resilience and cultural continuity that helped the Pikuni resist and overcome the assimilation tactics of the Napikwans.

Welch narrates the story from a primarily Blackfeet perspective. This perspective of Native Americans reorients readers' understanding of the encroaching white presence on the lives of the Native Americans. Welch is not simply narrating a historical event as it happened. Instead, he is attempting to recreate the lost world of the Pikuni people to show his readers what the Pikuni actually lost. The choice of language is important for attaining this aim. As Sarah Martin says, "[The] choice of language is fundamental to the project of reconstruction undertaken in *Fools Crow*." (93) Another critic, William Bevis, describes this language as "...a standard, slightly formal English (approximating Indian formalism)." (47) Welch uses Native American names and concepts while describing the story of the Pikuni people. This use of indigenous nomenclature highlights the Pikuni people's agency in defining their oppressors. The white colonisers are not presented as the civilisers or pioneers that they pretended to be. Instead, they are presented as the agents of chaos and suffering, for that is what they inflicted upon the Pikuni and other indigenous peoples. Welch describes in detail the trauma inflicted by the Napikwans by narrating various events.

The most important traumatic event is the physical violence that the Napikwans perpetrate against the Pikunis. This physical violence culminates in the massacre of unarmed and defenceless Pikunis at the end of the novel. As mentioned before, the climax of the novel is the Marias massacre, in which the U.S. cavalry attacked a friendly Pikuni camp, killing mostly women, children, and older people. Welch does not mince his words when depicting the brutality of this incident. The chilling description of the Napikwans' attack on Heavy Runner's band and its aftermath shows the indifference and cruelty of the white colonisers. The Napikwans had sneaked up on the Pikunis while they were still asleep. Many of them were killed in their beds. The Napikwans showed no mercy and shot everyone. Their cruelty did not end with the killing. Afterwards, they burned the bodies of the Pikunis who had been killed by them. (Welch 378–385) Welch's narration of the massacre highlights the indiscriminate nature of the killings. This act of state-sponsored violence shatters the Pikunis' sense of security and trust that the Napikwans will honour their commitments. This desperation is visible in one of the survivors, Black Prairie Runner's words. He says, "This world has changed and we do not belong to it. We would be better off to join our before-people in the Sand Hills. It is as Curlew Woman says. We would rather be killed by the Napikwans than live in their world." (Welch 385)

Adding to the trauma of physical violence is the impact of the diseases introduced by the Napikwans. This impact extends far beyond the effects of physical violence and shatters the spirit of the Pikunis. The "white-scabs disease," Pikuni term for smallpox, ravages the Pikuni camps, claiming lives indiscriminately and leaving survivors disfigured and traumatised. The survivors are left with physical scars and deep emotional trauma. The memory of loss and suffering lingers long after the disease has passed. Welch describes how the white-scabs disease breaks the spirit of the Pikunis. He portrays the disease as an invisible, insidious enemy, against which traditional medicine often proves ineffective, deepening the sense of helplessness and despair within the community.

It was then that Fools Crow knew the ceremonies were futile – the healing and purification were as meaningless as a raindrop in a spring river. Even if the healing worked, by the time the ceremony was over, twenty others would come down with the sickness.

Boss Ribs seemed to share this feeling of hopelessness…

"The Above Ones will stop the suffering when they see fit. Our medicines are as powerful as grass before Wind Maker." (367)

Welch portrays the disease as an invisible, insidious enemy against which traditional medicine is ineffective. At the end of the novel, when the White-scabs disease is ravaging through the Lone Eaters' camp, one of the elders named Boss Ribs says to the protagonist Fools Crow, "I have been through the bundle three times since daybreak, searching for a ceremony, a song that might have some effect." (Welch 367) However, there was nothing in his medicine bundle that could help cure the afflicted Pikuni. The ineffectiveness of their traditional medicine deepens the sense of despair and helplessness felt by Pikuni. Fools Crow, who was working tirelessly to help and heal the afflicted, finally asks, "Are we lost then?" (Welch 367) These words of Fools Crow show how desperate and helpless the Pikunis were in the face of the new diseases brought by the Napikwans. The physical, psychological, and emotional impacts of new diseases, especially epidemics like smallpox, traumatise the Pikuni people as they try to navigate their new reality with the ever-increasing presence of the Napikwans.

Another aspect of the Napikwans' encroachment was the loss of land and the decimation of the buffalo/blackhorn herds. This was an existential threat to the Pikunis, as it

severely undermined the economic, cultural, and spiritual foundations of their community. Blackhorns are an integral part of Pikuni life and culture. They were an essential resource for sustenance, shelter, and clothing.

…only the blackhorn could provide for all the needs of a family…[they] preferred to make spoons and dippers out of the horns of the blackhorn. They used the hair of the head and beard to make braided halters and bridles and soft-padded saddles. They used the hooves to make rattles or glue, and the tails to swat flies. And they dressed the dehaired skins to make lodge covers and linings and cloths and winding cloths. Without the blackhorn, the Pikunis would be as sad as the little bigmouths who howled all night. (Welch 47)

These blackhorns were thus an integral part of the lives and rich spiritual traditions and practices of the Pikunis. The disappearance of blackhorn herds symbolises not just a loss of wildlife. It also symbolises the destruction of the harmonious and symbiotic relationship that the Pikuni had with their land. The dwindling number of blackhorns would ultimately lead the Pikuni community to face a devastating dilemma: starvation or confinement of reservations.

Welch narrates how the contact with Napikwans had changed the Pikuni ways of life and the dangers that come with it. The protagonist, Fools Crow, remembers a time before the Napikwans, a time when the Pikunis led a peaceful and content life. It was a simpler time when there were only people, stars, and blackhorns. However, with the arrival of the Napikwans, everything changed. As they pushed further into Pikuni lands, a confrontation became inevitable, and the Pikunis would be forced to fight to their death, something that would be more honourable than waiting for handouts from the Napikwans. Fools Crow also remembers how the Napikwans break their promise and often send the Pikunis back empty-handed without giving them the commodities they were promised. (Welch 93)

Welch also portrays the nuanced beginnings of cultural erosion and forced assimilation that the indigenous communities faced after contact with Napikwans. These early influences were not as overt as the influence of the subsequent boarding school era. Nevertheless, they represented a threat to the integrity and traditions of Pikuni culture. Welch describes the surprise of the protagonist when he sees the lodges of one of the Pikuni bands made of white man's stiff cloth instead of the traditional materials. (Welch 91) The introduction of the Napikwan trading goods is a tangible manifestation of foreign influence that was gradually encroaching

on the Pikunis' lives. Welch describes the interest of the Pikuni people, especially the women, after a visit to the Napikwan trading post. (Welch 99)

The Napikwans not only try to corrupt the Pikuni culture by introducing their goods. They also try to actively redefine the Pikuni way of life. The influence of the Napikwan way of life can be seen in mad Plume's lament about the behaviour of their younger generation (Welch 97). The presence of Napikwan goods, the adoption of some white customs, and the growing pressure to abandon their traditional ways slowly erode the Pikunis' cultural integrity. This is seen in the case of the Black Patched Moccasins, who were influenced by the Napikwans to abandon their nomadic ways and settle down at a place. They even tried to grow crops and herd whitehorns like the Napikwans. However, they could not succeed and soon returned to their old ways. However, this bitter experience with the Napikwan way of life and the knowledge about the role of some of their elders in it changed the band forever, and they became secluded, distant, and distrustful. (Welch 96)

The internal debates among the Pikuni chiefs on how to address the growing Napikwan threat also reflect the gradual changes that were taking place in the Pikuni community. The chiefs of the different Pikuni bands met to discuss the Napikwan threat before meeting with the Napikwan chief. This discussion highlighted a crisis within their traditional governance structures and decision-making processes. The chiefs faced a dilemma: whether to confront the Napikwans or engage in discussions with these people, who were actively undermining and destroying their way of life. Some leaders, such as Young Bird Chief, suggested that "…now was the time to kill them all off, one by one or all at once. (Welch 173) However, others, such as Rides-at-the-door, reminded them of what happened when the Pikunis went to war with the Napikwans the last time. The Napikwans had mercilessly slaughtered the Pikuni warriors, and they were forced to make peace with the Napikwans. (Welch 174) The internal debate among the chiefs about whether to fight, flee, or negotiate with the Napikwans highlights the disruption to the traditional governance and decision-making processes of the Pikunis caused by the Napikwan contact.

The meeting of the leaders, however, is also a declaration of the resilience and spirit of resistance of the indigenous people, especially the Pikunis. Even when they are aware of the superior weapons and military power of the Napikwans, they are willing to defend their land until they are no more. (Welch 175) The words of the Three Bears at the end of the meeting highlight the resilient spirit of the Pikunis. He says,

We have always fought our enemies. We are now engaged in the biggest fight of all – the fight for our survival. If we must do it without weapons, so be it. But if the Napikwans mistake our desire for peace for weakness, let them beware, for the Pikunis will fight them to death. That too is natural. (Welch 177)

The very fabric of the Pikuni is torn apart by the Napikwans, who live by an entirely different value system. However, the resilient Pikuni spirit is not willing to give up without a fight, as can be seen in Three Bears' words.

Colonial trauma inflicted by the Napikwans affects not only the community but also the individual characters in the novel. Welch portrays how the external pressures translate into internal turmoil. A good example of this can be seen in the protagonist, Fools Crow. The character reflects the struggles of a young man coming of age in a collapsing world. The visions that he has throughout the novel were a source of guidance and power that helped him to grow. However, the vision with Feather Woman reveals the desolate future that awaited the Pikunis. He sees how the Napikwans destroy Pikuni culture and laments its loss. (Welch 353–359) His grief is not in losing their ways but in the fact that future generations will not know the ways of their people. He says, "I do not fear for my people now. As you say, we will go to a happier place far from these Napikwans, this disease and starvation. But I grieve for our children and their children, who will not know the life their people once lived." (Welch 359)

The knowledge that Fools Crow has about the future is a burden for him. Simultaneously, it helps him grow as a leader. He knows that he cannot prevent it. However, he also knows that he can help his people navigate these perilous times and survive. The vision with Feather Woman, in which he foresees the downfall of the Pikunis, is not entirely pessimistic. Even when the vision depicts the destruction of the Pikuni way of life by the Napikwans, it ends on a hopeful note. When Fools Crow laments that future generations will not know anything about their ancestors, Feather Woman comforts him by saying that they will. Future generations will learn about their Pikuni ancestors and their ways through stories passed down through the generations. (Welch 359) Welch thus portrays the colonial trauma and the resilient spirit of the Pikuni through this description of Fools Crow's vision.

Despite the overwhelming colonial trauma, Welch's novel is a testament to the resilience of the Pikunis. He highlights their capacity to endure, adapt, and maintain their cultural identity

in the face of existential threats. Welch uses the spiritual and ceremonial practices of the Pikunis as a vital part of their resilience and resistance to the Napikwans. The visions that the protagonist has, the quests he goes on, and the powerful spirits that he encounters are not mere supernatural occurrences. Spirit beings, like the Raven, Feather Woman, and Nitsokan, are integral parts of Pikuni epistemology. These visions provide guidance, reaffirm cultural values, and comfort with the guarantee of continuity of their ways as the world around them falls apart. The Sun Dance Festival mentioned at the beginning of the novel is a symbol of the collective spiritual strength and renewal of the Pikuni community. The ceremonial medicine practiced by Mik-api and later by Fools Crow also demonstrates efforts to cure their ailments, both physically and spiritually. It also demonstrates the unshakable faith in their own systems of knowledge and culture despite the introduction of new diseases. Welch describes how the Pikunis tried to overcome smallpox using their own ceremonial medicine. (Welch 365-370)

Welch also presents the oral tradition and storytelling as mechanisms for overcoming the whites' influence. Throughout the novel, Welch recounts various stories from Pikuni folklore. This recounting of ancient stories is a way of remembering the past and reclaiming their lives for the Pikunis. However, the most important declaration of the oral tradition and storytelling as modes of continuity is when Feather Woman says, "They will know the way it was. The stories will be handed down, and they [the future generations] will see that their people were proud and lived in accordance with the Below Ones, the Underwater People – and the Above Ones." (Welch 359) This statement by Feather Woman alone highlights the importance of oral tradition and storytelling as essential elements of the Pikuni people's resilient spirit.

Welch also presents the Pikuni as people with a remarkable capacity for adaptation and persistent hope for posterity. While resisting the assimilation attempts of the Napikwans, the Pikuni leaders also make difficult choices to ensure the survival of the Pikuni people. During the meeting of the leaders of the Pikuni community, Rides-at-the-door stresses the importance of focusing on the survival of their people. He tells others that they were up against an enemy they could not fight and that their main concern should be the survival of their coming generations. (Welch 177) The novel's ending also highlights the hope for a better future. Despite the tragedy of the Marias Massacre, the ending is not one of utter despair. The protagonist's son, born toward the end of the novel, is named Butterfly, a name that symbolises the enduring spirit of the Pikuni people. The description of the Thunder Pipe procession in the

final chapter, in which the Pikunis participated enthusiastically, also symbolises the resilient spirit, ability for adaptation, and hope for a better future. (Welch 389)

James Welch's *Fools Crow* is a profound literary testament to the devastating impact of colonialism on the indigenous communities. Through the novel, Welch portrays how the Pikuni people had to helplessly watch as the Napikwans destroyed their culture and pushed them out of their ancestral lands. From the Pikunis' point of view, Welch sheds light not only on the physical violence and diseases brought by the Napikwans but also on the profound psychological and cultural trauma that threatened to dismantle a way of life. The novel details the sufferings of the people – both individually and collectively – the erosion of traditional structures, and the pervasive sense of loss that characterised this period of American westward expansion.

However, the novel is not simply a story of victimhood. Rather, it is a narration of the enduring strength of indigenous people, especially the Pikuni, in the face of overwhelming odds. Welch powerfully demonstrates how the Pikunis' deep spiritual connections, robust community bonds, and vibrant oral traditions served as crucial mechanisms for resilience. These cultural anchors helped them to process the trauma, maintain their identity, and adapt in ways that ensured their survival. The novel's concluding image of the blackhorns returning (Welch 391) is imbued with cautious hope for the future and underscores the enduring spirit of the Blackfeet people. It suggests that even in the face of catastrophic change, their culture and identity would persist. Welch's *Fools Crow* thus serves as an indispensable work in Native American literature, challenging simplistic historical narratives and offering a nuanced, empathetic portrayal of Indigenous experience during a pivotal moment of colonial expansion.

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