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Vol. - XXV, No. - XXVIII



Eds.

Subir Dhar, Tapu Biswas, Ronan Paterson,
Bryan Reynolds, Papia Mitra

A Special Publication of
TAGORE-GANDHI INSTITUTE / SHAKESPEARE SOCIETY



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Corresponding Editor

Tapu Biswas

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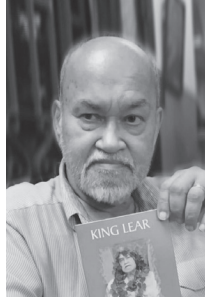
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In Memoriam

Shakespeare Society of Eastern India & Tagore–Gandhi Institute
mourns the passing away of



Amitava Roy
(1947–2024)

Professor Emeritus, Bankura University,
Former Shakespeare Professor & Head, Department of English,
Rabindra Bharati University,
Former Director, Shakespeare Centre for Advanced Research,
Rabindra Bharati University,
Executive President, Shakespeare Society of Eastern India,
Globally renowned Theatre Director and Actor.
You left thousands of students and admirers disconsolate
on 12th April, 2024
Farewell and Rest in Peace after your journey's end.

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Contents

Editorial

“The devil’s agents may be of flesh and blood”: Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy in Victorian <i>Sherlock Holmes</i> Shinjini Ghoshal	1
Literature for Children and Ideology in Transition: A Study of Haruki Murakami’s <i>The Strange Library</i> Anish Bhattacharyya	10
The Philosophy of Mahima Dharma: Bhima Bhoi’s Poetic Vision and Cultural Transformation Ashutosh Singh	22
Unravelling the Silent Tragedy of Missing Girls: A Study of Gita Aravamudan’s <i>Disappearing Daughters: The Tragedy of Female Foeticide</i> Chinmoyee Saikia & Dipendu Das	41
Identities, Attributions, and Prejudices: A Study of the Errors of Associating Bias to Judgment as Shown in the <i>All American Boys</i> Aiswarya Jayan & Dr. Shibani C Aich	51
Linking Women’s Educational Attainment to Economic Empowerment: A Case Study from Manipur Naorem Dayabati Devi	64
Effectiveness of Government Interventions For Health and Nutritional Status of Under-Five Tribal Children In Attappady, Kerala Anu Joseph & Smitha P	77

Contents

Resistance through Language: Reconstructing Issues of Identity and a Sense of Belongingness in Jerry Pinto's <i>Em and the Big Hoom</i>	
Bachaspatimayum Vimi Devi & Saugata Kumar Nath	98
Reconstruction of Gender Roles in Kavita Kané's <i>Lanka's Princess</i>	
Nancy Pangeijam & Pronami Bhattacharyya	112
The Impact of Displacement and the Role of Memory in Constructing a Sense of Self: A Study Through Sandeep Raina's <i>A Bit of Everything</i>	
Yamuna P. & Dr. Shibani Chakraverty Aich	120
Language Provisions for Education in NEP 2020: Challenges and Prospects	
Shraddha Singh	130
The 'Space' of the 'Other' in the Human Geography of Levinas: A Study	
Shreya Sarkar	141
Use of Plants in The Traditional Bengali Diet	
Rupa Chakraborty	154
Mathematical Thinking and Its Cognitive and Affective Correlates: A Partial Correlation Study	
Lalita Betgar & Russell D'Souza	168
Citizen Participation in Urban Planning in India	
Pinky Kumari	187
Portrayal of Sexual Minorities in Indian Cinema: A Systematic Review	
Sheerin Hamdani, Salik Parveaz & Asif Khan	200
The Book as the Myth: Genre as the Memory of the Novel in Italo Calvino's 'If on a winter's night a traveller' and Mario Vargas Llosa's 'Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter'	
Gargi Bhattacharya	229

Contents

Reconfiguring Bengali Masculinity in the Late Colonial Period: A Critical Literary Enquiry Md. Jisan Mondal	240
Vulnerability and Precarity: The Plight of Women Domestic Workers in Kolkata Monikinkini Basu	250
Daring the Patriarchy: Making of the New Women in the Novels of Shobha De Sonia Ningthoujam	267
Badal Sircar's <i>Evan Indrajit</i> : A Critical Reading Tapu Biswas	278
A Conceptual Exploration of The 7e Model In Fostering Inquiry-Based Learning Richa Chimulkar & Anna Neena George	309
Literary Studies at the Crossroads: An Ecological Study of William Blake's "The Lamb" and "London" Tilok Naskar	325
<i>Shakespeare Ke Sonnet</i> by Sudhir Kumar Mishra, published in 2025 by Bharatiya Mudran, Sundar Nagar: Bhopal. Sharmistha Chatterjee	332
Editors & Contributors	337

Editorial

This volume of the *International Journal of Cultural Studies and Social Sciences* follows its predecessors in showcasing a diverse range of topics and issues. The essays published within its covers range over from regardings of Sherlock Holmes and Haruki Murakami, from reflections on Bhima Bhoi to William Blake, from women's education in Manipur to child nutrition in Attappady, from urban planning and digital banking to cinema, domestic labour, and ecological thought. The memorial note dedicated to Professor Amitava Roy reminds readers that scholarship is never detached from the communities that nurture it, and that it maintains an emotional continuity with our academic and personal journeys. Hence we offer this issue to our scholarly readers in the spirit of shared learning.

Shinjini Ghoshal in her essay “The devil’s agents may be of flesh and blood”: Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy in Victorian Sherlock Holmes reads Sherlock Holmes through Nietzsche’s concepts of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Holmes is projected by her as a figure of reason, discipline, and logic, but also as someone drawn to excess, music, drugs, and ecstatic states. The paper argues that this duality is not contradictory but central to Holmes’s creative and investigative powers. By examining stories such as *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*, the author shows how Doyle uses superstition, fear, and myth only to return finally to rational explanation. In Ghoshal’s interpretation, Holmes emerges as both a modern detective and a symbolic figure shaped by Victorian anxieties, and yet as a protagonist set above the ‘herd’.

In “Literature for Children and Ideology in Transition: A Study of Haruki Murakami’s *The Strange Library*,” **Anish Bhattacharyya** interrogates the very idea of the genre of “children’s” literature by arguing that adult ideologies inevitably enter texts written for the young. Using Murakami’s “The Strange Library” alongside “Kafka on the Shore,” the author shows how motifs, anxieties, and symbolic structures transcend supposed age boundaries. The article traces the history of children’s literature from Britain to contemporary times, showing that ideas about childhood were and are culturally produced rather than being universal. Murakami’s work becomes a case study for how modern children’s writing can absorb trauma, fragmentation, gender tension,

and psychological complexity. Bhattacharya concludes that children's literature needs a broader, less restrictive understanding.

Ashutosh Singh's "The Philosophy of Mahima Dharma: BhimaBhoi's Poetic Vision and Cultural Transformation" studies BhimaBhoi as both poet and reformer, placing his work within Mahima Dharma's spiritual and social philosophy. The paper emphasizes his rejection of Brahmanical hierarchy, his insistence on spiritual equality, and his belief in Sarba Brahma, the divinity of all beings. It is shown that Bhoi used an accessible Odia language and folk elements rather than elite Sanskrit forms, allowing his teachings to be available to marginalized communities. His poetry is presented not only as devotional literature but also as ethical and a social critique. Singh portrays BhimaBhoi as a transformative thinker whose spiritual vision supported democratization, compassion, and resistance to caste oppression.

Chinmoyee Saikia & Dipendu Das in their essay "Unravelling the Silent Tragedy of Missing Girls: A Study of Gita Aravamudan's *Disappearing Daughters*: The Tragedy of Female Foeticide examines Gita Aravamudan's text as more than reportage, treating it instead as a powerful analysis of patriarchy, technology, and social violence. It argues that female foeticide and infanticide are not isolated crimes but outcomes of deep gender bias embedded in kinship, inheritance, dowry, and social expectations. The disappearance of girls is a demographic, cultural, and ethical catastrophe, not merely a statistical problem. Saikia and Das conclude that justice requires structural reform and a reimagining of daughters as central citizens rather than burdens within a patriarchal society.

"Identities, Attributions, and Prejudices: A Study of the Errors of Associating Bias to Judgment as Shown in *All American Boys*" authored by **Aiswarya Jayan & Shibani C. Aich** explores how *All American Boys* exposes institutional bias, racial stereotyping that normalize injustice, and the psychological effects of prejudice. Through the figures of Rashad and Quinn, the novel presents two different responses to racist violence: one from the victim's position and one from the witness who must confront complicity. Rashad becomes a symbol of courage while Quinn represents moral awakening. Jayan and Aich shows how trauma, solidarity, and resistance can effectively challenge systemic racism and encourage social awareness.

Naorem Dayabati Devi in the essay “Linking Women’s Educational Attainment to Economic Empowerment: A Case Study from Manipur” investigates how women’s education relates to economic empowerment in the Imphal districts of Manipur. The article argues that education improves women’s confidence, awareness, decision-making skills, and significantly enhances the ability of individual women to gain economic independence. It connects schooling to delayed marriage, smaller families, better health practices, and stronger voices in household and social decisions. At the same time, the paper notes that patriarchal structures still restrict women’s opportunities despite Manipur’s history of a relatively active female participation in economic life. Devi concludes that educational attainment is strongly linked with empowerment, though broader structural changes are still needed in Manipuri society.

Anu Joseph & Smitha P in their paper “Effectiveness of Government Interventions For Health and Nutritional Status of Under-Five Tribal Children In Attappady, Kerala” critically evaluates governmental efforts to improve the health and nutrition of tribal children under the age of five in Attappady, Kerala, by relying on a cross-sectional survey. The study finds that many respondents remain dissatisfied despite extensive government schemes, suggesting that official efforts have not been capable of fully addressing lacunae in local realities. The researchers argue that community-focussed and evidence-based policy revisions are necessary for bringing about lasting improvement.

Bachaspatimayum Vimi Devi & Saugata Kumar Nath’s contribution “Resistance through Language: Reconstructing Issues of Identity and a Sense of Belongingness in Jerry Pinto’s *Em and the Big Hoom*” studies language in *Em and the Big Hoom* as both a symptom of mental distress and as a means of resistance. Focusing on bipolar disorder, it argues that the novel challenges the silencing effects of medical and social stigma by giving *Em* a fragmentary, humorous, and transgressive voice. Devi and Nath suggest that humour, care, and storytelling resist the clinical reduction of mentally ill persons to objects of diagnosis.

Nancy Pangeijam & Pronami Bhattacharyya in “Reconstruction of Gender Roles in Kavita Kané’s *Lanka’s Princess*” reinterprets the mythological figure of Surpanakha in Kavita Kané’s *Lanka’s Princess* as a complex woman rather than the villain of epic tradition. Kané reconstructs gender roles by painting a picture of Surpanakha’s childhood marginalization, her intelligence, and her

strategic resilience. Her suffering, especially after the murder of her husband by Ravana, becomes a turning point that deepens her political awareness and agency. Her offer to Rama is a straightforward assertion of desire. Pangeijam and Bhattacharyya argue that Kané gives voice to a subaltern woman long silenced by patriarchal retellings of the *Ramayana*.

Yamuna P. & Shibani Chakraverty Aich studies displacement through the intertwined ideas of trauma, exile, memory, and identity in Sandeep Raina's *A Bit of Everything* in their essay "The Impact of Displacement and the role of Memory in Constructing a Sense of Self: A Study Through Sandeep Raina's *A Bit of Everything*".

The paper argues that displacement fractures the self, but memory can also become a healing force that helps reconstruct belonging. Exile does not erase identity permanently; instead, it transforms it. The scholars argue that by accepting loss and reworking memory into a coherent narrative, the protagonist builds a reconstituted sense of self.

Shraddha Singh's article "Language Provisions for Education in NEP 2020: Challenges and Prospects" goes beyond literature proper and examines the language-related provisions of India's National Education Policy 2020, especially its emphasis on multilingualism and the use of the mother tongue in early education. The author argues that language learning is central to the development of inclusiveness, to better learning outcomes, and the preservation of India's cultural diversity. At the same time, the paper highlights practical challenges in implementation, including the existence of resource gaps, teacher preparation, uneven institutional capacity, and the complexity of India's multilingual realities. Singh observes that NEP can be successful only if a genuinely inclusive multilingual education system is built.

Shreya Sarkar in her paper entitled "The 'Space' of the 'Other' in the Human Geography of Levinas: A Study" reads Emmanuel Levinas through human geography and argues that space should be understood ethically rather than merely physically. Drawing on Levinas's concepts of the face, responsibility, proximity, and hospitality, the author shows that human relations create an "ethical geography" in which the self becomes responsible for the Other before any act of freedom. Space is therefore not just territory, but a field of moral encounter and borders become thresholds of hospitality. Sarkar argues that home is also an ethical formation shaped by responsibility.

The piece “Use of Plants in The Traditional Bengali Diet” written by **Rupa Chakraborty** explores the traditional Bengali diet known for its deep use of plant resources, including vegetables, fruits, spices, pulses, and leafy greens. The point is made by Chakraborty that Bengali food practices retain and represent an important body of indigenous knowledge about nutrition, seasonal eating, and the sustainable use of traditional, local, phyto-resources. In this context, Chakraborty calls for further documentation, conservation of plant resources, and phytochemical research to scientifically validate traditional ethno-botanical knowledge systems.

Lalita Betgar & Russell D’Souza in their paper “Mathematical Thinking and Its Cognitive and Affective Correlates: A Partial Correlation Study” investigate how mathematical thinking relates to attitude, motivation, and general intelligence among Class VIII students. Using partial correlation rather than only zero-order correlation, the authors attempt to isolate the unique contribution of each factor. Their findings show that attitude toward mathematics has a modest but significant positive relationship with mathematical thinking. Betgar and D’Souza go on to suggest useful implications for classroom practice, particularly in building positive engagement with mathematics.

The essay “Citizen Participation in Urban Planning in India” by **Pinky Kumari** is a paper that studies the role of citizen participation in Indian urban planning and argues that public involvement is essential for democratic, inclusive, and sustainable urban governance. It reviews the constitutional basis provided by the 74th Amendment and related policy mechanisms such as ward committees, participatory budgeting, public hearings, grievance systems, and smart-city platforms. Using examples from cities like Ahmedabad, Pune, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Mumbai, the author shows both the potential and limits of participation. Kumari calls for deeper decentralization and more meaningful inclusion.

With their essay “Portrayal of Sexual Minorities in Indian Cinema: A Systematic Review”, **Sheerin Hamdani, Salik Parveaz & Asif Khan** present a systematic review of research on the portrayal of sexual minorities in Indian cinema. It finds that recent films increasingly offer more positive and humanizing depictions of LGBTQ+ identities, often foregrounding themes such as desire, resistance, dignity, freedom, and social acceptance. At the same time, the writers note that several stereotypical and harmful portrayals

still persist, especially in representations of transgender people and in older mainstream cinema where queer characters were often reduced to comic relief or to instances of deviance. The authors argue that more sensitive representations are necessary to counter prevalent stigma and to support and encourage social attitudinal changes.

Gargi Bhattacharya in her research paper on “The Book as the Myth: Genre as the Memory of the Novel in Italo Calvino’s *If on a winter’s night a traveller* and Mario Vargas Llosa’s *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*” argues that postmodern fiction is not only fragmented, playful, and metafictional, but also deeply discursive and mythographic. Re-reading Calvino and Vargas Llosa’s texts together, the paper’s author suggests that genre functions as a form of memory through which the novel remembers and reworks earlier narrative traditions. The use of pastiche and parody in particular embed fiction within bigger structures of myth and legend. Bhattacharya redefines the postmodern novel as a form that transforms books themselves into mythic, self-reflexive memory systems.

In the essay “Reconfiguring Bengali Masculinity in the Late Colonial Period: A Critical Literary Enquiry”, **Md. Jisan Mondal** explores how Bengali masculinity was reshaped in response to colonial stereotypes that cast Bengalis as effeminate and weak. Focusing on Saradindu Bandyopadhyay’s Byomkesh Bakshi, the paper argues that late colonial Bengali masculinity moved away from both Western muscular ideals and earlier imitative nationalist models. Byomkesh represents an alternative form of manhood grounded in intellect, moral autonomy, sympathy, and familial responsibility rather than brute force resisting colonial assumptions of superiority. Mondal reads Byomkesh as a distinctly Bengali model of ethical and intellectual masculinity.

Monikinkini Basu’s paper “Vulnerability and Precarity: The Plight of Women Domestic Workers in Kolkata” is a sociologically oriented scrutiny of the insecure lives and the exploitative conditions faced by women domestic workers in Kolkata. It argues that domestic labour remains economically essential yet socially undervalued, often marked by low wages, lack of legal protection, irregular employment, and invisibility within formal labour discourse. The labour of this female workforce sustains the running of urban households even as their own lives remain marked by instability and marginalization. Basu draws attention to these domestic workers as

constituting a vulnerable labour segment and calls for their welfare and advocates for stronger recognition and protection for them.

“Daring the Patriarchy: Making of the New Women in the Novels of Shobha De” by **Sonia Ningthoujam** shows how Shobha De’s fiction constructs the figure of the “New Woman” in urban Indian society. Focusing on novels such as *Socialite Evenings*, *Starry Nights*, *Sisters*, and *Strange Obsession*, the author argues that De’s women resist docility, challenge patriarchal norms, and assert autonomy over desire, identity, and ambition. Though these characters belong largely to the elite class in India, they also experience and endure emotional conflict and gender discrimination. Ningthoujam regards De’s fiction as an important intervention in feminist discourse through its presentation of women as determined to claim their rightful space within a male-dominated society.

Tapu Biswas in his essay “Badal Sircar’s *Evam Indrajit*: A Critical Reading” offers a detailed examination of Badal Sircar’s *Evam Indrajit* as a landmark work of modern Indian theatre. It situates the play within the aesthetics of absurdism, existential anxiety, and post-Independence urban alienation, and shows how Sircar departed from conventional realism to dramatize repetition, monotony, frustration, and the crisis of identity. The paper also traces the play’s wide influence through translation, performance, and circulation across various Indian languages, including Manipuri and English. By discussing its reception and theatrical afterlife, Biswas presents *Evam Indrajit* not only as an epochal Bengali play but also as a pan-Indian dramatic work that reshaped modern theatre practice and critical discourse in our country.

Richa Chimulkar & Anna Neena George in their essay “A Conceptual Exploration of The 7e Model In Fostering Inquiry-Based Learning” studies the ‘7E’ instructional model—Elicit, Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, Evaluate, and Extend—as a constructivist framework for promoting inquiry-based learning. The authors argue that this model helps cultivate curiosity, encourages active exploration, conceptual understanding, and student-centred learning. The 7E model is indicated as being useful for classrooms seeking to inculcate deeper engagement rather than rote memorization in students. Chimulkar and George thus present the 7E model as a promising pedagogic tool useful for strengthening inquiry and meaningful classroom learning.

In the paper “Literary Studies at the Crossroads: An Ecological Study of William Blake’s ‘The Lamb’ and ‘London’”, **TilokNaskar** re-reads William Blake’s lyrics “The Lamb” and “London” through an ecological lens. The paper shows how the two poems dramatize respectively harmony with nature and an alienation from it. “The Lamb” is interpreted as a vision of spiritual-natural-human connectedness, while “London” it is indicated displays the darker effects of industrialization, urban suffering, and estrangement from a holistic experience. Blake, long before ecological criticism came to be established, was already sensitive to the destructive consequences of anthropocenic mechanized civilization. Naskar shows that the two of Blake’s lyrics studied anticipate ecological consciousness and critique the dehumanizing effects of industrial modernity.

Sharmistha Chatterjee in “*Shakespeare Ke Sonnet* by Sudhir Kumar Mishra, published in 2025 by Bharatiya Mudran, Sundar Nagar, Bhopal” evaluates a recent Hindi translation of Shakespeare’s sonnets as an important cultural and literary act. Chatterjee argues that translating Shakespeare into Hindi is not merely an act of linguistic transference but a meaningful rereading that renews the Bard for contemporary Indian readers. The essay especially appreciates Mishra’s balance maintained between beauty and fidelity, and it notes that the translator sometimes retains the original imagery and at other times negotiates it through the usage of Indian cultural equivalents. Translation is discussed here as both risk and creative re-animation, and even as a kind of “ecotranslation” that sustains literature across languages and generations. Chatterjee lauds the volume as a significant and valuable addition to Hindi literary culture.

Happy Reading

“The devil’s agents may be of flesh and blood”:
Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy
in Victorian *Sherlock Holmes*

Shinjini Ghoshal

ABSTRACT:

Victorian England was a locale well known for sensational beliefs. Doyle used the fear and fascination of the age-old superstitions, and wove the plot of some of his famous stories. In the canon, Holmes is portrayed as this perfect embodiment of the *Apollonian* calm and reserve; however, he often indulges in *Dionysian* excesses like hallucinogens and the playing of the violin at late hours of the night. This shocking clash of the two different sets of values finds a recluse in Holmes. Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, believed that the clash between both the forces may apparently be destructive, but the duality needs to be inextricably unified for artistic enterprise: it is the source of creativity and procreation. The article seeks to problematise this narrative, and analyse how the ‘popular’ discourse of the famous detective can be deduced from two critical standpoints, the *Apollonian* and the *Dionysian*.

Keywords: Apollonian, Dionysian, Duality, Unification,
Creative Procreation

Apollonian and *Dionysian* are terms used by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* to designate the two central principles in Greek culture. Apollo and Dionysus were gods in the ancient Greek pantheon, despite representing nearly opposing values and orientations. Apollo was the god of light, representing reason, harmony and balance, while Dionysus was the god of wine, revelry, ecstasy and other convoluted emotions. Nietzsche distinguishes the *Apollonian* as all types of forms or structure: rational thought is also *Apollonian* because it is directly opposed to the *Dionysian* drunkenness and madness. All forms of enthusiasm and ecstasy are *Dionysian* in nature. Of all arts, Music is

the most *Dionysian*¹, since it directly appeals to a man's instinctive and chaotic emotions. The *Dionysian* qualities in a man are unable or unwilling to formally address a rational mind; they are generally associated with the exotic, the wildly emotional as opposed to the reasoning mind. Dionysus is the representative of mad inspiration, advocating effeminacy and enslavement of some kind. The calm reason and measured restraint over the emotions represent the state of the *Apollonian* mind. The Dionysus, on the other hand, surrenders the self and associates with a state of drunkenness – drunk on an inspiration, on an ecstatic identification with a higher entity that usually results in a creative zeal. Nietzsche, however, believed that the clash between both the forces may apparently be destructive, but the *Apollonian-Dionysian* duality needs to be inextricably unified for artistic enterprise: it is the source of creativity and procreation.

This duality is necessary for the process of artistic creation. Nietzsche views the *Dionysian* consciousness as crucial in attaining the state of primordial unity, a state beyond social limitations and boundaries. The ability to resist emotions in the light of reason is at the crux of *Apollonian* beauty. However, the ecstatic state of the *Dionysian* madness brings out a revelrous state of productivity in man. In the character of Sherlock Holmes, we find a near perfect blend of these two binary oppositions. He is a man who is more of a brain; one who mostly seems 'other-worldly' to Watson or his naïve readers. He is all about reason, logic, and science – an epitome of the *Apollonian* rationale. On the other hand, this perfect embodiment of the *Apollonian* calm and reserve, indulges in *Dionysian* excesses like cocaine and the playing of the violin at late hours of the night. This shocking clash of the two different sets of values finds a recluse in Holmes; he is both *Apollonian* in character, as well as a resurrected Dionysus, who is a passionate violinist, engaging in titillating his senses with the help of cocaine, to drive away boredom: "A unification of the *Apollonian* and the *Dionysian* ... is witness to the strength of that dual artistic drive of nature ..." (Nietzsche, *Birth* 39)

James Frazer in *The Golden Bough* says, "The god Dionysus or Bacchus is best known to us as the personification of the exhilaration ... His ecstatic worship, characterized by thrilling music ... mystic doctrines [were] appealing

1 It may be noted here that the original title of Nietzsche's book was *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872). A later edition was published in 1886 as *The Birth of Tragedy, or: Hellenism and Pessimism*.

as it did to that love of mystery and that proneness to revert to savagery which seem to be innate in most men" (Frazer 343b-344a). "Dionysus was believed to have died a violent death, but to have been brought back to life again; and his sufferings, death, and resurrection were enacted in sacred rites." (Frazer 345a) Doyle's own legendary detective carries a book about Dionysus soon after his own 'resurrection', thereby proving Nietzsche's another theory of 'eternal recurrence' that philosophises that "time itself is a circle" (Nietzsche, *Zarathustra* 125), and the idea that all events and characters in the world repeat themselves. Doyle's conscious identification of Holmes with the Dionysian cycle of death and rebirth is proven by the death and resurrection stories in the Holmesian canon. Like the Olympian God, Holmes is killed in winter; in *The Final Problem*, Watson and Holmes went to Reichenbach Falls in April where they faced winter-like conditions: "We made our way over the Gemmi Pass, still deep in snow, and so, by way of Interlaken, to Meiringen. It was a lovely trip... the virgin white of the winter above." (Doyle, 477) The opening lines of his 'resurrection' story *The Adventure of the Empty House*, also emphasizes this Dionysian parallel: "It was in the spring of 1894 that all of London was interested, and the fashionable world dismayed, by the murder of the Honorable Robert Adair" (Doyle, 483). Dionysus died in winter and was reborn in spring. Holmes, very much like the Greek god, brings a promise of life: in the minds of his ardent worshippers, he is eternally reborn – a force of savage genius who cannot be destroyed even by his own creator.

I find the first proper implication of a Dionysian reference (in the canon) within the plot of the famous short-story, *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*. Doyle borrowed the image of an adder biting a sleeping person from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "One day Zarathustra had fallen asleep beneath a fig tree, since it was hot, and he had laid his arm over his face. Then an adder came along and bit him ..." (Nietzsche 50) In *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes* Leslie S. Klinger opines that the snake that killed Julia Stoner and Grimesby Roylott could not be of Indian origin because there are no such varieties of snakes in India.² "Conan Doyle, while borrowing Nietzsche's image

2 "An adder, synonymous with the term 'viper', is the name given to any number of poisonous snakes found throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa. They range in length anywhere from one to six feet and are often decorated with diamond or zigzag patterns. The common viper (*Vipera berus*), the only poisonous snake in Britain, is also referred to as the 'adder', but its venom is not usually fatal to humans. There is, in fact, no known swamp adder." (Klinger 370)

of the biting adder from Zarathustra, also borrowed Nietzsche's mistaken idea that there were adders in the part of Asia through which Zarathustra travelled." (Rosenberg 86) In the story of *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*, Doyle presents the dramatic image of the Dionysian 'Maenad' who wears a snake as a headdress – the idea of a snake as a "peculiar yellow band" (Doyle, 272) or "strange headgear" (Doyle, 272) "bound tightly round" (Doyle, 272) someone's head is probably related to pictures and ancient art objects related to the Dionysian cult.

According to Conan Doyle, after his retirement from the world of crime, the detective had devoted himself to the cultivation of bees. The reference to the *Dionysian* cult is present even here – the honey-bee is considered to be the sacred insect of the Dionysus: the honey when fermented becomes the intoxicating mead to be used by the worshippers of Dionysus to reach higher levels of ecstasy. The 'un-killable' detective who has managed to survive and out-live his own creator, shares an eternal kinship with the undying god. The metaphor of the Dionysian bee is repeated in 'The Adventure of the Empty House', where Holmes sets up a wax dummy of himself for Sebastian Moran to shoot at. Holmes wrote a book on bees himself, titled, *Practical Handbook of Bee Culture, with Some Observations upon the Segregation of the Queen*³ which associates the killing of the drone by the fertilized queen bee with the killing of the sacred king by Aphrodite, who mated with her, by tearing out his sexual organs. [Graves 71]

Despite the ambivalence between the double-faceted personality of Sherlock Holmes [the logical and rational mind of Apollo versus the chaotic emotions of his Dionysian habits], and his obvious similarities to both the Olympian gods, I find him to be very much a Victorian gentleman, who sublimates all his erotic desires in analytical drives of crime and detection, research, and cultivation of science. Even his self-needling of hard drugs is essentially anti-aphrodisiacal, and mostly intended to hasten the process of crime-solving by triggering his brain, and thereby nullifying the banal urges of mortal existence. The London-detective is somehow transformed into an allegorical hero by Doyle, revealed in his 'death' story in *The Final Problem*, and the story of his 'resurrection' in *The Adventure of the Empty House*.

- 3 The reference to this book is found in the short-story "His Last Bow": "Here is the fruit of my [Holmes's] leisured ease, the magnum opus of my latter years! ... Alone I did it. Behold the fruit of pensive nights and laborious days when I watched the little working gangs as once I watched the criminal world of London." (Doyle 978)

On the Origin of Species (1859) [full name: *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*] by Charles Darwin was a ground-breaking piece of work, and the emergence of the book in the field of science paved the way for further experimentations in Victorian London – a place and time which was well known for sensational beliefs. Fascination with black dogs and their association with the devil were a common pre-occupation in Victorian minds. Myths about black dogs have existed since the days of Homer. We are all familiar with the Greek myth of Hades, the god of the Underworld, who uses his three-headed black dog Cerberus to guard the land of the dead. Since ancient times, common people strongly believed in witchcraft and the use of black animals to carry out evil deeds. Conan Doyle used this fear of the age-old superstition, and wove the plot of his most fascinating Holmesian novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. The moor's criminal master-mind was in possession of an abnormally large and dark hound. He used the legend of the hound and forged it into a primitive weapon to instill fear in the minds of the “poor peasants, who are not content with a mere fiend-dog but must needs describe him with hell-fire shooting from his mouth and eyes. [However] Holmes would not listen to such fancies, and I [Watson] am his agent.” (Doyle, 727) However, despite Watson and Sir Henry's desperate attempts to remain rational and derive scientific explanations out of all the incidents, they too tended to fall into the clasp of fear: the evidences presented by the witnesses and the following events, all pushed them to a near-breaking point – “standing over Hugo, and plucking at his throat, there stood a foul thing, a great, black beast, shaped like a hound, yet larger than any hound that ever mortal eye has rested upon.” (Doyle, 675) It was almost breaking an otherwise strong and sane man, Dr. Watson, until the apostle of the Apollonian reason and structure, Holmes, reunited with him, restoring his faith in logical reasoning and science.

As Watson and Holmes reunited and worked together, the dark and mysterious environment of the moor tended to combat their noble efforts. The fog of the moor was destructive, and the “dark, quivering mire[']s] ... tenacious grip plucked at [their] heels as [they] walked, and when [they] sank into it [,] it was as if some malignant hand was tugging [them] down into those obscene depths, so grim and purposeful was the clutch in which it held [them].” (Doyle, 759-60) However, the primitive location of the moor could not threaten the Apollonian scientific-detective enough to detain

him from his pursuit of the hound and its murderous master. Only Holmes seemed immune to the fear of the 'supernatural' hound and he decided to rough it out in the ancient caves located near the Baskerville Hall only for the sake of unraveling the truth. While Watson, being an ex-soldier and a man of medical-science, suggested the possibility of a "spectral hound, black, silent, and monstrous" (Doyle, 714), Holmes admitted that though the setting seems to be appropriate for devilish acts but "the devil's agents may be of flesh and blood." (Doyle, 684) The amazing powers of his deductions came into play as Holmes was quick to point out that the footprints were real enough and there was nothing remotely supernatural about the canine. Holmes relied only on scientific investigative techniques to catch the vicious owner of the murderous hound. His first suspect was Selden, a criminal, who was roaming the moor in search of a secluded place to hide. However, the escaped convict soon became a victim of the hound, thereby eliminating him as a suspect.

The faith in science and reason finally helped him to overcome the fog of supernatural, seemingly clouding the senses of all the residents, and discover the truth behind the devilish hound. Holmes had always been fascinated with studying things which were essentially related to his 'work' – the study of different types of tobacco ash, varieties of poisons, soil-types from different parts of London, to name a few. He was an excellent chemist, conducting his own experiments – his knowledge ranged from cataloguing crimes to the study of different kinds of human skull. His familiarity with phrenology, however, helped him to detect that Stapleton was ultimately a jealous relative of the Baskervilles. Stapleton's greed to own the estate of the Baskervilles compelled him to strategize such a magnificent plan to commit the murders. One evening while Watson and Holmes inspected the paintings at Baskerville Hall, the detective's 'trained' eyes instantly recognized the familiar face and saw through the disguise of Stapleton. The hound was shot down with five bullets, and "[e]ven ... in the stillness of death, the huge jaws seemed to be dripping with a bluish flame and the small, deep-set, cruel eyes were ringed with fire" (Doyle, 757) – It emanated a terrifying aura, but flesh and blood nonetheless it was. Stapleton used a "cunning preparation" (Doyle, 757) of phosphorus, to manipulate the appearance of the animal and gave it a supernatural quality to create an atmosphere of illogical fear and thereby satisfy his own murderous intent. However, the rational investigation by the Apollonian detective reduced the sensational hound to an ordinary animal

which was nurtured by Stapleton, and provided with an unnatural glow with the use of chemicals, to leave it in the devouring moor to finally satisfy his own criminal intentions of stealing the Baskerville estate. Holmes's concepts of forensic science and detection, his analytical mind, and ability to detect irrationality, finally helped him triumph over threats to reason and logic.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche talks about the importance of the instinctual and chaotic tendencies within the self, thereby elevating the *Dionysian* sensuality as one half of a whole creative human experience. The grand narrative of the nineteenth century European scholarship on ancient Greek literature misunderstood the vital importance of raw passion and sublimated them into the *Apollonian* discourse of pure reason and order. However, Nietzsche was of the opinion that a unity of the dialectic between the opposite drives is at the core of a fulfilled life – tragedy or true transcendental art is derived out of a harmony between the *Apollonian* and *Dionysian* aesthetics. “We will have achieved much for the discipline of aesthetics when we have arrived not only at the logical insight but also at the immediate certainty of the view that the continuing development of art is tied to the duality of the *Apollonian* and the *Dionysian*” (Nietzsche, *Birth* 19) The true form of artistic expression can be achieved when these impulses of both intellectual order and creative delights are embodied within the artist. One may discover that Sherlock Holmes could negate his chaotic artistic tendencies to bend more towards the *Apollonian* world of structural symmetry, yet at the same time also show an inclination toward the *Dionysian* impulses; thereby seeking pain, suffering and exultation, to combine both the creative forces and achieve a wholesome comprehension of human experiences, of crime and complexities.

The world, after Darwin's publication of *On The Origin of Species* in 1859, and Nietzsche's subsequent ground breaking declaration of the death of God, encountered a sense of nihilism and existential crises. If the concept of God is a myth, then the idea of morality and a moral order as decreed by the mythic God are all inventions of man. The absence of a superior being judging our conformation to His moral laws brought a sense of de-centering resulting in fear and confusion. The lack of something holy and unassailable which had dominated the 'herd' for so long, paved the way for a sense of hollowness – an inescapable feeling that there was no absolute morality; hence, there was no reward for the morally righteous, as well as no eternal punishment for

breaching the predominant moral codes established by the Judeo-Christian society. The response to this kind of a situation is a rebellious non-conformity to the social norms and a general disregard for any organized religion. Darwin's evolutionary ideas helped Victorians imagine a dynamic world of industrialization where man had successfully tamed nature. This kind of degenerative thought was the source of fear for many notable thinkers of that time; the social, cultural and moral decline of the era influenced great minds like that of Nietzsche. The notions of degeneration and decline that seemed to threaten the European civilization propelled Nietzsche to theorize the concept of the *Übermensch*⁴. The concept of 'free will' that emerged from Darwin's theory provoked a wave of skepticism and pessimism, resulting in a gradual rejection of Christian absolutes and moving towards self-empowerment. Only the 'fittest' would survive; therefore, it was of utmost necessity to be self-aware, to be a part of the socio-cultural power-play and not be solely dependent on an outdated concept of a God who could no longer provide a validation or a center to/for the chaotic confusion of Victorian minds.

Holmes found his 'way' to overcome the chaos and confusion of his surroundings through continuous learning and acquisition of knowledge which he theorised in *The Adventure of the Red Circle*: "Education never ends Watson. It is a series of lessons with the greatest for the last." (Doyle, 907) If we are willful receivers of knowledge, we can learn all through our life. He rejects any concept of absolute truths – discovery of new truths is an on-going phenomenon which sharpens his famous powers and acquired skills every day. He carefully points out in *A Study in Scarlet*: "No man lives or has ever lived who has brought the same amount of study and of natural talent to the detection of crime which I [Holmes] have done." (Doyle, 25) As a man who is aware of his elevated stature among his contemporaries, he is both careful of his intellectual supremacy as well as conscious of his isolation from the masses, owing to his overreaching tendencies which seem to be beyond anything that the mediocre could consciously comprehend. He continuously baffles the average psyche with his phantasmal exploits. However, to me, he is not only an exact physical embodiment of the Nietzschean Apollonian or Dionysian concepts, but also a protective and loyal companion, restorer of law and order, with his own set of 'weaknesses', set against the background of the gradually degenerating moral order of the era. Holmes is not the typical

4 *The Superman or The Overman* [roughly translated from the Nietzschean term]

Overman, but a man bred into the Victorian ethos, with his own set of super-human like faculties as well as insecurities which add to his enigmatic aura and set him apart from those whom Nietzsche so disdainfully identifies as the “herd”. (Nietzsche, *Zarathustra* 14)

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Literature for Children and Ideology in Transition: A Study of Haruki Murakami's *The Strange Library*

Anish Bhattacharyya

ABSTRACT

Children's Literature is a misleading phrase. It seems to establish that certain perspectives and topics may come under the purview of the genre, whereas more demanding issues may get assimilated into domains of literature meant for grown-ups. When adults construct literature to suit a specific readership, they may try to filter their narratives accordingly, but is it truly possible to pluck out ideological signifiers from a narrative? This question steers the following research paper.

Haruki Murakami, whose works are often said to be postmodern, has refrained from declaring his allegiance to such a label. However, his works do challenge established boundaries. His novella *The Strange Library*, catering towards children, apparently resembles his other work meant for grownups, *Kafka on the Shore*. Thus, the aim is to study if an author can filter ideologies based on the intended reader. The paper also investigates how these ideologies manifest when they become moderated. Finally, the paper explores if the very conventional understanding of 'children's literature' demands a revision.

Keywords: Ideology, readers, children's literature, 'matured' literature, power.

The paper seeks to explore whether there can be a literature reserved for children. It aims to study whether the literature being made available to children by the market is free from the ideologies pervading the supposedly "mature" literature.

This paper will study Murakami's *The Strange Library* to explore the above questions. I will be comparing the predominant symbols used in the work to those of another work by Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*. There seem to

be certain motifs that reappear in *Kafka on the Shore* even after 20 years of the publication of *The Strange Library* in Japanese. However, for this study, I would limit myself to the study of the English translation, which became available in 2014. Murakami is accused of telling the same story across his narratives. Yet, to my understanding, if we are to speculate on the issue, he does so perhaps quite intentionally to experiment with storytelling itself.

His work, thus, hurls the following questions to us as readers and researchers: Can the same story cater to different audiences? How can an author shape, or tell the same story to readers belonging to different age groups?

IS THE CHILD PRESENT IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE? A JOURNEY THROUGH THE AGES

The very notion of 'children's literature' is a problematic idea. At its core, there is a homogeneous identity which we tend to signify through the phrase 'children'. Quite ironically, the definition of the child thus seems to be defined by the adult in retrospect. As evident in topics like this, thinkers often fail to reach a consensus, partly because, trying to conclude upon an abstract entity can only yield interpretations and hardly anything conclusive. So, questions like the following become artificial – what should a child read? What constitutes children's literature? These questions are framed by adults to test their hypothesis of what it is to be a child.

Reading habits of and materials for children are not universal throughout history, and this can point to one direction, that is, there is no one universal understanding of childhood.

Children in medieval and Renaissance Britain were certainly provided with a wide range of reading material, books produced primarily for older readers that they were permitted or encouraged to read, as well as texts designed especially for them. But should we consider this children's literature? The critic Peter Hunt certainly thought not, arguing vociferously that children's literature is properly comprised only of texts that were 'written expressly for children who are recognizably children, with a childhood recognizable today'. (Grenby 3)

The Restoration witnesses the categorisation of the child as an 'other' entity, perhaps to be shielded from the malice of the adult society. Tales like Johnathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* became immensely popular. However, the satirical narratives were transformed to suit the imagined mind of the child.

Margaret Evans writes that “chapbook versions” of Swift’s original tale were made available for children (243). There is an inherent ideology at work here, the assumption which perhaps motivates this transformation is the priorities of the child must be made different from the adult. The child must be different, or else the authority of the adult loses its legitimacy.

The Romantic age sees the child as that innocent figure who has the potential to shape a better society. This vague statement must be understood in the context of romanticism. The writers of the times were moving away from the materialistic life of the urban scene, and they were advocating a return to nature. Here, nature perhaps represents a way of life standing in sharp contrast to their present society. William Blake’s little child brimming with curiosity, and eager to know the world, grows up to confront the ‘experience’ of adulthood. If the innocent child in “The Chimney Sweeper” concludes that if everyone performs their duties faithfully, then God will reward them in the afterlife (Blake, qtd in Yeats 51), then the experienced child of “The Chimney Sweeper” realises that in his society, God’s dictum never reaches, instead, it is the Church and King who regulate the social structure. The injustice which he faces is ensured by these authorities in the name of God, and religion becomes the foil to hide this social inequality (Yeats 71). Hence, Wordsworth’s Lucy cannot survive in the long run, despite the promise her existence ensures. She meets an untimely end (Brett 192).

Moving on, the Victorian age unsurprisingly seems to embed a moral lesson in its production of literature for children. Grenby, therefore, observes – “Pre- nineteenth century children’s poems, as the introduction to *The Oxford Book of Children’s Verse in America* puts it, ‘appear to twentieth-century eyes wholly impossible for children.’” (33). It must also be noted that illustrations became a major addition to Children’s literature of the period. Walter Crane is one such illustrator, working at the end of the Victorian era, who illustrated tales like *Aladdin* (Whalley 324). It is perhaps safe to say that just like ‘adult’ literature (as we can see in the modernist works), references from other national literatures and cultures intervene in the popular imagination behind Children’s literature.

Grand narratives like imperialism did not shy away from works catering towards Children. Dennis Butts writes that there were schools in Britain which prepared children to work in faraway colonies like India, and Rudyard Kipling was also a student in one such school. The adventure story genre for

children, therefore, garnered immense popularity – the British man/woman going to a faraway land and working for the empire (342).

While discussing the nineteenth century, one must mention Robert Lewis Stevenson. Grenby writes that his works try to locate the anxieties of the sensitive and solitary child (49). However, in a quite contradictory manner, Stevenson admits elsewhere, “It’s awful fun, boys’ stories. You just indulge the pleasure of your heart, that’s all; no trouble, no strain” (Hunt 191). Thus, Stevenson’s position simply strengthens the assumption that it is difficult to truly understand the motives behind the construction of a work that is meant for children. Talking about another eminent Victorian writer, Jacqueline Rose asserts that Lewis Carroll’s works explore the psychological space which represents childhood, which cannot be visited again. She writes that one is exiled from that imagined space as one grows old, and she asserts that the same can be said about C. S. Lewis’s *Narnia* (Grenby 145).

C.S. Lewis also stated, “if a book is not worth reading at sixty it is not worth reading at six” (Falconer 571). It is needless to say that other researchers studying him have also expressed similar observations. Many have identified hidden religious ideologies at play in his work. For instance, Ghesquiere writes that Christian morality remains enmeshed with a fantastical narrative in the case of Lewis (312). She points out that the child can partake in the fantastic tale, whereas the more mature reader can appreciate the religious allegory. If the above line of thinking is true, then it problematizes the idea of children’s literature even further. It appears that canonical children’s literature celebrates narratives where the child is in a way tricked to uphold/idolise the hidden morality at work, separating the good and bad.

Tolkien seems to prioritise another aspect of children’s literature, that is, the dominant role often played by fantasy within narratives. He says that a work of high fantasy is a parallel imaginative world, guided by its own rules, whereas, the world inhabited by the reader is the “Secondary World” (Sullivan 437). The magic woven by the author is such that readers willingly participate in this suspension of disbelief, to borrow Coleridge’s terms. However, Sullivan points out that occasional juxtaposition of the two worlds is necessary, or else, “the reader would not be able to understand a word of what was written” (437).

Moving on to another contemporary of Tolkien, I would like to discuss William Golding’s island story, *Lord of the Flies*. When talking about the

tradition that makes children's literature, one must look towards the horizon of the convention. It only broadens the scope of exploration. Unlike R. M. Ballantyne's island tale and the assumed identity of children, Golding focuses on the destruction of innocence, if there was ever one, to begin with. Golding's active role in the Second World War allowed him to perhaps witness how the war utilised child soldiers. His narrative shows that the division of adult-child identities is merely a construct. Children can be equally hungry for power and mindless violence. Peaceful co-existence is hardly desired by the children in Golding's narrative. It does bring to the forefront issues like bullying, which plague civilised society even today.

Thus, a brief enquiry into the rudimentary development of the history of Children's literature makes us question our existing assumptions between 'mature' literature and works meant for children. It seems authors, intentionally or quite subconsciously, leave a breadcrumb of ideologies at work in narratives meant for children. Moreover, the idea of children's literature is a problematic one, as these texts are being constructed by adults. They seem to propagate the idea of what a child should be through their works. In other words, there is an imagined essential identity of a child, which can either be ascertained or perhaps questioned by the author.

This line of thinking may bring us to the idea of childhood. The goal of the paper, however, is not to assert any understanding of childhood. Instead, it aims to ask if it has changed, then how the literature representing it has undergone changes. This transformation is perhaps only logical, otherwise, contemporary children's literature would lose its connection with the readers.

I speak for a generation whose experience of childhood has been shaped by books, television, and computer games. If qualities of morality and virtue are imparted by comics like the 'boy-scout' Superman, yet a harmless show like *The Road Runner* makes the viewer casually aware of the existence of TNT, and the unrelenting will to kill the enemy. Mushroom clouds frequent the television screens to such an extent that these viewers may become desensitised towards the implications of such topics. Computer games like *Resident Evil* effortlessly present the experience of killing humanoids with a headshot. My point is that childhood is not a singular experience that can be captured through a genre. To do justice to this ever-changing idea, authors need to be more adventurous. They perhaps need to devise a narrative that can

unlock hidden pathways within the long-standing, isolated, walled chambers, which come together to constitute children's literature.

A rough history of children's literature, which this paper has discussed previously, may yield a brief list of its sub-genres. Perhaps this is a structuralist attempt to categorise the available data. Grenby, for instance, in his book, *Children's Literature*, identifies fables, poetry, moral tales, school stories, family stories, fantasy, and adventure stories as variations within the discourse. He categorises the likes of *Harry Potter* under the school story sub-genre. But even though such categorisation may help identify the tale being scrutinised, occasionally, as researchers of literature, one may encounter a text which blurs these walls. One such example is Haruki Murakami's *The Strange Library*. The story masks its message if at all it contains a message.

Making this jump, from literature emerging from the British Isles to Japan, is necessary to test the hypothesis this paper aims to explore. This is because, at the core of this enquiry, we aim to discuss how contemporary children's literature has evolved to incorporate new realities that may constitute the experience of a twenty-first-century child, predominantly living in an urban locale. Hence, exploring Murakami's work, which has garnered immense transcontinental popularity, should strengthen the argument even further. Moreover, while conducting this literature survey, it surprises me as a researcher to see how works emerging from Asia have found representation in the critical discourse. So, incorporating Murakami in this argument is only rational.

Dissolving Boundaries: Construction of the Murakamiesque Child Figure
Murakami's works seem to address an issue that this paper prefers to discuss. Can an author, who is also an adult, 'dilute' his ideas to suit a different kind of readership? If it is so practised in the publishing industry, then how is the ideology of the adult creeping into the mind of the young? To understand this phenomenon, this paper compares Murakami's *The Strange Library* with *Kafka on the Shore*. Both works showcase certain overlapping motifs, while the former is meant for children and the latter caters towards young adults and grown-ups alike.

CLASH OF GENERATIONS:

THE OLD MAN AND MR JOHNNIE WALKER

In several Murakami narratives, a reader may encounter an archetypal member of the previous generation who seems to represent the angst of Japan's lost

decades. A person belonging to the 1980s, who has lost their faith in the grand narrative of the state, having enough to continue with a materialistic pursuit, yet wondering whether life is meant to be lived in such a way, powerless and without any alternative. The tales of Murakami seem to play with the alternate reality device to experiment with these states of angst. In *Kafka on the Shore*, it is implied that Koichi Tamura, an otherwise eminent sculptor, turns insane and acquires the persona of Johnnie Walker, a serial killer who murders cats to steal their soul. Koichi, even though an artist whose topic is the subconscious, is an immensely materialistic man. The readers get a glimpse of his study and his obsession with brands. The narrative almost seems to suggest that men who indulge in materialistic pursuits lose their mysterious connection with reality, and upon realising this, they resort to perverted ends, like Johnnie Walker did to re-establish that lost connection.

Now the question arises, how Murakami's tale meant for children can present this relevant, yet surreal and gory take on his society. *The Strange Library*, similarly, presents the character of the old man in the manner of Johnnie Walker, only this time, he eats the brains of little children after trapping them in the library. This instantly places the villain within the long tradition of witches and wolves guilty of consuming little children. Nevertheless, if the conflict between two generations was highlighted through the Oedipal take on Koichi Tamura and his son Kafka Tamura, in *The Strange Library*, it is represented through figures of the old man and young child – the former living a life of futility and perversion, while the other showcasing a promise towards a newer tomorrow.

CHARACTERS FROM THE MARGINS:

THE SHEEPMAN AND NAKATA

Murakami's narratives seem keen to present a character who lies at the margins of the commercially motivated society. In *Kafka on the Shore*, it is Nakata, who was left traumatised after a fateful incident in his childhood. His parents disowned him for his stunted mental faculties, and he ended up living with his grandparents. As Nakata grows up, he never manages to identify with the motivations of his society. He never understood the desire to live a life of materialistic plenty. He is a retired carpenter who searches for missing cats, and he has the unique ability to find them. An unusual skill, but something which is less valued in the society within Murakami's narrative.

The Strange Library also seems to present a similar character in the form of the Sheepman. He lives in the labyrinth under the library and looks after children who are kept imprisoned by the Old Man. Nakata befriended Hoshino, and the two went on a journey to find the entrance stone. Similarly, the Sheepman befriends the protagonist of the story, and they attempt to escape the labyrinth together. The Sheepman also lies outside mainstream society, and the protagonist suggests a path that can help him get assimilated within the society, opening a doughnut parlour (40).

If sometimes it may appear that Nakata represents the alter ego of Kafka, similarly, the Sheepman then represents the fearful psyche of the young boy. This may account for the dread which the Sheepman feels towards the Old Man.

FRAGMENTED SELVES:

LITTLE GHOST GIRL AND MISS SAEKI'S SPIRIT

Another character that apparently travels between the two narratives is the spirit of the young girl. In *Kafka on the Shore*, Murakami perhaps attempts to show how the minds of grown-ups become fragmented as they grow up. The 40-year-old Miss Saeiki has somehow managed to suppress her 16-year-old memories. These have taken the form of a spirit that haunts the library at night. Similarly, the silent young girl who frequents the labyrinth under the library is revealed to be the pet bird of the protagonist that had died earlier.

The two seem to share a budding romance, yet it never materialises into anything concrete. Perhaps the constraints of a story meant for children limit Murakami's free play at this juncture. However, Murakami does play around with the idea of a first kiss and a damsel in distress who is without a voice. During the moment of the escape from the library, when the Old Man confronts them, the girl transforms into a bird to stop his advances. Murakami's tale, therefore, reverses the conventional gender roles at this point. The boy fails to save the girl, and it is the girl who manages to save the boy.

THE WOMAN: ABSENT MOTHER AND DEATH

Another issue that revisits Murakami's fiction time and again is the absence of the mother figure. *The Strange Library* depicts a mother who hardly says anything throughout the narrative. Later, in a passing reference, the readers are made aware by the young protagonist that his mother has suddenly died. Likewise, *Kafka on the Shore* also begins with the search of Kafka's absent

mother and sister. This absentee mother is perhaps a depiction of the Japanese post-war literary tradition. Susan Napier writes – “[T]he post war fantasies of male writers are notable for the absence of women characters. Women are no longer part of wish-fulfilment fantasies. Instead, they are part of the reality which the male protagonist longs to escape” (54).

Women no longer settled for being controlled by the society around them. They became an active part of the workforce during the post-war nation-building. Women moved beyond the boundaries of the domestic sphere. Perhaps, for this reason, Koichi Tamura fails to control his wife. The latter is said to have eloped with her daughter. Koichi curses his young son to have a fate like that of Oedipus. The curse is perhaps symbolic, in other words, the father represents the old patriarchal generation that fails to accept the new role of the woman. Hence, the woman can never truly settle with him, and she chooses to leave such a limited domestic sphere. The son, however, represents the later generation, who is supposedly more open-minded, less bound by conventional ideas of gender roles. The woman can truly have a sustainable relationship with him.

The Strange Library does not seem to explore the character of the mother, and the readers never get a glimpse of her psyche. But they learn that the mother and son lived alone, without the father. It can conform to the larger framework of Murakami's works, as stated above. However, her death comes suddenly, and it seems nothing out of the ordinary – “My mother died last Tuesday. She had been suffering from a mysterious illness, and that morning she quietly slipped away” (72). The narrative at this moment may remind the readers of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, or more precisely, the casual passing reference to the death of Mrs Ramsay.

The mother's death and the subsequent reference to the protagonist's loneliness remind the readers that the division between child and adult is arbitrary. A child may encounter and brave a trauma which an adult has yet to confront. The comfort which adults try to bestow upon a child is a projection of their expectation of childhood, and it is not the reality of childhood. Murakami's narrative through the mother's demise seems to highlight this fissure between what childhood can be and what adults expect it to be.

AUTHORITY AND RESISTANCE:

MYSTERIOUS LIBRARIES AND BLACK DOGS

Murakami speaks of libraries and black dogs in both works. Apparently, these are just settings that the author perhaps prefers to revisit. However, a closer inspection of these symbols may tell another story. The library may not be what it seems to the reader. It is not just a fantastical space that the narrative introduces to capture the fancy of the reader, but it can also be a trope to explore the psyche of the child protagonist. The dark labyrinth which the library seems to be is perhaps an extension of the fears of the protagonist. He lets the readers know towards the end of the tale – “I lie here by myself in the dark at two o'clock in the morning and think about that cell in the library basement. About how it feels to be alone, and the depth of the darkness surrounding me” (76).

The library makes its appearance once again in *Kafka on the Shore*, and it becomes a source of escape for Kafka Tamura. It represents to him that secluded space far away from the materialistic life, which he longs to leave behind. It is in that same library, like the child protagonist of *The Strange Library*, that he meets the ghost of Miss Saeki and is attracted towards her, like the child protagonist.

If the library becomes a refuge, then the ‘black dog’ symbolises the ominous machineries through which authority exerts its influence. The old man is accompanied by the beast to do his bidding, in a manner quite similar to Johnnie Walker and his gigantic black hound in *Kafka on the Shore*. Murakami’s narrative for children seems to preach the same ideology that his novels targeting adults appear to highlight.

The narrative borrows conventional tropes like a child being captured by a monstrous figure, which prefers to eat him. It is not a witch or a big bad wolf, but instead, it is an old man in Murakami’s tale. The tale does not end with the promise of a fairy godmother, and instead, the readers are left to wonder if there was a spirit helping the lonely boy in the first place. The reader wonders if everything was but a figment of his imagination. Murakami’s work, thus, seems to deconstruct the conventional stereotypes of storytelling meant for children and fuses more ‘mature’ psychological themes.

TO CONCLUDE

Murakami's work questions this invisible wall, categorising literature into the mature and less mature versions. It attempts to show that this wall is a figment of our imagination, constructed by the cultural standards of morality. As evident through his works, the issues which are discussed in more 'mature' literature can simply revisit a work of art meant for children, even without the notice of the people in power, in this case, the parents, determining what their child can read. Murakami's work then resembles an experiment that exposes the artificiality of the prerequisite conditions which determine the outcome of a chemical reaction, in this case, building the minds of the future generations, the units of society.

Thus, it seems that the conventional relegation of the Children's Literature genre perhaps stems from the stubbornness of the institutions in power to recognise the ideologies at play within a work meant to cater towards children. As clichéd as it may sound, this ability of the work is certainly postmodern – it resists easy categorisations and questions the definitions and dictums set by the positions of power. The darkness which adults generally prefer to exorcise from children's literature, according to Murakami's work, never leaves the margins – it only waits for the child to break free of the parent figure. The death of the mother then becomes the symbolic growth and coming to power of the child.

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The Philosophy of Mahima Dharma: Bhima Bhoi's Poetic Vision and Cultural Transformation

Ashutosh Singh

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the philosophy of Mahima Dharma and the profound contributions of Bhima Bhoi, an iconic poet and social reformer from Odisha, India. Through an analysis of his seminal works, including *Stuti Chintamani*, *Bhajanamala*, *Brahma Nirupana Gita*, *Astka Bihari Gita*, *Nirveda Sadhana*, *Sruti Nisedha Gita*, *Cautisa Madhu Cakra*, and *Adi Anta Gita*, this study examines Bhima Bhoi's emphasis on spiritual egalitarianism, devotion to the formless divine (*Alekh*), and his call for social justice and equality. Bhoi's writings, while grounded in mysticism, also serve as a powerful critique of the caste system and religious orthodoxy. His vision of a just society transcends religious boundaries and advocates for the dignity of marginalized communities. This paper engages with both historical and contemporary scholarship on Mahima Dharma, positioning Bhima Bhoi's teachings as a critical intersection of spirituality, literature, and social reform. It also highlights the ongoing relevance of Bhim Bhoi's philosophy in modern discourses on environmental justice, and human rights.

Keywords: *Alekh*, social justice, spirituality, mysticism, Bhakti movement, egalitarianism,

INTRODUCTION:

The 19th century in India witnessed a significant rise in socio-religious reform movements aimed at challenging orthodox traditions and establishing egalitarian principles. Among these movements, Mahima Dharma emerged as

a unique and powerful spiritual tradition in Odisha, advocating the worship of a formless supreme being (Alekh) and promoting social equality and reform. Central to this movement was Bhima Bhoi, a revered mystic, poet, and reformer whose teachings and writings gave voice to the marginalized and oppressed. His poetry, deeply spiritual yet rooted in social realities, became the bedrock of Mahima Dharma, a movement that sought to liberate individuals from the rigid structures of caste and ritualistic practices prevalent in Indian society. Bhima Bhoi's works, including *Stuti Chintamani*, *Bhajanamala*, *Brahma Nirupana Gita*, and *Astka Bihari Gita*, reflect a complex intertwining of spirituality, philosophy, and social critique. His verses, often described as prophetic, speak to the suffering of the common people, particularly the oppressed classes, and express his deep commitment to alleviating their pain. Bhim Bhoi's poetry is not only a devotional expression but also a clarion call for a new social order based on equality, justice, and compassion. His famous line, 'Let my soul be damned if the world can be saved,' encapsulates his deep altruism and self-sacrifice, emphasizing the collective over individual salvation.

The philosophy of Mahima Dharma, as propounded by Bhim Bhoi, offers a radical reinterpretation of religious and social norms. Rejecting the authority of institutionalized religion, Bhim Bhoi and Mahima Dharma advocate a direct, personal connection to the divine that transcends caste, creed, and ritual. This philosophy, grounded in the belief in a formless divine (Alekh), critiques the ritualism and dogmatism of mainstream Hindu practices and presents a universal path toward spiritual liberation. Bhima Bhoi's works further expand this philosophy, incorporating themes of social justice, environmental stewardship, and personal morality. In examining Bhim Bhoi's contributions to Mahima Dharma, this paper delves into his major works, analyzing their philosophical significance, socio-political implications, and spiritual depth. It explores how Bhoi's poetry serves as both a religious doctrine and a manifesto for social change, addressing issues such as caste discrimination, economic exploitation, and religious dogma. Further, the study aims to shed light on the contemporary relevance of Bhim Bhoi's teachings in an increasingly fragmented and materialistic world, where his message of compassion, equality, and devotion to a formless divine continues to resonate with spiritual seekers and social reformers alike. Through this exploration of Bhim Bhoi's philosophy and his literary contributions, this

paper highlights the enduring legacy of Mahima Dharma as a spiritual and social force. By drawing upon Bhoi's visionary writings, the research seeks to contextualize his work within broader socio-religious movements in India and assess its impact on modern-day spiritual practices and social justice movements. In doing so, the paper also aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of Bhima Bhoi's place in Indian religious and literary traditions, positioning him as not only a mystic and poet but also a progressive thinker whose ideas remain profoundly relevant today.

The study of Mahima Dharma and Bhima Bhoi's contributions has gained prominence in recent years as scholars from various disciplines seek to understand his influence on religion, literature, and social reform. Bhoi, often hailed as the "blind poet of Mahima Dharma," has attracted attention for his unique blend of mysticism, egalitarianism, and social activism. The literature on Bhim Bhoi and Mahima Dharma encompasses a range of scholarly interpretations, focusing on religious studies, literary analysis, and socio-political reform. This section reviews key contributions to the academic discourse surrounding Bhim Bhoi's works, their religious and philosophical significance, and their socio-political impact.

Bhima Bhoi's role as a religious reformer has been extensively discussed in the works of scholars such as Sitakant Mohapatra and Satyabrata Sahu. Mohapatra's seminal work, *Bhim Bhoi: The Blind Poet of Mahima Dharma* (1996), provides a comprehensive analysis of Bhim Bhoi's life and contributions to the Mahima movement. Mohapatra highlights Bhim Bhoi's rejection of religious orthodoxy and caste-based hierarchies, arguing that his teachings were revolutionary in their insistence on the formless divine (Alekh) and their appeal to the oppressed classes. Mohapatra's study situates Bhim Bhoi within the broader context of 19th-century religious reform movements in India, comparing his ideas with those of contemporaries such as Swami Vivekananda and Dayananda Saraswati. Satyabrata Sahu's *The Philosophy of Mahima Dharma and Bhima Bhoi's Vision* (2012) further explores Bhim Bhoi's theological innovations, particularly his emphasis on Nirguna (formless) worship and the rejection of idol worship. Sahu contends that Bhim Bhoi's articulation of Mahima Dharma represents a radical departure from the Brahmanical traditions of his time, positioning him as a forerunner of spiritual democratization. Sahu also examines the significance of Bhim Bhoi's concept of Sarba Brahma—the belief that all living beings are manifestations of the

divine—and its implications for social and environmental ethics. This work emphasizes Bhim Bhoi's contributions to the development of an inclusive, accessible spirituality that rejects hierarchical religious structures.

Bhim Bhoi's literary legacy has been explored through various critical lenses, including poetic analysis, devotional literature, and oral traditions. Ganeswar Acharya's *Mahima Dharma: A Socio-Religious Study* (1984) offers a detailed examination of Bhim Bhoi's poetic works, highlighting their dual role as both spiritual scripture and social critique. Acharya emphasizes Bhim Bhoi's use of simple, yet evocative language that could resonate with common people, making his teachings accessible to even the most marginalized sections of society. Acharya also delves into Bhim Bhoi's unique style of devotional poetry, noting its departure from classical Sanskrit traditions in favor of local Odia vernacular and folk elements.

Nilakantha Senapati's *Cultural Heritage of Odisha: Bhima Bhoi's Contributions* (2018) provides an interdisciplinary perspective on Bhim Bhoi's writings, combining literary criticism with cultural studies. Senapati examines how Bhim Bhoi's works draw upon local oral traditions and folk performance, while simultaneously addressing universal themes of suffering, redemption, and divine grace. Senapati's work expands the study of Bhim Bhoi's poetry by situating it within Odisha's rich cultural heritage, arguing that his works serve as a bridge between the oral and written literary traditions of the region.

Krishna Mishra's article, "Bhim Bhoi and the Mahima Movement" (2003), takes a literary-historical approach, tracing the development of Bhim Bhoi's poetic voice within the broader context of Odisha's devotional literature. Mishra notes how Bhim Bhoi's poetry both conforms to and deviates from the traditions of the Bhakti movement, particularly in its emphasis on the suffering of the world as a collective burden. Mishra also explores Bhim Bhoi's innovative use of metaphor and imagery, which, he argues, elevates his devotional works to the level of philosophical treatises.

Several scholars have focused on the socio-political dimensions of Bhim Bhoi's work, emphasizing his role as an advocate for the marginalized and an early voice against caste-based oppression. Prabhat Dash's *Bhim Bhoi and His Quest for Social Reform* (2010) is a critical work that explores Bhim Bhoi's social activism within the framework of his religious philosophy. Dash argues that Bhim Bhoi's teachings challenge the Brahmanical patriarchy and assert

the spiritual dignity of all individuals, regardless of their caste or social status. By emphasizing the intrinsic divinity of all beings (Sarba Brahma), Bhim Bhoi sought to dismantle the oppressive structures of the caste system and promote a vision of universal brotherhood.

Jagannath Pattnaik's *Mahima Dharma: A Critical Study* (2015) further explores the socio-political implications of Bhim Bhoi's teachings. Pattnaik examines Bhim Bhoi's critique of feudalism and religious exploitation, arguing that his works advocate for a radical restructuring of society based on the principles of equality, justice, and compassion. Pattnaik highlights Bhim Bhoi's relevance to contemporary struggles for social justice, particularly in the context of Dalit and Adivasi movements in India.

In his article, "Bhima Bhoi's Vision of Social Justice" (2020), Sujit Kumar presents a modern interpretation of Bhim Bhoi's teachings, linking them to global discourses on human rights and environmental justice. Kumar draws parallels between Bhim Bhoi's advocacy for the oppressed and contemporary movements for social equity, particularly in the context of caste abolition and environmental sustainability. Kumar's work demonstrates the continued relevance of Bhim Bhoi's philosophy in addressing the socio-political challenges of the modern world.

The environmental dimensions of Bhim Bhoi's teachings have also garnered scholarly attention. Gopinath Dash's *Bhim Bhoi and the Ecology of Compassion* (2017) examines Bhim Bhoi's environmental ethics, particularly his emphasis on compassion for all living beings and his call for non-attachment to material possessions. Dash argues that Bhim Bhoi's teachings offer a spiritual framework for addressing contemporary environmental crises, advocating for a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature. Dash's work places Bhima Bhoi's ideas within the context of eco-theology, suggesting that his writings offer valuable insights into modern environmental movements.

Additionally, Pratima Mohanty's *Spirituality and Ecology in Bhim Bhoi's Poetry* (2019) explores the ecological themes present in Bhim Bhoi's devotional works, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all beings and the sanctity of the natural world. Mohanty argues that Bhim Bhoi's teachings offer a holistic vision of spirituality that integrates concerns for social justice and environmental sustainability, positioning him as a prophetic voice for the Anthropocene.

The scholarship on Bhima Bhoi and Mahima Dharma reflects a wide range of interdisciplinary approaches, encompassing religious studies, literary criticism, socio-political analysis, and environmental ethics. Bhoi's teachings continue to be recognized for their unique blend of spiritual devotion and social reform, making him a pivotal figure in both Indian religious history and contemporary discussions of social justice and environmental sustainability. His poetry, with its deep philosophical undertones and commitment to social equality, continues to inspire scholars and reformers alike. Through the lens of modern scholarship, Bhima Bhoi's legacy endures as a testament to the power of spirituality as a force for personal transformation and collective liberation.

PHILOSOPHY OF MAHIMA DHARMA

Mahima Dharma, a unique religious and philosophical movement that emerged in 19th-century Odisha, India, represents a significant departure from mainstream Hinduism. It presents a radical reinterpretation of spiritual devotion, with its foundational tenets centered on the worship of a formless, ineffable supreme being called *Alekh*. The philosophy of Mahima Dharma, grounded in monotheism and egalitarianism, rejected the caste system, ritualistic worship, and idol worship, emphasizing instead the universal equality of all beings and the ultimate realization of the oneness of existence. This section delves deeply into the key aspects of Mahima Dharma, exploring its metaphysical, ethical, and social dimensions.

Alekh Niranjana: The Concept of the Formless Divine: At the core of Mahima Dharma's philosophy is the worship of *Alekh Niranjana*, the formless and attribute-less divine. The word *Alekh* itself means "that which cannot be described or written," signifying the ultimate transcendence and ineffability of the supreme being. Unlike the anthropomorphic gods of Hinduism, *Alekh* cannot be represented through idols or images; instead, it exists beyond human perception and conceptualization. In this sense, Mahima Dharma presents a form of abstract monotheism, where the divine is understood as an all-pervading, all-encompassing, and singular reality that transcends all dualities. This belief in a formless divine being aligns Mahima Dharma with other spiritual traditions that emphasize an impersonal or abstract conception of God, such as Advaita Vedanta, Sufism, and certain strands of Sikhism. However, Mahima Dharma's focus on *Alekh* as the sole object of devotion differentiates it from these traditions, which often allow for the simultaneous

worship of personal deities. In Mahima Dharma, devotion to *Alekh* requires the complete rejection of idol worship and ritualistic practices, which are seen as distractions from the true nature of the divine. The formlessness of *Alekh* also implies its omnipresence and omnipotence. In the *Brahma Nirupana Gita*, a key text of Mahima Dharma, Bhim Bhoi describes the divine as:

“Sunya Brahma pervades the universe,
Invisible, beyond the grasp of mind and senses;
In every heart, in every particle of existence,
It resides as the eternal witness, formless and free.”

(Bhoi 47)

Here, Bhim Bhoi emphasizes the universality of *Alekh*—it is present in every being, yet it remains beyond human comprehension. The concept of *Sunya Brahma*, or the void-like, formless supreme being, reflects the non-dualistic nature of Mahima Dharma’s metaphysics, where the ultimate reality is singular, boundless, and without attributes. This understanding of the divine as an impersonal and transcendent force challenges the anthropocentric tendencies of conventional religion and offers a more inclusive and abstract form of spirituality.

Rejection of Ritualism and Caste Hierarchy: One of the most revolutionary aspects of Mahima Dharma is its rejection of ritualism and caste hierarchies, which were deeply embedded in the socio-religious fabric of 19th-century Odisha. Bhim Bhoi and other leaders of Mahima Dharma believed that the true path to salvation lay in direct, unmediated devotion to *Alekh*, rather than through complex rituals, temple worship, or priestly intermediaries. They viewed the rituals and ceremonies of mainstream Hinduism as corruptions of the original spiritual teachings, which had become tools for reinforcing social inequalities, particularly the caste system. In this sense, Mahima Dharma can be seen as a reformist movement that sought to democratize spiritual practice and dismantle the religious structures that perpetuated social injustice. By rejecting idol worship and ritualistic practices, Mahima Dharma eliminated the need for Brahmin priests and other religious intermediaries, allowing individuals of all castes and backgrounds to directly access the divine. This was a radical departure from the hierarchical religious practices of the time, which often excluded lower-caste individuals from participating fully in religious life. Bhima Bhoi’s writings frequently critique the caste system and

the role of the Brahminical orthodoxy in maintaining social hierarchies. In his *Sruti Nisedha Gita*, Bhim Bhoi explicitly rejects the authority of the Vedas and other sacred texts that uphold the caste system:

“The Vedas speak of divisions,
Creating hierarchies among men.
But the divine sees no such lines,
In every being, the same light shines.”

(Bhoi 78)

Here, Bhim Bhoi emphasizes the egalitarian ethos of Mahima Dharma, asserting that the divine light resides equally in all beings, regardless of caste or social status. This rejection of caste-based discrimination is one of the defining features of Mahima Dharma and reflects its broader commitment to social justice and spiritual equality.

Universal Brotherhood and Spiritual Egalitarianism: Mahima Dharma’s philosophy is grounded in a vision of universal brotherhood and spiritual egalitarianism. It teaches that all human beings, regardless of caste, creed, or gender, are equal in the eyes of the divine and that the divisions created by society are artificial and ultimately meaningless. This belief in the essential equality of all beings is closely tied to the movement’s emphasis on the formless divine, which transcends all distinctions and categories. Bhim Bhoi’s writings often reflect this egalitarian vision, calling for the abolition of social hierarchies and the creation of a society based on mutual respect and compassion. In *Stuti Chintamani*, Bhim Bhoi expresses his deep concern for the suffering of others and his commitment to the cause of social justice:

“The pain of others tears at my heart,
How can I rest when the world is in torment?
Let the suffering cease, let all be redeemed,
Even if it means my own destruction.”

(Bhoi 88)

This reveals Bhima Bhoi’s profound empathy and his willingness to sacrifice himself for the greater good. His vision of universal brotherhood is not merely theoretical but is grounded in a deep sense of compassion for the suffering of others. This compassionate ethos is central to Mahima Dharma’s philosophy, which teaches that spiritual liberation can only be achieved when

one recognizes the interconnectedness of all beings and works to alleviate the suffering of others.

The Ethical Imperatives of Mahima Dharma: The ethical teachings of Mahima Dharma are closely tied to its metaphysical and social philosophy. Bhim Bhoi and other leaders of the movement emphasized the importance of living a life of simplicity, humility, and compassion. They taught that true spirituality is not about performing rituals or following religious dogma, but about cultivating virtues such as kindness, honesty, and non-attachment. One of the key ethical principles of Mahima Dharma is *nirveda*, or detachment from material desires. Bhim Bhoi often warned against the dangers of materialism and urged his followers to renounce worldly attachments in favor of a life of spiritual devotion. In *Nirveda Sadhana*, Bhima Bhoi writes:

“The wealth of the world is fleeting,
It binds the soul in chains of desire.
But the wealth of the spirit is eternal,
Free from the shackles of the material world.”

(Bhoi 102)

This reflects the ascetic dimension of Mahima Dharma, which teaches that true happiness and liberation can only be found by transcending the material world and devoting oneself to the formless divine. However, this renunciation of materialism is not just an individual ethical imperative but also has broader social implications. By rejecting the pursuit of wealth and status, Mahima Dharma challenges the values of a society that privileges material success and social hierarchy over spiritual fulfillment and moral integrity. Another important ethical principle of Mahima Dharma is *ahimsa* or non-violence. Bhim Bhoi and other leaders of the movement taught that all forms of violence, whether physical, verbal, or psychological, are antithetical to the true spirit of spirituality. They emphasized the importance of treating all beings with kindness and respect, recognizing that the same divine light resides in everyone. This commitment to non-violence extends not only to human beings but also to animals and the natural world, reflecting Mahima Dharma's broader ethos of compassion and interconnectedness.

Mahima Dharma and the Quest for Social Justice: The philosophy of Mahima Dharma is deeply intertwined with the quest for social justice. Bhim Bhoi and other leaders of the movement sought to create a society based

on equality, compassion, and mutual respect, rejecting the caste hierarchies and social divisions that characterized Indian society at the time. Mahima Dharma's emphasis on the formless divine and its rejection of ritualism and caste distinctions provided a powerful theological basis for this vision of social justice. Bhim Bhoi's writings often reflect his concern for the plight of marginalized communities, particularly the lower castes and tribal populations of Odisha. In his poetry, he frequently expresses a deep sense of empathy for the suffering of others and calls for the abolition of the social structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice. This commitment to social justice is one of the defining features of Mahima Dharma and reflects its broader vision of spiritual egalitarianism. In many ways, Mahima Dharma can be seen as a precursor to later social reform movements in India, such as the Dalit movement and the struggle for caste equality. Bhim Bhoi's teachings on the equality of all beings and his rejection of the caste system resonate strongly with contemporary social justice movements that seek to challenge the entrenched inequalities of Indian society. His vision of a just and compassionate society, grounded in devotion to the formless divine, continues to inspire those who seek to create a more equitable world.

The philosophy of Mahima Dharma represents a profound and radical reimagining of spirituality, social relations, and ethics. Rooted in the worship of *Alekh Niranjana*, the formless and attribute-less divine, Mahima Dharma challenges the ritualistic practices, caste hierarchies, and idol worship that dominated mainstream Hinduism in 19th-century India. Bhima Bhoi, the most prominent figure of this movement, used his poetry and teachings to promote a vision of spiritual egalitarianism, universal brotherhood, and social justice. At its core, Mahima Dharma offers a metaphysical framework in which the divine is understood as beyond form and attributes, permeating all existence and residing equally in every being. This belief in the formless divine underpins the movement's rejection of caste-based discrimination, as it posits that all beings are inherently equal in the eyes of *Alekh*. By dismantling the religious structures that uphold social inequality, Mahima Dharma creates space for a more inclusive spiritual practice that emphasizes direct, personal devotion over adherence to rigid, hierarchical traditions. Mahima Dharma's ethical teachings, particularly its emphasis on non-violence, simplicity, detachment from material desires, and compassion for all beings, further reflect its radical approach to spirituality. Bhim Bhoi's call for a life rooted

in kindness, humility, and moral integrity serves as both an individual and societal directive, offering a pathway to both personal liberation and broader social transformation.

The movement's critique of materialism and its rejection of wealth and status as measures of worth are particularly resonant in contemporary discussions on environmentalism and social justice. Mahima Dharma's teachings, which advocate for living in harmony with nature and recognizing the interconnectedness of all life, provide valuable insights for addressing the ecological and social challenges of the modern world. The philosophy of Mahima Dharma stands as a testament to the power of spirituality to inspire social change and foster a more just and compassionate society. Bhim Bhoi's vision of a world free from social hierarchies, where all beings are united in devotion to the formless divine, continues to resonate with contemporary audiences seeking alternatives to the materialistic and hierarchical structures that dominate modern life. As the teachings of Mahima Dharma gain greater recognition in scholarly and spiritual circles, their potential to contribute to the ongoing struggle for social justice and environmental sustainability becomes increasingly clear. The enduring relevance of Mahima Dharma lies in its holistic approach to spirituality, which refuses to separate the pursuit of personal liberation from the commitment to social justice. By emphasizing the oneness of all beings and the formless nature of the divine, Mahima Dharma offers a vision of spirituality that is both inclusive and transformative, providing a blueprint for a more just, equitable, and compassionate world.

THE POET-PROPHET OF MAHIMA DHARMA

Bhima Bhoi is revered as the most prominent figure and voice of Mahima Dharma. He was a mystic, poet, and philosopher who not only articulated the spiritual and philosophical foundations of Mahima Dharma but also used his writings to address the social injustices of his time. Born into a Kondh tribal family in Odisha during the mid-19th century, Bhima Bhoi's life and works reflect his commitment to uplifting the oppressed and marginalized sections of society. Through his poetry, he voiced the struggles of the downtrodden and envisioned a world where the divine's grace would erase social inequities and human suffering. Bhima Bhoi's life was marked by hardship and adversity. Believed to have been born blind, Bhim Bhoi grew up in a society deeply entrenched in caste discrimination and social injustice. His early life

experiences shaped his worldview and spiritual quest, leading him to embrace Mahima Dharma's teachings and its critique of the caste system and ritualistic religion. His personal experiences of suffering deeply influenced his poetry, which is infused with a sense of compassion for humanity's plight and a desire for spiritual liberation for all beings. Despite his lack of formal education, Bhoi became a prolific poet and writer, composing several works that are now considered central to Mahima Dharma's literary and philosophical canon. His poetic voice was both spiritual and social, blending mysticism with a deep concern for the welfare of humanity. His works express his devotion to *Alekh* while also calling for the eradication of social injustices like caste discrimination, inequality, and exploitation. Bhoi's life and works made him a revered figure among his followers and established him as one of the key figures in the Indian Bhakti and reformist traditions. His teachings continue to inspire people across India, particularly among marginalized communities who see in him a symbol of resistance against oppression and a beacon of spiritual hope.

Bhima Bhoi's Poetry and Philosophy: Bhim Bhoi's poetry reflects the philosophical tenets of Mahima Dharma while also addressing the social realities of his time. His works emphasize devotion to *Alekh*, the formless divine while advocating for a life of simplicity, compassion, and non-attachment to material desires. His poetic compositions often blend philosophical reflection with lyrical expression, making his works both profound and accessible to his followers.

One of the central themes in Bhim Bhoi's poetry is his deep sense of empathy and compassion for the suffering of others. This is particularly evident in his famous verse from *Stuti Chintamoni*, which has come to symbolize his selflessness and commitment to social justice:

“Mo jeevana pachhe narke padi thau,
Jagata uddhara heu.”
(“Let my life be consigned to hell,
But let the world be redeemed.”)

(Bhoi 63)

This verse reflects Bhim Bhoi's willingness to sacrifice himself for the betterment of humanity. It encapsulates his deep compassion for the oppressed and his belief that spiritual liberation cannot be achieved in isolation—it

must involve the liberation of all beings. This ethos of collective salvation is central to Bhim Bhoi's vision of Mahima Dharma, which seeks to create a just and equitable society through spiritual devotion and social reform. Another recurring theme in Bhoi's poetry is the rejection of ritualistic religion and the caste system. In works such as *Sruti Nisedha Gita* and *Brahma Nirupana Gita*, Bhima Bhoi critiques the religious orthodoxy that perpetuates social inequality and oppression. He calls for a return to the pure, formless devotion of Mahima Dharma, free from the corrupting influence of ritual and caste hierarchies. For Bhoi, true spirituality is about recognizing the divine presence in all beings and living a life of simplicity, humility, and compassion.

Bhima Bhoi's Major Works: Bhima Bhoi's literary output is extensive, and his works have had a profound impact on the followers of Mahima Dharma. Some of his most important texts include *Stuti Chintamani*: This is perhaps Bhima Bhoi's most famous work, consisting of a collection of devotional hymns and prayers dedicated to Alekh. The *Stuti Chintamani* expresses Bhoi's deep devotion to the formless divine and his compassionate concern for the suffering of humanity. The text is filled with lyrical expressions of love and longing for the divine, as well as calls for the eradication of social injustice. *Bhajanamala*: This collection of Bhima Bhoi's bhajans (devotional songs) further explores his devotion to Alekh and his desire for spiritual liberation. The *Bhajanamala* emphasizes the importance of direct, personal devotion to the formless divine and reflects Bhoi's rejection of ritualistic religion. *Brahma Nirupana Gita*: In this text, Bhoi explores the nature of the divine and the path to spiritual liberation. The *Brahma Nirupana Gita* is a philosophical treatise that discusses the concept of *Sunya Brahma*, the formless, void-like supreme being that pervades the universe. Bhoi argues that true liberation can only be achieved through devotion to this formless divine and the rejection of material attachments. *Astka Bihari Gita*: This work further develops Bhima Bhoi's metaphysical ideas and explores the relationship between the individual soul and the divine. The *Astka Bihari Gita* emphasizes the importance of spiritual discipline and detachment from worldly desires as essential steps on the path to liberation. *Nirveda Sadhana*: In this text, Bhim Bhoi elaborates on the practice of nirveda, or detachment from material desires. The *Nirveda Sadhana* is both a philosophical treatise and a practical guide to living a life of spiritual simplicity and devotion. *Sruti Nisedha Gita*: This work critiques the authority of the Vedas and other sacred texts that uphold the caste system

and ritualistic practices. In the *Sruti Nisedha Gita*, Bhoi calls for a return to the original, formless devotion of Mahima Dharma and the rejection of the corrupt religious practices that perpetuate social inequality. *Cautisa Madhu Cakra*: This text is a poetic exploration of the relationship between the individual and the divine. It reflects Bhoi's mystical vision of the oneness of all beings and the ultimate unity of existence in the formless divine. *Adi Anta Gita*: In this work, Bhoi explores the cyclical nature of existence and the eternal presence of the divine in all aspects of life. The *Adi Anta Gita* reflects Bhima Bhoi's belief in the continuous, unbroken flow of divine grace and the ultimate goal of spiritual liberation for all beings.

BHIMA BHOI'S LEGACY AND INFLUENCE:

Bhima Bhoi's contributions to Mahima Dharma and Indian spiritual traditions are profound and far-reaching. His poetic vision, rooted in compassion, equality, and devotion to the formless divine, continues to inspire generations of followers in Odisha and beyond. Bhoi's teachings have also had a significant impact on social reform movements in India, particularly those focused on caste equality and the upliftment of marginalized communities. His legacy is not only spiritual but also social and political. His rejection of caste-based discrimination and his calls for social justice resonates strongly with contemporary movements for equality and human rights. Bhim Bhoi's vision of a just and compassionate society, grounded in the teachings of Mahima Dharma, continues to be a source of inspiration for those who seek to challenge the entrenched inequalities of the modern world. In many ways, Bhoi can be seen as a precursor to later social reformers such as B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi, who also sought to challenge the caste system and promote social justice through spiritual and ethical means. Bhima Bhoi's writings remain a powerful testament to the potential of spirituality to inspire social change and create a more just and equitable society.

Contemporary Relevance of Bhima Bhoi's Teachings and Mahima Dharma: Bhoi's teachings and the philosophy of Mahima Dharma remain highly relevant in the modern world, where issues of social justice, environmental degradation, and spiritual crises continue to dominate the global discourse. The values espoused by Bhima Bhoi—compassion for all beings, rejection of caste discrimination, and devotion to the formless divine—resonate with

contemporary movements that seek to create a more just, equitable, and spiritually fulfilled society.

Social Justice and Equality: One of the most enduring aspects of Bhoi's legacy is his unwavering commitment to social justice and equality. His rejection of the caste system and critique of religious orthodoxy paved the way for future reform movements in India that continue to challenge the structures of oppression. Today, Bhima Bhoi is seen as an early advocate for the rights of marginalized communities, including Dalits, Adivasis, and women, who have historically faced discrimination in Indian society. In contemporary India, Bhima Bhoi's teachings inspire movements for social equality and justice, especially among the oppressed and lower-caste communities. His works have been re-examined and celebrated as important contributions to the discourse on caste abolition, human dignity, and religious pluralism. The continued relevance of Bhim Bhoi's ideas is also evident in the numerous organizations and initiatives that promote his vision of social equality through education, activism, and spiritual guidance.

Environmentalism and Harmony with Nature: Bhoi's writings emphasize the importance of living in harmony with nature and practicing non-attachment to material wealth. This philosophy is increasingly relevant in today's global environmental crisis, where consumerism and unchecked industrialization have led to widespread ecological destruction. Bhoi's teachings advocate for a simpler, more sustainable way of life that recognizes the interconnectedness of all beings and the need to protect the natural world as a manifestation of the divine. Mahima Dharma's emphasis on non-violence and compassion for all living creatures aligns with contemporary environmental movements that seek to address the urgent need for sustainability and ecological balance. Bhim Bhoi's call to live by the divine order of nature can serve as a guiding principle for addressing the climate crisis, offering a spiritual framework for environmental activism that goes beyond political and economic concerns.

Spiritual Liberation and Global Spirituality: In a world increasingly defined by materialism, consumer culture, and spiritual fragmentation, Bhima Bhoi's teachings offer a path to spiritual liberation that transcends religious boundaries. His emphasis on the formless divine and direct, personal devotion appeals to a global audience searching for deeper spiritual meaning and connection beyond institutionalized religion. Bhoi's philosophy of formless devotion challenges the ritualistic practices of established religions, offering

an inclusive vision of spirituality that is accessible to all, regardless of social status, caste, or creed. As Mahima Dharma continues to gain followers in India and around the world, Bhim Bhoi's vision of spiritual liberation, equality, and justice has the potential to inform global conversations on spirituality and ethics. His teachings, which emphasize the unity of all beings in the formless divine, provide a framework for addressing the spiritual and moral crises facing contemporary society. In the modern era of global interconnectedness, Bhima Bhoi's emphasis on compassion, unity, and devotion can serve as a bridge between different spiritual traditions, fostering dialogue and mutual understanding among diverse religious communities. His vision of the divine as formless and universal resonates with many modern spiritual movements that seek to move beyond the confines of dogma and ritual to embrace a more inclusive and compassionate spirituality.

Impact on Contemporary Spiritual Movements: The teachings of Bhoi and Mahima Dharma have also influenced contemporary spiritual movements in India and beyond. The emphasis on direct spiritual experience and rejection of religious orthodoxy found in Mahima Dharma has parallels with other reformist and Bhakti movements that seek to democratize spiritual practice. In addition, Mahima Dharma's focus on the formless divine and its challenge to traditional religious hierarchies find resonance in modern spiritual movements that prioritize personal spiritual development over institutionalized worship. In the 21st century, Bhim Bhoi's teachings have found new relevance in progressive spiritual movements that prioritize social justice, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. His inclusive approach to spirituality, which embraces people from all walks of life, continues to inspire those who seek to break down the barriers of caste, class, and religion.

Bhima Bhoi's teachings and the philosophy of Mahima Dharma remain a vital source of inspiration and guidance for contemporary movements seeking social justice, environmental sustainability, and spiritual renewal. His unwavering commitment to the formless divine, social equality and compassion for all beings have made him a powerful symbol of resistance against oppression and a champion of the marginalized. As the modern world grapples with social, environmental, and spiritual crises, Bhoi's vision offers a timeless and profound path toward personal liberation and collective well-being. Mahima Dharma's emphasis on formless devotion and equality

continues to resonate with contemporary seekers who are disillusioned with rigid religious hierarchies and looking for a more inclusive and compassionate spiritual path. Bhima Bhoi's legacy, grounded in both spiritual and social reform, provides valuable insights into how spirituality can be harnessed as a force for positive change in the world. In recognizing the contemporary relevance of Bhima Bhoi and Mahima Dharma, it is clear that their teachings are not confined to the past but continue to shape and inspire new generations. As humanity faces the dual challenges of social inequality and environmental degradation, Bhima Bhoi's call for compassion, humility, and devotion to the formless divine remains as pertinent as ever, offering a powerful vision of hope and transformation for the future.

Bhima Bhoi's poetic and philosophical contributions offer us timeless wisdom in our ongoing struggles for justice, compassion, and spiritual fulfillment. His voice remains a beacon for those who seek to balance spiritual devotion with a commitment to social equity, making his teachings as vital today as they were over a century ago. The philosophy of Mahima Dharma, as articulated through the profound spiritual and poetic contributions of Bhima Bhoi, continues to hold relevance and inspire individuals today. Mahima Dharma's core tenets—devotion to the formless divine (*Alekh*), equality for all, rejection of religious orthodoxy, and compassion for the suffering—present a universal message that transcends the specific cultural and historical context of 19th-century Odisha.

Bhima Bhoi's personal life, marked by adversity and blindness, mirrors the experiences of the marginalized people for whom he spoke. His poetry is infused with a unique combination of spiritual longing and social conscience, calling for both individual spiritual liberation and collective redemption. His works, such as *Stuti Chintamani* and *Bhajanamala*, eloquently convey his deep devotion to *Alekh*, while his critiques of caste discrimination and ritualistic religion in works like *Sruti Nisedha Gita* and *Brahma Nirupana Gita* resonate with social reformers of both his time and ours. Bhoi's legacy as a poet-prophet extends beyond the spiritual realm into the spheres of social reform and environmental ethics. His call for compassion and equality challenges not only caste-based injustices but also the modern-day injustices faced by marginalized communities across the world. In an era of ecological crisis, Bhima Bhoi's teachings on non-attachment to material possessions and respect for the natural world offer a path toward sustainability and reverence

for life in all its forms. Mahima Dharma's rejection of dogma and institutional religion in favor of a direct relationship with the divine anticipates many of the critiques of organized religion seen in contemporary spiritual movements. Its emphasis on simplicity, ethical living, and spiritual equality provides a framework that is as relevant today as it was during Bhima Bhoi's time.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, Bhima Bhoi's work and Mahima Dharma represent not only a powerful spiritual tradition but also a potent force for social change. Their teachings continue to challenge and inspire those who seek a world free of oppression, inequality, and suffering. The poet's prayer for the salvation of the world, even at the cost of his suffering, encapsulates the essence of Mahima Dharma: a vision of spirituality that is deeply connected to the well-being of humanity as a whole. Bhima Bhoi's poetic and philosophical contributions offer us timeless wisdom in our ongoing struggles for justice, compassion, and spiritual fulfillment. His voice remains a beacon for those who seek to balance spiritual devotion with a commitment to social equity, making his teachings as vital today as they were over a century ago.

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Unravelling the Silent Tragedy of Missing Girls:
A Study of Gita Aravamudan's *Disappearing Daughters:
The Tragedy of Female Foeticide*

Chinmoyee Saikia & Dipendu Das

ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines Gita Aravamudan's *Disappearing Daughters: The Tragedy of Female Foeticide* through the lens of Society, Culture and Change: Crossings and Intersections. Aravamudan's work, which combines investigative reportage with personal testimonies, highlights the crisis of missing girls in India, placing female foeticide and infanticide at the intersection of patriarchal structures, technological progress, and socio-cultural expectations.

The work illustrates how society reproduces systemic inequalities by embedding gender hierarchies within kinship networks, inheritance logics, and community sanctions. Culture, far from being a static repository of values, operates as a dynamic site where modern technologies intersect with traditional practices to normalise gendered violence. The complicity of medical practitioners in enabling sex-selective abortions demonstrates how intersections of science, commerce, and cultural ideology sustain practices that devalue female life. By mapping these crossings, Aravamudan reveals the demographic, ethical, and political consequences of disappearing daughters: skewed sex ratios, intensified gender inequities, and the erosion of constitutional guarantees of equality. More significantly, the book invites reflection on how cultural continuity and social change operate in tandem, how aspirations toward modernity coexist with deep-seated patriarchal anxieties, producing paradoxical outcomes in which technological progress facilitates regressive practices.

This study argues that *Disappearing Daughters: The Tragedy of Female Foeticide* demands a reading beyond the documentation of a social problem; it is also a critical site where intersections of society, culture, and change become visible. The disappearance of daughters represents not only a demographic imbalance but also a profound cultural rupture that destabilises notions of justice, citizenship, and human dignity. Situating the book within interdisciplinary debates on gender and social transformation, this paper underscores the urgency of reimagining cultural narratives and instituting structural reforms to address the silent yet pervasive crisis of missing girls.

Keywords: Female foeticide, missing girls, gender discrimination, patriarchy, sex-selective abortion, demographic imbalance.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of “missing girls,” referring to those lost to female foeticide, infanticide, and trafficking, is one of India’s gravest humanitarian crises. In contrast to more visible forms of violence against women, female foeticide and infanticide remain “invisible,” ending lives without making noise. The root causes of this tragedy are deeply rooted in societal values, intersecting with modern technology, economic incentives, and the complicity of various actors, including the state and medical practitioners. This crisis not only violates basic human rights but also contributes significantly to the gender imbalance in India.

Gita Aravamudan, in her book, describes the issue of disappearing daughters as “serial killing” and as “holocaust.” She stated.

Female infanticide is comparable to serial killing. However, female foeticide resembles a holocaust; an entire gender is being wiped out. It is a silent, smoothly carried out crime that causes no waves. It occurs while we, as a nation, remain unaware. In some regions, nearly two generations of women have been eradicated before I finished this book, and there is still no solution in sight (Aravamudan xvi).

Female foeticide and infanticide cannot be attributed to isolated cases or simply regressive tradition. Instead, the practice is a function of patriarchal kinship systems that privilege sons who inherit property, carry on the family name, and are seen as economic assets. At the same time, daughters are often

viewed as financial burdens due to the dowry system and the perceived lack of lineage value. Even among modern and educated families, these patriarchal expectations persist, showing that social class, education, or urbanity do not necessarily lead to gender equity. Community norms exert immense pressure, with women facing ostracism or abuse for refusing sex-selective abortions. The social architecture, therefore, is geared toward reproducing gender inequality, turning society itself into an engine for systemic violence against women.

During her visit to Usliampatti in Madurai, Aravamudan discusses her experience in the chapter “In Search of Disappearing Daughters.” Her goal was to find out if mothers killed their newborn daughters. She writes:

For some years now, an alarming number of baby girls have been disappearing without a trace in the Madurai, Salem and Dharmapuri districts of Tamil Nadu. The suspicion was that they had been killed by their own families. The terrible secret behind the disappearance came to light for the first time in December 1985, when the popular Tamil magazine *Junior Vikata* published an article on the killing of babies in Usilampatti. The readers were shocked. They had heard grandmothers’ tales of girl babies being killed by their own families. But no one really believes it was still happening (2).

The title of the article was, “Fearing dowry, they kill girl babies”. Six months after this article was published, the English magazine *India Today* released another disturbing piece, “Born to Die”, featuring gruesome pictures of infant skeletons. The families themselves ended the lives of their girl children and buried them in temporary graves near their houses. (2).

Ironically, the government responded with denial, ordering the magazine copies to be burned. Officials insisted that the article had damaged the village’s image, but by then, the story had already drawn national and international attention. Even the BBC aired a program addressing the phenomenon of “killer mothers.” During that period, around the 1990s, economist Amartya Sen published his influential work on the issue of “missing women,” arguing that over 100 million women were unaccounted for in regions such as South Asia, West Asia, and North Africa. He attributed this alarming gap to gender bias and unequal treatment, suggesting that a significant portion of these missing women might be from India. Sen emphasised that these statistics reveal a silent yet horrifying narrative of discrimination and neglect, causing the premature deaths of countless female infants and women.

The problem of the “missing girl” is defined by another author, Nishant Anand, in his book *Women in India: The Problem of Missing Girl Child*. According to him,

.....a group consisting of the unborn children in their mother's womb, who are deliberately disposed of (in contravention of existing laws) before birth, only because they are female. Their disposal is an instance of the most extreme instance of gender discrimination (forbidden both by domestic and international laws and conventions). Still, it is seldom regarded as such, it being more commonly referred to as a social issue (Anand 24).

Another disturbing dimension highlighted is the active role of the medical community. Medical practitioners, rather than merely responding to patient demand, often enable and commercialise gender-biased practices. Abortion clinics offer covert packages, exploit coded language to navigate legal restrictions, and justify their role by appealing to consumer choice in a gendered market. This not only absolves individuals of ethics but transforms female foeticide into a normalised, clinical, and commercially viable practice. Thus, technological progress is not inherently liberating; it often becomes another tool for patriarchal control. Sex-selective abortion began to emerge as a serious issue in major urban centres during the mid-1980s. In Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan, reports indicated that around 3,500 female fetuses were aborted. According to UNICEF, a 1984 study conducted in Mumbai revealed that of 8,000 abortions following prenatal sex determination, 7,999 involved female fetuses. The report further highlighted that determining the sex of an unborn child had developed into a profitable medical practice. (Aravamudan 3).

The consequences of missing girls extend far beyond sex ratio imbalances. Long-term demographic shifts have resulted in communities, especially in states like Haryana and Punjab, where men outnumber women, triggering secondary crises such as bride trafficking, forced marriages, and polyandry. The commodification of women intensifies violence, while the normalisation of this invisible crime corrodes social and ethical norms. The collapse of gender parity not only erodes the constitutional promise of equality but also signals a larger cultural breakdown where the very fabric of citizenship, justice, and national identity is at stake.

Trafficking is another major cause of girls' disappearance. It is the most commonly used method in “the flesh trade”. Trading in human beings and the

exploitation of human beings are the most despicable forms of violation of human rights that can never be justifiable. As per the National Crime Records Bureau, one girl is abducted every eight minutes across India. A U.S. report on human trafficking further highlights India's role as a key centre of child sex exploitation. Officials estimate that while more than 100,000 minor girls are trafficked each year, law enforcement records seldom account for more than a thousand such cases (Roychoudhary 2014).

Young girls are trafficked from poorer backgrounds, where they are moved from supplying regions to places with a demand for brides to address the shortage of women of marriageable age. These girls are commodified and treated as property, often facing discrimination for not belonging to the local caste and being at the mercy of those who purchase them, who then exploit them. Some are abandoned or resold once they have fulfilled their role of bearing children (Anand 29). Manish Jha's 2003 film *Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women* confronts these social issues by depicting a dystopian Indian village in the year 2050, highlighting the consequences of female foeticide and infanticide on gender balance, social order, and human behaviour. The narrative closely mirrors actual cases of gender imbalance and bride trafficking in India, depicting a society left with only men due to generations of female infanticide. Additionally, films like 'Lakshmi' by Nagesh Kukunoor and 'Love Sonia' by Tabrez Noorani focus on the grim realities of trafficking and the exploitation of young girls through prostitution in India (Pramanick 2021).

Gita Aravamudan characterises the killing of girl children as a pervasive, almost nationwide "tradition." She records harrowing instances where, in Gujarat, mothers drowned their newborn daughters in milk, and in Punjab, buried them alive in sealed containers (7). Aravamudan further stated how the mothers and the other family members justify their killing of a female infant or foetus.

...mother killed their own daughters because they did not want them, 'to suffer', and where grandmothers fed poison to their own flesh and blood so they could accommodate more male offspring in the family (7).

More than just investigative reportage, Aravamudan's book is examined as a "site of testimony" which foregrounds women's lived experiences, from coerced abortions to resistance and secret mourning. The book becomes a counter-archive that challenges both official denial and apathy. Testimonies

rupture the narrative of passive compliance, offering glimpses of resistance and dissent, even if small or secretive. The book presents the tragic realities of female foeticide and its long shadow of social trauma. Through the lenses of Cathy Caruth and Veena Das, the text can be interpreted as a literary exploration of both “psychic rupture” and “social violence” within patriarchal India, where the trauma of gendered erasure operates simultaneously on individual, familial, and collective levels.

Cathy Caruth defines trauma as “a wound that resists full representation, an unclaimed experience” that returns belatedly through symptoms or fragmented narratives (Caruth 12). Aravamudan’s narrative style mirrors this fragmentation: the book’s accounts of sex-selective killings are mediated through stories, silences, hearsay, and interviews that together construct an incomplete archive of suffering. Caruth’s idea that trauma “shatters consciousness” and remains unspeakable is visible in the silenced grief of mothers coerced into foeticide, and in Aravamudan’s journalistic restraint, which evokes what cannot be easily articulated. The trauma here is “collective yet unacknowledged”, a psychic void spanning generations, where memory becomes residue rather than record. The distorted normalcy of killing daughters becomes, as Caruth suggests, a symptom of unresolved cultural trauma, a repetition compulsion at the societal level.

Veena Das, in *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, argues that trauma is not only an extraordinary rupture but also inscribed into the fabric of daily life. In *Disappearing Daughters*, this notion is realised through the normalisation of female foeticide ritualised violence enacted not as an aberration but as a socially sanctioned practice. Das’s framework helps decode how communities absorb violence into their moral worlds, making trauma part of domestic and social routine. The complicity of family members, medical practitioners, and social norms reflects a “language of silence” that sustains trauma within the mundane. Trauma, thus, becomes an everyday aesthetic of survival rather than a momentary event.

Caruth’s psychoanalytic model and Das’s anthropological insight, *Disappearing Daughters*, may be read as a text where the boundaries between witnessing and complicity blur. Caruth emphasises the internal fragmentation and belated recall of trauma, while Das exposes its sociocultural normalisation within gender hierarchies. Together, they reveal how the trauma of female erasure in India transcends bodily violence; it transforms memory, identity,

and ethics. The daughters' disappearance becomes not just a demographic tragedy but a "narrative of national trauma", where silence, shame, and repetition conceal wounds that remain historically unhealed.

Females were the worst victims of oppression and violence throughout the past, present, and will be in the future. In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin identified infanticide, especially of female infants, as a major check on the population expansion of early humanity. He remarked that this custom was widespread among Australia's Aboriginal tribes, while Barbara Miller later asserted that the practice was almost universal. Miller contends that in a region where women were not employed in agriculture and in regions where dowries were the norm, female infanticide was a common practice. Female infanticide was widespread in the impoverished regions of China, and while both Buddhism and Taoism condemned it, many people did not view it as immoral. In India, the practice of infanticide was accepted during the Vedic period and persisted for a long time across various Hindu castes. Similarly, infanticide was also practised and accepted in the two most developed ancient European cultures, Greece and Rome. (De 247).

The National Centre for Biotechnology has highlighted a troubling trend: the number of girls in India is steadily declining. If no action is taken, there may come a time when girls are absent altogether. To combat this issue, the government has implemented various measures, including the Baby Cradle Scheme, launched in. This initiative allows families to give up their children for adoption anonymously, without requiring paperwork or disclosing their identities (251).

In her 1985 book *Gendercide: The Implications of Sex Selection*, American feminist Mary Anne Warren introduces the concept of gendercide, describing it as the systematic mass killing based on gender. She draws a parallel between genocide and what she terms "gendercide," emphasising its selective and structural nature.

... by analogy, gendercide would be the deliberate extermination of persons of a particular sex (or gender). Other terms, such as "gynocide" and "femicide," have been used to refer to the wrongful killing of girls and women. Nevertheless, "gendercide" is a sex-neutral term in that the victims may be either male or female. There is a need for such a sex-neutral term since sexually discriminatory killing is just as wrong when the victims happen to be male. The term also calls attention to the fact that gender

roles have often had lethal consequences and that these are in important respects analogous to the lethal consequences of racial, religious, and class prejudice (Warren 22).

Aravamudan's *Disappearing Daughters*, analysed through the lens of "gendercide", articulated by scholars like Mary Anne Warren and expanded by political theorists, frames female foeticide not as isolated violence but as a systemic form of extermination: a coordinated and normalised effort to eliminate an entire category of life based solely on sex. Drawing parallels to genocide, gendercide theory emphasises the collective, systematic, and policy-driven nature of the crime, where technology, law, and commerce work together to create "the silent holocaust" of missing girls. In this view, the disappearance of daughters represents an existential rupture, a destruction of future possibilities, cultural memory, and the right to exist itself.

Gita Aravamudan, in the last chapter of her book titled "Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow", talked about the shameful realities of female gendercide and its impact on gender imbalance. While talking about the situation in 1979, in Punjab. She stated,

In Punjab, by 1979, the first sex determination clinic had opened and already families were trying to selectively abort the female children. Punjab, of course, had a historical deficit of women, and the New Reproductive Technologies (NRTs) coming in only aggravated an already bad situation. The census figure indicated that even as far back as 1901, the sex ratio in most of North India was less than the all-India average of 972 females to 1000 males (Aravamudan 162)

She further stated that investigating the crimes against daughters is like "opening Pandora's box". In her book, she talks about how female gendercide has evolved, with time, from bad to worse. She stated,

I started with the medieval-sounding crime of female infanticide. At that time, I could not imagine anything worse than a mother killing her own just-born. But, as I went on, I realised that female infanticide, though uglier to view, fades into insignificance before the much more widespread crime of female foeticide..... Sex detection techniques progressively become better and better. Abortion becomes easier and easier. Suddenly, the womb becomes the most unsafe place on earth for daughters..... By 2000, female foeticide had almost become a national pastime (166-167).

CONCLUSION

Gita Aravamudan's *Disappearing Daughters* is an intersection of lived experience, cultural narrative, psychological trauma, and gendered extermination. The crisis of missing girls is not merely demographic but a profound literary, psycho-social, and existential tragedy that destabilises justice, citizenship, gender, and the very meaning of collective identity. Addressing this rupture requires new strategies; re-narrativising cultural memory, foregrounding trauma, destabilising patriarchal power, and confronting the reality of gendercide as an urgent political and ethical project. As a non-fictional narrative, her book is like an open discussion on the issue of female gendercide. She quoted an interesting observation made by a well-known social worker in Chandigarh. "I think Sita was one of the early saved victims of infanticide", she said to me. After all, she was found by King Janak inside a pot buried in the earth (52).

The disappearance of India's daughters is not simply a matter of demographic imbalance; it reflects a far-reaching cultural and existential rupture at the heart of Indian society. As detailed in the paper, "disappearing daughters" makes visible the ways society, culture, and technology conspire to erase female lives, even as the country aspires to modernity and equality. The paper concludes that justice for India's "missing girls" will only be possible when they are seen not as burdens to be eliminated, but as vital citizens central to any vision of a just, equal, and humane society.

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**Identities, Attributions, and Prejudices:
A Study of the Errors of Associating Bias to
Judgment as Shown in the *All American Boys***

Aiswarya Jayan & Dr. Shibani C Aich

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the concepts of Associationism and Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE) or Correspondence Bias by analyzing the 2015 collaborative fictional novel *All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely. Garnering attention as the 26th most-banned book of 2022, in America, the novel tells the story of two teenage boys, Rashad Butler and Quinn Collins, and delineates how they navigate life in a politically charged environment plagued by social evils. By examining the book through the lens of 'Correspondence Bias,' the social reality of phenomena such as conditioning, profiling, and stereotyping can be understood. Correspondence bias or FAE is a perceptual bias that forms an unsubstantial connection between a person's action and their personality by ignoring the external situational factors. The practice of racism, when perceived as an extension of the attribution errors, results in a revelation about the fundamental nature of discrimination and bias. This perpetuated bias culminates in a form of conditioning that leaves the victim traumatized and unprotected against the enforced stigmatization. This paper also aims to examine the practice of 'associationism' in relation to the racist practices that are perpetually linked to irrational beliefs and ideologies formed based on implicit bias. *All American Boys* is a testimonial piece of work that exposes and represents the grueling reality of the racial discrimination that has afflicted contemporary American society. Thus, this paper is an endeavor to comprehend such invidious acts from a sociological, psychological, and theoretical perspective, as well as to analyze the effect such issues exert over the aspect of social identity.

Key Words: Racism, Stereotypes, Conditioning,
Discrimination, etc.

INTRODUCTION

All American Boys is a 2015 novel that gained acclaim for its brutally honest representation of the cruel reality of racism in contemporary American society. The book commands interest just by the fact that it is a collaborative work of fiction authored by two writers who impart their voices to their respective ethnic characters. The book attracted controversy and even made it to the list of banned literature due to its raw depiction of overtly sensitive issues like police brutality. The story revolves around the perspectives and the lives of two teenage boys, Rashad and Quinn, who are caught in the whirlwind of an incident that changed their lives forever.

Rashad is just like any other teenager who thought of partying and girls, and lived the carefree life of a student. But his life turns upside down when he is wrongfully accused of stealing and is subjected to the hostile charges of racism and police brutality. Although this incident does not directly affect Quinn's life, he was a direct yet passive witness to the incident. His guilty conscience eventually leads him to evolve into a morally responsible citizen who voices anguish and boldly protests in the face of injustice. The novel openly showcases the prejudices and the biases that accompany the act of racism and exposes the horrifying reality of the persistent presence of racism even in an ultra-modern, civilized society that gloats in the glory of progress.

Discriminating against people solely based on one's own bias and prejudice is an anomaly of human psychology. Perceiving differences based on illogical assumptions stems from the need to validate the hierarchy of societal existence. However, generalizing such assumptions as the intrinsic characteristic is a perceptual error that promotes stigma and unwarranted prejudices. In social psychology, this error is termed 'Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE)', which refers to the tendency to attribute someone's behavior primarily to their personality while overlooking the external factors. FAE is presumed to fall under the category of 'Correspondence Bias.' Correspondence Bias occurs when strong assumptions are made solely by inferring a person's behavior or traits. In the context of racism, attributing a person's behavior primarily to their physical appearance (skin color and race) is an error of judgment brought on by biased perception.

Associationism is another psychological phenomenon that can also be used to analyze racist practices, as it is a method that examines how ideas or concepts become associated with each other, like the relation between race and crime. Such associationism leads to the formation of social stereotypes and unwarrantedly targets a community, thereby perpetuating inequality and placing a substantial burden of stigma on the affected. This paper is thus an attempt to analyze racist practices showcased in the novel using the framework of Associationism and FAE or Correspondence Bias. This paper also focuses on revealing how conditioning can instill self-doubt in the target and bias in the perpetrator, respectively, and analyzes the ill effects of harboring ignorance in the face of injustice.

THE ERROR OF ASSOCIATION AND THE FATALITY OF ATTRIBUTION

“If it walks like a duck and talks like a duck, then it must be a duck.”(p. 49)

Prejudiced conceptions consequently lead to the sociological process of racialization, which is a systemic construction of racial identities within a society. These constructs are based on unfounded generalizations about the various behavioral and sociological aspects of racial groups. This often leads to an erroneous tendency that can be described using the psychological theory of FAE (Fundamental Attribution Error) or Correspondence Bias. Associationism in the context of racism refers to the inclination to unreasonably associate the racial group with adverse traits or stereotypes, resulting in bias and racism. The novel, *All American Boys*, poignantly showcases the detrimental side of such prejudiced tendencies and the extent to which they can inflict harm on the targeted individual or community.

Associating negative traits and forcibly attributing criminalized behaviors as definitive of a collective identity is a psychologically complex tendency born from a conditioned society that exhibits bigotry and ignorance. It can be argued that racialization is the result of the act of baseless association. As said earlier, racialization can hinder individual progress as well as the societal progress of the community and inflict trauma that can become generational baggage.

“*Were your pants sagging?* Dad interrogated..... *But they don't know that*, Dad said. *What they see is what he represents.*” (p.30)

This line from the novel highlights how consequentially grave the act of associating character traits with appearance is. This association is possible because of the existence of stereotypes or cliches that enhance and promote a certain image as the definitive aspect by which individuals are grouped to become a columnized clump. A person who wears a certain style of clothing or wears their hair in a certain way is a matter of personal choice; it does not become the defining criterion of their personality.

“Of course, part of working hard, to him, was looking the part, dressing the part, and speaking the part..... They’ll think you are doing drugs, he’d say. Spoony’s clothes..... That was just his style. That was pretty much his whole generation’s style..... Nineties hip-hop..... Hoodies and unlaced boots. They’ll think you’re selling drugs, Dad would say. *Why can’t you get a haircut? Why can’t you dress like a respectable adult....*” (p.31)

As this excerpt from the novel entails, a dressing style or hairstyle or even the music preference could be a determinant that could brand a person as a drug user or a drug peddler, which is again a common denominator attributed to certain racial communities.

“Listen to me. There’s no better opportunity for a black boy in this country than to join the army.” (p.7)

This ambition is born out of a need to prove one’s worth to acquire a social standing in a biased society. Rashad’s father believed that the only way to be deemed a decent person in a highly discriminatory society is to play one’s part as a responsible citizen and to fit into the socially accepted norms.

“He could’ve been killed!..... For a bag of chips that he was gonna pay for! For having brown skin and wearing his jeans a certain way. And guess what Dad, that ROTC uniform was right there in that bag. The bag was open so that cop probably saw it. But did it matter?” (p.32)

Playing one’s part was not enough to escape the bigoted cliches that were inherently attributed to Rashad. Such are the errors and fallacies of associationism and attribution exhibited through unfounded discrimination. Rashad evidently played the part of a decent kid, an ROTC kid with decent grades, but that was not enough. Be it Rashad or Spoony or English, all of them had, at some point in their lives, been humiliatingly subjected to the banality of racial profiling.

“He’d never been beaten up, but he’d been stopped on the street several times, questioned by cops, asked to turn his pockets out and lift his shirt up, for no reason. He’d been followed around stores, and stared at on buses by women who clutched their purse tight enough to poke holes in the leather. He was always a suspect.” (p.35)

This description of Spoony’s experience is relevant to show how concepts like FAE or Correspondence Bias, and associationism can be used to study the harsh consequences of racialization. When analyzing the ‘grocery store incident’ in the novel, we can see how the practice of associationism hinders Paul, as well as the shopkeeper, from acting rationally and reasonably. They wrongly attributed the racialized clichés (of criminal behavior/stealing) to his personality, shunning the situational evidence that proved Rashad’s innocence.

“Yeah, he was trying to steal those chips, the clerk interrupted.....”

“What was going on? He was accusing me of things that hadn’t even happened...”

“I was just trying to get my phone out of my bag when she fell over me- I tried to explain, but the policeman shut me down quick.” (p.14)

The utter helplessness Rashad felt and the irrationality of the shopkeeper’s and Paul’s actions are very evident in these conversations that entail the consequences of attributing stereotypes. The shopkeeper brazenly assumed Rashad to be a thief solely based on his prejudiced notion, and Paul rashly ignored the situation and suspected Rashad to be an armed assailant. This is the dire consequence of associationism and attribution when an utter negligence of external conditions leads to a grave misinterpretation of certain situations.

“Ma’am, are you okay? the officer asked, concerned. And before she could finish her sentence, the sentence that would’ve explained that she had tripped and fell over me, the cop cut her off. Did he do something to you.” (p.13)

Throughout the novel, instances are provided that explain how associationism and attribution lead to dire misjudgment. As mentioned earlier, when Rashad’s father asked “if his pants were sagging”, he asked it being completely aware of how society associated certain stigmas with the people of his race. The fact that the same question would never find relevance if asked to Quinn, how fallacious and marginalizing stereotypes can be. The altercation between Paul and Rashad can undoubtedly be classified as an

instance of 'hate crime.' Paul's irrational use of brutal force, his addressing Rashad as a thug, as well as the Marc Blair incident, reveal that the error of attribution made by Paul is the hate he associated with his stigmatizing beliefs.

Incidents like this can affect a society in an unthinkable manner. Friends can turn into foes, brothers can turn against each other, and family bonds and relations can become askew. It is shown in the novel how a city was split into two factions, with some calling the incident an act of racism while some justifying the incident as the involvement of a dutiful cop. For example, the cab driver from the news who believed that it was just another "case of a teenage criminal, caught red-handed."

"And why is that? Because of the way he looks?..... I mean, listen, I've been robbed before. Right around here..... And he looks like the guy who robbed me. He was dressed just like him." (p.103)

Rashad's dressing style was a factor of concern only because he was a black boy. Sweatshirts, jackets, and sneakers are worn by almost all teenagers, but when the same apparel is worn by a black kid, it becomes a point of racialized attribution. The presupposition that a boy who looked like Rashad could have drugs or guns in his car, or would be an immediate suspect in a burglary case, happens because the external factors are completely overlooked. The very shocking confession made by Rashad's father is the most grievous instance of an error in associative attribution and racialization. Rashad's father, a black man himself, shot a black teenager (Daniel Shackelford) just because he looked the part of a 'thug' and on suspicion of robbery when he was the one being robbed by the white boy. He shot the kid, thinking he was about to take a gun out of his backpack, when he was just reaching for his inhaler.

"The black kid was dressed like..... Dressed like your brother. Hair all over his head. A hoodie. Boots. His pants were damn near all the way down,,,,, I ran over and jacked the black boy up because I knew he was in the wrong. I just knew it." (p.127)

What he thought he knew was nothing but his biased belief in the stereotypes and cliches attributed to his community. Unkempt hair and low-riding jeans were tangible criteria for suspecting a young boy because, apparently, he looked the part. Rashad's father saw discipline, hard work, and neat appearances as an antidote to the stigmas, biases, cliches, and stereotypes that plagued his race. However, this made him "no different than Galluzzo.

Another trigger-happy cop who was quick to assume and even quicker to shoot.” Daniel Shackleford, Marc Blair, and Rashad Butler all became victims of racial profiling as well as racialization that was born out of errors in classifying attributions.

CONDITIONING TRAUMA AND SUBMISSION

The erroneous acts of attribution and associationism can be presumed as the inadvertent consequences of the subversive act of conditioning. Conditioning occurs when a person is constantly subjected to a constructed set of ideas or experiences that then becomes the normalized reality. This, then, goes on to affect one's perceptions, and it hinders one's ability to take rational decisions. The novel provides us with various instances that showcase how these socio-psychological acts and concepts can perpetuate consequential discrimination, which affects the lives of the various characters within the story.

Conditioning a person into believing that their existence depends on submission to oppression leads to the proliferation of generational trauma. A trauma that promotes fear and self-doubt in a person that stops them from freely expressing their individuality. From a different perspective, conditioning can also act as a catalyst that justifies the practice of oppression, as it can lead to the silent advocacy of premeditated bias. Thus, conditioning can also lead to the escalation and rationalization of discriminatory practices among individuals as well as generations. Conditioning can undoubtedly lead to the emergence of oppressors as well as targets.

In the novel, the character of David Butler, Rashad's father, was a man who lived a strictly righteous life, abiding by the rules and laws of society. Apart from the societal laws, he had a set of guidelines carefully designed to lead a silent life, a life hidden from the biased eyes of society. David Butler cannot be blamed for his strict adherence to these guidelines because the society he lived in was inherently biased and prejudiced. Despite having served in the military and police, he still felt the urge to prove himself and to earn his place in society by being docile. He believed that, to have a peaceful/normal existence in society, one should exercise caution and prove one's worth to gain the title of 'All American', unlike those who are born with the privilege, the privilege of being white.

From the story, it is palpable that he had carefully tempered himself to the extent that he believed that a person's choice of dressing or hairstyle could be

found offensive enough to perpetuate and justify racial profiling. However, the truly formidable part is that he perpetuated his beliefs and teachings to his children, thus fabricating low self-esteem and self-doubt in their young minds. David Butler believed that one's lifestyle as well as physical appearance could be deemed a criterion for discrimination. Wearing your hair in a certain way or your jeans in a certain manner was, according to David, a catalyst for unwarranted suspicion. What he failed to perceive was the illogical discrepancy of such reasoning; just because a dark-skinned boy has unkempt hair and low-waist jeans, it should not make him a target of racial profiling, it does not make him a criminal, a junkie, or a thug. These are stereotypes designed by society to justify and uphold discriminatory practices.

“Never fight back. Never talk back. Keep your hands up. Keep your mouth shut. Just do what they ask you to do, and you'll be fine.” (p.30)

This was the life lesson that David Butler fervently preached to his sons throughout his life. He thought that by conditioning his sons into accepting prejudices as the norm and by subjecting their mindsets to acclimate to bias with docility would help them survive societal discrimination. However, in the face of blind and brutal prejudice, this falls short as these acts are born from violence and hate.

The fateful ‘incident’ at the store highlighted the way Rashad was subjected to the atrocities of racial profiling. From the store owner who falsely accused Rashad of stealing to Paul, the police officer who brutally assaulted him, it is shown how Rashad was irrationally targeted by people who judged him for his skin color. The sad truth is that no number of life lessons or advice could prepare a person for the experience that can absolutely shatter their sense of identity and existence. Rashad was conditioned to submit and never resist, and Paul was conditioned to believe that a person who looked like Rashad should not resist, even if innocent.

“...thugs can't just do what they are told. Need to learn how to respect authority. And I'm gonna teach you.” (p.15)

Innocent until proven guilty is the thumb rule of law, yet Rashad was punished without trial or evidence. Paul had been conditioned by the ruthless society to racialize and discriminate against Rashad's community as he stereotypically perceived them as “thugs. Rashad was a victim of the label that was unfairly attributed to his race, the label of a “thug.” Attributing

criminalist tendencies to an entire community based on the criterion of race is an aggravated form of profiling; this generalizes as well as marginalizes the community, making them susceptible targets of hate crimes.

“My hands were already up, a reflex from seeing a cop coming towards me.”(p.14)

Even though Rashad was completely innocent, his fear-incited reflexes made him look guilty, and the absolute conviction in Paul’s judgment made Rashad doubt himself momentarily. Just like Paul, the shopkeeper, influenced by his distorted perceptions, suspiciously eyed Rashad the moment he stepped into the store. He blatantly accused Rashad of stealing and ardently stuck to the claim even when Rashad revealed his intention to buy from the store. The shopkeeper’s misplaced and unwarranted suspicion is indicative of his fallacious perception of black teenage boys. The shopkeeper’s and Paul’s flawed perspectives showcase how stereotypes collectively affect a society’s ability to perceive and associate. Throughout the novel, insights are provided on how stereotypes are effectively and strongly branded upon people’s minds. These selective perceptions create a stigma that devalues their collective existence and ostracizes the target community to lead a segregated existence plagued with self-doubt and fear.

THE ALL-AMERICAN IDENTITY AND THE MANTLE OF IGNORANCE

“If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I?”

— Hillel the Elder

The title of this novel is indicative of the deeply infringed irony that encapsulates the society depicted in the novel. Rashad and Quinn are both young teenage boys who were overwhelmed by the pressure of finding their place and identity in a turbulent society. However, their paths were distinctly divergent; while one had to achieve his position in society, the other was born into it ‘All-American’ refers to the quintessential values of American culture like patriotism, sense of community, brotherhood, family, and ambition etc. The word ‘All’ in ‘All-American’ refers to the implicit value of inclusivity, denoting that these values are representative of everyone regardless of race or class.

“That was my role: the dutiful son, the All-American boy with an All-American fifteen-foot dead eye jump shot and an All-American 3.5 GPA.” (p.18)

Thus, by employing this title, the author urges the readers to reflect on the false sense of inclusivity prevalent in society. Quinn is assigned the 'All-American' identity as part of his 'white-privilege', but Rashad is living a life where he has to navigate his identity as he faces racial discrimination that makes him question his place in the biased society. "But Ma, all we want is to feel like we can be who we are without being accused of being something else. That's all." (p.109)

Rashad, Spoony, or English are just as 'All-American' as Quinn is, but their race brings about an exclusion as they are not accepted as the ideal images of 'Americanness.' Thus, the novel is an exploration of how Rashad and Quinn found the meaning of being 'All-American' boys through their shared yet distinct experiences. The disparities in their experiences form the crux of the story as their different perspectives expose the reality of racism and its aftermath that visibly shook the foundations of the 'All-American' sense of community.

"I could be all the way across the country in California, and I'd still be white, cops and everyone else would still see me as just a regular kid, an All-American boy. Regular. All American. White." (p.99)

When a person is being treated differently, they are not only targeted but also ignored. The 'All-American' society failed to protect Rashad as they saw Rashad through the heavily tinted spectacles of deep-rooted bias. Even after failing to protect him, society ignored the implicit irrationality of such a brutal act and failed to recognize the perils of racism that battered his young soul. Quinn's narrative, thus, functions as a directive that exposes the shortcomings of the 'All-American' society that feigns ignorance in the face of injustice. Quinn's narrative is interwoven with Rashad's, but Quinn still bore silent witness to Rashad's misfortune. In the story, Quinn was initially concerned with Paul's involvement in the incident rather than Rashad's ill-fate. Quinn was preoccupied with Paul's transformation from being his childhood hero and mentor to a brute of a man.

"Paulie's always been the good guy." (p.72)

Quinn's inner struggle to believe in Paul's innocence drove him to blatantly ignore the ugly truth that society presented. He wanted to escape the frenzy that surrounded the incident; he did not want to be part of the unsettling

conversations. He wanted to turn a blind eye to the reality of his indifference and forced ignorance.

“Couldn’t I leave it at the door wherever I went? Maybe we all should have tried to do that. It wasn’t any of our problem.” (p.77)

Quinn wanted to believe that he could ignore the issues, but it only made him realize that by doing so, he too became part of the issue. He too forcibly tried to attribute the biased notions upon Rashad in vain to vindicate Paul and to rest his own guilty conscience.

“Maybe he got out of hand? I just had to say. Maybe he was on drugs.” (p.97)

Quinn wanted to believe that Paul “was just doing his job” and that he was not committing a brazen act of racial injustice. Quinn did not want to face the reality that challenged his ‘All-American’ society and its flawed values

“I didn’t want my life to change from the way it was before I’d seen that.” (p.98)

Quinn walked away because he wanted to live his life as a regular ‘All-American’ boy; he didn’t want to acknowledge that it was everyone’s problem, that it was an ‘All-American’ problem. Through Quinn’s narrative, the story reflected on the need for society to reconcile to its responsibilities and to remain intolerant towards injustice and despotism. As Desmond Tutu once said, if a person is neutral in situations of injustice, then they have chosen the side of the oppressor. Quinn’s realization helped him change his flawed perspective and to realize that to protest against discrimination is the freedom that ‘All-American’ values should represent. It is quite symbolic that Rashad and Quinn were unable to “see” each other in the beginning, but at the end their eyes met and they finally saw each other and understood each other. Quinn was lastly able to look beyond his ignorance and understand the cause Rashad stood for.

“Asking only to be seen and respected like the citizen he was. Would he be thought of as the ‘All-American boy?’” (p.160)

CONCLUSION

“How you feelin, Rashad?” the pastor asked. Everybody was asking that, as if I ever was going to tell them the truth. Nobody wanted to hear the truth, even though everybody already knew what it was. I felt ... violated. That’s the only way I can put it. Straight-up violated.” (p.51)

From being falsely accused as a criminal to being mediatized as a victim, Rashad's journey renders the brave act of breaking the traumatic cycle of conditioning and associationism. Acts of discrimination and violence are often discussed in relation to their impact on the societal and legal frameworks; however, their impact on individual victims is often overlooked. The trauma inflicted on Rashad was enduring, both physically and mentally, and it moved on to his family, friends, and his community, fostering fear, anger, and a loss of trust in the institutions instilled to protect them.

The novel honestly portrayed how trauma evinces in various ways, either through physical harm or emotional anguish or even through the distress of communities grappling with bias and stigmas. It was a compelling study of how citizens of the society are affected by these instances and how awareness and resilience can emerge from within the society.

Rashad and Quinn's stories developed as they faced their fears and struggles to reclaim their identities and their voices. Rashad's life was changed by the trauma, but his victory came from his refusal to be reduced to a mere victim. Quinn's life changed when he finally refused to be part of the problem.

All American Boys, suggestively depicts the issues of conditioning, stereotype maintenance, associationism, and racialization with relation to how society and institutions react to the said issues. The novel garners significance for providing a deep understanding of the complex issues through a profoundly moving narrative. From being conditioned to never fight back and to never resist, Rashad emerged as a beacon of strength and courage that urged a community to fight back and resist the force of injustice, whereas Quinn symbolized change and awareness. By intertwining their narratives, the author alighted upon the importance of unity in a fight against social evils.

The novel came out in 2015, but the significance of the message it relays has not dwindled, even in this post-COVID era. Hate crimes, racism, perpetuation of stigmas, etc., may have statistically reduced, but as said before, the systemic bias remains. The ascend of different governments and the corresponding political situations are crucial to the continuance of radical changes for the betterment of society. This paper was written with the aim of ascertaining the significance of discussing the issues raised in the novel by examining the nuances that are inherent to understanding institutionalized bias. *All American Boys*, thus, righteously served as a framework to uncover the

psychological and behavioral implications that are associated with discerning such discriminatory acts and their effects on societal relations.

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Linking Women's Educational Attainment to Economic Empowerment: A Case Study from Manipur

Naorem Dayabati Devi

ABSTRACT:

The purpose of the present study is to probe the linkage of women's educational attainment to economic empowerment of Imphal Districts of Manipur. The sample comprised 500 currently married women aged 21 to 70 years from the Imphal districts (Imphal East and Imphal West). Among them, 250 were categorized as educated (having completed at least high school) and 250 as less-educated (not having completed high school). Data were collected during 2018 – 2019 using a convenient stratified random sampling technique based on specific inclusion criteria. Primary data were gathered through interviews with respondents using a structured schedule that included demographic details and six questions related to economic security. Consent was obtained from all respondents after providing them with the necessary information. Descriptive (frequency distribution and percentage) and analytic (chi-square test for group comparisons) statistical methods were used for data analysis. The present study highlights how education transforms women's demographic and economic status. Educated women attain better occupational positions and marry highly qualified, higher-earning spouses. They also enjoy higher monthly household incomes. Compared to less-educated women, educated women are more likely to own a house or land (individually or jointly), possess valuable assets like gold or silver jewellery, maintain a savings bank account, participate in micro-credit or savings programs and engage in paid employment outside the home. Therefore, improving the educational standards of women in Manipur is of utmost importance.

Keywords: Education, Demographic, Occupation, Income, Economic empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

"The more you learn, the more you earn" says Warren Buffet.

Education helps individuals and communities to recognize their potential and inner strengths as well as encourages the fight against oppression, exclusion, and discrimination. Education not only imparts knowledge but also builds active participation in social, economic, and political life. It plays a crucial role in empowering women, promoting prosperity, development, and well-being by providing them with the necessary knowledge and skills to access more opportunities. The National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1986 emphasizes using education to bring fundamental changes in women's status and to address past inequalities. This policy, revised in 1992, marks a significant milestone in India's educational landscape, focusing on eliminating female illiteracy and removing barriers to women's education. Historically, since the 19th century, movements worldwide have recognized education as the key factor in improving the social standing of women (Rao, R.K. 2000).

Education is incomplete without incorporating values. True empowerment is achieved only through acquiring knowledge (Parvathi, S. & Kartikeyan, C., 18-20). Ghosh, G.K, and Ghosh, S. (1997) emphasize that educating women is a crucial tool for bringing about positive social change. They highlight that the lack of education among women significantly limits their ability to adapt to change. Education empowers women to become self-reliant, freeing them from complete dependence on men in all situations. Shankar, B. (1980) observed that women in Bihar had low occupational status primarily due to insufficient education, skills, and vocational training. According to Devi, L. (1982), working women enjoy increased freedom, decision-making power, and respect at home because of their economic independence, as well as receiving recognition and support at their workplace. Kantamma, K. (1990) studied the effects of education and employment on women's status and found that higher education levels corresponded with greater involvement in decision-making, better communication between spouses, and more progressive views on various matters. Kalpagam, U. (567-580) noted that educated and employed women are more adept at managing finances than

their uneducated counterparts. They understand how to carefully invest their earnings and prioritize spending for their children's future.

Bhumisana Devi, R. K. (2000) examined the diverse roles of educated working women both within their families and at their workplaces. The research also addressed issues such as equal property rights, women's participation in politics, seat reservations, the dowry system, divorce, and widow remarriage. Agarwal, D. (6-8) found that women's employment not only serves as a source of income but also promotes economic independence, giving many women greater confidence to pursue self-employment. Economic stability, according to the study, depends on asset ownership – such as a house, land, or savings – which enhances women's sense of security and their involvement in household decision-making (Biswas, T. K., 2004). Ahmed N. and Siddiqui M. A. (16-20) observed that educated urban women from higher socio-economic backgrounds enjoy greater psychological security and social status than their counterparts in rural or underprivileged urban areas, where access to primary and secondary education remains limited. Sangeeta, M. (2008) found that education influences women's socio-economic status through factors such as delayed marriage, smaller family size, delayed childbirth, safe deliveries, breastfeeding practices, educational compatibility between partners, shared leisure time, stronger marital understanding, independent decision-making, better professional standing, and higher combined income. However, the study noted that education had little impact on family structure, marital status, marriage type, or social participation.

Rani et al. (507-510) emphasize that education plays a crucial role in transforming the cultural norms and lifestyles of tribal women by helping them achieve economic independence, form organized groups, and critically assess their living conditions. It also enables them to become aware of their rights and duties, thereby fostering active participation in the advancement of women and society at large. The study underlines the need to enhance educational access and provide women with diverse vocational and skill development programs. Similarly, Thokchom, L. & Thokchom, B. (68-71) observe that education increases women's awareness of their social standing and the injustices and inequalities they face. Despite their significant contributions to Manipur's socio-economic and political life, women often remain undervalued in society. According to Devi, Sh. (79-81), women's education has been pivotal in the state's overall progress since Independence,

bringing about profound transformations in their perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs. This shift has given rise to growing emphasis on women's empowerment and feminist ideas.

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study is to probe the linkage of women's educational attainment to economic empowerment of Imphal Districts of Manipur.

Manipur is one of the seven states of Northeast India. The state is bounded on the east by Upper Myanmar, on the west by Cachar District of Assam, on the north by Nagaland and on the south by the Chin Hills of Myanmar and Mizoram. Manipur earlier had nine (9) administrative districts, namely, Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal, Bishnupur, Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong, Churachandpur and Chandel district. On 9th December, 2016, State Government creates seven (7) new districts by dividing the nine (9) existing ones for administrative convenience and more equitable development. The new districts are Jiribam bifurcated from Imphal East district, Kangpokpi from Senapati district, Tengenoupal from Chandel district, Pherzawl from Churachandpur district, Kakching from Thoubal district, Noney from Tamenglong district and Kamjong from Ukhrul district, taking the total number in the state to sixteen (16) districts. The population consists of 38 ethnic groups speaking different dialects following different religious, having diverse cultures and traditions. The four major ethnic groups of Manipur are the Meiteis, the Meitei Pangal, the Nagas and the Kuki-Chins. The Meiteilon is the lingua franca of the state. Historically, Manipuri women held significant social and economic status, known for their hard work and industry. They played a vital role in the agrarian economy, from production to marketing of food grains, and managed much of the internal trade in food and clothing, enjoying a relatively free lifestyle. Although gender inequality is lower in Manipur compared to the rest of India, strict gender norms define women's roles and responsibilities. Over time, patriarchal structures have limited women's opportunities and pushed them into subordinate position.

HYPOTHESES

This study is grounded in the research hypothesis that women's educational attainment is interconnected with their level of economic empowerment.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was primarily descriptive and analytical in design. The sample comprised 500 currently married women aged 21 to 70 years from the Imphal districts (Imphal East and Imphal West). Among them, 250 were categorized as educated (having completed at least high school) and 250 as less-educated (not having completed high school). Data were collected during 2018 – 2019 using a convenient stratified random sampling with specific inclusion criteria. Primary data were gathered through interviews using a structured schedule that included demographic details and six questions on economic security viz. “do you own a house or any land (alone or jointly with others)?” “do you personally own any other property or valuables such as gold/silver jewellery items etc.?” “do you have a bank (saving) account that yourselves use?”, “do you involved in any income generating activity?”, “do you participate in a micro-credit or savings programme?” and “do you engage in paid work outside the home?”. Consent was obtained from all respondents after providing them with the necessary information. Statistical methods were used to support a detailed analysis of the problem. Descriptive (frequency distribution and percentage) and analytic (chi-square test for group comparisons) statistical methods were used for data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At first, the analysis utilized frequency distribution and percentage to examine the demographic profile, along with chi-square tests comparing educated and less-educated women respondents. Ultimately, the study presented the analysis and interpretation of women’s educational status and economic security using frequency distribution, percentage, and chi-square comparisons between the two groups of respondents.

Table No. 1 Comparison between demographic characteristics of educated and less-educated women

Linking Women's Educational Attainment

Characteristics	Educated women		Less - educated women		Chi square (x2) Value
	(N = 250)	(%)	(N = 250)	(%)	
Age group (in completed year):					
21 – 30yr	40	16	45	18	x2 = 34.976
31 – 40yr	80	32	55	22	d.f = 4
41 – 50yr	90	36	70	28	Significant at
51 – 60yr	35	14	40	16	P<.05
61 – 70yr	05	02	40	16	
Occupation:					
Homemakers	75	30	135	54	
Farmer	-	-	05	02	x2 = 175.124
Labourer	-	-	10	04	d.f = 8
Weavers	25	10	40	16	Significant at
Craftsperson	05	02	10	04	P<.05
Government Employee	80	32	-	-	
Private Employee	40	16	-	-	
Small Scale Business	20	08	50	20	
Pensioner	05	02	-	-	
Educational Qualification of Husband:					
Below High School	05	02	90	36	x2 = 179.52
High School	20	08	65	26	d.f = 4
Higher Secondary	50	20	50	20	Significant at
Graduate	130	52	40	16	P<.05
Post Graduate and Above	45	18	05	02	
Occupation of Husband:					
Farmer	05	02	25	10	
Labourer	20	08	70	28	x2 = 106.752
Government Employee	100	40	35	14	d.f = 7
Private Employee	40	16	20	08	Significant at
Business	65	26	45	18	P<.05
Driver	15	06	20	08	
Pensioner	05	02	25	10	
No Job	-	-	10	04	

Type of Family:					$\chi^2 = 0.208$
Nuclear	155	62	150	60	d.f = 1
Joint	95	38	100	40	Not Significant at $P < .05$
Size of Family:					
2 - 4	140	56	115	46	$\chi^2 = 7.142$
5 - 7	90	36	100	40	d.f = 3
8 - 9	15	06	25	10	Not Significant
10 - Above	05	02	10	04	at $P < .05$
Monthly Family Income:					
Below - 10000	40	16	105	42	$\chi^2 = 78.932$
10001 - 25000	75	30	90	36	d.f = 5
25001 - 50000	70	28	45	18	Significant at
50001 - 75000	40	16	10	04	$P < .05$
75001 - 100000	15	06	-	-	
100001 - Above	10	04	-	-	

It is observed from Table No. 1 that only 2 percent of educated women are aged 61-70 years, compared to 16 percent among less-educated women. The test value ($\chi^2 = 34.976$) indicates a significant difference in age distribution between educated and less-educated women. Regarding occupation of the respondents, homemakers are more common among less-educated women (54 per cent) than educated women (30 per cent). Educated women show higher representation in better occupational categories; 32 per cent government employees and 16 per cent private sector employees. Among less-educated women; 16 per cent are weavers and 20 per cent operate small-scale businesses. The test value ($\chi^2 = 175.124$) confirms a highly significant difference in the types of occupation between educated and less-educated women. Thus educations of women have certain link with their occupation. The current result aligns with Sangeeta, M. (2008), who reported a positive correlation between higher education levels and improved occupational status. Additionally, it supports the earlier findings of Shankar, B. (1980). The Table also shows a clear relationship between wives and husbands educational levels. Educated wives mostly have educated husbands, except 2 per cent whose husbands are below high school level. Less-educated wives largely have less-educated husbands (36 per cent are below high school). The chi-square test value ($\chi^2 = 179.52$) indicates a highly significant difference between the

educational status of husbands of educated and less-educated women. The present finding aligns with Sangeeta M. (2008), who observed that couples often have similar educational levels. Educated women have the highest percentage (40 per cent) of husbands working as government employees. Less-educated women have the highest percentage (28 per cent) of husbands working as labourers, and 4 per cent of them have unemployed husbands. The chi-square test value ($\chi^2 = 106.752$) indicates a significant difference in the occupational status of husbands based on women's education level. It is also observed that more educated women have more earning husbands and less-educated women have less earning husbands.

It is also apparent from Table No. 1 that nuclear family has higher percentage than that of its counterpart joint family in both the educated (62 per cent) and less-educated (60 per cent) women respondents. And the not significant test value ($\chi^2 = 0.208$) shows that there is no relationship between women's educational status and type of family. Among the selected families 56 percent of educated women family belong to '2 - 4' (small) size family category. Again 46 percent of uneducated women family belong to '2 - 4' (small) size family categories. Again the not significant test value ($\chi^2 = 7.142$) shows that there is no relationship between educational status of women and the size of their family.

The table highlights a clear relationship between women's educational status and their family's monthly income. Among educated women, 54 per cent belong to families earning more than Rs. 25,000 per month. In contrast, 78 per cent of less-educated women come from families earning less than Rs. 25,001 per month. This indicates that households of less-educated women generally have lower income levels. The difference in income between the two groups is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 78.932$). The current finding aligns with Sangeeta, M. (2008), showing a positive link between higher educations, better occupational status, and increased income among couples. Educated women are better position in demographic characteristics in compare with less-educated women.

Table No. 2 Economic empowerment of educated women (N=250)

Questions asked for economic security	Number	Percentage
Do you own a house or any land (alone or jointly with others)?		
Yes	45	18
No	205	82
Do you personally own any other property or valuables such as gold/silver jewellery items, etc.?		
Yes	115	46
No	135	54
Do you have a bank (saving) account that you yourselves use?		
Yes	120	48
No	130	52
Do you involved in any income generating activity?		
Yes	55	22
No	195	78
Do you participate in a micro-credit or savings programme?		
Yes	75	30
No	175	70
Do you engage in paid work outside the home?		
Yes	120	48
No	130	52

Table No. 2 presents details on the economic empowerment of the educated women. The data reveal that 18 percent of these women own a house or land, either individually or jointly. About 46 percent possess other assets or valuables, such as gold and silver jewellery, while 48 percent maintain their own savings account.

Furthermore, 22 percent are involved in income-generating activities, and 30 percent participate in micro-credit or savings programs. The table also shows that 48 percent of respondents are engaged in paid employment outside their homes.

Table No. 3 Economic empowerment of less-educated women (N=250)

Questions asked for economic security	Number	Percentage
Do you own a house or any land (alone or jointly with others)?		
Yes	15	6
No	235	94
Do you personally own any other property or valuables such as gold/silver jewellery items, etc.?		
Yes	95	38
No	155	62
Do you have a bank (saving) account that you yourselves use?		
Yes	100	40
No	150	60
Do you involved in any income generating activity?		
Yes	70	28
No	180	72
Do you participate in a micro-credit or savings programme?		
Yes	65	26
No	185	74
Do you engage in paid work outside the home?		
Yes	30	12
No	220	88

Table No. 3 presents information on the economic empowerment of less-educated women. The figures indicate that only about 6 percent of these women own a house or land, either solely or jointly. Approximately 38 percent hold other assets or valuable items, such as gold and silver jewellery, while 40 percent have a

personal savings account. In addition, 28 percent are engaged in income-generating activities, and 26 percent participate in micro-credit or savings programmes. The table further shows that just 12 percent of the respondents are employed in paid work outside their homes.

Table No. 4 Comparison between economic empowerment of educated and less-educated women

Questions asked for economic security	Obs.	Educated women		Less-educated women		Chi square (x ²) Value
		No. of Yes	Percentage	No. of Yes	Percentage	
Do you own a house or any land (alone or jointly with others)?	250	45	18	15	6	x ² = 50.14 d.f. 5 Significant at P<.05
Do you personally own any other property or valuables such as gold / silver jewellery items etc.?	250	115	46	95	38	
Do you have a bank (saving) account that you yourselves use?	250	120	48	100	40	
Do you involved in any income generating activity?	250	55	22	70	28	
Do you participate in a micro-credit or savings programme?	250	75	30	65	26	
Do you engage in paid work outside the home?	250	120	48	30	12	

The comparison of economic empowerment between educated and less-educated women respondents is shown in Table No. 4. According to the table, 18 per cent of educated women own a house or land (individually or jointly), compared to 6 per cent of less-educated women. Again 46 per cent of educated women possess assets or valuables (gold or silver jewellery, etc.),

while 38 per cent of less-educated women do. Furthermore, 48 per cent of educated women have personal savings accounts, compared to 40 per cent of less-educated women. Regarding income-generating activities, 22 per cent of educated women engage in income-generating work, while 28 per cent of less-educated women do. Participation in micro-credit or savings programs is higher among educated women at 30 per cent compared to 26 per cent among those with less-educated women. The table also highlights that 48 percent of educated women are employed in paid positions outside the home, while only 12 percent of less-educated women hold such jobs. The chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 50.14$) shows a clear difference in economic empowerment based on educational status (educated and less-educated).

CONCLUSION

The present study highlights how education transforms women's demographic and economic status. Educated women attain better occupational positions and marry highly qualified, higher-earning spouses. They also enjoy higher monthly household incomes. Compared to less-educated women, educated women are more likely to own a house or land (individually or jointly), possess valuable assets like gold or silver jewellery, maintain a savings bank account, participate in micro-credit or savings programs and engage in paid employment outside the home. Therefore, improving the educational standards of women in Manipur is of utmost importance.

The study concentrated on two valley districts of Manipur, Imphal East and Imphal West, at a micro level. It sampled 250 educated and 250 less-educated currently married women from these areas. Due to time constraints, the sample size was small. However, expanding this research to include more districts or the entire state, along with additional characteristics, could offer broader insights and more generalizable results.

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Effectiveness of Government Interventions For Health and Nutritional Status of Under-Five Tribal Children In Attappady, Kerala

Anu Joseph & Smitha P

ABSTRACT:

This study meticulously examines the effectiveness and determinants of government interventions aimed at improving the health and nutritional status of under-five tribal children in Attappady, Kerala. Employing a cross-sectional survey-based approach, the research assesses the effectiveness of prevailing government interventions, and explores how socio-demographic and community factors influence the effectiveness of these initiatives. The findings reveal that approximately half of the respondents express dissatisfaction with the perceived effectiveness despite governmental efforts, with demographic factors and community dynamics emerging as significant determinants. The implications underscore the need for community-centric interventions and evidence-based policy adjustments to ensure sustained improvements in the health and nutrition of tribal children.

Keywords: Effectiveness of government interventions,
Health and nutritional status, Tribal children,
Socio-economic factors.

INTRODUCTION

In the pursuit of global aspirations outlined in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and subsequently the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the world has committed to eradicating hunger, poverty, and malnutrition. A pivotal facet of these commitments has been the concerted effort to reduce the prevalence of underweight children, encapsulated

in MDG-1's objective to halve underweight rates by 2015. Despite these ambitious global endeavours, child malnutrition, a complex and multifaceted challenge, persists as a formidable contributor to child mortality, claiming the lives of approximately 3 million children annually worldwide. India, with its rich tapestry of diversity and challenges, stands at the forefront of this global struggle against malnutrition. The Global Hunger Index of 2022 underscores the severity of the issue, placing India at the 107th position out of 121 countries. Within India, the state of Kerala, renowned for its 'Kerala model' of human development in non-commodity sectors, faces the stark reality of nutritional disparities, particularly within tribal populations. Attappady, nestled in the bosom of the Western Ghats in the Palakkad district, stands as a microcosm of these challenges, housing the most disadvantaged and marginalized tribes.

Child malnutrition within vulnerable communities is shaped by a multitude of interconnected factors. Beyond socio-economic disparities and maternal education, the accessibility of healthcare services plays a pivotal role. Limited infrastructure and inadequate access to medical facilities hinder preventive measures and timely treatment of common childhood illnesses. The prevalence of diseases like diarrhoea and respiratory infections, often linked to unsanitary living conditions and poor water quality, compounds the nutritional challenges faced by children in these marginalized settings. Moreover, food security is a critical determinant, as economic constraints and insufficient access to diverse, nutritious food contribute to inadequate dietary intake. The quality of available food, particularly its micronutrient content, also significantly influences the overall health of vulnerable children. Community and cultural practices and beliefs, including traditional dietary habits and childcare practices, along with the socio-cultural status of women within these communities, further influence the nutritional landscape. Empowering women through education and enhancing their decision-making power can positively impact child health outcomes by influencing household resource allocation, including food. Additionally, environmental factors such as access to clean water and sanitation are integral components of child health. Inadequate sanitation facilities and a lack of access to clean water contribute to the spread of waterborne diseases, further compromising the nutritional status of children.

In the heart of the Western Ghats lies Attappady, a region in Kerala adorned with lush green landscapes and rich biodiversity. Amidst this natural splendour, a significant population belonging to various tribal communities faces formidable challenges in accessing essential health and nutritional services. Indigenous and aboriginal tribes in India, especially in regions like Attappady, have historically encountered numerous adversities, ranging from socio-economic marginalization to limited access to basic healthcare and nutrition. The scheduled tribes in Attappady, including communities like Kurumbar, Irular, and Mudugar, confront a countless issue that contribute to the high prevalence of malnutrition and health issues among their under-five children. Despite achieving commendable rankings on human development and social progress indexes, the state of Kerala faces challenges in preventing malnutrition among Adivasi infants, and the persistent pleas of Adivasis for land rights have often been overlooked. Both the central and state governments in Kerala have implemented various programs and policies aimed at addressing child malnutrition in tribal areas. However, there remains a gap in effectively overcoming these issues, highlighting the need for a more concerted effort to ensure that the well-being of Adivasi children is adequately prioritized, and the effective addressal of their socio-economic issues.

In the realm of combating malnutrition across India, the Government has instituted comprehensive initiatives such as the POSHAN Abhiyaan and Mission Poshan 2.0. The recent National Family Health Surveys (NFHS-5) indicate a promising decline in the prevalence of stunting, wasting, and underweight conditions among tribal children on a national scale. POSHAN Abhiyaan, launched in 2018, represents a concerted mission-mode strategy with a specific focus on Adolescent Girls, Pregnant Women, and Lactating Mothers. The program employs a multi-faceted approach, incorporating technology, inter-ministerial collaboration, and community mobilization to instigate behavioural changes related to nutrition. Simultaneously, Mission Poshan 2.0, building on the achievements of its predecessor, seeks to address malnutrition challenges holistically through a strategic shift in nutrition content, leveraging technology, and promoting the use of millets for enhanced dietary diversity. In response to the unique challenges faced by tribal communities, recent PoshanMaah and PoshanPakhwada activities have shown a commendable effort in customizing interventions. With a focus on tribal populations, these initiatives include anaemia camps, awareness

campaigns on millets, and growth measurement camps. Furthermore, Mission Poshan 2.0 emphasizes the importance of diet diversity, leveraging traditional knowledge, and placing a spotlight on millets for their nutritional value. The allocation of fortified rice under the Supplementary Nutrition Programme adds a significant dimension to the mission's focus on improving the quality of supplementary nutrition provided.

The Government of Kerala has implemented a multifaceted strategy to cater to the diverse needs of the Scheduled Tribes (STs) population through a range of developmental schemes. The Food Support/Security Programme, designed to combat malnutrition and poverty among STs, distributes food grains tailored to area-specific preferences. Complementary schemes such as the Critical Gap Filling Scheme (Corpus Fund) under the Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) and Special Central Assistance to Tribal Sub Scheme (SCA TO TSP) concentrate on pivotal areas like self-employment, skill development, infrastructure, and cultural promotion. Prioritizing the welfare of ST girls, the state provides marriage assistance and deploys Tribal Promoters to ensure effective scheme implementation at the grassroots level. Initiatives like the Organization of Oorukoottams and the Special Programme for Adiyas, Paniyas, PVTGs, and Tribes Living in Forest underscore community empowerment and targeted interventions for vulnerable groups. This comprehensive approach reflects Kerala's commitment to holistic tribal development, encompassing education, health, employment, and cultural preservation. Furthermore, the state actively participates in the Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana (VKY) initiated by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, aiming for the holistic development and welfare of the tribal population nationwide. Various components, including the Honorarium to Management Trainees and Health Management Trainees, seek to empower educated, unemployed scheduled tribe youths through apprenticeship training. The provision of counselling services, residential accommodations, and engagement of committed social workers in tribal welfare highlights Kerala's dedication to addressing the psychological and social challenges faced by tribal populations. In addition to these developmental schemes, the recent launch of the ambitious UNICEF-supported initiative, Oorinte Tharattu (meaning lullaby of the hamlet), specifically targeting the elimination of neonatal deaths in Attappady, exemplifies Kerala's ongoing commitment to improving the health and well-being of its tribal communities.

The prevailing scenario indicates that both the central and state governments have implemented numerous programs and policies to address the issue of tribal malnutrition among children under the age of 5. The crucial question that arises is whether these initiatives have been effective and successfully reached the tribal communities whose children are grappling with severe health and malnutrition challenges. Can these programs truly elicit positive responses from tribal communities, and what socio demographic and community factors play a role in shaping the community responses to government interventions for alleviating malnutrition among tribal children? Notably, there exists a gap in seminal works addressing the effectiveness of government programs and policies concerning tribal child malnutrition. This study aims to bridge this gap by conducting a comprehensive examination. The paper critically explores the efficacy of government interventions targeted at enhancing the health and nutritional well-being of under-five tribal children in Attappady. Conducting a cross-sectional survey in the Attapady Tribal block of the Palakkad district in Kerala, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of health and nutritional services, along with the prevailing government programs and policies related to tribal health and nutrition. Additionally, it explores how socio-demographic community factors influence the efficacy of these initiatives, shedding light on both the effectiveness of government efforts and their reception within the tribal community.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In acknowledging the interrelation between government interventions and the health and nutrition of vulnerable populations, a global consensus observes the necessity for targeted and comprehensive strategies. Studies worldwide emphasize the requirement for government policies on the health and nutrition of vulnerable sections, as demonstrated by Pradyumna et al (2021), Aryeetey et al (2022), and Mohajeri et al (2020). These studies collectively stress the importance of more focused and comprehensive government strategies in the realm of health and nutrition. This sentiment is echoed by the significance attributed to community-based nutrition education, particularly in developing countries, as seen in works by Majamanda et al (2014) and Htwe (2021), emphasizing the need for a multisectoral approach to address social determinants. Upon a comprehensive examination of the existing literature, both within and outside India, the pivotal role of

targeted government interventions becomes evident. Pike et al (2021) observed the implementation of various public health policies to address child undernutrition, with a specific focus on micronutrient fortification. However, these policies may not fully consider the material limitations and social factors influencing diet and nutrition in low-income households (Attree, 2006). Effective interventions to enhance children's diets, including repeated tasting, parental modeling, and culturally appropriate messages, as highlighted by Summerbell (2014), emerge as crucial considerations. In the context of India, where malnutrition prevalence among under-five children persists, the urgency for effective public health interventions is apparent, as highlighted by Sahu et al (2015). Chandran and Sandhya (2010) emphasize the importance of addressing child malnutrition in rural areas, pointing to key predictors such as the child's age, birth order, mother's education, and household standard of living. Chandra, A (2021), in an investigation into under nutrition among under-5 tribal children, emphasizes the socio-economic disadvantage faced by tribal populations, revealing high rates of stunting and wasting, with 14.7% experiencing both conditions. (Patwari 2013) points out that despite the invention of various policies and schemes on reducing the rate of under nutrition, India reduced under nutrition to 33%, falling short of the Millennium Development Goal target of 26%. The critical need for a multi-sectoral approach to address under nutrition, emphasizing the significant impact of socio-economic factors on children's nutritional status, is underscored by Dey, U., & Bisai, S (2019). Similar trends are observed in other tribal areas of India, linking under nutrition to factors such as maternal education, household wealth, and morbidities (Meshram, et al, 2012). Despite the wealth of literature discussing health and nutritional status and suggesting various approaches, there is a conspicuous gap in seminal works specifically evaluating the effectiveness of government interventions for health and nutrition, especially among vulnerable populations like Scheduled Tribes. This study aims to fill this gap by assessing the effectiveness of government interventions for the health and nutritional status of tribal children, focusing on the case of children in the Attappady tribal community of Palakkad district, Kerala. This endeavour is crucial for guiding evidence-based policies tailored to the unique challenges faced by tribal communities.

DATA AND METHODS

The study is anchored in primary data derived from a meticulously chosen sample of 815 cross-sectional units, approximated to 800. The selection process was executed through a multi-stage stratified random sampling method in the Attappady block of Mannarkkad Taluk, situated in the Palakkad district of Kerala state. While the initial sample size was determined as 815, 15 respondents were intentionally excluded due to factors such as non-cooperation, data skewness, and the presence of missing values. Consequently, the finalized sample size was confirmed as 800. The sampling procedure unfolded in three stages. Initially, the district of Palakkad was chosen in consideration of its ranking as the third-highest in tribal population concentration (10.10 percent) according to the 2011 Census. Subsequently, the Attappady block within Palakkad district, recognized as the singular tribal block area in Kerala state, was selected in the second stage. In the third stage, households were identified based on information obtained from Anganwadis in three Panchayaths—Agali, Puthur, and Sholayur. To ensure an accurate representation of the population, 50 percent of the sample was drawn from the more populous Agali Panchayath, while the remaining 25 percent each was selected from the other two Panchayaths.

Semi Non-parametric Extended Ordered Probit (SNEOP) model of Stewart (2004) is estimated to find out the drivers of policy effective of government interventions for health and nutritional status of Attappady Tribes. The outcome variable used by this study is the self-assessed rating elicited by the heads of the households of Attappady tribes on the effectiveness of various policies implemented by the government to uplift their health status. As the household heads are supposed to be aware of the institutional interventions in the form of programmes, schemes and policies of both Government of India and Kerala respectively, they are asked to mark their responses in a scale of 1 to 3 for the question: 'Taking all things together, would you describe your level of satisfaction regarding governmental interventions, encompassing various schemes and policies?', their responses are marked as 1= Not Effective, 2= Fairly Effective and 3= Highly Effective. As the dependent variable of the study is ordinal, the present study used Ordered Probit (OP) model and its extended version Semi Non-parametric Extended Ordered Probit (SNEOP) model.

The estimated model can be written as:

$$y_i^* = \sum_{k=1}^K \beta_k X_{ki} + U_i \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

Where y_i^* is individual i 's response and the β s are the associated regression coefficients; represents x exogenous variables and U_i s are mutually independent standard normal variables. The model yields maximum likelihood estimates of the parameters of the response function given in equation (1). is related to the observable ordinal variable of as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} y_i = 1 \quad [\text{Not Effective}] \quad & \text{If} \quad \theta_0 = -\infty < y_i^* < \theta_1 \\ y_i = 2 \quad [\text{Fairly Effective}] \quad & \text{If} \quad \theta_1 < y_i^* < \theta_2 \\ y_i = 3 \quad [\text{Highly Effective}] \quad & \text{If} \quad \theta_2 < y_i^* \leq \theta_3 = +\infty \end{aligned}$$

Where θ stands for the threshold value of the dependent variable at which the outcome changes.

The variable y_i thus indicates in what interval y falls into. Thus, the probability of outcome $j \in \{1, 2, \text{ and } 3\}$ is

$$\Pr(y_i = j) = F(\gamma_j - x_i \beta) - F(\gamma_{j-1} - x_i \beta),$$

$$\text{With } F(\gamma_0 - x_i \beta) = 0 \text{ and } F(\gamma_2 - x_i \beta) = 1$$

The consistency of the estimates of β , however, depends crucially on the assumed distribution of U_i s. To avoid this distributional assumption, Stewart's (2004) Semi Non-Parametric Extended Ordered Probit (SNEOP) model is used. This model has several advantages over OP. Firstly, it relaxes the distributional assumption required by OP; instead, $F(\cdot)$ is estimated by maximum likelihood from a semi-nonparametric cumulative distribution whose density function is the product of the square of an unknown polynomial multiplied by the normal density, so that:

$$F_K(z) = \int_{-\infty}^z \left(\sum_{k=0}^K \gamma_k u^k \right)^2 \phi(u) du \left(\int_{-\infty}^{+\infty} \left(\sum_{k=0}^K \gamma_k u^k \right)^2 \phi(u) du \right)^{-1} \dots\dots\dots (2)$$

In Equation 1, K is the order of the unknown polynomial and $\phi(z)$ is the standard normal density at z . After choosing K based on simple likelihood-ratio tests and setting θ_1 to its ordered probit value for identification, the coefficients γ_k are estimated jointly with θ_2 and β by maximum likelihood.

This flexible approach can take any distribution provided it is smooth enough and its tails are not too flat. Secondly, SNEOP nests the OP model, which corresponds to both $K=1$ and $K=2$. Prior to estimating the models, the study diagnosed the multicollinearity problem and confirmed that corresponding collinearity is not too high. After estimating a standard OP model, the study tests the underlying distributional assumption by computing Stewart's (2004) likelihood ratio tests on the value of K in SNEOP.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF TRIBAL HOUSEHOLDS

The ethnic composition is dominated by the Irular community (57 percent), followed by Kurumbar (23 percent) and Mudugar (21 percent). Family structures predominantly comprise joint families (57 percent), indicative of strong familial ties. Housing conditions reflect economic challenges, with a significant proportion residing in thatched houses (41 percent). The gravity of water scarcity is evident, as over 50 percent of tribes walk beyond 15 km to fetch drinking water. Shockingly, 87 percent lack access to purified water, contributing to chronic health issues and unhygienic practices such as open defecation (75 percent). Land possession is a concern, with only 38 percent having cultivable land, while 42 percent are landless. Agricultural engagement is significant (72 percent), yet the adoption of advanced techniques like multiseed farming is limited (21 percent). Waste management practices are suboptimal, with 69 percent dumping waste in open spaces. Maternal care is predominantly led by mothers (53 percent), and institutional deliveries stand at 64 percent. Disturbingly, the birth interval for tribal children is short, with 47 percent born within 24 months of the first child. Breastfeeding practices reveal a lack of consistency, with 38 percent breastfeeding rarely, 35 percent occasionally, and 25 percent regularly. Child health remains a concern, as 47 percent experience recurring illnesses, and 64 percent report diseases in the past two weeks. Shockingly, 57 percent of tribal children remain unvaccinated, emphasizing healthcare gaps. The study highlights early marriages (average age 17.34) and significant health issues during delivery (85 percent). Employment patterns reveal challenges, with 52 percent of fathers unemployed despite 81 percent of mothers being employed. Agriculture and goat rearing are primary occupations for employed fathers (66 percent). Substance abuse is prevalent among parents, with 280 mothers and 85 fathers consuming drugs. Nutrition

disparities persist, with 65 percent lacking supplementary nutritional food. Education levels are low, with a substantial portion having less than five years of schooling, hindering socio-economic progress. Access to health centers and awareness of government policies are limited, posing additional challenges. It is found that the average distance to near health centre is 15 km while that of Anganwadi is near 3 km. This is a serious problem as the propensity of infant death increases with increase in distance coupled with lesser availability of mobile health units. The information on the awareness of tribes with regard to the government policies tailored for their amelioration. As much as 82 percent of the respondents admitted that they were not aware of the government Policies and Programmes. It was mainly through tribal promoters (36 percent) and NGO's (36 percent) that they could avail themselves of the information on Programmes. The contribution of Oorukoottams, fellow beings and Government officials in eliciting information are found to be negligible.

ASSESSMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL HEALTH AND NUTRITIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY MECHANISMS

In Attapady, exclusive institutional health and nutritional service delivery mechanisms are designed for the tribal communities, demonstrating a commitment to the welfare of the region. The Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) serves as a central initiative, orchestrating a comprehensive approach to uplift the tribal population by addressing critical areas such as health, education, and infrastructure. The Attappady Co-operative Farming Society (ACFS) actively supports collective agricultural endeavors, fostering resource sharing and knowledge exchange among tribal members. Mahila Samakhya and Kudumbashree assume pivotal roles in empowering women through education, skill development, and socio-economic betterment. This intricate network of institutions collectively forms a robust framework aimed at sustainable development and the overall enhancement of well-being for the tribal communities in Attapady, playing a dominant role in driving significant socioeconomic changes. An examination of their effectiveness was conducted by assessing satisfaction levels with these service mechanisms. The results, as depicted in Table 1, highlight Mahila Samakhya as the most satisfactory service, followed by Kudumbashree, ACFS, and ITDP. Remarkably, ITDP secures the second-highest satisfaction level (80%), reinforcing its

impact, followed closely by Kudumbashree and Mahila Samakhya. This ranking pattern provides insights into the nuanced levels of satisfaction among respondents, affirming the diverse positive impacts of these crucial institutional mechanisms.

Table 1: Assessment of Institutional Health and Nutritional Service Delivery Mechanisms at Attappady

Rank	Integrated Tribal Developpemnt Project Attapady (ITDP)	Mahila Samakhya	Attappady Co-operative Farming Society (ACFS)	Kudumbashree
1 (100 % Satisfaction)	75 (9.38)	88 (11)	77 (9.62)	79 (9.8)
2 (80 % Satisfaction)	99 (12.38)	88 (11)	84 (10.5)	88 (11)
3(60 % Satisfaction)	134 (16.78)	120 (15)	134 (16.75)	130 (16.25)
4(40 % Satisfaction)	176 (22)	167 (20.88)	164 (20.5)	170 (21.25)
5(20 % Satisfaction)	200 (25)	220 (27.5)	210 (26.25)	199 (24.88)
6(0 % Satisfaction)	116 (14.5)	117 (14.62)	131 (16.38)	134 (16.75)
Sample Size	800			

Source: Primary survey

POLICY EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION FOR SCHEDULED TRIBES OF ATTAPADY

It is disheartening to observe that tribal children in Attappady are among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Despite institutional interventions, the equitable distribution of benefits remains a challenge. To address the plight of tribal children, both the Government of India and the Government of Kerala have implemented a series of programs, policies, and schemes focused

on health and nutrition. Unfortunately, child deaths persist among tribes, making it a persistent and challenging issue for government authorities. Consequently, finding lasting solutions to overcome this impasse has become a pressing necessity. This section delves into the self-assessment of the effectiveness of government interventions in tribal schemes, focusing on households with children below 5 years old. Figure 1 provides insights into the self-assessment ratings given by the respondents regarding government policies. It is evident that nearly 50 percent of the respondents expressed the view that the schemes are not effective at all, followed by those who found them fairly effective (35 percent) and effective (18 percent).

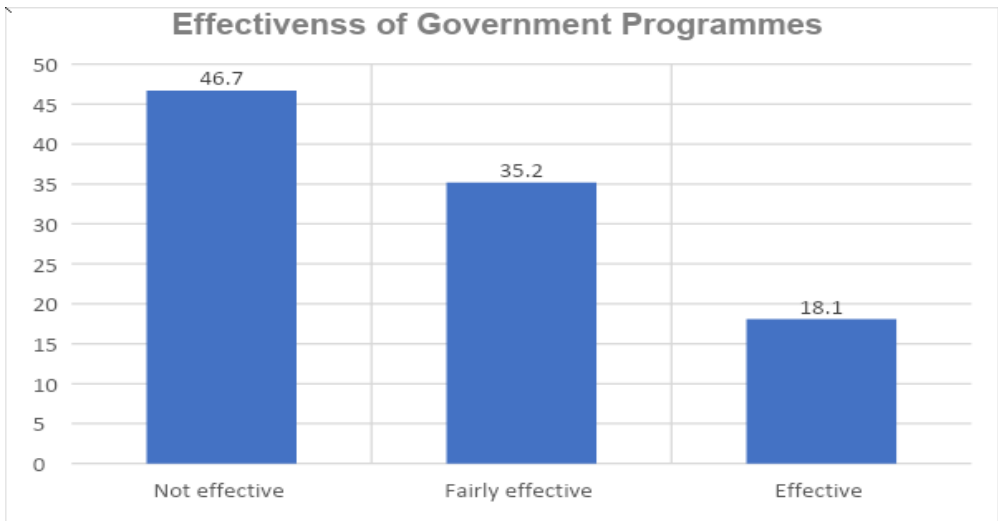
Table 2 provides examination of respondents' evaluations of government schemes, unveiling distinct patterns based on age, income, and family size. Notably, respondents with an average age of 48 lean towards perceiving government interventions as 'not effective,' while their counterparts at the age of 37 express a more optimistic outlook, deeming the schemes 'highly effective.' This generational divergence in perception highlights the need for tailored approaches to engage different age groups effectively. The influence of income on these perceptions is evident, with higher-income respondents attributing a 'highly effective' label to government schemes, contrasting with lower-income respondents who characterize them as 'not effective.' This underscores the critical interplay between economic factors and the perceived success of government initiatives. Furthermore, family size emerges as a key determinant, with larger families expressing skepticism about the effectiveness of government schemes, while smaller families convey a more positive assessment. This suggests that household dynamics and composition play a pivotal role in shaping opinions on the impact of interventions.

Table 3 scrutinizes the efficacy of government programs across various variables. In the context of community-wise classification, it is evident that the Mudugar community (53 percent) perceives the implementation of government schemes as fairly effective. Similarly, 50 percent of the Irular community finds government schemes to be fairly effective. However, 28 percent of the Irular community deems the implementation of government schemes as not effective, while this figure is 23 percent for the Mudugar community. Concerning the type of family, a substantial percentage of both

Nuclear (47 percent) and Joint families (56 percent) believe that government schemes are fairly effective.

No noteworthy distinction is observed in the rating of government schemes between those with or without mobile internet connections. Likewise, around 50 percent of individuals with above or below primary education report that the implementation of government schemes is fairly effective. The presence of an educated member in a family emerges as a crucial factor influencing the rating of government schemes designed to enhance the well-being of tribal children. Approximately 56 percent of families with an educated member and 45 percent of families without an educated member consider government schemes to be fairly effective. Another determinant of the effectiveness of government schemes is the distance to Anganwadi. The farther the distance, the lower the rating of government schemes. While 41 percent of employed heads of households believe that government schemes are fairly effective, 57 percent of unemployed heads of households hold a similar view. Concerning engagement in multiseed farming, it is noted that 46 percent of those involved in multiseed farming perceive government schemes as effective, whereas 58 percent of those not engaged in multiseed farming find government schemes to be fairly effective.

Figure 1: Peoples' Self-assessment on Government programmes



Source: Primary survey

Table 2: Rating of effectiveness of government schemes across scale variables

Variables	Not effective	Fairly effective	Highly Effective	Total
Age of father	47.85 (9.46)	42.41 (12.86)	37.13 (12.42)	42.46 (12.02)
Income	3000.50 (8519.28)	4600.62 (5873.56)	6230.62 (7376.16)	4610.58 (7027.49)
Family size	6.08 (1.53)	5.66 (1.36)	4.45 (1.04)	5.396 (1.36)

Note: Figures in the parenthesis are standard deviations

Source: primary survey

Table 3: Rating of effectiveness of government schemes across scale variables

Explanatory Variables	Categories	Not effective	Fairly effective	Highly Effective	Total
Community	Irular	28.20%	49.50%	22.30%	100.00%
	Mudular	23.40%	53.20%	23.40%	100.00%
Type of family	Nuclear	29.70%	48.60%	21.60%	100.00%
	Joined	17.90%	56.40%	25.60%	100.00%
Mobile with internet connection	Yes	16.70%	55.60%	27.80%	100.00%
	No	29.80%	49.10%	21.10%	100.00%
Education	Above primary	29.10%	51.30%	19.70%	100.00%
	Below primary	25.10%	50.30%	24.60%	100.00%

Effectiveness of Government Interventions

Educated member in the family	yes	15.30%	56.00%	28.70%	100.00%
	No	38.00%	45.30%	16.70%	100.00%
Distance to Anganwadi	Less than one kilometer=1	19.10%	54.30%	26.60%	100.00%
	Above one kilometer=0	39.30%	44.60%	16.10%	100.00%
Employment status of household	Employed	37.30%	40.70%	22.00%	100.00%
	Not employed	19.80%	57.10%	23.10%	100.00%
Multi-seed farming	Yes	14.20%	40.20%	45.70%	100.00%
	No	35.80%	58.40%	5.80%	100.00%

Source: primary survey

DETERMINANTS OF EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

The study initially explored how household heads rate the effectiveness of government schemes, examining variations among different factors such as family type, family size, income, and age. Subsequently, the focus shifted to analyzing the determinants of policy effectiveness in government interventions implemented among tribes in Attappady. Instead of solely examining nutritional schemes, the study encompassed overall schemes aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of tribes, recognizing their direct impact on health and nutrition. The section explores the determinants of governmental policy effectiveness, with the rating of government interventions' effectiveness as the dependent variable. Explanatory variables include age, income, family type, community, family size, mobile usage with internet connection, household education, presence of an educated member, distance to the nearest Anganwadi, household employment status, and engagement in multiseed farming.

The study employed an Ordered Probit model and its extension, the Semi-Nonparametric Extended Ordered Probit (SNEOP) model, to understand variations in government intervention effectiveness across different covariates. The likelihood ratio test favored the SNEOP model with $K=4$ over the Ordered Probit model. The results indicate that age, income, and family size significantly influence the likelihood of government policy intervention effectiveness among Attappady tribes. With increasing age, the perceived effectiveness of government schemes declines (-2.4 percent). In terms of income, a positive correlation exists, with higher income associated with higher ratings of government scheme effectiveness. Additionally, nuclear families, when compared to joint families, tend to rate the effectiveness of government schemes lower. Community-wise, Irular and Mudugar communities exhibit higher self-assessed ratings of government intervention compared to the reference category, Kurumbar, highlighting unequal distribution of government scheme benefits among Attappady's tribal communities.

In terms of family size, it is evident that the tribal perception of policy effectiveness diminishes as the family size increases. Larger families may find it challenging to ensure equitable benefits for each member through the implemented schemes. Concerning the possession of a mobile with internet access, those familiar with this technology tend to rate policy interventions more positively. This is attributed to their enhanced access to information technology, making them more engaged stakeholders compared to those without such access. The educational background of the respondents plays a pivotal role, with those having primary education and above expressing higher ratings for the effectiveness of government schemes in Attappady. The presence of an educated member in the household further contributes to an elevated rating, emphasizing the critical role of education in scheme effectiveness.

Respondents rate government schemes more favorably when the distance to the Anganwadi is less than one kilometer, highlighting the crucial role of Anganwadi as the central hub for supplying nutrient food to tribes. Regarding employment status, the employed show a lower rating for the effectiveness of government schemes in Attappady. This may be attributed to the assumption that the unemployed consistently access government schemes for free, creating a habitual reliance that fosters a higher regard for the schemes. However, this convenience might inadvertently lead to a leisure-oriented mindset. On the

other hand, individuals engaged in multiseed farming express a higher level of satisfaction with the effectiveness of government schemes in Attappady. In summary, youth, education, technological intervention, accessibility to government institutions, employment status, and involvement in farming processes collectively exert a significant positive influence on the successful implementation of government schemes.

Table 4: Factors influencing the rating of effectiveness of government intervention: Estimates of OP and SNEOP Models

Explanatory Variables	OP Model OP Estimates	SNEOP Models	
		SNEOP Model (K=3)	SNEOP Model (K=4)
Age	-0.0189 (0.064)	-0.029 (0.000)	-0.0244 (0.000)
Income	0.1493 (0.430)	0.1678 (0.362)	0.2113 (0.189)
Type of family (nuclear=1)	-0.434 (0.016)	-0.374 (0.018)	-0.302 (0.050)
Community: Irular	0.1493 (0.430)	0.1678 (0.362)	0.2113 (0.189)
Community: Mudugar	0.1493 (0.430)	0.1678 (0.362)	0.2113 (0.189)
Family size	-0.057 (0.813)	-0.1731 (0.422)	-0.1888 (0.328)
Mobile with internet connection (yes=1;no=0)	0.133 (0.023)	0.1256 (0.006)	0.0884 (0.038)
Education (above primary=1;below primary=0)	0.645 (0.000)	0.4719 (0.008)	0.464 (0.003)
Educated member in the family (yes=1)	0.343 (0.038)	0.4325 (0.020)	0.483 (0.037)
Anganwadi Less than one kilometer=1	0.407 (0.008)	0.653 (0.000)	0.569 (0.000)

Employment status of HH (employed=1;not =0)	-2.511 (0.000)	-4.197 (0.000)	-4.223 (0.000)
Multiseed farming (yes=1;no=0)	2.877 (0.000)	4.593 (0.000)	4.608 (0.000)
Threshold 1	-1.758	-1.757	-1.757
Threshold 2	0.3567	0.307 (0.272)	0.1461 (0.678)
Polynomial 1	—	1.176 (0.131)	0.320 (0.393)
Polynomial 2	—	0.037 (0.763)	-0.611 (0.000)
Polynomial 3	—	-0.283 (0.053)	-0.076 (0.078)
Polynomial 4	—	—	0.0843 (0.000)

Notes. Number of observations = 800; Ordered Probit results: Log-likelihood: -197.46; LR Chi-Square (with 12 degrees of freedom) 225.08 (0.000). SNEOP results:K=3; Log-likelihood:-188.24. Wald Chi-Square (with 12 degrees of freedom): 208.88. Likelihood ratio test of the OP model against SNEOP model: Chi-square (with 1 degrees of freedom):18.40(0.000). SNEOP results:K=4; Log-likelihood:-188.15. Wald Chi-Square (with 12 degrees of freedom): 111.82. Likelihood ratio test of the Ordered Probit model against SNEOP model: Chi-square (with 1 degrees of freedom):18.65(0.000).; Values in the parenthesis indicate level of significance.

Source: Estimated from primary survey

CONCLUSION

In the pursuit of global development goals, particularly those related to eradicating hunger and malnutrition, the paper has explored the effectiveness of government interventions for the health and nutritional status of under-five tribal children in Attappady, Kerala. Despite concerted global efforts, child malnutrition remains a formidable challenge, particularly in marginalized tribal communities. The study focused on the Attappady region, a microcosm of challenges faced by tribal populations in Kerala, and critically examined the multifaceted factors influencing child malnutrition. The paper sheds light on

the intricate interplay of socio-economic backgrounds, maternal education, environmental factors, and health issues within tribal communities. Attappady, despite being situated in the socially progressive state of Kerala, grapples with nutritional disparities, especially among Scheduled Tribes. Various government interventions, including the POSHAN Abhiyaan, Mission Poshan 2.0, and state-level schemes, aim to address these challenges. The findings reveal both positive and concerning aspects. While government initiatives like Mahila Samakhya, Kudumbashree, ACFS, and ITDP play crucial roles in community upliftment and are generally well-received, there is a significant proportion of respondents who perceive government schemes as ineffective. This raises questions about the equitable distribution of benefits and the need for targeted improvements. Policy implications drawn from the study highlight the importance of tailoring interventions based on age, income, family size, and community dynamics. Addressing the challenges faced by larger families, improving access to information through technology, enhancing education, and ensuring proximity to essential services like Anganwadi centers are crucial considerations. Moreover, the study emphasizes the need for continuous evaluation and refinement of government programs to ensure their effectiveness in addressing the specific needs of tribal communities. In light of the study's outcomes, policymakers are encouraged to prioritize a nuanced, community-centric approach that addresses the unique socio-economic and cultural context of tribal populations. This could involve targeted awareness campaigns, improved accessibility to health and educational services, and a more inclusive and participatory policy formulation process.

In conclusion, while the government has made commendable efforts in implementing various programs, there is a pressing need for ongoing evaluation, community engagement, and targeted interventions to ensure that these initiatives effectively contribute to improving the health and nutritional well-being of under-five tribal children in Attappady. The study provides valuable insights for policymakers to refine and strengthen existing programs, fostering a more inclusive and sustainable approach to address the complex challenges of child malnutrition in tribal communities.

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Resistance through Language:
Reconstructing Issues of Identity and
a Sense of Belongingness in
Jerry Pinto's *Em and the Big Hoom*

**Bachaspatimayum Vimi Devi &
Saugata Kumar Nath**

ABSTRACT

In India, mental illness still persists within a matrix of cultural silence, stigma, and clinical marginalisation of the patient, culminating in the suppression of individual's subjectivity and disintegration of familial identity. Linguistic issue is one of the cores of this problem as there is a lack of socially appropriate lexicon for expressing psychological distress without provoking stigma or exclusion. Within such an environment, issues of identity, belongingness, and resistance become inextricably linked to language politics. Jerry Pinto's *Em and the Big Hoom* addresses this issue by providing a counter-narrative in which language serves as a tool to reclaim voice, agency, and belongingness for people living with mental illness. The novel presents the lived experience of a mentally ill patient Em and her family. The novel uses Em's fragmentary, humorous, and transgressive speech to challenge the clinical objectification of the "mad" person and redefine language as a tool of resistance rather than a construct shaped by clinical discourse. The narrative structure which was moulded by the retrospective narration of her son helps to recreate identity and belongingness by translating unpredictable lived experience into meaningful connections. Humour, narrative attention, and interpersonal caregiving emerge as alternate linguistic strategies for overcoming silence and reconstructing interpersonal identities within the family.

The primary focus of this paper is to study the role of language which is, on the one hand, disintegrating and dysfunctional to express the inner

nuances of the patients, and, on the other hand, is a tool of resistance and identity construction. The paper aims to explain how the linguistic strategies and narrative structure serve to undermine traditional discourses of illness, thus offering a more humanised understanding of mental illness, specifically bipolar disorder. The paper also aims to discuss the caregiving relationship in the familial context, which reveals the importance of caregiving as a moral and a relational process that preserves identity and belongingness amid the chaos imposed by the illness.

Keywords: Mental Illness, Language and Identity,
Belongingness, Caregivers, Humour

Cultural silences and societal stigma have always been the intertwines of mental illnesses in literature. Michel Foucault in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* argues that the problem of madness has always been subject to the so-called medical gaze where the mad subject is isolated and silenced (38). In postcolonial societies like India, this silence has been expressed in two-fold ways as the subject is marginalised both by the medical authority and societal taboo. Jerry Pinto's *Em and the Big Hoom* presents one of the compelling accounts of this complexity. The novel is set in a Goan Catholic family in Bombay. In the novel the narrator tries to capture the nuances of his mother's experiences with bipolar disorder. Narrated in pieces of memory, the diary entries and conversations, the text blurs the line between illness and individuality, thereby discussing the way language arbiters identity and belongingness amidst the dispersion and fragmentation induced by bipolar disorder.

Bipolar disorder which is medically characterised by alternating manic and depressive episodes subverts the very categories through which rationality, emotion, and identity are socially understood (Health). Although these biomedical definitions are practical as a diagnostic criterion, these often do not fully represent the existential and linguistic disorientation that the bipolar disorder causes. Bipolarity has the effect of interrupting the continuity of time and self-coherence, the inexplicable feeling of being the same person through alternating times and affective conditions (World Health Organization). As such, bipolar disorder is not amenable to any unified narrative presentation to the extent that it shakes up the traditional linearity, rationality and the concept of a single subject that the conventional narrative structures assume.

Mood disorders, according to the data provided by the World Health Organisation, constitute about three percent of world disease burden and the experiences of the illness are strongly mediated by cultural contexts (Mental Health). In South Asia, mental health discourse is not only limited by the absence of clinical understanding but an even stronger limitation exists of a set of cultural codes of shame, silence, and familial honour. Mental illness, especially when it manifests in women, is often explained through moral or spiritual perspectives instead of psychological ones. In Indian social systems, a person diagnosed with a mental disorder often finds himself/herself in the danger zone of being labelled as “paagal,” (Grover et al. 48) which makes a medical diagnosis a social stigma and a moral failure. Consequently, the mentally ill individual is pathologised and otherised and such an individual is made both visible and invisible at home and in the world at large.

In, most societies in India, mental illnesses are not only a biomedical deviation but a moral/social sin. The ill person is often viewed as one who is a threat to the social respect of the family, the turmoil of the illness has to be held in, hidden, or justified. According to the medical anthropologist Arthur Kleinman, the illness narratives in the Indian household is embedded in the “local moral world” (49) where suffering is understood through the idioms of relational identity, duty, and shame rather than biomedical self-diagnosis or individual rights. As a result, both the victim and the family develop the locus of anxiety around mental illness. Pinto dramatised this issue in his novel *Em and the Big Hoom*. Em is not depicted as a bipolar rather she is depicted as an embodied struggle between pathology and identity. Em swings between the very vitality and crippling despair, which discloses how the illness pervades the rhythmic patterns of life in the household. But the narrator does not want to turn Em’s illness experience into a ‘case.’ Her condition, though disabling, also throws a light of normative ideas of sanity, motherhood, and order in the world. The narrator admits, “I tried to look now at the words we were saying and I could not see how they matched our needs” (Pinto 220). This confession reflects the cultural inability to find acceptable words to describe mental anguish.

The specific problem of bipolar disorder in India consists in the clash of several discourses, such as the clinical, familial, and the colonial ones. Madness, which is a form of colonial psychiatry, is often treated by the medical system as a perversion to rational modernity. Colonial psychiatry denotes the

psychiatric systems that tend to pathologise any behaviour that failed to meet the Western idealised notion of civility (Fernando 63). On the contrary, the family takes the condition of mental illness as a violation of social harmony or a divine punishment. The voice of the person, in this dilemma, is nullified. The account that Pinto narrated is not a typical illness narrative; it is a psychological and cultural analysis of how the patients and their loved ones rebuild meaning through the mayhem. So, the novel collides with a dual realm of exploration – mental illness and the postcolonial crisis of identity. Through language as a medium of resistance, *Em and the Big Hoom* brings back the voice that has been silenced and marginalised. The patient Em's comical, and lyrical speech is a protest against the "Medical gaze," which objectifies the mentally ill and removes them out of the dialogues. By letting Em talk in her own voice, which switches among mania, irony, and sanity the narrative destroys both the patriarchal and psychiatric authority. Em's language achieves what Julia Kristeva refers to as the "semiotic," an expressive layer based on touch, rhythm, and physical intensity as opposed to rational syntax (Kristeva 21). In this regard, the bipolarity of Em is not just an illness, but a kind of radical linguistic and emotional wisdom, an alternative consciousness that challenges the idea of sanity, gender, and the hierarchies of being normal.

In *Em and the Big Hoom*, language acts as the most powerful point of resistance against institutional authority, patriarchal rules, and cultural silence. Through the words of Em, the text demonstrates how insanity can subvert instead of succumbing to the institutions that attempt to contain it. The presence of the clinical authority in the text can be deconstructed by the idea of "Medical gaze" developed by Michel Foucault in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Foucault argues that psychiatry in the modern world reduces the patient to an object of study and deprives them of their subjectivity and agency. This objectification in the novel of Pinto is highly dramatised in Em's frequent visit to the psychiatrists. The narrator recalls an instance of her hallucination followed by their psychiatrist visit, Em says, "No one is to eat a thing that hasn't been cooked in the house, they might poison us." "They' are back. And we went back to the psychiatrist hoping for another drug. There was none. The pharmacopoeia was exhausted" (Pinto 71). There were no more drugs to treat her and her experiences of illness were changed into clinical terms and pharmacological compositions. But when they returned back home she simply asked for a

cup of tea and continued with her usual ironical babblings about sex. Her irony, self-awareness and shrewdness make the clinical encounter a subversive act. In another instance she jokes, “Mad people are telepathic, chairvoyant and everything that should frighten you. Be afraid of me” (Pinto 102) here she tries to disarm the medical authority that seeks to categorise her. At this point, her speech reinstates subject-hood onto diagnosis. The rebellion of Em is not an act of eccentricity; it is a political act. By voicing out for herself, she undermines what Foucault mention as “reason’s triumph over unreason” (Foucault 63). This resistance is further amplified by the writings of her son. His narration takes back the story of Em in the medical records and creates a continuity of her disjointed statements. In this way, the text of Pinto is a counter-discourse, one which returns humanity back into madness.

Although Foucault sheds light on the institutional modes of silence, the concept of the “object” as articulated by Julia Kristeva describes the affective and linguistic disruption that speech generates. In “Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,” Kristeva describes the abject as something that society needs to dispatch away to preserve its order – the taboo, the bodily, the unspeakable (4). Em is a reflection of this abject presence. Her crude discussion of death, sexuality, and despair upsets her family’s domestic boundaries. At some point, she informs her son “If I go [die], don’t call it madness, call it tiredness” (Pinto 118). Her bluntness shocks him as it shatters the illusion of security in the family setting. Kristeva argues that the abject does not respect boundaries (4) and the discourse of Em literally destroys these same boundaries – the boundaries between sanity and insanity, decency and indecency, life and death. The audacity of her language turns taboo into testimony. In the words of Pinto, what psychiatry would recognise as a symptomatic deviation turns out to be a gesture of expression, which restores her subjectivity. Therefore, the role of the narrator is central here: he filters the crude, disordered semiotic product of the speech of Em into a narrative structure. By doing so, he does not sanitise her madness but places it within the frames of narration. Thus, the novel itself serves as what Kristeva refers to as a “purifying catharsis” – a discursive process which converts the inexplicable into art, the unspeakable into language. With the help of narration, the pathology of Em is integrated into the overall symbolic order of the family.

While Kristeva’s concept of the abject explains how Em’s transgressive speech disrupts normal, emotional and familial limits, Rita Charon’s idea of

narrative medicine elaborates on the narrator's reaction to such disruption through an organised approach to narrative engagement. Rita Charon's concept of "Narrative Medicine" deepens the understanding of language as ethical care. According to Charon, narrative competence refers to the capacity to recognise, receive, process and respond to stories of others (4). She claims that narrative practice re-humanises medical relations by nurturing attention, representation, and affiliation. The narration of the son is an act of narrative attentiveness: he listens to the broken words that Em speaks, transcribes them and he is not swept by the reductive desire to diagnose her. His writing becomes what Charon would call "representation" – shaping chaos into story, preserving dignity through form. In her words, he promotes affiliation, the relational connection that narrative medicine proposes to be the first stage in healing. *Em and the Big Hoom* can be considered in the context of Charon as a literary 'case study' regarding the ethics of listening. The son is not a physician and therapist, but he turns the act of writing into an act of therapy by documenting the sufferings of his mother.

Documentation and narration, as has been seen, appear to give new meanings to the life of the patients. Narration often gives meaning to the life. Such an idea can be seen in Paul Ricoeur's case of "emplotment". The idea of "Emplotment," as explained by Paul Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative*, describes the way in which narrative takes the chaos of lived experience and forms it into a meaningful, comprehensible form. Ricoeur's concept of emplotment acts as a powerful lens for comprehending the fragmented experiences of Em into a meaningful one. To Ricoeur, narrative form does not spontaneously exist in life; events happen in pieces, contradictions, and disruptions in time. The art of emplotment is to rearrange these fragments in a way that generates causal and emotional continuity in the narrative where none was previously present. According to Ricoeur, narrative unites the factors which were dispersed and creates the sense by means of organising the experience and turning it into a story (66). Notably, emplotment does not eliminate suffering, yet, it rearranges it, bringing trauma to narratable and bearable form. Narrative serves as a mechanism with which the subject unites contradictory interpersonal recollections, thereby restoring agency in the process.

This Ricoeurian concept of emplotment directly illuminates the son's narrative project in *Em and the Big Hoom*. His childhood experiences of Em's bipolar disorder were chaotic, frightening, and often incomprehensible as

they occurred. He did not, and could not, understand those in real time. But as an adult narrator, he performs precisely the kind of emplotment that Ricoeur describes: he gathers scattered memories such as Em's letters, her manic laughter, her suicidal comments, and hospital visits, the silences that followed and weaves them into a narrative that gives emotional and intellectual coherence to those events happened earlier. His statement, "I wrote because it was the only way I could make her whole again" (Pinto 103), echoes Ricoeur's belief that storytelling is an act of reconstitution. By narrating, the son imposes structure upon experiences that once overwhelmed him. The son's narrative is thus not merely recollection but reconfiguration. In Ricoeur's terms, he performs a "refiguration of time," converting the nonlinear, recursive temporality of trauma into an ordered narrative sequence. His childhood fear, as the narrator stated, "But it was the other Em who was my night terror. As if it were a wild animal with flecks of foam at its mouth, I feared her depression," (Pinto 59) becomes contextualised within a larger narrative arc where memory, love, and loss intersect. The chaos of living with Em is given shape and meaning through storytelling and the disorder becomes comprehensible through emplotment. Therefore, the son transforms trauma into testimony. He becomes not just a witness but an interpreter of his own life, using narration to reclaim coherence, identity, and belonging.

The obsessive need of the son to write is also a performance of what Cathy Caruth imagines as the "delayed realisation of trauma" (Caruth 63). Caruth claims that the definition of trauma is a temporal dislocation: the effect of the traumatic experience is specifically its belatedness, its inability to be completely know when it happens (4). In other words, trauma is lived twice, first as something that floods the psyche and is unable to be processed and then as a phantom reoccurrence in memory, dream, or story. This experience of the traumatic event is therefore never fully present; it is always deferred, always late. This deferred temporality is represented when the son writes the story of Em. He narrated the story after his mother's death and the narration serves as a source of preservation. His statement about the excerpts of Em's letters, 'Or was writing a manifestation of the condition? If often seemed like it was, the letters growing larger and larger until there was barely a word or two on a page. If we had cared to, we could have mapped her mania against her font size.' (Pinto 33), this late recognition is not merely a recalling, but a new experience of what had been incomprehensible in the earlier times.

The very theory of Caruth is based on the Freudian theory (as described by Bistoien) of “*Nachtraglichkeit*” or deferred action, where he described how a memory could become traumatic “after the event” (Bistoien et al. 669). As mentioned by Freud, the trauma is not formed at the time of the occurrence but retroactively when the subject attaches significance to a past event that was psychologically overwhelming at the time (Bistoien et al. 670). It is in this Freudian mode of retrospective narration that the narrator functions. Whenever Em has a manic or depressive mood, he cannot understand her behaviour; he only lives through it. It is only later in recollecting them that he starts to give them some form of meaning, to transfer the raw intensity of experience into the understandability of language. The effect of delayed understanding is clearly entrenched in the structure of the text. The text is designed as a mosaic of disjointed memories comprising of short passages differing in temporal frameworks, narrative voices and tonalities. This non-linear structure also corresponds with the repetitiveness and fragmentation of the trauma story. Cathy Caruth’s observation that trauma frequently “takes the form of repeated nightmares and flashbacks, the re-enactment of the event” (Caruth 11) can here be applied to understand and interpret the text. Similarly the narrator keeps on revisiting certain memories of Em, such as her suicide attempts, her loud laughter and her letters, to relive it and not to search for the solution. Therefore, the process of writing functions in accordance with a psychoanalytic phenomenon of working-through (Freud 147), where a person constantly repeats a painful experience in a strategy to gradually incorporate it into consciousness, thus preventing the constant entrapment in the repetitive process. In Pinto’s novel, this counter narrative allows the son to turn the rawness of the event into a form of significance, allowing him to connect with Em’s pain without being weighed down by it.

The son’s narrative is paradigmatically characterised by Dominick LaCapra’s two modalities of trauma expression, namely, acting out and working through (LaCapra 40, 71). LaCapra draws a distinction between compulsive reliving of trauma that is acting out and reflective writing of the trauma which is working through (LaCapra 71). The narrator of the text is alternating between these two modes, for instance the narrator repeatedly questions his own adequacy as son and wondering whether he ever truly listened to his mother or loved her enough (Pinto 134). But through repeated narration, he converts paralysis into movement and grief into articulated discourse. There

is also an ethical dimension of this narrative belatedness. Caruth urges that the ability to narrate the trauma is bearing witness not of the pain itself but also of the impossibility of knowing completely the pain. The narration of the son, in this sense, presupposes the ethical act of witnessing. His writing is not an act of the closure, rather an act of continuity, his attempt to keep the voice of Em alive, specifically, with its incompleteness. In this way, the narrator of Pinto can turn silence into narrative and sorrow into knowledge. The belated narrative, far from being an afterthought, becomes the very means by which meaning and belonging are reclaimed.

The way Jerry Pinto uses humour as a tool of resistance and self-preservation is one of the glaring aspects of *Em and the Big Hoom*. The humour of Em is her major agency. She turns any pretence of humiliation into a more overt assertion of life by mocking her own conditions, the social expectations that surround her, and even death itself. She uses self-mockery, irony, and verbal tricks as a means of reclaiming a locus of control in the circumstances that would make her otherwise impotent. This dynamic is also well aligned to Sigmund Freud's conceptualisation of humour, where he defines it as the victory of the ego over the distressing reality (Freud 162). According to Freud, humour is a means through which the subject could overcome suffering and not conquered by it. Instead of repressing pain, the ego reframes it as amusement, a "victory not of the pleasure principle, but of the ego itself" (163). In this regard, humour demonstrates emotional stronghold and not just a denial. This Freudian type of humoral defiance is embodied in Em. When she tells her son, "I'm not mad, I'm just interesting" (Pinto 73), she asserts her subjectivity against the reductive gaze of medical authority. The sarcasm works on two tiers – exposing the absurdity of psychiatric expertise, and at the same time, appropriating the language of madness for her uses. Freud would decode this as the ego's deliberate refusal to suffer – a re-signification of distress through wit. Likewise, the continuous self-irony strategically employed by Em such as "I'm the family lunatic, darling" (Pinto 47) sheds light on humour both as a psychic defence mechanism as well as critical mechanism. Through her false grandeur, she satirises not only her own illness but also the stereotypes it creates. The humour is, therefore, not an escapist move, rather a tactical diversification of affect, turning pain into play.

Through laughter, the main character reforms the domestic space of sickness to a place of collective solidarity. Similarly, the family embraces

humour as a language of survival. For instance when her son asked whether she is in pain or not she answers,

No pain, no. I just ate some Iodex.

Open your mouth.

Ha ha ha, she mocks.

This memory of the laughing mother keeps her not as a clinical case study but as a living being, intricate, self-reflexive, and undefeated. Thus, laughter is an exquisite form of society-wide exorcism, a momentary surrender of fear. Thus, a sense of humour is equivalent to the final expression of agency in *Em and the Big Hoom*: a language of resistance that overshadows psychosis and morality.

In a psychoanalytic context, the humour in Pinto's text is functioning as what Frued termed "saving of affect," a psychodynamic mechanism in which affect is not eliminated, but displaced. Instead of giving up under the pressure of despair, the subject reforms affective content. The humour shown by Em does not deny the presence of suffering; instead, it aestheticises it, giving it a recognisable form and rhythm. For instance, Em's childlike rhythm "Pain pain go away, come again some other day. Little Johnny wants to play with himself" (Pinto 112) enacts as a form of "saving of affect" (Frued) where the psychic pain is transformed into comic transgression and ridicule the vulnerability of the moment instead of experiencing the pain directly. This metamorphosis also finds its expression in the form of narrative: her jests are translated into the written text; her one-liners are stored and restated by her son. In her wit she codifies herself into the cultural discourse, denying the atomised role of 'patient' that clinical narratives ascribe.

In the discourse of mental health, the focus is often placed squarely on the patient, their symptoms, treatment and prognosis. However, there exists an equally critical yet often overlooked axis beyond the patients – the caregivers. The term "caregiver" refers broadly to any individual who provides physical, emotional, and psychological support to someone who is ill, disabled, or dependent. The World Health Organization defines caregivers as "people – typically family members – who provide assistance with activities of daily living and are essential partners in care, particularly in low-resource settings" (WHO, "Mental Health of Caregivers"). This definition emphasises the crucial contributions that the caregivers' give and their role, not as passive

supporters but as active participants in the health journey of the person they care for. In the context of mental illness, caregiving becomes not only physically and emotionally taxing but also deeply intersubjective – where boundaries blur between care provider and recipient. In *Em and the Big Hoom*, caregiving is shared between the unnamed narrator (the son), his sister and father, referred to as the Big Hoom. The cultural silence surrounding mental health and care in Indian society are at the heart of the text.

The novel, through the characters of the reflective son and the stoic presence of the Big Hoom, puts caring as a practice based on listening, a kind of moral and narrative care that translates both the caregiver and care receiver. Rita Charon in her “Narrative Medicine,” opines “To listen to a story of illness is to receive a human being in their most vulnerable state” (Charon 8). This is the principle, which the Big Hoom embodies in the novel. His attention to Em is evoked not with the help of medicine but with the unending patience and linguistic steadiness. Even when her words cross the manic borders, he does not shut her down. The Big Hoom console his son by telling him,

‘If your mother had diabetes, what would they say?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘This is like diabetes. She’s not well. That’s all.’ (Pinto 98)

His answer, which is direct and untheatrical depicts the ethical quietness of care. He deliberately reframes the illness of Em as an ordinary and treatable illness rather than social and moral failing. The failure of the Big Hoom to pathologise her illness is actually enacting the definition of what Charon calls an ‘attentive presence’, listening that supports personhood and does not diminish it to illness. He redefines her by a considered and loving manipulation of language and transforms the diagnostic term ‘lunatic’ into a more human one, ‘woman’. Through this subtle rephrasing, he also dismisses two things: a pitying tone, and the pathologising inclination. In addition, the caregiving of the Big Hoom opposes the medical gaze, instead of medicalising the situation of Em, he participates with her in exchanging humours thereby adopting a mutual survival tool. His restraint, or rather, readiness to listen rather than talk, illustrates what Charon calls “the narrative competence to hear, translate, and be moved by another story” (Charon 9). In the text, this competence is not expressed through grand gestures but through minute acts of attention such as listening attentively to Em’s stories of her youth, humouring her manic

laughter, or simply sitting beside her in silence. These gestures embody care as an interpretive practice – one that restores subjectivity to the one whom madness threatens to erase.

Dori Laub argues that trauma is never fully experienced at the moment it occurs; instead, it becomes real only when it is spoken and witnessed by another (Felman and Laub 59). For Laub, testimony is a relational act in which the survivor and the listener co-create meaning. The listener does not remain outside the trauma but becomes a “co-witness,” helping the speaker articulate what otherwise remains fragmented, unprocessed, or unspeakable (Felman and Laub 58). Testimony, therefore, is not simply recounting events – it is a process of reconstructing a coherent self through the presence of someone willing to receive and hold the story. This concept of co-witnessing clarifies the emotional dynamics of caregiving in *Em and the Big Hoom*. Em’s bipolar disorder shatters her narrative continuity, leaving her speech marked by abrupt confessions, contradictions, and flashes of despair. When the narrator realises that the doctors spoke about her and not to her, he sees the structural silencing imposed to Em. In reaction, the narrative of the son plays the role of a remedial act, a penetration into the lived experience of Em upon which he transmits her narrative. By preserving her humour, her manic thoughts, and her paradoxical wisdom, the narrator contributes to the “reconstitution of the event” (Laub 85) through testimony. For instance, the narrator search meaning amidst the tears of Em and he states, “ How to read those tears would always be a problem...But each time Em told me something about her life, I would examine it for signs, for early indications of the ‘nervous breakdown’. It was an obsession and might have something to do with my curiosity about her life” (Pinto 33). The narrative, thus, becomes a territory where he, as co-owner and witness, proclaims his ownership of the fragmented past of Em and to give coherence to that disorder which was about to disperse. Therefore, the son writes beyond recollection; the writing is an act of ethical listening that attempts to reinstate the subjectivity of Em and to find the root of the breakdown.

In *Em and the Big Hoom*, Jerry Pinto shows that language acts as a space where identity, power, and belonging are reclaimed and challenged rather than just being a means of communication. The novel undermines the legitimacy of medical and social discourses that tend to marginalise people with mental illness through Em’s disjointed, hilarious, and transgressive

speech. By refusing to fit into the language of pathology, she subverts the “medical gaze” (Foucault 38) and turns madness from a diagnostic object into a subject of discussion. Pinto’s work eventually illustrates that identity is not fixed rather it is formed via acts of remembering, narrating, and opposing silence. For the narrator, the narrative serves both as an act of grieving and a way of survival. Despite its frailty, language serves as the cornerstone for the reconstruction of love, dignity, and a sense of belonging. The emotionally charged representation of mental illness in *Em and the Big Hoom* argues that, even in the midst of chaos, language has the potential to build places of bonding, resilience, and purpose.

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Reconstruction of Gender Roles in Kavita Kané's *Lanka's Princess*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Kavita Kané's *Lanka's Princess* (2016) as a feminist retelling that reclaims the marginalised voice of Surpanakha, historically portrayed in the *Ramayana* as a demoness and morally transgressive figure. Employing Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of subalternity, the study foregrounds Surpanakha's experiences, desires, and strategic agency, illustrating how her marginalisation within her family, her husband's murder by her brother Ravana, and subsequent encounters with Rama and Lakshmana shape her resilience and political acumen. Kané's narrative transforms Surpanakha from a peripheral figure into a morally and psychologically complex protagonist, challenging patriarchal interpretations of epic narratives. Through exploration of her childhood neglect, familial betrayal, and tactical manoeuvring, the novel demonstrates that subaltern agency can manifest through intellect, reflection, and calculated action. This analysis underscores the capacity of literary retellings to amplify silenced female voices and reframe cultural perceptions of gender, power, and morality in Indian epics.

Keywords: subaltern, patriarchal, retelling, agency

In the vast landscape of Indian epics, the *Ramayana* occupies a central place, shaping cultural, moral, and literary consciousness over centuries. Within its narrative framework, women are often confined to binary roles: virtuous paragons of ideal womanhood or vilified embodiments of desire and disruption. Surpanakha, the sister of Ravana, has historically been cast in the latter role, remembered primarily as a demoness whose passions bring about her downfall. Her desires are punished, her identity reduced to her monstrous traits, and her agency within the narrative is practically nonexistent.

Traditional retellings present her as a disruptive, morally flawed figure whose voice is silenced by patriarchal and heroic narratives. Kavita Kané's *Lanka's Princess* disrupts this conventional portrayal by offering a feminist reinterpretation of Surpanakha's story. Kané transforms her from a peripheral and vilified character into a woman with voice, agency, and moral complexity, allowing readers to engage with her as a fully realised human being rather than a symbolic obstacle to male heroism. Through this reimagining, Kané not only challenges patriarchal interpretations of the *Ramayana* but also provides a space to examine subalternity in terms of gender, desire, and marginalisation.

Surpanakha's position within the epic can be understood through the lens of subalternity, as theorised by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Spivak's framework emphasises the marginalisation of those who are denied a voice within dominant discourses, whether due to gender, caste, class, or political position. In the traditional *Ramayana*, Surpanakha exemplifies this marginalisation, her desires are punished through violence, her identity is reduced to that of a demoness, and her narrative agency is absent. She is rendered a cautionary figure whose transgressions are foregrounded, while her perspective remains unheard. Kané's intervention inverts this dynamic by centring Surpanakha's experiences and internal life, allowing her to articulate her desires, frustrations, and ambitions in ways that the epic traditionally denies. The novel presents her thoughts and reflections, giving readers access to her consciousness and, thereby, restoring a subaltern voice that has historically been ignored.

From the outset, Kané humanises Surpanakha by exploring her early life in the court of Lanka under her father Vishravas and mother Kaikesi. Unlike conventional depictions that present her monstrous traits as innate, Kané portrays Surpanakha as an intelligent, sensitive child navigating a patriarchal household where her brothers, particularly Ravana, are consistently favoured. From her earliest memories, she senses the emotional distance of Kaikesi, who, while ambitious and politically astute, lavishes attention, guidance, and affection almost exclusively on her sons. "She (Kaikesi) needed sons to consolidate what she had dreamt of: an asura empire with her sons as the ruler of the three worlds: and Lanka' their lost golden city as their capital" (1). However, Kaikesi thought "this girl (Meenakshi) has cheated me of my plans" (2). Surpanakha internalises a persistent feeling of being unwanted, as her accomplishments, curiosity, and intelligence are often overlooked,

while her brothers receive constant praise and recognition. Ravana, by virtue of his strength, charisma, and future role as heir, dominates both the family and the court, casting a long shadow that leaves Surpanakha marginalised within her own household. She becomes acutely aware of her secondary position, learning early to navigate spaces where her voice is devalued. Yet, these formative experiences do not simply suppress her; rather, they cultivate her perceptiveness, emotional resilience, and strategic thinking. She learns to observe carefully, to understand the power dynamics in her family, and to calculate how to assert herself subtly within constraints. Kané emphasises how this early marginalisation and overshadowing by her brother, coupled with her mother's favouritism of her siblings, forms the foundation of Surpanakha's later awareness of inequity, her capacity for reflection, and her emerging agency. Through this nuanced portrayal, readers are encouraged to empathise with Surpanakha as a sensitive and perceptive child, whose understanding of family politics and gendered hierarchies prefigures her later development as a subaltern figure capable of articulating her voice and asserting her presence in a patriarchal society.

Kané also explores the profound impact of Surpanakha's marriage and the brutal loss of her husband at the hands of her own brother, Ravana, further shaping her understanding of power, vulnerability, and resilience. Unlike traditional depictions that largely ignore this aspect of her life, Kané gives Surpanakha a personal and emotional dimension, showing how her marital bond briefly offered her a sense of companionship and recognition that had long been denied in her childhood. The murder of her husband by her own brother, Ravana, is both a deeply personal betrayal and a stark demonstration of the patriarchal and familial hierarchies that limit her agency, reinforcing the precariousness of her position as a woman in a male-dominated world. Surpanakha's anguish is expressed vividly when she declares, "You killed whatever I had. And it is because of only one man—Ravan (172)" highlighting both her grief and her recognition of the direct source of her suffering. This trauma heightens her emotional complexity and catalyses the development of her strategic and reflective agency. Confronted with grief, injustice, and the violent assertion of male power over her life, Surpanakha learns that overt authority may be inaccessible but that subtle influence, foresight, and calculated action can serve as tools of survival and assertion. The death of her husband, perpetrated by her own brother, becomes a turning point that strengthens her

resilience, sharpens her political and emotional acumen, and adds layers of moral and psychological depth to her subsequent decisions and interactions. Through this experience, Kané emphasises how structural oppression, familial betrayal, and personal loss coalesce to shape the consciousness and agency of a subaltern woman navigating a patriarchal society.

Following the murder of her husband by her own brother, Ravana, Surpanakha channels her grief and anger into strategic thought, transforming personal trauma into a form of agency. She observes the forest, the movements of key figures, and the dynamics between her brother and potential adversaries, recognising an opportunity to influence events in her favour. Surpanakha identifies Rama and Lakshmana as pivotal figures in her subtle plan for revenge against Ravana. "*Ram and Lakshman*. Through them, she now again had the means and method to bring her brother down. All she needed were these two brothers to fight her war" (189). By leveraging the two brothers, she demonstrates that subaltern power can operate through intelligence, observation, and strategic action rather than overt confrontation, highlighting her growing political acumen and emotional resilience. In doing so, Kané portrays her not merely as a victim of circumstance but as a perceptive and deliberate agent, capable of shaping outcomes within the constraints imposed upon her by family and society.

A pivotal moment in Surpanakha's life, both in the epic and in Kané's retelling, is her encounter with Rama and Lakshmana in the forest. Traditional narratives depict this episode as the point where her desires provoke her punishment; her attraction to Rama is construed as transgression, and the mutilation of her nose and ears at Lakshmana's hands serves as moral justification for patriarchal retribution. Kané reframes this encounter to highlight Surpanakha's agency rather than merely her transgression. Her attraction to Rama is treated as a natural expression of human desire, and this is reflected in her own words to him: "I like you, I liked what I saw. I hope you like me too" (198) revealing her honest admission of attraction without shame or apology. Her forwardness demonstrates a willingness to act upon her emotions, even at personal risk. While the violence inflicted upon her physically weakens her, Kané emphasises her psychological resilience, showing how Surpanakha recalibrates her strategies and negotiates her position in a hostile world. By giving readers access to her inner thoughts, her fear, indignation, and contemplations on justice, Kané transforms what is

traditionally a narrative of punishment into one of emerging awareness and deliberate agency. This depiction highlights the nuanced nature of agency, demonstrating that it does not always equate to overt power, but can instead manifest through strategic thinking, emotional acuity, and the capacity to assert one's perspective within restrictive circumstances.

Kané further develops Surpanakha's subaltern voice by emphasising her intellect and political acumen. Rather than a one-dimensional figure defined by desire, Surpanakha is depicted as a keen observer of the courtly and familial dynamics of Lanka. She navigates alliances, understands the implications of political manoeuvres, and exercises influence from the periphery. These episodes demonstrate that subaltern agency can be subtle yet effective, operating through observation, calculation, and strategic engagement rather than direct authority. For instance, Surpanakha recognises the vulnerabilities and ambitions of various characters in Lanka's court, assessing potential allies and threats with a shrewdness that surpasses the expectations placed upon her as a woman and a marginalised figure. Her capacity to act within constraints, to influence outcomes through reflection and initiative, situates her as a character of remarkable depth and strength. Kané thereby dismantles the traditional reading of Surpanakha as passive or merely reactionary, presenting her instead as a subject capable of shaping her destiny within the limitations imposed by her society.

The narrative perspective in *Lanka's Princess* plays a crucial role in restoring Surpanakha's voice. Kané employs first-person narration and internal reflection to provide access to Surpanakha's thoughts, emotions, and moral reasoning. Through these insights, readers encounter a character who critically evaluates her circumstances, contemplates ethical dilemmas, and expresses grief, longing, and ambition. By granting her narrative authority, Kané restores the subaltern speech denied to her in the epic. Surpanakha's reflections on the patriarchal dynamics surrounding her, the inequities she observes in familial and social hierarchies and her lamentation over unfulfilled desires all contribute to a nuanced portrayal that challenges the simplistic dichotomy of virtuous versus villainous women in classical texts. In Kané's retelling, Surpanakha's voice is not merely reactive; it is reflective, analytical, and assertive, making her a participant in the moral and political discourse of her world.

Kané's depiction also captures the interplay between desire, power, and morality in Surpanakha's life. Kané portrays Surpanakha's desires openly and honestly, presenting them as natural and morally complex rather than framing them as inherently transgressive. Surpanakha's longing for love and recognition, her interactions with Rama and Lakshmana, and her navigation of Ravana's court highlight the tensions between personal ambition and structural constraints. These interactions extend beyond the forest episode; Kané provides nuanced portrayals of Surpanakha's interactions with other women in Lanka, including Mandodari and Kaikesi, exploring how female solidarity and rivalry shape opportunities for agency. Through these depictions, Kané asserts that female agency can take multiple forms, ranging from emotional resilience to intellectual and strategic engagement. The novel foregrounds the idea that subalternity is not a static state of powerlessness but a dynamic space where voice, negotiation, and resistance are possible, even in the face of systemic oppression.

The transformation of Surpanakha in *Lanka's Princess* carries significant implications for interpreting Indian epics. By centring a character who has traditionally been marginalised and vilified, Kané critiques patriarchal narratives that define women primarily through their relationships to male heroes. Through careful exploration of Surpanakha's thoughts, desires, and strategic actions, Kané challenges the conventional silencing of female voices in epic traditions. By portraying her as both desiring and politically aware, Kané complicates the reader's understanding of morality, power, and gender, demonstrating that women's experiences in patriarchal societies are multifaceted and cannot be reduced to simplistic archetypes. The novel thus becomes a space for re-examining notions of justice, agency, and voice, offering a feminist intervention that amplifies the perspective of a historically silenced character.

Kané also explores Surpanakha's self-perception and the development of her moral and ethical reasoning. By reflecting on her decisions, her ambitions, and the consequences of her actions, Surpanakha demonstrates an awareness of the larger social and cosmic order of her world. This reflective capacity highlights how subaltern voices are not merely reactive but critically engaged with ethical and societal questions. Kané presents her as questioning the rigid codes that govern female behaviour, lamenting the inequities faced by women while simultaneously negotiating the space available to her. This narrative

treatment expands the reader's understanding of the ways in which women in marginalised positions exercise agency, combining intellect, strategy, and emotional insight to navigate patriarchal power structures.

By restoring Surpanakha's voice and portraying her as a morally and intellectually complex figure, Kané not only humanises a marginalised character but also interrogates the patriarchal structures that have historically constrained women in epic narratives. The novel affirms that subalternity is not an absence of agency but a condition that requires negotiation, reflection, and strategic assertion. Surpanakha's evolution from a vilified peripheral figure to a woman with voice and agency exemplifies how literature can serve as a vehicle for feminist reclamation and ethical re-examination of canonical texts. In doing so, Kané contributes meaningfully to the ongoing discourse on gender, power, and narrative authority in Indian literature, demonstrating that even historically silenced voices can find resonance and recognition through imaginative, empathetic storytelling.

Kavita Kané's *Lanka's Princess*, thus, transforms Surpanakha from a marginalised, vilified figure into a protagonist with voice, agency, and moral complexity. By foregrounding her internal experiences, desires, and strategic interventions, Kané reclaims a subaltern perspective long denied within the patriarchal framework of the *Ramayana*. The novel highlights the multifaceted nature of female agency, encompassing emotional resilience, intellectual acumen, and strategic engagement. Through this retelling, Kané not only revises the narrative of a classical epic but also asserts the significance of giving voice to those historically silenced. Surpanakha's journey demonstrates the enduring potential of literature to challenge established hierarchies, amplify marginalized voices, and reimagine cultural narratives with empathy, insight, and ethical awareness. By centring the experiences of a character long relegated to the margins, Kané encourages readers to question the assumptions of canonical texts and to recognise the agency, intelligence, and humanity of subaltern women, making *Lanka's Princess* a vital contribution to contemporary feminist literature.

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The Impact of Displacement and the Role of Memory in Constructing a Sense of Self: A Study Through Sandeep Raina's *A Bit of Everything*

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ABSTRACT:

The identity of a diasporic community or individual has always been in question. They are mostly seen struggling with fragmented identity. This is not just about their identity, but also about their sense of belonging. These people are often seen inhabiting a space of in-betweenness, that of the memories of the homeland and the realities of the hostland.

Forced displacement, in most cases, leads to the loss of one's cultural background and severing of familial ties. This study explores the impact of memory and displacement on personal identity development in the novel *A Bit of Everything* by Sandeep Raina. The protagonist, a Kashmiri Pandit, as the story depicts his journey, not only travels but also recreates his new world of place and belonging in exile. The paper also delves into the role of memory as a source of trauma and as a way of identity reconstruction. Through trauma theory, memory studies, and identity analysis, the article locates the protagonist's path to his self-reconstruction. The paper points to the fact that memory and displacement can be very painful and terrible experiences, but it also states that they are very important for the ongoing identity transformation.

Drawing on Maurice Halbwachs' concept of memory being a social structure rather than an individual one, the paper shows how memory helps sustain the cultural identity of displaced people. Pierre Nora's idea of "lieux de mémoire" ("sites of memory") explains how symbols or objects can evoke the memories and longing of a homeland. With the help of Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman's theories, this paper discusses how the pain of exile

and displacement reappears through remembering and storytelling. The protagonist of this novel can be seen reflecting on his past and connecting all of his doubts and confusions to rebuild his sense of self and belonging. Through this, memory acts as a tool to rediscover one's identity after loss and displacement.

Keywords: exile, displacement, memory, identity, diaspora, trauma, loss.

INTRODUCTION:

“Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place” (Said 223). Like Edward Said has mentioned, exile or displacement is not just confined to the idea of a physical movement, but it's a profound psychological and emotional disruption. Such individuals or communities find themselves in a liminal space, struggling with confusion about their identity and belonging, caused by the loss of home and the challenge of adapting to a new place. They are always living in the memory of their nativeness while they have to adapt to the new world, which is full of challenges.

The theme of displacement and its impact on one's sense of self is evident in the literature of the diaspora. The displacement could be a consequence of a political fight, a religious persecution or a social uprising. This forces individuals to abandon their cultural roots for an unfamiliar landscape, forcing them to renegotiate their identity. The process of reconstruction of identity involves the participation of memory. The memories of the past are often fragmented, nostalgic and painful as well. It is these memories that play a vital role in understanding the present and seeing it through a different lens. This ultimately helps individuals navigate their sense of belonging and identity.

In *A Bit of Everything* (2020) by Sandeep Raina, we can see the struggle for identity and belonging as the novel captures the experiences as well as the struggles of displacement through the lens of the protagonist, a Kashmiri Pandit, who embarks on his journey after a forced displacement. The novel is set against the backdrop of the Kashmiri Pandit exodus that happened during the late 1980s and early 1990s, where the Kashmiri Pandits were forced to migrate from the Kashmir valley due to an insurgency. This forced migration results in disruption in cultural continuity, homes, social networks,

etc. Through this novel, we understand what it means to be forcefully displaced, how one longs to go back to their homeland and how one tries to understand their sense of belonging when their home gradually ceases to become a memory.

In *On Collective Memory* (1992), Maurice Halbwachs explains that memory is not an individual agency, but rather a collective one that is shaped by social structures. Memory acts as an instrument that upholds cultural identity across time and space in the case of displaced groups or communities. This can be seen in the novel *A Bit of Everything*, where the protagonist's memories connect with the collective memories of his community - food, rituals, familiar places, language, customs that make up the Kashmiri Pandit identity in him. These memories try to fill the vacuum caused by displacement and loss. Pierre Nora's concept of "lieux de mémoire" ("sites of memory") attributes to places or symbols that help people grip onto their memories, when these memories are prone to forgetting. These symbols can be anything: one's home, familiar food, a word, physical locations, natural objects like a tree, or anything that has an emotional connection and can bring a feeling of nostalgia to someone.

To analyse the impact of displacement, this paper has utilised trauma theory, particularly the insights of Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman. Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) says that trauma is an experience that is so hurtful and disturbing that a person reaches a point where he or she cannot fully comprehend what is happening when it happens. At first, it is ignored by the mind, and then it slowly emerges and makes an impact through memories, dreams or even similar incidents that relate to it. In this novel, the trauma is that of exile and forced displacement. The trauma of displacement - forced to leave one's homeland - is an emotional wound that becomes hard to heal because of the memories of the past that resurface time and time again. In this novel, *A Bit of Everything*, the protagonist is reminded of the memories of his homeland. These memories are not something he deliberately or intentionally evoked; they are remembered when something similar and relatable happens in the hostland. When these things bring back memories, they are actually mixing up the past and the present. This shows how trauma confuses time and emotion, leaving the individual feeling confused and disoriented and stuck between two worlds - the longing for homeland and the need for adapting in the hostland.

In *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1992), Judith Herman contributes to this understanding by stating that healing from trauma occurs when the individual revisits the memories and attempts to make sense of what happened. The protagonist of this novel can be seen going through the instances of his life in his homeland, talking to his acquaintances, etc. By doing so, he can be seen piecing together his broken self; he discovers the things he ignored and forgot and even lost. Here, memory acts as something that helps the individual navigate their identity. The interplay of remembering and forgetting represents the instability of identity when one is in exile. However, it is the same memories that help in rediscovering and sustaining the sense of self. Through this novel, Raina portrays the emotional complexities of those who are suspended between worlds and seeking to connect the past and present to understand their identity.

IDENTITY AND THE QUESTION OF BELONGING

Displacement is both physical and emotional or psychological. The novel portrays the protagonist's confusion about his sense of belonging and fractured identity. The protagonist, Rahul Prakash Razdan, experiences displacement that goes beyond the physical plane; it goes into a world of memory and identity. This is due to the trauma of displacement and the loss of his home.

When Rahul landed in Munich, he was welcomed by his cousin Amar Koul's sister-in-law, Claudia. Rahul introduced himself as "Amar Koul's relative from Kashmir." Raina 8 "He did not know why he'd said Kashmir and not India; it just seemed more natural to say that in a foreign country." Raina (8-9) This can be explained with the help of what Edward Said has said about "the unhealable rift forced between the self and a native place". (Said 223) Rahul's spontaneous and unconscious reply to identify himself as Kashmiri instead of Indian shows that the memories of Kashmir stay as the foremost identity marker. The idea of saying "from India" brings a feeling of something official and external, or even related to politics; it is more of a national identity, which is void of his lived experience. However, that is not the case in saying "from Kashmir"; it brings a feeling of emotional, nostalgic and even personal.

Another instance is: "So, you belong to Kashmir?" said Claudia. Did he belong to Kashmir or did Kashmir belong to him? 'I used to,' he said." (Raina

13). This reply, “I used to”, shows his shifting dynamics of belonging while in exile. His home now stays only in his memories. He no longer belongs to Kashmir. “Did he belong to Kashmir or did Kashmir belong to him?” encompasses the idea of diasporic alienation and confusion. His homeland, rather than being a lived space, has become an object of possession and memories. So, for the exiled/displaced people, home becomes just a site of longing; it becomes a place of memory rather than a place of residence. His identity has now become a question due to the displacement that was forced upon him. He is now caught between his past self and his present self. The question “Did he belong to Kashmir or did Kashmir belong to him?” embodies this fracture: the self and homeland. These two entities were once interconnected with one another, but now they have become two and are trying to get a grip on each other across time and space. The protagonist later tells himself, “it had made him wonder if he belonged to Kashmir or if Kashmir belonged to him. Maybe both belonged to each other, or maybe both were each other.” (Raina 21)

Stuart Hall’s conception of diasporic identity as a production that “is never complete, and always in the process of becoming” further informs our understanding. Even Rahul’s utterance, “I used to,” contains an element of the dislocated self-identity. It is a recognition that one, even his identity, changes, just as one’s sense of belonging transforms through the state of being dislocated. He is not the same person who once belonged to “Kashmir”; rather, exile has reflected his understanding of himself.

MEMORY, TRAUMA, AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF SELF

The novel shows how collective memory can both sustain and fracture identity in exile. Rahul’s experiences in London illustrate Maurice Halbwachs’ idea that memory survives through social frameworks and community bonds rather than in isolation. His work with the Hindu Congress Continental Sabha in the beginning is a clear depiction of an organised attempt to reconstruct the identity of the Kashmiri Hindus in exile through building temples, celebrating rituals, and preserving cultural practices. As Halbwachs points out, communities keep alive collective memory through shared traditions, symbols, and spaces, and the temple project of the Sabha is the materialisation of the desire to re-establish a homeland memory-space in another land.

Rahul's friendship with the tea seller, Mo, is a vivid example of what Halbwachs was saying: memory stays and comes back through people, not in isolation. According to Halbwachs, we remember who we are through the stories we share with others. When Rahul meets Mo and speaks Kashmiri again—after years of silence—it is not just a casual conversation. The two men, by the experience of displacement and the desire for what they no longer have, in silence, create a tiny but very strong community of memory. By means of Mo, Rahul not only gets back to the language of his native country but also to the feelings, the loving nature, and the security that were associated with it. So, talking, hearing, and recalling are the ways of recovery now.

Halbwachs also reminds us that memory needs place. It is Mo's humble tea stall that becomes his emotional home in exile. The steam of hot tea on cold days, the comfort of familiar words, and the gentle companionship revive Rahul's sense of self in a foreign land. In this simple, everyday space, memory breathes again. Remembering is not something Rahul decides to do — it just happens to him. His memories come back by themselves, sometimes giving him a feeling of comfort through the connection to his roots, and at other times, they release the pain that was inside him all along. According to Cathy Caruth, the experience of trauma is not felt at the time of the event, but rather when it comes back again through memory. Rahul is very much aware of this. The sudden memories demonstrate how being uprooted makes him insecure, as he is stuck between the person he used to be and the one he is trying to become.

When Rahul lands in Munich, his pain of being uprooted is conveyed through his sensory memory:

“Rahul wanted to sit down on a woollen Kashmiri *namda*, put up his feet on a warm *kangri*, savour some *rogan josh*, lick off sticky Kashmiri rice from his fingers, slurp a steaming brass *khos* of *pik* Kashmiri tea. He wanted the comfort of his home and his food. He wanted to demand less cardamom and more cinnamon in his cup of *kahwa*. He wanted to speak Kashmiri, with its whine and twangs, its *kaikgi*, dry questioning, and its *jahal*, unreasonable arguments. He didn't want to be a nomad on the road. He wanted to talk of war. He wanted to talk like a Kashmiri and to a Kashmiri. He wanted to shout. He didn't want to be a refugee. He just wanted to be heard.” (Raina 24)

Here, the trauma is fused with the past. The list of Kashmiri things—*namda*, *kangri*, *kahwa*—demonstrates how material and linguistic memories become

the new homeland. According to Caruth, trauma is felt through the repetitive way in which loss is experienced and not through its resolution; Rahul's craving for Kashmiri sounds and tastes is at the same time his remembrance and his unhealed trauma. The phrase "He didn't want to be a refugee; he just wanted to be heard" brings to light the silence that exists around the displaced people's voices, and thus, his memory becomes a call for recognition. His desire for the tea, spices, and language of Kashmir acts as a sensory recreation of his home. These cultural specifics work as memory aids that comfort and disturb him. They serve as reminders of his past and his losses.

Pierre Nora says that places of memory appear after a rupture, when lived experience is lost. For Rahul, being exiled makes memory a way to fight against forgetting, but it also brings the pain of trauma. Cathy Caruth says trauma is an event that wasn't processed and comes back later through memories, mixing past and present. Rahul's exile puts him in a situation where he repeats the past while trying to heal. The trauma of being forced to leave home is central to Rahul's thoughts.

This constant presence of the past shows up when Rahul and his family move to Delhi: "All their things were crying softly... They wanted to be back where they belonged, not here in this 'barsati set.'" (Raina 119) The objects, described as having human feelings, become places of memory. They are quiet witnesses to the exile and cry because they miss home. These household items, like bedsheets and photos, hold the emotional impact of Kashmir. They represent the family's broken sense of belonging and how meaning itself is displaced. Judith Herman writes in *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* that healing starts when a survivor goes back to the past and makes it part of a complete story. Through these memories, Rahul starts to rebuild pieces of himself that he lost because of exile, maybe without even realising it.

In the last scene of the novel, Rahul opens the gate and says to a cowherd's son, "Will you be my son?" (Raina 261) This is essentially the end of his deep emotional journey from pain to recovery. Rahul, throughout the book, has been a character whose life was significantly impacted by his refugee condition—a man always on the run, uprooted not only from the world but also from himself. His choice "not to run anymore" is a powerful metaphor for the change he undergoes: it is the very instant where he faces his past, lets go of his old-time grief, and starts to create again a new sense of home. The

gesture of staying, of extending one's hand instead of withdrawing, is the very rebuilding of one's self-identity, as Judith Herman describes the third stage of trauma recovery—reconnection.

Cathy Caruth sees trauma as something emotionally overwhelming and painful that keeps returning in one's experience. Essentially, what the author presents to us is a character with an unhealed wound. This wound, among other things, is Rahul's exile from Kashmir, the death of his wife Doora, and eventually the breakup of his cultural identity. It has been stuck in silence, in between the poles of remembering and forgetting, between the homeland one can no longer come back to and the hostland which never truly welcomes. And so, when he unlocked the door and offered his help to the cowherd's son, Rahul, in a metaphoric sense, he did it anew. However, this time, not to suffer but to change it by empathy and human connection.

Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1992) discusses the idea of three stages of healing: safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection. Rahul's experience reflects the same stages. The first stage is him trying to adapt and get busy in Delhi and London; then, his coming back to Kashmir and confrontation with Firoze and Asha Dhar stirred up remembrance and mourning; and now, his kind act toward the cowherd's son is a sign of reconnection. The acknowledgement of loss, the phrase "You lost your father, I lost my son", is a moment when the divide of exile and belonging comes down, and the shared humanity that is based on pain, love, and reconciliation becomes visible here instead.

Here, this instant also changes the definition of home and identity. Earlier on, Rahul's persona was framed around displacement and nostalgia—his yearning for the Kashmir of memory. Through the act of hugging the cowherd's son, he travels beyond memory to continuity. Belonging for him is no longer a matter of geography but of relationship and recognition. He decides to stay and simultaneously reclaims his power over his traumatic past; rather than being a victim, he opens the possibility of renewal.

As a result of this acceptance and restoration of humanity, Rahul's identity on a personal level shifts from that of a refugee, an identity that is mainly associated with loss, displacement, and silence, to the identity of a survivor, a person who can transform his/her own trauma into understanding and

getting connected again. His statement, “Will you be my son?” is not just an emotionally charged request; it is a statement that healing and belonging to a community are possible through common memory and love.

CONCLUSION

Sandeep Raina's character, Rahul, depicts the exile's sorrow that never seems to end and his struggle to find belonging again in a world that is torn by loss. The story follows Rahul's change of heart—from a man tormented by the memory of his past and the feeling of being out of place to the one who accepts and even reconciles with his history. His wanderings through Munich, Delhi, and finally Varmull are a testament to how the breaking of one's home in the physical sense also shatters the psychological side of one's integrity, but at the same time, it motivates one to look inside oneself for purpose and identity. His desire for the food, language, and the warmth of Kashmir is an indication that memory can serve as a shelter and at the same time be a hurt, because it is always there, reminding one of what was once home.

Rahul's coming back to his garden, which is now looked after by others, reflects the bitterest of all truths—that life goes on without him—that new roots get established even in the earth of exile. Nevertheless, it is through this encounter with memory that Rahul does not find desolation, but rather revival. His act toward the cowherd's son—“Will you be my son?” (Raina 261) signifies this metamorphosis most profoundly, mourning into connection and loss into the origin of new belonging.

By going over and over his past and stitching together his doubts and confusions into a connected narrative, Rahul manages to form a unified identity. Hence, memory becomes a building block through which one can regain a sense of belonging even after being uprooted. *A Bit of Everything*, through the acceptance of the past and the readiness to start afresh, is a telling of the story that the wounds of exile are not necessarily going to be forever bleeding; they can turn into places where one is healed. The identity which had been broken by exile is not gone but rather changed through memory, insight, and the bravery to come to terms with one's own life story.

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Language Provisions for Education in NEP 2020: Challenges and Prospects

Shraddha Singh

ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) emphasizes the importance of language in education and its role in the holistic development of an individual. The policy recognizes the diverse linguistic heritage of India and aims to promote multilingualism and the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in primary education. This paper explores the importance and role of language in the NEP 2020, highlighting its significance in enhancing learning outcomes, promoting inclusivity, and preserving cultural diversity. The paper examines the challenges and opportunities of implementing the language provisions of NEP 2020 and suggests ways to overcome them. The study concludes that the success of the language provisions of NEP 2020 depends on the collective efforts of all stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, parents, and communities, to promote a multilingual and inclusive education system.

Keywords: Multilingualism, NEP 2020, Mother Tongue, Cultural diversity, Education

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) is a comprehensive policy document that outlines the framework for the development of education in India. One of the key aspects of the NEP is the provision for the promotion of multilingualism and the development of proficiency in at least two languages, including the mother tongue or regional language, throughout the education process. The policy also acknowledges the role of English in the global context and aims to promote proficiency in English as well. The policy aims to provide an equitable and inclusive education to all, fosters creativity and critical thinking, and prepare students for the 21st-century challenges.

A preliminary literature review of the NEP 2020 and the role of English reveal several key findings. First, the NEP 2020 emphasizes the importance of promoting multilingualism and the use of the mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction in the early years of schooling. This is in line with research that suggests that using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the early years can lead to better learning outcomes and cognitive development (Baker & Wright, 2017; UNESCO, 2016). Second, the NEP 2020 recognizes the importance of English in the global context and aims to promote proficiency in English as well. This is in line with research that suggests that English proficiency is essential for social mobility and economic opportunities in today's globalized world (Cummins, 2019; Kachru, 2017). Third, the literature suggests that the implementation of the language provisions in the NEP 2020 may face several challenges, including the availability of trained teachers who can teach in the mother tongue or regional language, the development of appropriate teaching materials, and the integration of multilingualism into the curriculum (UNESCO, 2020). Fourth, the literature also highlights the need for a nuanced approach to the role of English in education, which takes into account the sociolinguistic context and the diverse linguistic backgrounds of learners. This includes promoting bilingualism and biliteracy, rather than advocating for monolingualism in English (García & Wei, 2014; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2017).

Some other studies have highlighted the importance of using the mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction in early years of schooling, which aligns with the NEP 2020 provisions (Baker & Wright, 2017; UNESCO, 2016). These studies suggest that using the mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction in the early years can lead to better learning outcomes and cognitive development. For instance, research conducted by UNESCO (2016) found that children who learn in a language that they understand are more likely to achieve better learning outcomes than those who do not.

However, the implementation of the language provisions in the NEP 2020 may face several challenges, including the availability of trained teachers who can teach in the mother tongue or regional language, the development of appropriate teaching materials, and the integration of multilingualism into the curriculum (UNESCO, 2020). These challenges have been highlighted in several studies, which suggest that the lack of trained teachers and appropriate

materials can limit the effectiveness of mother tongue-based education (Baker & Wright, 2017; UNESCO, 2016).

The NEP 2020 also recognizes the importance of English in the global context and aims to promote proficiency in English as well (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020). This aligns with research that suggests that English proficiency is essential for social mobility and economic opportunities in today's globalized world (Cummins, 2019; Kachru, 2017). However, the literature also highlights the need for a nuanced approach to the role of English in education, which takes into account the sociolinguistic context and the diverse linguistic backgrounds of learners (García & Wei, 2014; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2017).

Overall, the literature review suggests that the language provisions in the NEP 2020 are in line with current research on multilingualism and the role of English in education. However, the successful implementation of these provisions will require careful planning and a nuanced understanding of the sociolinguistic context and the diverse linguistic backgrounds of learners.

LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION:

Language is a critical component of education, and its role in learning is well-established. Research has shown that the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the early years of education has several advantages, including enhancing learning outcomes, improving retention, and promoting inclusivity (Benson, 2004). The NEP 2020 recognizes the importance of language in education and aims to promote the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in primary education. The policy states, "Children learn and grasp nontrivial concepts more quickly in their home language/ mother tongue" (p. 24).

Language and education are intimately connected, as language is the primary means of communication and the medium through which knowledge and information are transmitted. The National Education Policy 2020 recognizes the importance of language in education and promotes the use of the mother tongue or local language as a medium of instruction in the early years of schooling.

The use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction has several benefits. First, it can enhance learning outcomes, as children are more likely to engage and participate in the learning process when they are educated

in their mother tongue. Second, it can promote cognitive development, as children develop their language skills more rapidly and effectively in their mother tongue. Third, it can contribute to the preservation and revitalization of endangered languages, promoting linguistic diversity.

The policy also recognizes the importance of learning multiple languages and promotes the teaching of at least two languages in addition to the mother tongue in primary school. By promoting multilingualism, the policy aims to enhance students' language proficiency and communication skills, as well as their ability to engage with different cultures and communities.

However, the implementation of the language provisions of NEP 2020 will require significant investment in teacher training, curriculum development, and learning materials. Policymakers need to ensure that adequate resources are allocated for the implementation of the policy to ensure its success. The language provisions of NEP 2020 also emphasize the importance of providing additional support to students who do not speak the local language or mother tongue. This support can include language classes, bilingual education, and the provision of learning materials in multiple languages. By ensuring that all students have access to education in a language they understand, the policy aims to promote inclusivity and ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to learn and succeed.

Language plays a crucial role in education, and the language provisions of the National Education Policy 2020 recognize the importance of promoting linguistic diversity, multilingualism, and inclusivity in education. By promoting the use of the mother tongue or local language as a medium of instruction and the teaching of multiple languages, the policy aims to enhance learning outcomes, promote cognitive development, preserve endangered languages, and enhance students' communication and cultural awareness. The successful implementation of the policy will require a collaborative effort from all stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, parents, and communities, to promote a language-rich and inclusive education system.

MULTILINGUALISM AND INCLUSIVITY:

India is a linguistically diverse country, with over 19,500 languages spoken (Census of India, 2011). The NEP 2020 recognizes this diversity and aims to promote multilingualism in education. The policy states, "Wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably

till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language” (p. 24). The policy also emphasizes the need to teach at least one Indian language other than the mother tongue in schools. The promotion of multilingualism in education is essential for promoting inclusivity and preserving the cultural diversity of India.

The promotion of multilingualism and inclusivity in education is a critical aspect of the National Education Policy 2020. The policy recognizes the diverse linguistic heritage of India and aims to promote language and cultural diversity by promoting multilingualism and the use of the mother tongue in education.

Multilingualism refers to the ability to communicate in more than one language. In a multilingual country like India, promoting multilingualism in education is essential for fostering inclusivity and promoting linguistic diversity. The use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction can enhance learning outcomes and promote social cohesion, as children are more likely to engage and participate in the learning process when they are educated in their mother tongue. Furthermore, the promotion of multilingualism can help to preserve and revitalize endangered languages, promoting cultural diversity.

Inclusivity refers to the recognition and celebration of diversity and the inclusion of all learners, regardless of their linguistic or cultural background. The language provisions of NEP 2020 aim to promote inclusivity by recognizing the linguistic diversity of India and by ensuring that all students have access to education in their mother tongue or local language. By promoting inclusivity, the policy aims to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to learn and succeed, regardless of their background.

However, the successful implementation of the language provisions of NEP 2020 requires the collaboration of all stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, parents, and communities. Policymakers need to provide adequate funding and resources for the implementation of the language provisions of the policy. Educators need to be trained in the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction and in developing high-quality learning materials in all Indian languages. Parents and communities need to be sensitized to the importance of multilingualism and the use of the mother tongue in education.

In nutshell, the promotion of multilingualism and inclusivity is a critical aspect of the National Education Policy 2020. The policy recognizes the

diverse linguistic heritage of India and aims to promote language and cultural diversity by promoting multilingualism and the use of the mother tongue in education. By promoting inclusivity and linguistic diversity, the policy aims to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to learn and succeed, regardless of their background. The successful implementation of the policy will require a collaborative effort from all stakeholders to promote a multilingual and inclusive education system.

IMPORTANCE OF MOTHER TONGUE

The use of the mother tongue in education can also contribute to the preservation and revitalization of endangered languages. According to UNESCO, approximately 600 languages in India are in danger of disappearing (Benson, 2004). The language provisions of NEP 2020 can help to reverse this trend and promote linguistic diversity in India. Some critics argue that the language provisions of NEP 2020 could lead to the exclusion of certain groups of students who do not speak the local language or mother tongue. To address this concern, the policy emphasizes the importance of providing additional support to students who do not speak the local language or mother tongue. The implementation of the language provisions of NEP 2020 will require significant investment in teacher training, curriculum development, and learning materials. Policymakers need to ensure that adequate resources are allocated for the implementation of the policy to ensure its success. The use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction can also enhance students' self-esteem and motivation. Studies have shown that children who are educated in their mother tongue are more confident, have higher self-esteem, and are more motivated to learn (Benson, 2004). The promotion of multilingualism and the use of the mother tongue in education can also contribute to social cohesion and national unity. By recognizing and valuing the diverse linguistic heritage of India, the policy can help to promote a sense of national identity that is inclusive and respectful of cultural diversity.

Overall, the language provisions of NEP 2020 have the potential to transform the education system in India and promote linguistic diversity, inclusivity, and cultural preservation. However, the successful implementation of the policy will require a collaborative effort from all stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, parents, and communities.

ROLE OF ENGLISH

The role of English in education in India is a subject of ongoing debate and discussion. English is widely recognized as a global language of communication, commerce, and science, and its proficiency is seen as essential for students to succeed in the global economy. The National Education Policy 2020 recognizes the importance of English as a language of communication and seeks to promote its learning and teaching in Indian schools.

The policy emphasizes the need to ensure that all students are proficient in English, in addition to their mother tongue or local language, by the time they complete their secondary education. The policy recognizes that English proficiency is essential for students to succeed in higher education and in the global job market, and it promotes the use of English as a medium of instruction in higher education.

However, the policy also recognizes the importance of preserving and promoting linguistic diversity and the use of the mother tongue or local language as a medium of instruction in the early years of schooling. The policy recommends that children be taught in their mother tongue or local language in the early years of schooling, as research has shown that this can enhance learning outcomes and cognitive development.

The promotion of English in education is not without its challenges, particularly in a country as linguistically diverse as India. English proficiency is often seen as a marker of social status, and the promotion of English as a medium of instruction in schools can exacerbate social inequalities, particularly for students from low-income families. Furthermore, the promotion of English can lead to a neglect of other Indian languages and cultures, further marginalizing communities.

The NEP 2020 recognizes the importance of English in education and seeks to promote its learning and teaching in Indian schools. The policy emphasizes the need to ensure that all students are proficient in English by the time they complete their secondary education, while also promoting the use of the mother tongue or local language as a medium of instruction in the early years of schooling. The promotion of English in education in India must be balanced with the promotion of linguistic diversity and the recognition of the importance of the mother tongue or local language in preserving culture and promoting inclusivity.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

The implementation of the language provisions of NEP 2020 presents several challenges and opportunities. One of the significant challenges is the lack of trained teachers who can teach in the mother tongue. The policy recognizes this challenge and aims to train teachers in the mother tongue. Another challenge is the lack of quality learning materials in the mother tongue. The policy aims to develop high-quality learning materials in all Indian languages. The implementation of the language provisions of NEP 2020 also presents several opportunities, including promoting language and cultural diversity, enhancing learning outcomes, and fostering inclusivity.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India has provisions for language education aimed at promoting multilingualism and providing equal opportunities for all students to learn and excel in their respective languages. The policy recognizes the importance of mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction in the early years of education and suggests its continuation until at least Grade 5. It also advocates for the teaching of a third language, which could be any language of India or a foreign language, starting from Grade 6.

“Children learn and grasp nontrivial concepts more quickly in their home language/mother tongue.” (National Education Policy 2020, p. 24.)

“Wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language.” (National Education Policy 2020, p. 24.)

The provisions of language education in NEP 2020 present both challenges and opportunities. One of the challenges is the implementation of the policy in a diverse country like India where there are over 22 official languages and many more regional languages. Ensuring that all students have access to quality education in their mother tongue or regional language requires significant investment in teacher training and curriculum development. Furthermore, the introduction of a third language may lead to additional workload for students, who may already be grappling with a challenging curriculum.

However, the policy also presents several opportunities. By emphasizing multilingualism, NEP 2020 recognizes the value of language diversity and cultural exchange. It can help students develop a deeper understanding and

appreciation for different cultures and perspectives, which can promote social harmony and national unity. Furthermore, the policy's focus on teaching English as a global language can provide students with a competitive advantage in a globalized world, where English is the primary language of communication in many fields.

The role of English in NEP 2020 is significant. While the policy advocates for the promotion of mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction in the early years of education, it recognizes the importance of English as a language of opportunity and global communication. The policy recommends that English be taught from at least Grade 3, and it suggests the use of innovative methods to make the teaching of English more effective.

In this way, the provisions of language education in NEP 2020 present both challenges and opportunities. The successful implementation of the policy requires a concerted effort by all stakeholders, including the government, educators, and parents. The role of English in the policy is crucial, as it can provide students with the skills and competencies needed to succeed in a globalized world.

The National Education Policy 2020 recognizes the importance and role of language in education and aims to promote multilingualism and the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in primary education. The policy acknowledges the linguistic diversity of India and aims to promote inclusivity and preserve cultural diversity. The implementation of the language provisions of NEP 2020 presents several challenges and opportunities, but the success of the policy depends on the collective efforts of all stakeholders to promote a multilingual and inclusive education system. By promoting multilingualism and the use of the mother tongue in education, the policy can enhance learning outcomes and prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century.

CONCLUSION:

The NEP 2020 recognizes the importance and role of language in education and aims to promote multilingualism and the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in primary education. The language provisions of the policy have significant implications for enhancing learning outcomes, promoting inclusivity, and preserving cultural diversity. The success of the language provisions of NEP 2020 depends on the collective efforts of all

stakeholders to promote a multilingual and inclusive education system. Policymakers need to provide adequate funding and resources for the implementation of the language provisions of the policy. Educators need to be trained in the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction and in developing high-quality learning materials in all Indian languages. Parents and communities need to be sensitized to the importance of multilingualism and the use of the mother tongue in education.

The language provisions of NEP 2020 represent a significant step towards promoting a more inclusive and equitable education system in India. The policy recognizes the diverse linguistic heritage of India and aims to promote language and cultural diversity. By promoting multilingualism and the use of the mother tongue in education, the policy can enhance learning outcomes and prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century.

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The 'Space' of the 'Other' in the Human Geography of Levinas: A Study

Shreya Sarkar

ABSTRACT

Emmanuel Levinas re-imagines philosophy as a movement from ontology to ethics. Rejecting the Western tradition that defines being through knowledge and self-identity, Levinas contends that human existence becomes meaningful only through its exposure to the 'Other.' His works *Totality and Infinity* (1979) and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1991) replace the self-centred subject of metaphysics with one that is endlessly answerable to the call of the 'Other.'

This paper examines how Levinas's notion of alterity and his idea of the face-to-face encounter can be understood as a re-reading of *space* in ethical terms. Space, here, is not geographical distance but the interval of responsibility that arises when one person stands before another. By bringing Levinas into conversation with human geography, this study explores how his ethics of proximity transforms the understanding of dwelling, hospitality, and coexistence. It argues that Levinas's philosophy maps a "human geography" grounded in moral nearness rather than physical measurement — a geography in which every encounter demands care, restraint, and infinite obligation.

Keywords: Alterity, Face-to-Face, Responsibility, Hospitality,
Ethical Space, Human Geography

INTRODUCTION

Western thought has traditionally sought the essence of being through knowledge and comprehension. From Plato's ideal forms to Heidegger's analytic of 'Dasein,' philosophy has pursued the meaning of existence in terms of the *same* — that which can be known and contained within thought.

Emmanuel Levinas overturns this orientation. He writes that “ethics precedes ontology,” because the relation with the ‘Other’ is more primary than the comprehension of being itself (Levinas 48).¹

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas describes philosophy’s error as its desire to totalize — to transform difference into unity. He calls for a radical reversal: before knowledge there is responsibility, and before freedom there is obligation. The encounter with the ‘Other’ does not occur within a neutral backdrop of space; rather, it creates a new ethical topology. He explains, “The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding the idea of the other in me, we here name face” (Levinas 50).² The face is not a physical appearance but a manifestation of vulnerability that commands the self: *Thou shalt not kill*.

This study situates Levinas’s philosophy within the discourse of human geography. If geography analyses spatial relations among people and places, Levinas offers a deeper dimension — an ethics that reshapes the very notion of distance and proximity. The paper proceeds to examine how his critique of totalization, his concepts of exteriority and hospitality, and his vision of infinite responsibility together outline a moral geography of human coexistence. In such a geography, space is no longer measured in miles but in the depth of our response to the ‘Other.’

TOTALIZATION AND THE ‘OTHER’

The dominant movement of Western thought, Levinas observes, is the will to reduce the other to the same — to integrate alterity into a total system of comprehension. Philosophy’s desire for totality is what he calls “the tyranny of the same” (Levinas 43).³ For centuries, knowledge has been guided by the notion that truth means grasping, containing, and mastering. Levinas argues that this act of mastery erases the ethical dimension of human existence. To understand everything is, paradoxically, to ignore the infinite that cannot be contained.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas writes that “the relation with the Other, or conversation, is a non-allergic relation; it is the revelation of a being to

1 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Martinus Nijhoff, 1979) p. 48.

2 Ibid., p. 50.

3 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), p. 43.

another being without the mediation of any concept" (Levinas 51).⁴ This conversation shatters the totality of thought because it acknowledges that the 'Other' cannot be possessed or represented. The 'Other' is not an object within my world; rather, the 'Other' stands outside my categories and yet faces me. As Paul Ricoeur observes in *Oneself as Another*, "the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such a degree that one cannot be thought of without the other."⁵

The notion of **totalization** in Levinas's philosophy may be compared to what in human geography is known as **mapping** — the impulse to measure, chart, and contain. In both cases, the act of "knowing" implies control. To "map" is to set limits; to "totalize" is to deny infinity. Levinas disrupts this logic by insisting that the ethical relation is founded not on comprehension but on responsibility. He writes, "Infinity is produced as revelation in the idea of infinity. It is a desire that cannot be satisfied" (Levinas 27).⁶

Ethically, this means that the 'Other' exceeds the boundaries of my thought. I do not *contain* the 'Other'; rather, the 'Other' *commands* me. This command does not arise from a system of law but from the immediate appeal of the face — a call that resists the closure of totality. Thus, Levinas replaces ontology with ethics, and comprehension with compassion.

In the field of human geography, this has deep implications. If totalization is analogous to spatial domination, then Levinas' thought suggests that true coexistence begins only when space becomes hospitable to difference. An ethical geography would therefore be one that refuses to assimilate or erase otherness — a geography of openness rather than occupation.

THE FACE-TO-FACE ENCOUNTER

Levinas' central idea — the **face** — is neither metaphorical nor merely physical. "The face," he says, "is meaning all by itself" (Levinas 50).⁷ It is not reducible to visual appearance; it is the presence of vulnerability that forbids violence. When the Other's face confronts me, I am immediately responsible. This encounter is asymmetrical — I am responsible before I am free.

4 Ibid., p. 51.

5 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 3.

6 Ibid., p. 27.

7 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 50.

The **face-to-face** relation inaugurates ethics because it opens a space in which I cannot remain indifferent. Levinas writes that “the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation where I am not merely a perceiving subject but a respondent” (Levinas 66).⁸ The ethical command that emanates from the face — *Thou shalt not kill* — is not a moral rule learned later; it is the first expression of human coexistence.

In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas deepens this argument, explaining that subjectivity itself is a form of exposure: “I am in myself through the others” (Levinas 112).⁹ To be a self is to be already answerable. This exposure constitutes a form of ethical proximity — a nearness that is not spatial but moral.

In human terms, this idea transforms how we understand community and belonging. Social space is not built by contracts or laws alone but by the continual encounter of faces. Every social structure — from family to nation — begins in this original face-to-face moment. Geography, then, is not simply the study of land or distance but of **responsibility** — how one being makes room for another.

Levinas’s insistence on proximity undermines the modern obsession with autonomy and possession. He writes that “in the welcoming of the face the will is broken and reason is purified” (Levinas 198).¹⁰ Ethical space begins when possession gives way to hospitality.

RESPONSIBILITY AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF SPACE

Levinas’ philosophy displaces the self from the centre of existence and replaces it with an obligation that begins in the encounter with the ‘Other.’ “The self,” he writes, “is responsible before the Other for all and for all the others” (Levinas, *Otherwise than Being* 117).¹¹ Responsibility is not an optional virtue or a social contract; it is the very structure of subjectivity. Before I speak or act, I am already addressed by the Other’s demand. This primordial call inaugurates what Levinas calls “the one-for-the-other,” an asymmetry that defines ethics as substitution. I stand in the place of the ‘Other’ — I am answerable even for what I have not done.

8 Ibid., p. 66.

9 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), p. 112.

10 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 198.

11 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), p. 117.

In this redefinition, Levinas radically alters the understanding of space itself. Traditional human geography conceives of space as distance, territory, or location. Levinas' thought replaces these physical coordinates with an ethical topography where the primary measure is **proximity** — not in metres, but in moral nearness. The moment of encountering the 'Other' is itself a spatial event; it creates an interval of obligation that neither fuses nor separates completely. Space, in this sense, becomes an **ethical field**, charged with asymmetry and exposure.

Levinas calls this "the space of responsibility," a zone where my freedom is interrupted by the face of another. He remarks, "Responsibility is what is incumbent on me exclusively, and what, humanly, I cannot refuse" (Levinas, *Otherwise than Being* 100).¹² This responsibility is infinite because the 'Other' is infinite; no completion or total response can exhaust it. The "geography" that emerges from this thought is one where distance is not abolished but sanctified. The 'Other' remains other — irreducible, exterior, infinite — yet calls me from that distance into proximity.

Human geography, read through Levinas, thus becomes a study not merely of terrain but of **relation**. The border is no longer a line of separation but a threshold of hospitality; the dwelling is not ownership but openness. Ethics, then, is a spatial practice — a way of inhabiting the world that recognizes every encounter as an event of infinite responsibility.

This interpretation allows us to rethink modern spatial categories like home, nation, and community. Home (*chez soi*), for Levinas, is necessary because it gives the subject the strength to give; but if the home becomes a fortress, it denies the very ethics that make it meaningful. The human dwelling must be permeable to the call of the 'Other.' "The welcoming of the 'Other' is precisely the fact that the home is not an exclusive place" (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 152).¹³

Thus, the ethical relation becomes the foundation of cohabitation. Responsibility builds a geography of approach rather than withdrawal, dialogue rather than domination. In this moral landscape, every step toward the 'Other' is a departure from isolation, and every refusal to respond is a

¹² Ibid., p. 100.

¹³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), p. 152.

form of exile. The ethical subject is, therefore, the true cartographer of human geography — tracing routes of obligation rather than conquest.

EXTERIORITY, SEPARATION, AND HOSPITALITY:

THE ETHICAL ARCHITECTURE OF SPACE

Levinas insists that ethics is possible only because the self and the ‘Other’ are not fused. There must be separation—a distance that allows encounter without absorption. He writes, “The idea of infinity is not a participation in infinity but a relation with it.”¹⁴ This separation is not alienation; rather, it is what safeguards alterity. If the ‘Other’ were simply another version of myself, responsibility would vanish. True ethics requires that the ‘Other’ remain absolutely exterior, beyond my grasp yet still facing me.

This exteriority is the condition for hospitality. Levinas defines hospitality as the act of welcoming the ‘Other’ without converting that ‘Other’ into the same.

Derrida notes that for Levinas, metaphysics itself is “an experience of hospitality.”¹⁵ In his words, “To welcome the ‘Other’ is to put in question my freedom.”¹⁶ Hospitality is therefore an event of self-displacement: to open my dwelling, to let the foreigner enter, is to accept that my world will change. The host does not remain untouched; he becomes responsible.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas introduces the image of the home as the site where interiority and exteriority meet. The home (*la maison*) provides shelter, privacy, and rest—yet its true meaning lies in its door, in its openness to what is beyond. “The home opens to the ‘Other’ who approaches, and this opening is the very structure of subjectivity.”¹⁷ Thus, hospitality is not an occasional virtue but the architecture of the self. Every wall implies a doorway; every dwelling presupposes a welcome.

Through this logic, Levinas transforms the notion of spatial boundaries. In political geography, borders often signify exclusion or defense. For Levinas, the ethical border is porous—it protects without imprisoning, separates

14 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), p. 26.

15 Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 46.

16 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 27.

17 Ibid., p. 157.

without severing. Exteriority becomes not a frontier but a threshold, a liminal space where responsibility begins. As he states, "The dwelling opens on the absolute other who is the Other."¹⁸ The home's openness figures the possibility of peace: not the peace of fusion or sameness but of proximity that sustains difference. Adriaan T. Peperzak explains that Levinas' ethics "begins where ontology ends, in the recognition of the Other as prior to being."¹⁹

This understanding of hospitality reconfigures the moral meaning of dwelling and community. To inhabit the world ethically is to recognize that every private space is haunted by the stranger's approach. The self's first act is not to occupy but to receive. Levinas writes, "The welcoming of the Other is the beginning of moral consciousness."²⁰ Ethical life thus has a geography of its own—a network of thresholds rather than walls. Communities become humane only when they preserve the asymmetry of the host and the guest, where the one who gives also remains answerable to the one who receives.

Human geography, read in this light, is the study of how spaces can sustain such openness. Urban planning, migration policy, and even domestic life acquire a new dimension: each becomes a test of our capacity for hospitality. The ethical question "*How should we live together?*" is inseparable from the geographic question "*How should we share space?*" Levinas teaches that the two are one and the same.

ETHICAL PROXIMITY AND DWELLING

Levinas's idea of ethical proximity presents a new dimension of space. Proximity does not mean physical nearness but the immediacy of moral response. He observes, "To be in proximity to the Other is to be exposed to him, to be responsible for him" (Levinas, *Otherwise than Being* 79).²¹ This exposure is not a mere sentiment of compassion; it is the very foundation of human subjectivity. The self, according to Levinas, is "for-the-Other"—a being that cannot retreat into itself without betraying its humanity. In such proximity, time and space lose their neutrality and become charged with the weight of obligation.

18 Ibid., p. 172.

19 Adriaan T. Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1993), 28.

20 Ibid., p. 173.

21 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), p. 79.

In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas deepens this understanding by describing proximity as asymmetrical. The 'Other' has a priority that the self cannot cancel or equalize. "I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity" (Levinas 114).²² This means that the ethical relation is not an exchange but a substitution. The self stands in the place of the 'Other,' answerable even for what it has not done. Through this asymmetry, Levinas transforms coexistence into co-responsibility, making the human world a network of obligations rather than agreements.

The notion of dwelling (*demeure*) in Levinas's philosophy represents the space where this responsibility takes root. The home shelters me, but only so that I can open it to the stranger. Levinas remarks, "The dwelling signifies a withdrawal into oneself, but it is already hospitality" (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 153).²³ The ethical subject therefore lives in tension between interiority and exteriority—protected enough to give, open enough to receive. The door of the home becomes the first symbol of moral geography: it separates, yet it also connects.

This understanding of dwelling has profound implications for human geography. When architecture or social structures isolate individuals or communities, they produce what Levinas would call a closure of being. Conversely, when spaces invite encounter and participation, they reflect the openness of ethical dwelling. From urban planning to cross-cultural coexistence, the Levinasian home reminds us that peace arises not from walls but from thresholds—spaces that both protect and welcome.

Ultimately, ethical proximity transforms the meaning of habitation itself. To dwell is to respond—to live with an awareness that every home is already shared. In a world fractured by displacement and exclusion, Levinas' idea of dwelling offers a moral blueprint: a space defined not by ownership but by generosity. The geography of ethics, thus, begins at the threshold of the home, where one's private being becomes the world's responsibility.

22 Ibid., p. 114.

23 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), p. 153.

LEVINAS' ETHICS IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERN HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

Levinas' philosophy opens a new field of reflection for contemporary human geography by suggesting that ethical relation precedes all forms of spatial organization. Geography, in modern understanding, often refers to patterns of movement, migration, and settlement. However, when read through Levinas, these patterns acquire a moral dimension. "The proximity of the Other is not a spatial fact but a moral signification" (Levinas, *Otherwise than Being* 83).²⁴ This statement transforms geography from a study of territory into a study of relationship. The ethical nearness between people becomes the true measure of civilization.

In today's world of technological connectivity, Levinas' idea of proximity becomes paradoxical. We are connected globally yet isolated morally. Social media and urban growth create contact without communion. Levinas reminds us that genuine nearness is not digital or physical but ethical—it begins when one life takes responsibility for another. His framework can reshape the way planners, educators, and policymakers view space: not as an object of control, but as an opportunity for encounter.

If geography studies how humans shape and inhabit the earth, Levinas's ethics asks how our habitation can remain humane. He insists, "The earth is already the home of the Other; to live is to dwell with the Other" (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 174).²⁵ In this sense, environmental degradation, displacement, and conflict are not merely ecological or political crises—they are ethical failures. The destruction of land and the denial of refuge both arise from the same forgetfulness of responsibility. To rebuild the planet, Levinas implies, is to restore the sense of the face—the human presence that commands care.

Thus, Levinas redefines the function of geography as a field that connects physical and ethical terrains. Every map becomes a moral text, and every border a site of conscience. His vision urges geographers and philosophers alike to see space as the dwelling of responsibility, where distance is not separation but an invitation to approach.

24 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), p. 83.

25 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), p. 174.

RELEVANCE OF LEVINAS' IDEA OF THE 'OTHER' IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Levinas's thought remains remarkably relevant in today's fractured global landscape. His insistence on responsibility toward the 'Other' challenges the growing culture of indifference. In a time marked by refugees, wars, and social divisions, Levinas offers a language of peace that begins with individual conscience. He writes, "The first word of the face is the obligation which commands: thou shalt not kill" (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 199).²⁶ This command, addressed to every person, re-establishes the sacredness of life that political systems often overlook.

His philosophy speaks directly to issues of identity and diversity. Whereas modern discourse often defines people by difference—race, religion, class—Levinas defines humanity by relation. To see the face of the 'Other' is to recognize that no one exists in isolation. This ethical awakening, if applied to global contexts, could reshape the way nations respond to migration, poverty, and environmental crisis.

In the age of artificial intelligence and digital anonymity, Levinas' warning about "the temptation of totality" becomes prophetic. He reminds us that knowledge and control, when detached from responsibility, can easily turn oppressive. The moral task, therefore, is to reintroduce the face—the human presence—into systems that risk becoming faceless. Education, governance, and technology must all return to the ethical encounter as their foundation.

Levinas' idea of the 'Other' also provides a counterpoint to consumer culture. In societies driven by self-interest and competition, he restores the notion of generosity as the essence of being. To exist is not to possess, but to give; not to dominate, but to respond. The world, Levinas teaches, is not a stage of power but a dwelling of obligation.

Ultimately, Levinas' relevance lies in his refusal to treat ethics as theory. For him, Ethics is life itself—a continuous exposure to others, a readiness to answer even when unprepared. His voice calls us to rebuild our societies as spaces of welcome rather than withdrawal. To recognize the face of the 'Other' is to rediscover what it means to be human.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 199.

HOSPITALITY AND GLOBAL SPACE

Levinas' concept of hospitality extends beyond the boundaries of the home to the moral space of humanity itself. If ethics begins in the face-to-face encounter, it must also extend to the larger frameworks that organize human coexistence. The same moral logic that defines personal responsibility also governs collective and global responsibility. He remarks that "peace is produced as a relationship with the Other; it is a will that comes to the idea of infinity."²⁷ True peace, therefore, cannot be established through treaties or contracts alone; it must be lived as an openness that transcends borders and systems.

In a world shaped by migration, displacement, and exile, Levinas' idea of hospitality becomes increasingly urgent. The refugee and the stranger stand as moral tests for civilization. For Levinas, the arrival of the stranger is not an intrusion but a summons—a demand to rethink the meaning of belonging. He writes, "The welcoming of the stranger... is the very moment of human fraternity."²⁸ Hospitality thus becomes the foundation of justice: an active recognition of difference without the impulse to erase it.

Modern geography often operates on exclusion—the division of land, the fortification of borders, and the construction of territories of privilege. Levinas' ethics reimagines this geography as one of openness. Space is no longer defined by possession or control but by the ability to receive. The face of the 'Other' redraws the map of the world; every encounter becomes a moral event, every distance a measure of responsibility. If political systems operate by limitation, ethical systems—as Levinas envisions them—operate by invitation. A truly ethical world, therefore, would be one where institutions learn to listen before they legislate, where laws begin from compassion rather than fear.

To be hospitable on a planetary scale, Levinas suggests, is not an idealistic fantasy but the minimal requirement of humanity. "Responsibility for the Other, without reciprocity, is precisely the human."²⁹ Human geography, understood through Levinas' lens, becomes the study of how space itself can

27 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), p. 305.

28 Ibid., p. 204.

29 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), p. 114.

host compassion—how societies can be organized around the principle of care rather than conquest.

CONCLUSION: THE MAP OF RESPONSIBILITY

Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy transforms what it means to inhabit the world. By placing ethics before ontology, he shifts the foundation of human geography from possession to participation, from measurement to responsibility. Space, in this sense, is not a neutral dimension but a living texture woven from encounters, gestures, and responsibilities that connect one human being to another. "I am in myself through the others."³⁰ This simple yet profound statement encapsulates the geography of ethics that Levinas envisioned.

The arguments presented throughout this paper—from totalization and alterity to the face-to-face encounter and hospitality—lead to a unified realization: that the self's truest identity is discovered in its exposure to the 'Other.' In Levinas' world, the beginning of ethics is not reflection but response. Each encounter draws a new line on the moral map of existence, a line that measures not distance but duty.

In contemporary contexts, this insight demands a re-imagination of our shared spaces—cities, nations, and even global systems. If every meeting is an ethical event, then architecture, governance, and planning must be reoriented toward human dignity. An ethical city is one that refuses to make anyone invisible; an ethical border is one that breathes; an ethical home is one that knows how to open its door. Levinas' call is not to abolish boundaries but to make them porous—to transform every wall into a threshold.

To think ethically is, ultimately, to draw a new kind of map—a map that replaces conquest with care, and separation with solidarity. Levinas' "space of the Other" becomes the first geography of peace, reminding humanity that before measuring the Earth, we must first learn how to face one another. In that encounter, as Levinas teaches, lies both the origin and the possibility of our shared humanity.

30 Ibid., p. 112.

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Use of Plants in The Traditional Bengali Diet

Rupa Chakraborty

ABSTRACT

Among the various diversified forms of Indian cuisine, plants play a key role in generating authenticity while designing the Bengali platter. The Bengali community has a distinctive practice of choosing and utilizing plant resources as their primary source of nutrition. The group has long-standing, distinctive eating customs for their dietary support. A variety of plants are used as food, both cultivated and wild.

Keywords: India, West Bengal, Bengali community, food, plant resource.

INTRODUCTION

India is one of the oldest civilizations in the world with its unique cultural heritage. Rich diversity and climate shaped the cultural inheritance including the culinary status of India. West Bengal continues to be one of India's most important creative and intellectual hubs among all the states. In addition to that, Bengal is characterized by its unique climate, leading to the growth of a variety of fruits and vegetables. The traditional life of the Bengali community is enriched with deep knowledge and understanding. All these aspects got a direct influence on the culinary culture of Bengal. The rich indigenous knowledge systems lead Bengalis to focus on available plant resources for the purpose of balanced nutrition. Bengali community always design their platter with a total parity of vegetarian and non-vegetarian items. A huge number of traditional vegetarian recipes are there which carefully select and utilize plant resources attracting people from other states as well as from other countries also. A major portion of the traditional Bengali diet is totally green as it comprises different types of plants along with their roots, stems, leaves, fruits, flowers, seeds, gums and even pith extract.

The present paper highlights the culinary uses of plants/plant parts/plant products by the Bengali community of West Bengal. These food plants include mostly the species used for cereals, pulses, vegetables, fruits, spices and condiments.

DISCUSSIONS

West Bengal is considered as a cultural hub of India. It is reflected in its deep-rooted culture and tradition including a green food pattern. The culinary culture of Bengal is influenced by its unique soil and weather patterns. The majority of this state benefits from its alluvial soil, which is continuously replenished with new organic matter during floods, making it highly fertile and ideal for growing a wide variety of rice, pulses as well as vegetables and fruits also.

The traditional Bengali platter contains rice, pulse, and vegetables which are termed as “bhat”, “dal” and “sobji” respectively in Bengali.

The suitable climate along with the wide availability of water helps the Bengal farmers to carry on their age-old traditional rice cultivation practices. West Bengal is the rice bowl of the nation which is a good source of carbohydrates, calcium, iron, thiamine, pantothenic acid, folate and vitamin E (Rathna Priya et al., 2019), and this is considered as a part and parcel of Bengali life. The grain has integrated itself into Bengali culture, rituals and festivals .

After rice, next comes pulse in the daily diet in Bengal . Pulses are a substantial source of protein along with iron, zinc, folate, magnesium and dietary fibers (Langyan et al., 2022). Bengalis prefer to eat different types of pulses on an alternate basis; those are lentils , mung bean , black gram, pea, chickpea, pigeon pea etc. With a characteristic low glycemic index and the presence of high amount of fiber, phytochemicals like saponin, tannin etc. making the pulses highly beneficial for the people suffering from cardiovascular disease, diabetes , cancer (Mudryj and Aukema, 2014). Among various pulses, chickpea (*Cicer arietinum* L.) is particularly popular due to its affordability and year-round availability. It is commonly consumed in different forms, such as pulse, soaked raw seeds, and roasted seeds as snacks. Chickpeas are also rich in amino acids, unsaturated fatty acids, essential sterols, and vitamins (Jukanti et al., 2012).

Bengal is rich in a diverse range of both wild and cultivated fruits and vegetables. Many people in rural areas of Bengal rely on their skills in growing vegetables in home gardens or agricultural fields to support their daily meals. Irrespective of their financial status, Bengalis (Ghosh, et al., 2022) ‘love for vegetable is unique and traditional practices involve the use of different plant parts like root, stem, leaf, flower, bud, fruits in preparing different recipes in different ways for their daily diet. Most of those traditional recipes are cooked in a healthy way using a little bit oil with tempered spices and fresh vegetables. Popular recipes of vegetables involve items like curry, fry, pickle, fritters, stew named as “ghanto”, “vaja”, “chutney”, “vada” and “seddho / vate” respectively.

Nutrient and immune deficiencies affect people globally, often due to poverty and lack of awareness (Paredes-López and Osuna-Castro, 2006). Wild leafy greens play a significant role in addressing these challenges (Flyman and Afolayan, 2006). Rural community still depends on these wild green like water spinach (“Kolmi shaak”), arum (“Kochu shaak”), pigweed (“Note shaak”) and many more to meet their daily diet. (Some and Mukherjee, 2018) These are easily available and considered as weed, but they are full of nutrition. Even the younger generations are making efforts to adhere to a dietary plan that emphasizes the importance of micronutrient-rich leafy greens because of their focus on nutrition and calorie intake. Studies proved that leafy vegetables are full of protein, vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals in addition to other nutrients (Misra and Misra, 2014). Leafy vegetables are full of antioxidants, that reduce the risk of a number of health issues in people (Kumar et al., 2013). Even the Hindu Bengali community has got a ritual to consume “14 shaks” (fourteen different leafy vegetables all together) before Diwali festival (Festival of Light) to boost their immunity power. Fenugreek leaves, commonly consumed in winter, are a rich source of phosphate, iron, calcium, and protein, along with notable amounts of vitamins and minerals (Beaulah et al., 2020). A thorough research has shown that spinach provides high-quality protein that meets FAO standards (Edelman and Colt, 2016). Coriander has got several uses in everyday Bengali diet especially in winter. It is characterized by the presence of Iron, vitamin C, vitamin A, calcium, and phosphorus with a significant impact on health system (Laribi et al., 2015).

Several health disorders like diabetes, stroke, heart disease and cancer are becoming serious health concerns now-a-days. Research shows that

traditional eating habit greatly contributes in lowering the risk of all those chronic illnesses. Vegan diet including fresh vegetables and fruits are becoming popular worldwide as they can delay the age-related health disorders. Vegetables and fruits are rich sources of amino acids, potassium, calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, B vitamins, vitamin C, fibers, polyphenols and sterols (Ahmad et al.,2021; Ghule et al., 2013; Rahman, 2003; Vicente et al., 2014;). Regular vegetables as well as fruit consumption is a must for Bengalis, which fulfils the nutritional balance by providing vitamins , minerals and a number of phytochemicals leading to immense health benefits. Seasonal variation of these fruits and vegetables also helps to explore different colours, flavours, textures throughout the year. It helps not only to overcome the boredom of repeating the same diet but also to combat the stress due to season change. Traditional Bengali cooking also involves the use of oil, spices and condiments in various forms (Table 1). Mustard oil along with spices like cumin, fenugreek, mustard seeds, poppy seeds, cardamom, cinnamon, bay leaf and others are regular ingredients in traditional Bengali food, which contributes to its simplicity and uniqueness.

CONCLUSION

A number of traditional food practice still exists in Bengal which ensure the scientific and sustainable livelihood of the Bengali community. This study has made it clear that Bengalis from West Bengal has a very deep traditional knowledge base when it comes to using phyto-resources in culinary purposes. The community uses a number of species of plants, including angiosperms and pteridophytes , which essentially highlight a large body of information about traditional knowledge of this community on locally accessible phyto-resources and their sustainable uses. Adherence to this nutritious dietary approach there is a reduced risk of developing various chronic diseases. More research must be carried out to compile details about the traditional knowledge of Bengali cuisine connected to plant resources from other Indian states. Proper measures for conservation must be taken to protect the huge phyto-resources utilised by this rich indigenous community. Furthermore, phytochemical and pharmacological investigations need to be carried out in order to validate ethnobotanical and ethnomedical claims in order to identify novel compounds present within the plants / plant parts used as food.

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Table 1. List of plants used in traditional Bengali cuisine in West Bengal

Sl No.	Scientific Name	English Name	Vernacular Name	Family	Economical part / parts	Culinary use
1	<i>Zingiber officinale</i> Roscoe	Ginger	Aada	Zingiberaceae	Modified Stem (rhizome)	Spice
2	<i>Curcuma longa</i> L.	Turmeric	Holud	Zingiberaceae	Modified Stem (rhizome)	Spice
3	<i>Curcuma amada</i> Roxburgh	Mango Ginger	Amada	Zingiberaceae	Modified Stem (rhizome)	Spice
4	<i>Allium cepa</i> L.	Onion	Peyaj	Amaryllidaceae	Modified Stem (bulb), green stem	Vegetable, spice
5	<i>Allium sativum</i> L.	Garlic	Rosun	Amaryllidaceae	Modified Stem (bulb)	Vegetable, spice
6	<i>Anacardium occidentale</i> L.	Cashew nut	Kaju	Anacardiaceae	Seed	Spice and condiment
7	<i>Daucus carota</i> L.	Carrot	Gajor	Apiaceae	Root	Vegetable
8	<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i> Mill.	Fennel	Mouri	Apiaceae	Fruit	Spice
9	<i>Alocasia macrorrhizos</i> (L.) G. Don	Giant Taro	Mankochu	Araceae	Stem, leaf	Vegetable
10	<i>Amorphophallus paeoniifolius</i> (Dennst.) Nicolson	Elephant foot yam	Olkochu / Ol	Araceae	Tuber	Vegetable

11	<i>Alocasia fornicata</i> , (Roxb.) schott	Creeping Alocasia	Sholakochu	Araceae	Stem, stolon, leaf	Vegetable
12	<i>Metroxylon sagu</i> Rottb.	Sago	Sabu/ Sabudana	Araceae	Pith extract	Soaked or boiled grain
13	<i>Basella alba</i> L.	Malabar spinach	Pui	Basellaceae	Stem, leaf, fruit	Vegetable
14	<i>Ananas comosus</i> (L.) Merr.	Pineapple	Anaros	Bromeliaceae	Fruit	Vegetable
15	<i>Dillenia indica</i> L.	Elephant apple	Chalta	Dilleniaceae	Unripe, ripe fruit	Vegetable
16	<i>Myristica fragrans</i> Houtt.	Mace / Nutmeg	Jayitri / Jaiphal	Myristicaceae	Fruit and seed	Spice
17	<i>Papaver somniferum</i> L.	Poppy seeds	Posto	Papaveraceae	Seed	Spice
18	<i>Piper nigrum</i> L.	Black pepper	Golmorich	Piperaceae	Seeds	Spice
19	<i>Amomum subulatum</i> Roxb.	Black cardamom	Baro Elach	Zingiberaceae	fruit	Spice
20	<i>Elettaria cardamomum</i>	Green Cardamom	Choto Elach	Zingiberaceae	Fruit	Spice
21	<i>Hygrophila auriculata</i> (Schumach.) Heine	Swampweeds	Kulekhara	Acanthaceae	Stem, leaf	Vegetable
22	<i>Spinacia oleracea</i> L.	Spinach	Palak	Amaranthaceae	Stem, leaf, flower	Vegetable
23	<i>Amaranthus viridis</i> L.	Amaranth	Note	Amaranthaceae	Stem, leaf	Vegetable
24	<i>Amaranthus cruentus</i> L.	Red amaranth/ Blood amaranth	Lal shak	Amaranthaceae	Stem, leaf	Vegetable
25	<i>Chenopodium album</i> L.	Pigweed	Betho / Bethua	Amaranthaceae	Stem, leaf	Vegetable
26	<i>Amaranthus palmeri</i> S.Wats.	Red-root amaranth	Data	Amaranthaceae	Stem, leaf	Vegetable
27	<i>Beta vulgaris</i> L.	Beetroot	Beet	Amaranthaceae	Root	Vegetable
28	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L.	Mango	Aam	Anacardiaceae	Unripe fruit	Vegetable

29	<i>Spondias mombin</i> L.	Hog plum	Amra	Anacardiaceae	Unripe, ripe fruit	Vegetable
30	<i>Centella asiatica</i> (L.) Urban	Indian Pennywort	Thankuni	Apiaceae	Stem, leaf	Vegetable
31	<i>Coriandrum sativum</i> L.	Coriander / Cilantro	Dhone	Apiaceae	Stem, leaf, seeds	Stem, leaf as vegetable and seeds as spice
32	<i>Ferula assa-foetida</i> L.	Asafoetida	Hing	Apiaceae	Gum, dried latex	Spice
33	<i>Cuminum cyminum</i> L.	Cumin	Jeera	Apiaceae	Seed	Spice
34	<i>Trachyspermum roxburghianum</i> (DC.) Craib	Wild celery	Radhuni	Apiaceae	Seed	Spice
35	<i>Carissa carandas</i> L.	Bengal currant	Karomcha	Apocynaceae	Fruit	Vegetable
36	<i>Colocasia esculenta</i> (L.) Schott	Taro	Kochu	Araceae	Stem, stolon, corm, leaf, root	Vegetable
37	<i>Typhonium trilobatum</i> (L.) Schott	Bengal arum	Kharkol	Araceae	Leaf	Vegetable
38	<i>Phoenix dactylifera</i> L.	Date palm	Khejur	Arecaceae	Fruit, sap	Vegetable
39	<i>Dregea volubilis</i> (L.f.) Benth.ex Hook. f.	Green milkweed climber	Jukti ful	Apocynaceae	Flower	Vegetable
40	<i>Enhydra fluctuans</i> Lour.	Water cress / Buffalo spinach	Helencha/ Hincha	Asteraceae	Stem, leaf	Vegetable
41	<i>Diplazium esculentum</i> (Retz.) Sw.	Vegetable fern	Dheki	Athyriaceae	Stem, leaf	Vegetable
42	<i>Raphanus sativus</i> L.	Radish	Mulo	Brassicaceae	Stem, leaf, root	Vegetable

Use of Plants in The Traditional Bengali Diet

43	<i>Brassica oleracea</i> var. <i>capitata</i>	Cabbage	Badhakopi	Brassicaceae	Bud	Vegetable
44	<i>Brassica oleracea</i> var. <i>gongylodes</i>	Kohlrabi	Olkopi	Brassicaceae	Modified Stem (bulb); leaf	Vegetable
45	<i>Brassica rapa</i> L.	Turnip	Shalgom	Brassicaceae	Root	Vegetable
46	<i>Carica papaya</i> L.	Papaya	Pepe	Caricaceae	Unripe fruit	Vegetable
47	<i>Ipomoea aquatica</i> Forssk.	Water spinach	Kolmi	Convolvulaceae	Stem, leaf	Vegetable
48	<i>Ipomoea batatas</i> (L.) Lam.	Sweet potato	Misti alu	Convolvulaceae	Root	Vegetable
49	<i>Trichosanthes dioica</i> Roxb.	Pointed-gourd	Patol	Cucurbitaceae	Leaf, fruit	Vegetable
50	<i>Momordica charantia</i> L.	Bitter gourd	Uchhe	Cucurbitaceae	Fruit	Vegetable
51	<i>Luffa acutangula</i> (L.) Roxb.	Ridged gourd	Jhinge	Cucurbitaceae	Fruit	Vegetable
52	<i>Lagenaria siceraria</i> (Molina) Standl.	Bottle gourd	Laau	Cucurbitaceae	Stem, leaf, fruit	Vegetable
53	<i>Cucurbita maxima</i> Duchesne	Pumpkin	Kumro	Cucurbitaceae	Stem, leaf, fruit, flower, seeds	Stem, leaf, fruit, flower as vegetable and seeds as spice.
54	<i>Benincasa hispida</i> (Thunb.) Cogn.	Ashgourd	Chalkumro	Cucurbitaceae	Stem, leaf, fruit	Vegetable
55	<i>Rhaphispermum nigrum</i> (L.) Al-Shehbaz	Black mustard	Sorshe	Brassicaceae	Stem, leaf	Stem, leaf as vegetable, seed as spice, seed extract as cooking oil

56	<i>Coccinia grandis</i> (L.) Voigt	Ivy gourd	Kudri / Telakucha	Cucurbitaceae	Fruit	Vegetable
57	<i>Trichosanthes cucumerina</i> L.	Snake gourd	Chichinga	Cucurbitaceae	Fruit	Vegetable
58	<i>Momordica dioica</i> Roxb. ex Willd.	Spiny gourd	Kakrol	Cucurbitaceae	Fruit	Vegetable
59	<i>Luffa aegyptiaca</i> Mill.	Sponge gourd	Dhundhul	Cucurbitaceae	Fruit	Vegetable
60	<i>Brassica oleracea</i> var. <i>botrytis</i>	Cauliflower	Fulkopi	Brassicaceae	Inflorescence, leaf	Vegetable
61	<i>Cucumis sativus</i> L.	Cucumber	Shosa	Cucurbitaceae	Fruit, seeds	Fruit as vegetable and seeds as spice
62	<i>Lens culinaris</i> Medik.	Lentil	Musur	Fabaceae	Seed	Pulse
63	<i>Vigna radiata</i> (L.) R. Wilczek	Mung Bean	Mug	Fabaceae	Seed	Pulse
64	<i>Vigna mungo</i> (L.) Hepper	Black gram / Urad	Kolai / Mashkolai / Biuli	Fabaceae	Seed	Pulse
65	<i>Cajanus cajan</i> (L.) Millsp.	Pigeon pea	Arhar	Fabaceae	Seed	Pulse
66	<i>Pisum sativum</i> L.	Peas	Mator	Fabaceae	Stem , leaf and seeds	Stem, leaf as vegetable and seed as pulse
67	<i>Cicer arietinum</i> L.	Chickpea	Chhola	Fabaceae	Stem , leaf and seeds	Stem, leaf as vegetable and seed as pulse

Use of Plants in The Traditional Bengali Diet

68	<i>Glycine max</i> (L.) Merr.	Soya bean	Soya bean	Fabaceae	Seed	Pulse
69	<i>Phaseolus vulgaris</i> L.	Cowpea	Bean	Fabaceae	Fruit	Vegetable
70	<i>Dolichos lablab</i> L.	Hyacinth bean	Shim	Fabaceae	Fruit	Vegetable
71	<i>Vigna unguiculata</i> (L.) Walp.	Longbean	Barboti	Fabaceae	Fruit	Vegetable
72	<i>Trigonella foenum-graecum</i> L.	Fenugreek	Methi	Fabaceae	Stem, leaf	Vegetable
73	<i>Sesbania grandiflora</i> (L.) Poiret	Vegetable hummingbird	Bokful	Fabaceae	Flower	Vegetable
74	<i>Tamarindus indica</i> L. 1753	Tamarind	Tetul	Fabaceae	Unripe, ripe fruit	Vegetable
75	<i>Trigonella foenum-graecum</i> L.	Fenugreek	Methi	Fabaceae	Seed	Spice
76	<i>Arachis hypogaea</i> L.	Peanut / Groundnut	Badam	Fabaceae	Seed	Roasted seeds as nuts, seed extract as oil for cooking medium
77	<i>Mentha spicata</i> L.	Mint	Pudina	Lamiaceae	Leaf	Vegetable
78	<i>Laurus nobilis</i> L.	Bayleaf	Tej pata	Lauraceae	Leaf	Spice
79	<i>Cinnamomum verum</i> J.Presl	Cinnamon	Darchini / Daruchini	Lauraceae	Bark	Spice
80	<i>Abelmoschus esculentus</i> (L.) Moench	Lady's finger	Dheros	Malvaceae	Fruit	Vegetable

81	<i>Corchorus capsularis</i> L.	White jute	Mithapat	Malvaceae	Stem, leaf	Vegetable
82	<i>Corchorus olitorius</i> L.	Nalta jute	Titapat	Malvaceae	Stem, leaf	Vegetable
83	<i>Marsilea quadrifolia</i> L.	Waterclover	Susni	Marsileaceae	Stem, leaf	Vegetable
84	<i>Azadirachta indica</i> A.Juss., 1830	Margosa / Indian Lilac	Neem	Meliaceae	Leaf	Vegetable
85	<i>Glinus oppositifolius</i> L.	Bitter Cumin	Ghima	Molluginaceae	Stem, leaf	Vegetable
86	<i>Ficus racemosa</i> L.	Indian fig	Dumur	Moraceae	Flower	Vegetable
87	<i>Artocarpus heterophyllus</i> Lam.	Jackfruit	Kanthal	Moraceae	Unripe fruit, seed of ripe fruit	Vegetable
88	<i>Moringa oleifera</i> Lam.	Drumstick	Sojne	Moringaceae	Leaf, flower, fruit	Vegetable
89	<i>Musa x paradisiaca</i> L.	Banana	Kola	Musaceae	Stem, inflorescence, unripe and ripe fruit	Vegetable
90	<i>Syzygium aromaticum</i> (L.) Merr. & L.M.Perry	Clove	Labongo	Myrtaceae	Flower bud	Spice
91	<i>Nymphaea alba</i> L.	Water lily	Shapla	Nymphaeaceae	Stem	Vegetable
92	<i>Nymphaea nouchali</i>	Water lily	Shapla	Nymphaeaceae	Stem	Vegetable
93	<i>Nelumbo nucifera</i> Gaertn.	Lotus	Padmokando	Nelumbonaceae	Underground stems	Vegetable
94	<i>Nyctanthes arbor-tristis</i> L.	Night-flowering Jasmine	Shiuli	Oleaceae	Leaf	Vegetable
95	<i>Cocos nucifera</i> L.	Coconut	Narkel	Areaceae	Fruit	Vegetable
96	<i>Sesamum radiatum</i> Schumach. and Thonn.	Black Sesame	Til / Kalotil	Pedaliaceae	Seeds	Spice
97	<i>Sesamum indicum</i> L.	White Sesame	Sadatil	Pedaliaceae	Seeds, Seed extract	Spice & oil

Use of Plants in The Traditional Bengali Diet

98	<i>Phyllanthus emblica</i> L.	Indian gooseberry	Amlaki	Phyllanthaceae	Unripe , ripe fruit	Vegetable
99	<i>Bacopa monnieri</i> (L.) Pennell	Water hyssop / Herb of grace	Brahmi	Plantaginaceae	Stem , leaf	Vegetable
100	<i>Oryza sativa</i> L.	Paddy	Dhan	Poaceae	Seed, bran	Seed as cereal, bran oil as cooking medium
101	<i>Triticum aestivum</i> L. ; <i>Triticum durum</i> Desf.	Wheat	Gom	Poaceae	Seed	Cereal
102	<i>Nigella sativa</i> L.	Black cumin	Kalojira	Ranunculaceae	Seed	Spice
103	<i>Ziziphus mauritiana</i> Lam.	Indian jujube	Kul	Rhamnaceae	Fruit	Vegetable
104	<i>Citrus x aurantiifolia</i> (Christm.) Swingle	Key Lime	Lebu	Rutaceae	Fruit	Vegetable
105	<i>Solanum tuberosum</i> L.	Potato	Aalu	Solanaceae	Modified Stem (tuber)	Vegetable
106	<i>Solanum melongena</i> L.	Brinjal / Eggplant / Aubergine	Begun	Solanaceae	Fruit	Vegetable
107	<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i> L.	Tomato	Tometo	Solanaceae	Fruit	Vegetable
108	<i>Capsicum annum</i> L.	Bell pepper	Capsicum	Solanaceae	Fruit	Vegetable
109	<i>Capsicum frutescens</i> L.	Chilly	Lonka	Solanaceae	Fruit	Vegetable
110	<i>Vitis vinifera</i> L.	Raisin	Kismis	Vitaceae	Dried fruit	Spice and condiment

Mathematical Thinking and Its Cognitive and Affective Correlates: A Partial Correlation Study

Lalita Betgar & Russell D'Souza

ABSTRACT

The study has adopted a correlational design with a sample of 80 Class VIII students from a secondary school in Goa, India. Mathematical thinking was assessed using a researcher constructed test aligned with three core processes namely, mathematical communication, reasoning, and problem solving. Standardised scales were used to measure attitude towards mathematics, motivation, and general intelligence. Zero-order correlations were computed between mathematical thinking and each variable under consideration followed by partial correlations to examine association of these variables under statistical control.

The findings indicated a modest but statistically significant positive association between mathematical thinking and students' attitudes towards mathematics, even after controlling for motivation and general intelligence. No statistically meaningful associations were found between, mathematical thinking and motivation nor between mathematical thinking and general intelligence despite accounting for relevant affective and cognitive variables. These results suggest that mathematical thinking is more closely connected to students' attitudinal dispositions than to their motivational levels or general intellectual ability.

Keywords: Mathematical thinking; attitude towards mathematics; motivation, general intelligence; zero-order correlation; partial correlation.

INTRODUCTION

Mathematical thinking is recognised as a central goal of mathematics education both internationally and well as within the Indian context. Recent research, policies and reform initiatives suggest that meaningful mathematics learning involves more than procedural accuracy. Students are expected to reason, justify solutions, communicate ideas, and engage with unfamiliar and situation-based problems and trivia in flexible ways (Kilpatrick, Swafford, & Findell, 2001; Schoenfeld, 2014; Lithner, 2017). Mathematical thinking is therefore viewed as higher order processes that are essential for deep and wide engagement with mathematical ideas and their application across contexts.

In India, the National Education Policy, 2020, echoes for a shift from rote-based instruction towards modern pedagogical approaches that increasingly support and promote conceptual understanding, reasoning, and problem solving. These priorities emphasised in NEP, 2020, align closely with international developments in mathematics learning and foreground mathematical thinking as a key educational outcome.

Despite this shared emphasis, the psychological correlates of mathematical thinking remain insufficiently explored and understood. Earlier studies have examined the relationship of mathematical thinking with affective variables such as, attitude and motivation, as well as cognitive variables such as general intelligence (Marchis, 2013; Berger & Karabenick, 2011; Primi et al., 2010). However, these variables are found to be interrelated, but, the existing evidence is based on zero-order correlations, which do not account for overlapping influences of other affective or cognitive variables. As a result, the unique association of each variable with mathematical thinking appears unclear.

The present study attempts to explore the observed limitation by examining the relationships between mathematical thinking and selected cognitive and affective correlates namely, attitude towards mathematics, motivation, and general intelligence by first determining the zero-order correlations followed by a partial correlation analysis. By statistically controlling for overlapping influences, the study aims to explore the unique psychological associations of mathematical thinking in relation to motivation, attitude and general intelligence of middle school students, in line with current educational reforms in India.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mathematical Thinking

Mathematical thinking is a domain-specific cognition that is built around reasoning, problem solving, representation, and mathematical communication. It involves making strategic choices, reflecting on solutions, and justifying mathematical ideas (Schoenfeld, 1985, 2014; Stylianides & Stylianides, 2014). Research insights that mathematical thinking develops most efficiently and effectively when students engage with cognitively demanding tasks that require creative and non-routine reasoning (Lithner, 2017).

In terms of assessment, mathematical thinking is widely assessed through graded performance-based tasks that determine the extent to which students can reason and communicate their comprehension. Such assessments align with mathematical thinking processes and content rather than on modelling latent traits, particularly when the focus is on student's demonstrated competence rather than underlying dispositions (Kilpatrick et al., 2011).

Mathematical Thinking and Attitude towards Mathematics

Attitude towards mathematics is an affective construct that is closely associated with student's willingness to engage, persist, and participate in mathematical tasks and other real-world applications (McLeod, 1992; Hannula, 2002; Middleton & Spanias, 1999;). Research further reflects association between mathematical thinking and attitude towards mathematics, suggesting that, students who engage in reasoning and problem solving tend to develop more favourable tendencies towards mathematics (Marchis, 2013; Zan et al., 2012). Strikingly, these relationships are seen as moderate in strength and vary across educational settings (Ma & Xu, 2014).

Recent reviews show that attitude towards mathematics is often examined vis-a-vis motivational and cognitive constructs relying on zero-order correlations which could potentially mask the distinct contributions of attitude relative to related variables such as motivation and cognitive ability (Aquilina et al., 2024; Supriadi et al., 2024; Yip et al., 2025)

Mathematical Thinking and Motivation

Motivation as understood through expectancy-value models, emphasise student's beliefs about their likelihood of success and the value they attach to tasks (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Research

adopting this perspective indicates that, motivation is strongly influenced by perceived usefulness, enjoyment, and classroom experiences, rather than by cognitive competence alone (Berger & Karabenick, 2011; Schukajlow, Rakoczy, & Pekrun, 2017).

Research evidences on the relationship between mathematical thinking and motivation lack consistency. Studies have reported weak or non-significant associations, indicating that students may demonstrate strong mathematical thinking without corresponding levels of motivational engagement (Middleton & Spanias, 2019). Research on mathematics identity further draws importance to recognition, belonging, and social positioning in shaping motivation, often independently of student's cognitive proficiency (Boaler & Selling, 2017; Martin, Gholson, & Leonard, 2010; Heyd-Metzuyanim, 2013).

Mathematical Thinking and General Intelligence

General intelligence is traditionally viewed as a significant predictor to academic performance. However, research distinguishes general cognitive ability and domain-specific mathematical processes. Studies examining the link between intelligence and higher-order mathematical thinking have reported weak or inconsistent associations, particularly when affective variables are taken into account (Primi et al., 2010; Schneider & Stern, 2010).

Research shows that mathematical thinking does not simply emerge from general intelligence but is shaped by instructional experiences and sustained engagement with mathematical practices (Bicer, 2021; Cresswell, 2020; Jonnson, 2020). Sternberg (2012) emphasises the role of educational contexts in transforming cognitive potential of students into higher order forms of thinking and doing, thereby emphasising the need of examining general intelligence within a broader affective and instructional framework.

Research Gap

Literature indicates that, relationships between mathematical thinking and attitude, motivation, and general intelligence are not only complex, but also inconsistent. A prominent methodological concern is the over reliance on zero-order correlations that fails to account for the interdependence of cognitive and affective variables. There remains limited research employing partial correlation to examine the distinct associations of mathematical thinking, particularly within the Indian school context (Ramanujam, 2016).

The present study responds to this gap by systematically analysing the relationships between mathematical thinking and its cognitive and affective correlates under statistical control. In doing so, it seeks to contribute a more nuanced understanding of the psychological dimensions associated with mathematical thinking, in alignment with the priorities outlined in NEP 2020.

CONCEPTUALISATION OF MATHEMATICAL THINKING

In the present study, the authors integrate three closely related processes: mathematical communication, mathematical problem solving, and mathematical reasoning as components of mathematical thinking. This conceptualisation is very much seen in Indian curricular and policy documents and is positioned suitably within global understanding of mathematical thinking as reflected in table 1.

Table 1 consolidates the key components of mathematical thinking outlined in select curricula and policy frameworks across the world. This illustrates their shared emphasis on problem solving, reasoning, communication, and representation, alongside contextual and metacognitive dimensions.

Table 1: Cross – National Synthesis of Mathematical Thinking Frameworks

✓ - explicit emphasis ⊙ - implicit emphasis

Components of Mathematical Thinking	USA	UK	Canada	Australia	Netherlands	Japan	Singapore	India
Problem Solving	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reasoning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Communication	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Representation & Modelling	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Connections	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Metacognition	⊙	⊙	✓	⊙	⊙	⊙	✓	⊙
Context-based Sense Making	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	✓	⊙	✓	✓

As shown in table 1, in the United States, mathematical thinking is understood through student's engagement in reasoning, problem solving, and reasoned mathematical discussions. The Australian curriculum similarly highlights problem solving, reasoning, and understanding as pivotal competencies in school mathematics that shape and sharpen critical mathematical thinking. In Japan, mathematics instruction is organised around structured problem solving and collective reasoning supported by a varied classroom discussion.

A similar emphasis is seen in other education systems as well. In Singapore, mathematical reasoning and communication are taught and learned along with problem solving as the main focus, rather than as isolated skills., while in the Netherlands, Realistic Mathematics Education emphasises situational problem solving, reasoning, and the gradual refinement of mathematical ideas. Across these contexts, mathematics learning is steadily and gradually directed towards sense-making rather than following memorised steps.

In India, the NCERT conceptualises mathematics as a subject that nurtures logical reasoning, problem-solving ability, and the clear communication of ideas through appropriate mathematical language and representations. Similarly, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) emphasises on reasoning, problem solving, and mathematical communication across school stages as significant curricular expectations. These educational priorities are further fortified in the National Education Policy 2020, which calls for a shift from rote procedures towards deeper conceptual understanding, critical thinking, and student's ability to articulate mathematical ideas.

Despite differences in terminology and pedagogies, there is a global agreement that mathematical thinking is best understood as a set of interrelated processes involving communication, reasoning, and problem solving. Situated within this global understanding, and in consistency with the Indian curricular and pedagogical goals, the present study defines mathematical thinking as the ways by which student's reason, make sense of ideas, solve problems, and communicate mathematically, rather than simply applying memorised procedures.

Mathematical thinking is also contrasted with general problem-solving ability and mathematical competence due to its emphasis on reasoning, communication, representation, and, engagement with non-routine tasks and contexts, rather than on procedural fluency or task-specific performances

Schoenfeld, 1985, 2014; Kilpatrick, Swafford, & Findell, 2001; Stylianides & Stylianides, 2014; Lithner, 2017). It concerns with how learners manipulate mathematical ideas, justify their thinking, and apply concepts with fluidity and flexibly across situations.

ALIGNMENT OF CONCEPTUALISATION WITH THE MATHEMATICAL THINKING TEST

The test operationalises mathematical thinking through three core processes: mathematical communication, mathematical reasoning, and mathematical problem solving.

The mathematical thinking test consisted of 10 open-ended questions, each carrying 3 marks and 32 multiple-choice questions, each carrying one mark. A maximum score of 62 could be achieved by a test-taker. The 10 items measuring mathematical communication were designed to capture student's ability to express mathematical ideas clearly through appropriate symbols, representations, explanations, and justifications wherever required. These items made students to articulate their thinking, interpret representations, and communicate solutions rather than merely providing final answers. Mathematical reasoning was assessed through tasks that required logical justification, identification of patterns, evaluation of arguments, and explanation as to why a solution or method was valid. Mathematical problem solving was operationalised through non-routine and context-based problems that needed strategic thinking, flexibility, and reflection, rather than the application of memorised procedures.

Together, these three core processes ensured that the test measured mathematical thinking as an active, process-based construct rather than a procedure or task-based performance.

RATIONALE

Mathematical thinking is widely regarded as a key outcome of meaningful mathematics learning (Schoenfeld, 2014; Lithner, 2017). Research suggests that the development of such thinking depends greatly on the nature of classroom instruction and the opportunities students have to engage with mathematical ideas, rather than arising automatically from general cognitive ability alone (Boaler & Selling, 2017; Stylianides & Stylianides, 2014). At the same time, affective factors such as student's attitudes and motivation play

an important role in shaping their engagement with mathematics, although research findings on how these factors relate specifically to mathematical thinking are not consistent (Zan et al., 2012; Marchis, 2013; Middleton & Spanias, 2019). Studies examining the role of general intelligence further indicate that its direct link with higher-order mathematical processes tends to be limited once instructional and affective influences are taken into account (Primi et al., 2010; Sternberg, 2012).

A recurring limitation in this body of research is the frequent use of zero-order correlations, which do not adequately capture the overlapping influences of cognitive and affective variables. By using partial correlation analysis, the present study responds to this limitation and seeks to provide clearer insight into the unique psychological correlates of mathematical thinking, with implications for both classroom practice.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the relationship between mathematical thinking and student's attitude, after controlling for general intelligence and motivation.
2. To examine the association between mathematical thinking and motivation, controlling for general intelligence and attitude.
3. To examine the association between mathematical thinking and general intelligence, controlling for motivation and attitude.

HYPOTHESES

- H₁: Mathematical thinking is positively associated with student's attitude towards mathematics after controlling for general intelligence and motivation.
- H₂: Mathematical thinking is positively associated with student's motivation in mathematics after controlling for general intelligence and attitude.
- H₃: Mathematical thinking is positively associated with general intelligence after controlling for student's attitude towards mathematics and motivation.

Table 2 summarises the research objectives, hypotheses, statistical analyses and outcome type.

Table 2: Summary of Research Objectives, Hypotheses, and Statistical Analyses

Sr. No	Objective	Corresponding Hypothesis	Statistical Analysis
1	To examine the relationship between mathematical thinking and student's attitude, after controlling for general intelligence and motivation.	H1 There is a significant positive relationship between mathematical thinking and attitude, after controlling for intelligence and motivation.	Zero-order Correlation Partial correlation (Pearson), controlling for general intelligence and motivation.
2	To examine the association between mathematical thinking and motivation, controlling for general intelligence and attitude.	H2 There is a significant positive relationship between mathematical thinking and motivation, after controlling for intelligence and attitude.	Zero-order Correlation Partial correlation (Pearson), controlling for general intelligence and attitude.
3	To examine the association between mathematical thinking and general intelligence, controlling for motivation and attitude.	H3 There is a significant positive relationship between mathematical thinking and general intelligence, after controlling for attitude and motivation.	Zero-order Correlation Partial correlation (Pearson), controlling for attitude and motivation.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a correlational research design with statistical control. The sample comprised 80 Class VIII students from a secondary school. Mathematical thinking served as the focal variable, with attitude and motivation as affective correlates and general intelligence as the cognitive correlate.

A Mathematical Thinking Test was developed and standardised by the authors following a systematic procedure, including construct definition, expert validation, pilot testing (N = 500), item analysis, and reliability estimation (KR-20 = .90; internal consistency = .89). The test assessed

communication, reasoning, and problem solving through a combination of open-ended and multiple-choice items.

The Attitude Towards Mathematics Scale by Yasar et al. (2014) was employed as it provides a validated measure of students' general affective disposition towards mathematics, a construct emphasised in India's NEP 2020, that focuses on learner engagement and positive dispositions. Although contemporary research conceptualises attitude as intertwined with motivation and cognition (Hannula et al., 2023; Aquilina et al., 2024), the scale remains appropriate when complemented with multivariate analyses that statistically control related variables, consistent with current Q1/Q2 methodological recommendations. Mathematics Motivation scale by Berger & Karabenick (2011) was employed to measure multiple motivational dimensions like interest, utility, Importance, self-efficacy etc. Mixed Type Group Test of Intelligence developed by Dr. P. N. Mehrotra (2008) was used to measure general intelligence of students as it includes variety of verbal and non-verbal items on analogy, number series, classification, vocabulary, reasoning etc.

To examine the relationship between mathematical thinking and its cognitive and affective correlates, partial correlation analysis was employed. This technique facilitated the examination of associations between variables while statistically controlling for the influence of relevant cognitive and affective factors, including intelligence, motivation, and pre-existing levels of mathematical thinking and attitude, wherever applicable. In addition, the zero-order correlation was conducted to describe the relationships among variables in the absence of statistical control, thereby providing a baseline for comparison with the partial correlation results.

Prior to conducting the partial correlation analysis, the assumptions of normality, linearity, outliers, multicollinearity among control variables, and independence of observations were examined. Since all the variables yielded continuous scale data, the relationships were found to be linear, and the distributions near- normal. No outliers nor multicollinearity was detected. Thus, the data were deemed suitable for partial correlation analysis. In addition, the zero-order correlation was determined for each relationship

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS (HYPOTHESES $H_1 - H_3$)

The present study examined the associations between mathematical thinking and selected cognitive and affective variables under statistical control, with

the aim of clarifying the psychological correlates of mathematical thinking among middle school students. The complete analysis is presented in table 2.

Table 3: Zero-Order and Partial Correlations Between Mathematical Thinking and Its Correlates (Controlling for Motivation, General Intelligence and Attitude)

Objectives	Hypotheses	Zero-order Correlation	p value	partial r	p value	N
1	H₁ : Mathematical Thinking and Attitude (controlling for Motivation and General Intelligence)	0.241	0.032	0.269	0.017	80
2	H₂ : Mathematical Thinking and Motivation (controlling for Attitude and General Intelligence)	0.083	0.467	0.186	0.102	80
3	H₃ : Mathematical Thinking and General Intelligence (controlling for Motivation and Attitude)	0.175	0.120	0.137	0.231	80

HYPOTHESIS H₁: MATHEMATICAL THINKING AND ATTITUDE

Test and Results

At the preliminary level, mathematical thinking showed a positive and statistically meaningful association with students' attitudes towards mathematics ($r = .241$, $p = .032$), though the strength of this relationship was modest. When the effects of motivation and general intelligence were controlled, the association not only persisted but showed a slight increase in

magnitude (partial $r = .269$, $p = .017$, 95% CI [.05, .46]). Using commonly accepted interpretive guidelines, these coefficients fall within the small to lower-moderate range, together explaining roughly six to seven per cent of the variance.

The increase in the value of the correlation coefficient following statistical control suggests that, motivation and general intelligence shared variance with both variables and, in doing so, masked part of their direct association. Once these influences were adjusted for, the specific link between mathematical thinking and attitudinal disposition towards mathematics emerged more clearly, even though the overall strength of the relationship remained limited.

Conclusion

Taken together, the findings indicate that mathematical thinking is related to students' attitudes towards mathematics in a manner that is not solely dependent on their motivation or general intellectual ability. While the effect observed is small in size, it points to a distinct attitudinal connection that operates alongside broader cognitive and motivational influences. On this basis, the hypothesis predicting a positive association between mathematical thinking and attitude, after controlling for relevant covariates, received empirical support.

Consistent with the emphasis of the National Education Policy 2020, mathematics instruction should actively engage students in reasoning, communication, and non-routine problem solving to foster positive attitudes towards the subject. Accordingly, teacher preparation and professional development programmes should prioritise pedagogies that integrate mathematical thinking into regular classroom practice.

HYPOTHESIS H₂: MATHEMATICAL THINKING AND MOTIVATION

Test and Result

The zero-order correlation between mathematical thinking and motivation was found to be positive but not statistically significant ($r = .083$, $p = .467$), indicating a very weak association between the two variables. Further, when the effects of attitude and general intelligence were controlled through a partial correlation analysis, the relationship remained non-significant (partial $r = .186$, $p = .102$, 95% CI [-.04, .39]). The results that emerged indicated

that mathematical thinking and motivation do not exhibit a statistically meaningful association even when the influence of affective and cognitive variables were controlled.

The absence of a statistically significant association between mathematical thinking and motivation becomes clearer when motivation is seen to be influenced by more than a cognitive ability. The *Expectancy-Value Theory*, suggests that learners' engagement is shaped largely by how confident they feel about succeeding and by the personal value they assign to activities, rather than by their reasoning skills alone. Scholars such as Wigfield & Eccles (2000) and Eccles & Wigfield (2002) have shown that feelings of usefulness, enjoyment, and social affirmation play a central role in sustaining motivation, even when cognitive performance is held constant. From an affective standpoint, motivation tends to fluctuate with classroom experiences, emotional responses, and contextual cues. Mathematics identity research suggests that mathematical thinking develops more gradually through structured learning and practice. Studies on mathematics identity by Martin (2009) and Boaler (2016) indicate that student's motivation is closely tied to whether they see themselves as legitimate participants in mathematics and feel recognised within learning environments. As a result, students may demonstrate well-developed mathematical thinking while remaining only weakly motivated, which helps explain the non-significant association observed in this study.

Conclusion

The result suggests that student's motivation towards mathematics is not closely linked to their level of mathematical thinking, even when differences in attitude and general intelligence are taken into account. This indicates that motivation is influenced by a wider set of factors, including students' emotions, beliefs about themselves as learners, and their sense of inclusion in mathematics classrooms. On this basis, the hypothesis prediction stating a positive association between mathematical thinking and motivation, after controlling for relevant covariates, received no empirical support.

In light of this finding, classroom teaching and teacher education programmes need to move beyond a sole focus on cognitive skill development and deliberately incorporate practices that support students motivational and identity development in mathematics education.

HYPOTHESIS H₃: MATHEMATICAL THINKING AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE

Test and Result

The analysis showed a small positive association between mathematical thinking and general intelligence, but this relationship did not reach statistical significance ($r = .175$, $p = .120$). However, the partial correlation between mathematical thinking and general intelligence was found positive, but not statistically significant (partial $r = .137$, $p = .231$, 95% CI $[-.09, .35]$). This suggests that mathematical thinking and general intelligence overlap only to a limited extent, and that affective factors play a role in reducing their apparent association.

Importantly, the lack of a statistically significant relationship should not be interpreted as diminishing the role of intelligence in learning mathematics. Instead, it points to a distinction often highlighted in mathematics education research between general intellectual ability and the kinds of domain-specific thinking fostered through instruction. Mathematical thinking—especially skills related to reasoning, communication, and problem solving tends to develop through sustained engagement with mathematical ideas and classroom practices, rather than emerging directly from general intelligence alone. When motivational and attitudinal influences are considered, the direct link between intelligence and higher-order mathematical thinking appears less pronounced.

Conclusion

The results suggest that mathematical thinking has only a weak connection with general intelligence, and this link becomes even less evident when students' motivation and attitudes are considered. This indicates that mathematical thinking does not arise automatically from general cognitive ability but is shaped largely by classroom experiences and instructional practices. Accordingly, the findings underscore the need for teaching approaches that deliberately foster reasoning and communication in mathematics, rather than relying on students' general intelligence alone; the hypothesised association was therefore not supported.

OVERALL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The analysis examined how mathematical thinking relates to key cognitive and affective variables namely, attitude, motivation, and general intelligence, while accounting for their overlapping influences. The findings indicate that mathematical thinking is positively associated with students' attitudes towards mathematics, and this relationship remains evident even after controlling for motivation and general intelligence. Although the strength of the association is modest, it suggests that students who engage more deeply in mathematical thinking tend to hold more favourable attitudes towards the subject, independent of their broader cognitive ability or motivational level.

In contrast, mathematical thinking did not show a statistically meaningful relationship with motivation. This pattern highlights that motivation towards mathematics is shaped by a wider set of factors, including emotional experiences, perceived value, and students' sense of belonging, rather than by cognitive processing skills alone. Students may therefore demonstrate strong mathematical thinking without necessarily being highly motivated, particularly when classroom experiences do not support positive identity development.

Similarly, the relationship between mathematical thinking and general intelligence was weak and non-significant, and became even less pronounced after accounting for affective variables. This suggests that mathematical thinking is not merely an outcome of general intellectual ability but develops through sustained instructional engagement and opportunities to reason, communicate, and solve problems meaningfully.

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Citizen Participation in Urban Planning in India

Pinky Kumari

ABSTRACT

As India has become largest populated country in the world with approx 523 million people living in urban areas, contributing approx 70 % of GDP. it is imperative to ensure that sustainable urban governance reflects the choices and demands of citizen. This research paper objective is to the understand the impact of citizen participation on the urban planning process specifically in the context of Indian cities. Citizen participation means allowing people to participate in the policy making and implementation process where citizen as a member provide his crucial input. Citizen participation is recognized as cornerstone for sustainable urban development and participatory governance. Citizen participation has resulted into effective implementation of policies and programme since these programme are accepted, suggested and reviewed by people. This paper discusses existing constitution mechanism, various policy measure and initiative taken to ensure participatory planning in urban governance. The paper concludes with va various examples citizen participation in urban planning and its impact for democratic governance.

Keywords: citizen participation, urban planning, 74th constitutional amendment, participatory budgeting, sustainable urban governance

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

- What institutional mechanism exist in India to facilitate citizen participation in urban planning
- On what extent these measures are inclusive and bring holistic development
- What are the constrain in successful participation of citizen in urban planning

- What measure can be taken to ensure strengthen citizen participation in urban planning

METHODOLOGY

This article is based on the qualitative review of secondary data sources. Three popular search engines Google Scholar, research scholar and JSTOR were scanned for the identification of research articles along with UN REPORT on Urban governance and Annual report of ministry of Housing and Urban affair is used for better analysis and comparison The period of the articles selected on these platforms was from 2014 to 2024. This study utilizes a secondary method of data collected to examine the influence of citizen participation in urban planning

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Scholars distinguish between three types of justifications for citizen participation: substantive (social fairness and redistribution), instrumental (better decisions and local knowledge), and normative (citizen rights and democracy). Classifying involvement from manipulation to citizen control, Arnstein's ladder of participation is still a helpful heuristic. More recent research places a greater emphasis on deliberative democracy, power dynamics, co-production, and how digital platforms either facilitate or affect participation.

Important theoretical issues consist of: Tokenism vs. Empowerment: Do citizens have a say in final choices or are they only consulted? Equity and representation: Who is included and who is excluded? Informal laborers, migrants, women, and the urban poor are frequently left out. Scale and institutionalization: How are participatory contributions included into statutory plans, and does engagement take place at the neighborhood, municipal, or metropolitan levels? Knowledge and ability: Do residents and local government representatives possess the abilities required for significant participation?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Participation by citizens is a fundamental component of sustainable development and democratic urban governance, according to academic research. Although public participation is widely recognized as being crucial

for successful urban development planning in India, Bansari Sharma, Swasti Sharma, Ashwani Kumar, Nand Kumar, and Satish Pipralia contend that actual engagement mechanisms are still limited and frequently restricted to consultations with specific stakeholders rather than inclusive involvement of ordinary citizens. Their examination of how urban development plans are created also reveals that people's influence over policy outcomes is diminished since engagement is often less during the planning phase and occurs mostly during implementation.

Adding to the conversation around governance innovation, Sanskriti Menon and Janette Hartz-Karp stress that inclusive, educated, and truly influential decision-making procedures are necessary for meaningful involvement. They illustrate that active civil society involvement, competent third-party facilitation, and supportive political leadership are necessary for successful participatory government by using action research conducted in Indian cities. However, they also point out that asymmetries in knowledge, unequal decentralization, and socioeconomic inequalities all provide structural obstacles that prevent fair involvement in municipal decision-making.

Deepak Kumar examines how the public participates in the conversation around smart cities in India, concentrating on ongoing legislative initiatives. Although smart city frameworks ostensibly support citizen-centric and bottom-up governance, he points out that actual participation may be veiled, symbolic, or impacted by technocratic and market-driven objectives. For Kumar, active, rights-based civic engagement is the only way to transform participation from a formality to an equitable and sustainable aspect of urban development. The relevance of people-centered and bottom-up development techniques in Global South cities is emphasized by Darshini Mahadevia, who supports this viewpoint by contending that inclusive involvement is required to alleviate structural disparities and empower vulnerable urban communities.

Isher Judge Ahluwalia offers constitutional criticisms of India's planning system, pointing out that traditional master planning, which is typified by strict land-use zoning, drawn-out preparation procedures, and top-down decision-making, has historically restricted citizen participation and failed to sufficiently account for social inclusion or financial viability. In India, these technocratic planning cultures still impede the development of flexible and participatory urban governance.

Overall, three key conclusions can be drawn from the evaluated literature. First, the importance of public engagement in democratic, inclusive, and sustainable urban development is generally acknowledged. Second, India's institutional and socioeconomic barriers still prevent real interaction, which frequently leads to tokenistic consultation. Third, new methods that focus on sustainability, deliberation, and rights provide encouraging avenues, but they also call for more inclusive institutional design, more decentralization, and the empowerment of underrepresented groups. These academic viewpoints collectively provide a framework for the current state of change and potential future developments in India's participatory urban planning.

INTRODUCTION

India's population is rapidly urbanizing; 377 million people, or 32% of the total, live in cities, and by 2046, that number is expected to rise to 800 million, or 50% of the total population.

This steady movement of people toward cities has created new pressures on housing, infrastructure, services, and environmental sustainability. Addressing these challenges requires effective and transparent decision-making that actively involves citizens. In this context, public participation becomes an essential element of democratic governance and a key factor in achieving sustainable urban development.

A further objective of the UN Sustainable Development Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities is to increase capacity for "participatory, integrated, and sustainable human settlement planning and management." Public participation is widely recognised as an important element for promoting sustainability (Carcasson, 2013; Chu, Angelovski et al., 2016; Fung, 2006; Menon and Hartz-Karp, 2020). In India, however, citizen involvement is more visible during the implementation of plans and policies rather than at the stage when these plans and policies are formulated (Kumar and Prakash, 2016). Participatory spaces in large metropolitan cities are often scattered and weakly connected (Singh, 2012). Unlike rural areas, where institutions such as the Gram Sabha provide formal platforms for community engagement, most Indian cities lack clear mechanisms for direct citizen participation (Menon and Hartz-Karp, 2020). Although policies are carried out for the public and through the public, meaningful public involvement in policy design is not always treated as essential. In some

situations, this involvement can be described as 'pseudo-participation', where informing citizens about decisions or implementation plans is presented as participation, even though real influence and inclusion of stakeholders especially the public limited.

Deliberative Democracy, a type of involvement in governance that has been effectively used globally, as a way to enhance sustainability results in Indian cities. Inclusion, the caliber of deliberation, and influence on decision-making are characteristics of deliberative democracy.

INDIA'S INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND POLICIES

India's urban government structure is made up of several layers, including national ministries, state urban departments, metropolitan development bodies, municipal corporations, and municipal councils. Important policy tools that influence involvement include:

Constitutional and legal framework: An essential foundation for public involvement in urban government is provided by India's legislative and constitutional structure. By giving urban local bodies (ULBs) constitutional standing, the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 sought to deepen decentralization. In order to promote democratic decision-making at the city level, it established ward committees, elected municipal councils, and increased functional duties. State-by-state variations exist in the degree of implementation, and several ULBs continue to encounter administrative and financial constraints.

National programs: Participatory components have been included into major urban development plans at the national level. AMRUT, the Smart Cities Mission, and the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) placed a strong emphasis on citizen consultation, openness, and reforms. Cities were compelled by these missions to create development plans by interacting with stakeholders and the general public. Despite these initiatives, real involvement has frequently been shallow, with varying results in different locations.

City-level mechanisms: A number of methods are employed at the municipal level to engage citizens in government. Public input is included into planning and service delivery through ward committees, area sabhas, public hearings, grievance redress sites, participatory budgeting experiments, and citizen charters. Although these instruments encourage

inclusivity and accountability, their effectiveness mostly rests on awareness, active civic engagement, and efficient implementation.

While the policy framework formally recognizes participation, actual practice is shaped by political incentives, bureaucratic capacity, fiscal constraints, and civic mobilization.

DETAILED DISCUSSION: URBAN CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN INDIAN CITIES

Participatory Urban Planning and Neighbourhood Engagement

Direct resident involvement in neighborhood administration and planning is the most obvious manifestation of urban civic engagement.

Urban planning authorities in Ahmedabad often engage with organized resident organizations and historical conservation groups to influence choices about the preservation of historic neighborhoods, enhancement of streetscapes, and upkeep of common public areas. Their regular participation is indicative of a culture of organized civic engagement bolstered by vibrant community organizations and comparatively open institutional procedures. Citizens may add local knowledge and cultural priorities to planning results through discussion, consultation, and cooperative projects. This experience shows that public participation in urban planning may become more meaningful, sustainable, and capable of enhancing the caliber and inclusivity of city development when open governance frameworks are coupled with strong civic traditions.

Pune is an important illustration of participatory budgeting and ward-level engagement in urban governance. In order to better match public expenditure with local requirements, residents are given the chance to recommend neighborhood priorities such parks, road upgrades, drainage systems, and community facilities. Even while participation varies by socioeconomic category, the procedure still increases public power over local decision-making. This strategy emphasizes the benefits of decentralized financial planning, where community involvement enhances governance's responsiveness, accountability, and openness. All things considered, Pune serves as an example of how organized local public involvement may enhance democratic norms and the success of urban development projects.

Kerala's long-standing dedication to community consultation and decentralized planning has influenced Kochi's civic engagement pattern. In order to conduct social programs, environmental initiatives, and basic service delivery, local forums, neighborhood groups, and civil society organizations frequently work in tandem with municipal authorities. By encouraging citizens to participate in daily government, this cooperative framework urges them to stop being passive recipients of public policy. Opportunities for significant public engagement increase when political decentralization is paired with robust social development and community awareness, as demonstrated by the Kochi experience. As a result, regular urban administration incorporates participatory involvement, enhancing local governing systems' responsiveness, accountability, and inclusivity.

Digital and Technology-Enabled Civic Participation

In Bengaluru, civic technology platforms, mobile grievance applications, and open data systems enable residents to report potholes, waste management problems, and failures in public services. These digital tools enhance administrative transparency and allow authorities to respond more quickly to everyday urban concerns. However, access to such technologies is uneven and often benefits educated, digitally literate, and economically secure groups. As a result, while digital participation expands opportunities for civic engagement, it can also reproduce existing social inequalities. Bengaluru therefore illustrates the dual nature of technology in governance, where innovation improves responsiveness but must be accompanied by inclusive access to ensure equitable and meaningful public participation.

Hyderabad has implemented smart-city governance platforms that link citizens to a variety of urban services, including traffic information and municipal complaint systems. These online resources show how technology may improve citizen-government communication, increasing the effectiveness and transparency of service delivery. Such technologies promote better urban administration and speedier administrative action by enabling citizens to report issues and receive real-time information. However, regular institutional follow-up and broad accessibility across social groups are essential to their long-term effectiveness. Technological innovation by itself cannot guarantee meaningful involvement or long-term improvements in the results of urban governance without fair digital access and trustworthy government action.

Online consultations and e-governance platforms provide Delhi residents more ways to participate in policy debates and service oversight. However, differences in knowledge, literacy, and internet access lead to unequal participation results, reminding experts that only technical solutions can ensure democratic inclusion.

Environmental and Sustainability-Focused Civic Action

Environmental issues have sparked widespread civic engagement in a number of Indian cities.

Chennai's frequent floods and cyclones have aided in the development of robust networks of community volunteers engaged in relief distribution, rescue efforts, and post-disaster rehabilitation. Civil society organizations, neighborhood associations, and local citizens frequently react swiftly, assisting official emergency services and making sure aid reaches houses who are at risk. Meanwhile, citizen efforts promote better drainage systems, climate risk-aware planning, and wetland conservation. These initiatives demonstrate how long-term citizen participation in urban government may be spurred by environmental fragility. Thus, Chennai exemplifies how ecological constraints may foster more resilient and ecologically conscious approaches to city development, increase civic engagement, and fortify collective responsibility.

Mumbai is a prime example of how patterns of environmental civic involvement may be influenced by coastal vulnerability and high urban density. Civil society organizations regularly advocate for causes including waste management, air quality, mangrove ecosystem preservation, and the construction of coastal roads. In order to affect governmental decisions and the results of urban planning, these activities frequently combine organized public protest, legal action, and persistent policy lobbying. These initiatives demonstrate that, rather than relying solely on administrative action, environmental governance in major urban areas usually results from ongoing public pressure. Mumbai therefore emphasizes how important organized public involvement is in advancing ecological preservation, responsibility, and more sustainable urban development models.

Housing Rights, Informality, and Social Justice Movements

Rights-based civic mobilization has emerged in some cities as a result of urban inequality and informal settlements.

Organised community groups have grown in number as a result of Mumbai's sizable informal population. These groups actively fight for access to rehabilitation homes, land rights, and basic amenities. Protests, group bargaining, and persistent campaigning are more common forms of public engagement in this setting than regular government discussions. Disenfranchised citizens can express their grievances and seek acknowledgement in municipal government procedures through such mobilization. These group endeavors demonstrate the political character of involvement in unequal cities, where organized action is necessary to attain exposure and inclusion. In general, Mumbai shows how community cooperation may turn marginalization into active participation in municipal policy choices and state institutions. Kolkata is a crucial example of how community organizations with historical roots may maintain urban civic engagement for extended periods of time. Neighborhood associations, labor unions, nonprofits, and social welfare organizations have a long history in the city and actively address issues of housing rights, livelihood security, and public service accessibility. Decades of political mobilization, working-class movements, and community-based social action led to the gradual development of these grassroots structures. This historical continuity means that, rather than relying solely on official municipal consultation procedures, civic engagement in Kolkata frequently takes the shape of collective organization and shared community identity

The access to welfare is one important area of involvement. Particularly in low-income or informal settlements, community groups often help people navigate government welfare programs that include social protection, health care, food distribution, and education support. These groups assist in closing information gaps and removing administrative obstacles by serving as a bridge between the public and government agencies. This exemplifies how the practical reach of welfare government may be enhanced by grassroots engagement, especially for economically and socially vulnerable groups.

Disaster Resilience and Community Preparedness

Cities that experience natural disasters frequently create robust forms of community-centered engagement. Chennai's neighborhood collaboration during the floods serves as an example of how institutional disaster response mechanisms may be greatly strengthened by community involvement. Local volunteers, citizen groups, and unofficial support networks frequently mobilize quickly to exchange information, plan rescue operations, distribute

relief supplies, and offer temporary shelter when severe rainfall and urban flooding occur. They are able to respond more quickly and precisely than state agencies alone because of their expertise with the local topography, homes that are at risk, and urgent requirements. Building resilient, responsive, and inclusive urban systems in hazard-prone regions requires incorporating volunteer capacity and local knowledge into disaster management planning, as this citizen-government partnership shows.

Riverine flooding has had a major impact on Guwahati's civic engagement patterns, making the city reliant on community preparation programs and local adaption techniques. The Brahmaputra River's frequent flooding has prompted neighborhood associations, volunteer groups, and community-based organizations to actively participate in early warning distribution, evacuation assistance, and relief coordination. In addition to enhancing official disaster management systems, these locally based solutions emphasize the importance of community expertise in environmental risk management. Guwahati's experience shows that in ecologically vulnerable areas, participatory resilience—created through consistent public engagement and collaborative planning—is crucial for lowering vulnerability, enhancing readiness, and guaranteeing more inclusive and responsive urban disaster governance.

The necessity of community-government cooperation in emergency management has been emphasized by the attempts to coordinate relief operations and establish citizen support networks in Visakhapatnam, which is regularly affected by cyclones.

Public Service Monitoring and Accountability

Citizen supervision of municipal services is another aspect of civic engagement. Surat's public health programs have long demonstrated close collaboration between the local government and the populace, especially in areas like cleaning campaigns, sanitation management, and illness prevention. In order to manage epidemics and enhance living conditions, municipalities have benefited from active public participation in awareness campaigns, neighborhood monitoring, and cleanliness practices. This ongoing partnership shows how shared accountability and trust may improve the efficacy of public services. In the end, better governance results, higher health standards, and more resilience within the urban community result

from people' increased willingness to take part in collective action when they perceive local government to be inclusive and responsive.

In Bengaluru and Pune, where civil society organizations actively monitor governance through transparency efforts, social audits, and the use of right-to-information systems, participatory accountability is readily apparent. These initiatives give individuals the ability to critically analyze public spending, assess the caliber of local services, and intelligently challenge administrative choices. In addition to deterring resource exploitation, these methods improve confidence between local authorities and communities by establishing forums for examination and discussion. Because organized public action may foster transparency, accountability, and better service delivery in quickly expanding metropolitan contexts, this type of involvement demonstrates that democratic participation goes beyond voting.

CONCLUSION

Recognising relevant stakeholders and building cooperative networks are essential for a participatory approach that supports sustainable urban development (Das, 2017). This suggests that meaningful public participation can play an important role in improving urban sustainability. However, effective participation mechanisms that address concerns of equity and sustainability remain limited in India. Introducing improved and inclusive participation methods could strengthen urban governance and promote sustainable outcomes (Menon and Hartz-Karp, 2019). At the local level, the Indian planning process is generally consultative in nature rather than fully participatory (Munshi, Joshi et al., n.d.). For a participatory strategy to support cities' sustainable development, it is critical to identify pertinent stakeholders and build coalitions (Das, 2017). According to this, improving urban sustainability may depend on citizen engagement. India does not, however, have efficient procedures for public engagement that include sustainability and fairness. According to Menon and Hartz-Karp (2019), the use of novel techniques for public involvement can facilitate enhancements in sustainability and urban governance. According to Munshi, Joshi et al. (n.d.), locally in India, the planning process is consultative rather than participatory.

The "public's" involvement and responsibility need to be better structured and acknowledged at every level of the development plan's creation, from problem identification to implementation proposal creation. The engagement

of citizens should be taken into consideration while operationalizing participation at each level. Open workshops, as opposed to meetings, which are often used for expert group consultation, would promote citizen conversations in small groups. When creating participation procedures, the geographical variability that Indian cities provide should be properly taken into account. Incorporating the language preferences of the citizens might guarantee the participation of a bigger population. It is necessary to create interactive and educational resources that may assist residents comprehend the intricate procedures involved in creating plans; this will encourage their participation.

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Portrayal of Sexual Minorities in Indian Cinema: A Systematic Review

Sheerin Hamdani*, Salik Parveaz & Asif Khan

ABSTRACT

Film representations reflect cultural ideals and shape societal attitudes. In India, over the last decade, sexual minorities, including LGBTQ+ characters, have increasingly moved from sidekicks to lead roles. This shift raises concerns about whether portrayals are positive (realistic) or negative (derogatory and stereotypical). This paper aims to understand how Indian cinema portrays sexual minorities in films. A comprehensive search query was executed across major academic databases and identified 789 studies on the portrayal of sexual minorities in Indian cinema. After establishing strict inclusion and exclusion criteria, titles and abstracts of research articles were screened to find relevant literature. This was followed by screening full texts to ensure that relevant articles were chosen and analyzed. Forty-five research articles fit the criteria and were analyzed. The review revealed a significant rise in studies after the Supreme Court struck down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). A positive portrayal of sexual minorities was discerned in 31 articles. A disparity was found between how Bollywood and regional cinemas depict sexual minorities, highlighting the need for accurate and sensitive portrayals. This review aims to contextualize research on the representation of sexual minorities in Indian cinema and to discuss future research avenues.

Keywords: Sexual minorities, LGBTQ+,
Representation, Cinema, India

INTRODUCTION

Cinema is a compelling and influential medium. Films have the power to move, inspire, provoke thoughts, discourse, and shape our public opinion on

* corresponding Author

significant issues. Through storytelling, visual imagery, and sound, cinema creates a powerful emotional and sensory experience that profoundly connects with viewers. Stories narrated from varying perspectives can promote empathy and understanding between people by portraying diverse characters and cultures (Chandra & Bhatia, 2019). Through film, individuals can be inspired to pursue their aspirations, challenge traditional norms, and positively impact the world around them. They function as a catalyst for action, compelling audiences to engage with and address critical issues and fostering meaningful contributions to their communities and the broader society.

Indian cinema has exerted a substantial influence both globally and locally. It has effectively showcased the country's rich culture and diversity-propelling technological advancements in the film industry and shaping popular culture and public opinion (Schaefer and Karan, 2013). Prominent films such as *Lagaan* (2001), *Taare Zameen Par* (2007), *Dangal* (2016), and *Baahubali* (2015-2017) exemplify the extensive social, cultural, emotional, and economic impact that cinema can exert on both a global and local scale.

Films have an immeasurable potential to communicate, educate, and socialize with the outer world. However, this powerful capacity can be hazardous in reinforcing the established stereotypes related to minorities. American social psychologist Wirth (1945) defined a minority group as

“Any group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination” (p347).

Minority groups are mainly classified into race and ethnic minorities, gender and sexual minorities, religious minorities, and people with disabilities (Ciampa, 2021). Rodrigues et al. (2017) defined sexual minorities as “A variety of gender and sexual identities and expressions that differ from cultural norms. Usually, sexual minorities comprise lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender individuals”.

Over the past hundred years, the films have been characterized by representations of queer people. The onscreen representation of LGBTQ+ communities at different historical points has a long, complicated, and often coded history due to censorship and prejudice. The characters belonging to sexual minority groups were used for laughs or made no explicit mention of

their orientation in mainstream Hollywood films (Ciampa, 2021). If queer characters are exponentially growing in USA's movies and series, the same cannot be claimed by other developed countries in the world (Ciampa, 2021). According to Ciampa (2021), claiming that Italian and American productions are equally inclusive is unjustifiable. For the last decade, queer characters have gradually been appearing in Indian cinema, but accurate portrayal remains a challenge.

In their book 'Queer Cinema: The Film Reader', Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin (2004) have given three general characteristics that identify cultural products as queer: Auteurs (if the author or director of the film belongs to queer people), Forms (if the media product concern with queer issues), and Receptions (if the cultural products are consumed widely by queer people). Queer cinema is a genre of film that focuses on the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, their relationships, and their struggles for acceptance and equality. With both filmmakers and viewers knowing the power of film to foster greater knowledge, awareness, and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community, queer cinema has become a significant genre of film worldwide.

Although queer cinema is still a genre in its infancy stage in India, (Kaur, 2017) believes that it has a significant contribution to make in the promotion of greater tolerance, inclusion, and acceptance of LGBTQ+ people. In several countries, queer cinema has become a significant sub-genre of indie and art house films. Notable examples of international queer cinema, both critically acclaimed and award-winning Hollywood films, include Ang Lee's "Brokeback Mountain" (2005) and Barry Jenkins' "Moonlight" (2016). Global queer cinema is celebrated and exhibited at queer film festivals, including Outfest in Los Angeles and the BFI Flare in London.

Since the early 2000s, queer cinema in India has grown in popularity, with several indie directors exploring LGBTQ+ narratives. The paradigm shift has been observed post abrogation of section 377 of IPC, which had earlier made homosexuality illegal in India. In recent years, the Indian film industry, which encompasses Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Malayalam, Marathi, and other regional cinemas, has also started to embrace LGBTQ+-themed films like Hansal Mehta's "Aligarh" (2016), Jayan. K. Cherian's "Ka Bodyscapes" (2016), Onir's "Shab" (2017), Rituparno Ghosh's "Chitrangada: the crowning wish" (2012), Hitesh Kewalya's "Shubh Mangal Zyaada Saavdhaan" (2020), and Shelly Chopra Dhar's "Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga" (2019)

tackling issues related to same-sex relationships. The KASHISH Mumbai International Queer Film Festival, which features queer films, has become a significant platform encouraging awareness and inclusion of LGBTQ+ people. Notwithstanding stereotypes and censorship, Indian queer cinema has played an important role in dispelling myths and encouraging greater acceptance and understanding of LGBTQ+ people.

The representation of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) characters in films has changed evidently in the last several decades. According to Baldwin (2021), recent years have seen a noteworthy shift toward positive portrayal and diversity. Globally, this trend transcends regional boundaries. Whether or not LGBTQ+ characters are featured, films influence and mirror society's perceptions of underrepresented and marginalized groups. While some films have raised awareness and fostered acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals, others have perpetuated harmful stereotypes and reinforced prejudice.

The purpose of this review is to address the following questions:

1. How are LGBTQ+ characters depicted in Indian cinema in positive, negative, stereotypical, and/or realistic portrayals?
2. What impact has the abrogation of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code had on the representation of LGBTQ+ individuals in films?
3. Are there any discernible differences in the portrayal of sexual minorities across Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil, and other regional Indian cinemas?

METHOD

Research protocol

To prevent bias, promote transparency, and assure reproducibility, a research protocol outlining the goals, procedures, and criteria is essential for systematic reviews (Higgins & Green, 2011). Enhancing the review's credibility and rigor helps with planning, organizing, and quality assurance. To maintain scientific rigor and improve the reproducibility and reliability of findings through clear documentation of the review process (Moher et al., 2009), this review adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviewing and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) standards. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed to methodically direct the ensuing search procedure following the study's objectives.

Eligibility criteria

Using specific inclusion and exclusion criteria, the researchers identified studies that examined the portrayal of sexual minorities in Indian cinema. For inclusion, papers had to meet the following criteria:

1. Studies focusing on the portrayal and representation of sexual minorities in LGBTQ+-themed films.
2. Peer-reviewed publications.
3. Written in English.
4. Studies related to the Portrayal of LGBTQ+ individuals in all Indian cinemas (Hindi, Malayalam, Marathi, Bengali and Tamil).

The exclusion criteria ensured that selected articles did not include:

1. Studies focused on the portrayal of sexual minorities in novels, plays, short stories, documentaries, and OTT platforms.
2. Studies on the portrayal of women, courtesans, sex workers, disabilities, and HIV/AIDS in films.
3. Studies solely on the annulment of Section 377 of the IPC.
4. Studies focused on queer film festivals.
5. Studies on non-Indian cinemas (e.g., Irish, European, American, and South Asian).

There was no time limitation for the inclusion of studies, as most related articles were published after the year 2000, following the release of the film 'Fire' in 1998, which is believed to have sparked the idea of queer movement in India.

Search strategy

Comprehensive searches were conducted across scholarly databases, including JSTOR, Elicit, Google Scholar research databases, and grey literature, which includes theses, dissertations, and conference papers. These databases were chosen due to their extensive coverage, providing access to a wide range of academic literature necessary for conducting in-depth research in gender and film studies. The search terms (refer to Table 1) were designed to encapsulate the core concepts of LGBTQ+ representation within Indian cinema. By examining the terminology used in the obtainable literature, keywords pertinent to these concepts were derived. According to the database

configurations and the scope of the results, search fields were meticulously chosen (refer to Table 1). Each study identified through the database search was manually reviewed, and identical records were systematically removed. In addition, all references of studies included in the review were screened for additional relevant articles.

Table 1: Database search strategies

Search strategy	Database (search fields)	Search fields	No. of records retrieved
(“sexual minorities” OR LGBTQ OR homosexual OR gay OR lesbian OR bisexual OR transgender OR queer OR non-binary)	JSTOR	Title & Abstract	164
AND (“Indian cinema” OR Bollywood OR Tollywood OR Kollywood OR “Indian movies” OR “Indian films” OR “Indian film industry”) AND (Portrayal OR representation OR depiction OR characterization OR stereotyping OR imagery OR narrative)	Elicit	Title & Abstract	500
	Google Scholar	Title & Abstract	100

Selected literature

Figure 1 illustrates the selection process for the records retrieved, screened, removed, and included in the systematic review. 789 publications were found in an initial search. 660 papers remained after the identical records were removed. These papers were subsequently reviewed based on their titles and abstracts to assess their eligibility based on the criteria set for inclusion, resulting in the identification of 110 potentially relevant articles. After that, the complete text of these articles was acquired and examined against the predefined exclusion criteria, leading to the exclusion of 65 papers. The systematic review ultimately included 45 articles that met the inclusion criteria.

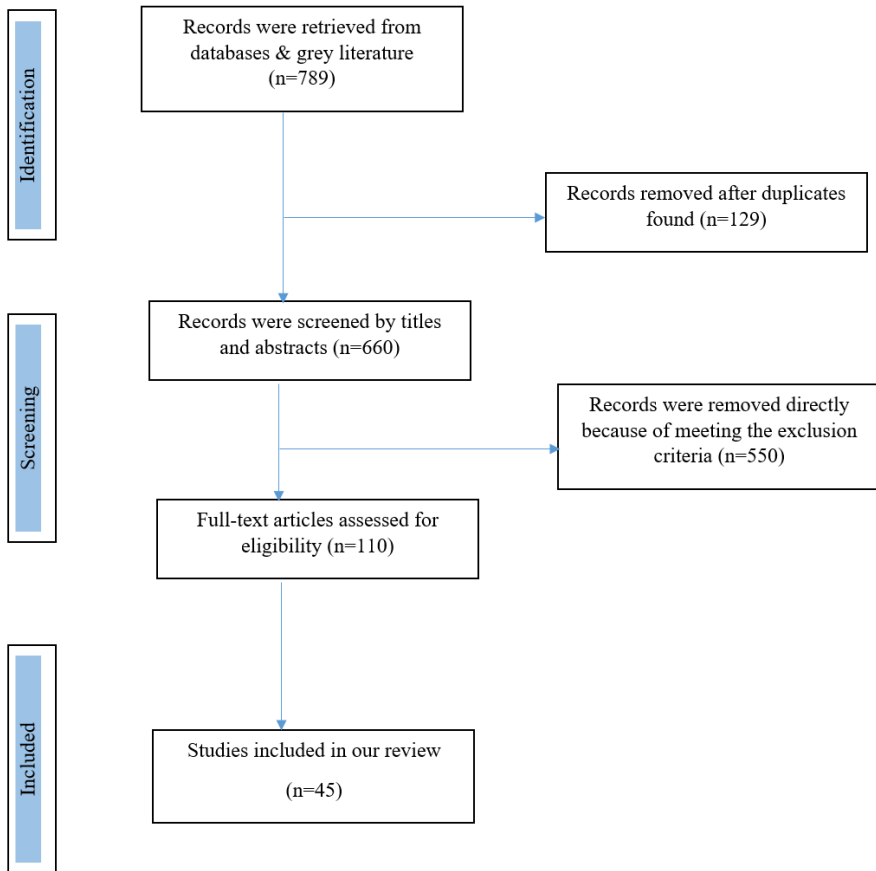


Figure 1: Selection process of records retrieved, screened, removed and included.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following a comprehensive analysis of every article that was reviewed, the results were organized and classified according to themes. These themes were used to present the findings. The number of evaluated publications on the portrayal of sexual minorities in Indian cinema that have been published each year since the year 2000 is depicted in Figure 2. Table 2 provides an overview of the research methods, sample sizes, target cinemas, and subjects examined in the studies.

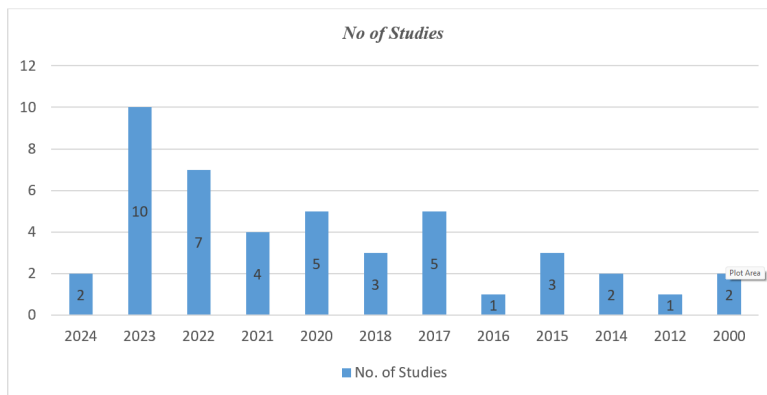


Figure 2: The number of reviewed papers since the year 2000 (Timeline)

OVERVIEW OF INCLUDED STUDIES

A comprehensive evaluation of a seed set consisting of 789 studies published between 2000 and 2024 was conducted - from which 45 articles were selected for further analysis. The selection comprised ten papers from literature, visual and performing arts, and culture-related journals; 10 from film, media, and communication; seven from humanities and social sciences; six from journals related to homosexuality, lesbian, and transgender studies; five from interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary journals; three from history and sociology-related journals and others from pure and applied mathematics, innovative research and development, women and change, psychiatry, and medical ethics (refer to Table 2). The representation of sexual minorities in Indian cinema has been explored from different perspectives. The studies have been conducted through the lenses of sociology, art and culture, history, psychiatry, visual and performing arts, mass media and communication, gender studies, and medical ethics.

Table 2: Overview of studies included in the review

Author(s)/ (year)	Journals	Methods	Sample (no. of films)	Subject	Portrayal	Cinema
Prasitha, V., & Bhuvaneswari, G. (2024)	Humanities & Social Sciences Communication	Content Analysis	n=2	Lesbian & Gay	Positive	Hindi
Sooraj, S. S., & Krishna, K. R. K. (2024)	Journal of Homosexuality	Not specified	n=1	Gay	Positive	Malayalam
Abishek, U. (2023)	Shanlax International Journal of English	Content Analysis	n=1	Gay	Positive	Malayalam
Arora, A., & Sylvia, N. P. (2023)	Feminist Media Studies	Content Analysis	n=2	Lesbian & Gay	Positive	Hindi
Arya, P. (2023)	Journal of Communication and Management	Content Analysis	n=4	Lesbian	Positive	Hindi
Bashir, S.M., & Pandey, S. (2023)	History and Sociology of South Asia	Content Analysis	n=17	Hijra/ Transgender	Negative	Hindi

Bhardwaj (2023)	International Journal of Research in Social Science & Humanities	Content Analysis	n=5	LGBTQ	Positive	Hindi
Biju, R., & Sheeba, C. (2023)	ShodhKosh: Journal of visual and performing arts	Content Analysis	n=1	homosexuals	Positive	Hindi
Jayadev, A., Mohan, V., & Appu, A. (2023)	International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research	Thematic & Qualitative Content Analysis	n=3	LGBTQIA+	Positive	Malayalam
Raveendran, K., & Pannikot, D. (2023)	Quarterly Review of Film and Video	Textual & Discourse Analysis	n=1	Gay	Positive	Hindi
Raveendran, K., & Pannikot, D. (2023)	Quarterly Review of Film and Video	Content Analysis	n=2	Transgender	Positive	Bengali & Tamil
Ruchi, K., & Jha, S. (2023)	Quarterly Review of Film and Video	Not specified	n=1	Hijra/ Transgender	Positive	Bengali
Bhatt, R. & Chudawala, K. (2022)	Indian J Med Ethics	Content Analysis	n=1	Transgender	Negative	Hindi

Chatterjee, H. (2022)	Journal of Literature and Cultural Inquiry	Content Analysis	n=4	Queer & gender non-conforming	Positive	Bengali & Tamil
James, R., & Venkatesan, S. (2022)	Wacana Seni Journal of Arts Discourse	Content Analysis	n=2	Gay & Lesbian	Positive	Malayalam
Kumar, P. (2022)	RESEARCH HUB International Multidisciplinary Research Journal	Not specified	n=1	Gay	Positive	Hindi
Labade, S., & Ajaonker, H. (2022)	A Global Journal of Humanities	Content Analysis	n=4	homosexuality	Positive	Bengali, Malayalam & Marathi
Narayan, S., & Mittal, R. (2022)	IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences	Not specified	n=1	Lesbian	Negative	Hindi
Iyyappan, K. (2022)	Shanlax International Journal of Tamil Research	Content Analysis	(1977-2017)	Transgender	Negative	Tamil

Chatterjee, S. (2021)	South Asian Popular Culture	Content Analysis	n=1	Bisexual & disability	Positive	Hindi
Hussain, R. (2021)	Adoption & Culture	In-depth Analysis	n=2	Hijra/ Transgender	Shift towards positive	Hindi
Mammen, A.A. (2021)	Smart Moves Journal IJELLH	Content Analysis	n=5	Queer (LGBT)	Positive	Malayalam
Trivedi, G. (2021)	Global Media Journal	Content Analysis	n=4	Lesbian	Negative	Hindi
Choudhuri, S. M. (2020)	South Asian Popular Culture	Not specified	n=1	Gay	Negative	Hindi
Dineshan, J., SP, Ananya., & Ramappa, S. (2020)	Studies in Indian Place Names	Content Analysis	n=1	Transpersons	Positive	Malayalam
Raju, N. (2020)	Not Specified (link available)	Content Analysis	n=3	Queer (LGBT)	Positive	Malayalam
Kuriakose, A. (2020)	South Asian Popular Culture	Content Analysis	n=2	Transgender	Positive	Malayalam

Yasin, Z., Batool, S., & Naseer, I. (2020)	Global Mass Communication Review	Content Analysis, interviews & survey	n=8	Transgender	Negative	Hindi Bollywood
Jain, J. (2018)	ANTYAJAA: Indian Journal of Women and Social Change	Content Analysis	n=2	Lesbian & Gay	Negative	Hindi
Pooja, J., & Rekha, K.P. (2018)	International Journal of Pure and Applied Mathematics	Content Analysis, interviews & survey	n=4	homosexuality	positive	Hindi
Rashmi Raja V.R. (2018)	Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences	Content Analysis	n=4	LGBTQ	Positive	Hindi
Afshana, S., & Din, H. (2017)	International Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies	Content Analysis	n=4	Third Gender	Negative	Hindi
Bhatia, S. (2017)	Media & Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)	Multimodal Discourse Analysis	n=3	Homosexuality	Negative	Hindi

Chopra, S. (2017)	Rupkatha Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities	Content Analysis	n=2	Gay	Negative	Hindi
Kaur (2017)	Amity Journal of Media & Communications Studies	Content Analysis	(1990-2016)	Queer (LGBT)	Inclusive and positive	Hindi
Singh, D., Bhandari, D.S., Kaur, G., & Sharma, D. (2017)	Trames Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences	Content Analysis & Case Study	n=1	Gay (LGBT)	Positive	Hindi
Bhattacharyya, A. (2016)	International Journal of Innovative Research & Development	Content Analysis	n=10	LGBT	Positive	Hindi
Dasgupta, R. K. (2015)	Journal of Arts Writing by Students	Not specified	n=1	Gay	Positive	Hindi
Kalra & Bhugra (2015)	International Journal of Transgenderism	Not specified	n=29	Hijra/ Transgender	Shift towards positive	Hindi
Bhugra et al. (2015)	International Review of Psychiatry	Not specified	n=16	Gay	Negative and stereotyped	Bollywood (Hindi)

Bhattacharjee, J. (2014)	International Journal of Scientific & Research publications	Content Analysis	n=1	Transgender & Gay	Positive	Bengali
Mahn, C., & Watt, D. (2014)	Journal of Lesbian Studies	Content Analysis	n=1	Lesbian	positive	Hindi
Devchoudhury, M. (2012)	Christ Institutional Repository	Survey	n=2	LGBT	Negative	Hindi
Kavi, A.R. (2000)	Journal of Homosexuality	Not specified	Not specified	Gay	Negative	Hindi/ Bollywood
Gopinath, G. (2000)	Journal of Homosexuality	Not specified	n=4	Lesbian, Gay and Transgender (cross-dressing)	positive	Hindi

PORTRAYAL/CHARACTER/THEMES

The research concerning the representation of sexual minorities pivots around certain key variables. The systematic review revealed that a large majority of the representation of sexual minorities in films revolves around identity, desire, resistance, gender performativity (Chatterjee.a, 2021; Choudhuri, 2020 & Dasgupta, 2015), social acceptability (Bhattacharyya, 2016; Prasitha, 2024; Chatterjee. b, 2021) love, respect, and freedom (Bhardwaj, 2023 & Chatterjee. a, 2021). Studies also highlighted the impact of these movies on the attitudes of heteronormative society (Bhugra et al., 2015; Biju & Sheeba, 2023). Given the influence of Hindi cinema worldwide, one of the studies examined how transgender people are portrayed in Bollywood films and how this affects the transgender community of Pakistan, Lahore (Yasin et al., 2020).

A central theme explored in the movies concerning sexual minorities is the sexual orientation of LGBTQ characters. Concurrently, the studies investigating the portrayal of sexual minorities have also examined it. On the subjects of the studies, the review revealed that twelve studies focused on the portrayal of transgender people, eleven on gay, ten on queer, eight on homosexuals, four on lesbians, and one on bisexuals.

A significant portion of the studies (n = 31, 68.8%) revealed a positive portrayal of sexual minorities in Indian cinema (Prasitha & Bhuvaneswari, 2024; Arora & Sylvia, 2023; Arya, 2023; James & venkatesan, 2022; Labade & Ajaonkar, 2022; Kuriakose, 2020; Dasgupta, 2015; & Mahn & Watt, 2014). The majority of the studies underscored the dynamic role that Hindi films have played in normalizing LGBTQ+ identities and challenging heteronormative narratives (Bhardwaj, 2023).

Despite this trend toward more positive portrayals, 14 studies highlighted a negative portrayal of LGBTQ individuals. These studies emphasized the ongoing need for accurate, sensitive, and realistic representation (Bhugra et al., 2015; Arora, 2023; James, 2022; Abhishek, 2023; Mammen, 2021; Kalra & Bhugra, 2015; & Kaur, 2017). This review emphasizes the dire need for a critical analysis of films to address the complexities and nuances involved in the contemporary portrayal of sexual minorities in Indian cinema.

The studies underlining the negative impact of films argue that transgender people experience emotional anguish and societal prejudice as a result of poor media portrayals, which negatively impact public opinion and

behavior (Yasin et al., 2020). Traditionally, Bollywood has portrayed LGBTQ characters through stereotypes, frequently confining them to roles of comedic relief or antagonists (Bashir & Pandey, 2023). Bollywood films often depict homosexuality negatively, which both reflects and potentially perpetuates negative societal attitudes (Bhugra et al., 2015). Bollywood still has a dearth of diverse, sensitive, and realistic representations of LGBTQ+ characters, even when some regional movies progressively embrace Western sensibilities (Labade, 2022; Gopinath, 2020; Kumar, 2022).

The comprehensive findings from all studies underscore a nuanced and sensitive depiction of hijras (transgenders) and increased visibility of gay relationships in Hindi cinema. In the recent Hindi film industry, gay characters are seen with an almost constant influx. Some of the reviewed articles discuss films that have begun to mainstream gay love and destigmatize non-normative sexualities, often using intertextual references to Hindi cinema that can be queer subversive. This creates a genealogy of gay desire within the industry, balancing between upholding the heteronormative status quo and promoting progressive narratives. A new gay culture is emerging in Bollywood, characterized by the portrayal of homoeroticized, single heroes facilitated by underlying misogyny. This marks a transitional phase in the depiction of Bollywood heroes and gay identities.

While there are historic films showcasing queer relationships, such as those between two women, the portrayal often remains limited by societal norms and the protagonists' social privileges. This sanitization weaves queerness into nationalist, cultural, and family themes, diluting its impact. An adequate portrayal of bisexual characters is still a distant dream. The review shows that only one film, "Margarita with a Straw (2014)", partially engaged in bisexual representation. This film primarily deals with disability while engaged in sexual orientation discourse. Some films celebrate queer relationships through performativity and gender parody. Films such as "Dostana (2008)" engage with queer discourse by challenging heterosexual norms through an often insensitive portrayal. Contrastingly, movies like "Aligarh (2016)" highlights marginalized queer identities, underscoring the importance of queer visibility in Indian cinema and critiquing legal and neoliberal discourses, presenting queer abjection as a form of resistance.

The articles examined the socio-political aspects of same-sex desire, with a particular focus on how family systems limit women's sexual agency and

how films such as “Fire (1998)” address these issues. Hindustani cinema’s portrayal of transgender people has historically been stigmatized. Despite the Film industry’s continued preference for male-centric tales, the portrayal of strong lesbian characters in films like “Badhaai Do (2022)” and “Angry Indian Goddesses (2015)” suggests development. There is still a long way to go before people who identify themselves as LGBTQ+ are realistically portrayed in Indian cinema, particularly in Hindi cinema.

In conclusion, there has been a general shift in society’s views toward sexuality, which manifests itself in the expanding literature of studies on how LGBTQ+ identities are portrayed in Indian cinema. It emphasizes LGBTQ+ communities’ ongoing struggles for acceptance and visibility. Numerous studies emphasize the need for ongoing efforts to achieve genuine, accurate, sensitive, and inclusive representations, even as they show that significant progress has been made in depicting LGBTQ characters and narratives. In order to support more acceptance and inclusion in Indian society and to add to the ongoing discussion about LGBTQ+ rights and visibility, it is imperative that this change occurs and advances.

The stories frequently show how families oppose same-sex relationships, emphasizing how crucial family acceptance is in the larger context. It strived to take a nuanced approach to how sexuality and disability are portrayed in Hindi films, with movies significantly influencing public discourse.

IMPACT OF SUPREME COURT DECISION

In the context of India’s socio-political setting around the decriminalisation and re-criminalisation of homosexuality, this review examines the representation of sexual minorities in Indian cinema. This review centers on the implications of the 2009 Delhi High Court ruling, which amended Section 377 temporarily, and the subsequent re-criminalization in 2013. The decriminalization of adult consenting homosexual conduct by the Delhi High Court in 2009 was a significant milestone for the LGBT movement in India. This legal shift gave hope, leading to a more inclusive portrayal of sexual minorities. However, in 2013, the Supreme Court decided to overturn this ruling and reinstitute the prohibition on homosexual activity, thus solidifying heteronormative paradigms shaping the portrayal of LGBTQ+ people in movies. In 2018, the Section was repealed again, reviving hopes for LGBTQ+

people to be accepted both on and off-screen. The review includes articles before and after Section 377 of the IPC annulment.

Studies on the portrayal of sexual minorities in Indian cinema are a relatively new phenomenon, with a gradual increase in publications observed after Section 377 of the IPC was abrogated in 2018. This impactful decision to decriminalize Section 377 of IPC has evidenced a notable shift in the increased number of films produced and the way sexual minorities are portrayed in films. As viewers and filmmakers explore more complex representations, the portrayal is becoming more inclusive and realistic (Bhugra et al., 2015 & Bhattacharyya, 2016). According to Bhattacharyya (2016), films made after the Supreme Court's decision show how society is changing in favour of greater acceptance and empathy for sexual minorities. Most articles ($n = 10$, 22.2%) were published in 2023 (Figure 2). The results of this review indicate a marked increase in the number of studies ($n = 28$, 62.2%) conducted after the Supreme Court decided to abrogate Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code.

Despite the abrogation of Section 377, the increasing visibility of self-proclaimed gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals, and the politicization of the movement, Hindi cinema's representation of queer people has not significantly evolved (Bakshi & Sen, 2012). Some films like *Rules: Pyaar Ka Superhit Formula* (2003), *Chameli* (2003), and *Honeymoon Travels Pvt. Ltd.* (2007) make commendable efforts to 'naturalize' homoerotic desires, others such as *Girlfriend* (2004), *Fashion* (2008), and *Bol Bachchan!* (2012) continue to depict queer characters as diseased, scheming, and grotesque, reinforcing their status as societal aberrations (Bakshi & Sen, 2012). These conflicting trends have been concurrently present in Bollywood over the past two decades, both before and after the abrogation of Section 377 (Bakshi & Sen, 2012).

CINEMA PERSPECTIVE

The majority of studies concerning the representation of sexual minorities in Indian cinema focus on Hindi cinema ($n = 27$, 60%). Other studies focused on Malayalam ($n = 9$), Bengali ($n = 5$), Tamil ($n = 3$), and Marathi ($n = 1$), as shown in Figure 3. Although the number of movies portraying sexual minorities in regional cinema is limited, the findings reveal that the representation is positive in general. Films like "*Ka Bodyscapes* (2016)" subvert conventional depictions of patriarchal masculinity, placing them

within the historical framework of male homosexuality in Malayalam cinema and the evolving feminist and queer politics in Kerala. There is a growing acceptance and visibility of LGBTQ+ identities in mainstream culture, as evidenced by the popularity of films like “Njan Marykutty (2018)”. The systematic review suggests a potential for more realistic portrayals in regional cinema in the future.

Of the 14 movies that reveal a negative portrayal of sexual minorities in Indian cinema, 13 were from Hindi cinema, while only one was made in regional cinema. This disparity can be attributed to the prioritization of commercial interests, which has overshadowed the potential to make a significant impact. In Hindi cinema, sexual minorities are often depicted as marginalized individuals struggling with personal and social issues (Kuriakose, 2020). The focus of Hindi cinema on commercial success hinders the opportunities to provide a more nuanced and impactful representation of sexual minorities. Mainstream Bollywood films have started to tackle homosexuality. However, they frequently misrepresent the hardships of the LGBTQ+ community (Raju, 2020). This disproportionate representation underscores the need for Bollywood/Hindi cinema, which exerts a significant influence on social perceptions, to adopt more accurate and sensitive portrayals of sexual minorities, as exemplified by the regional cinemas.

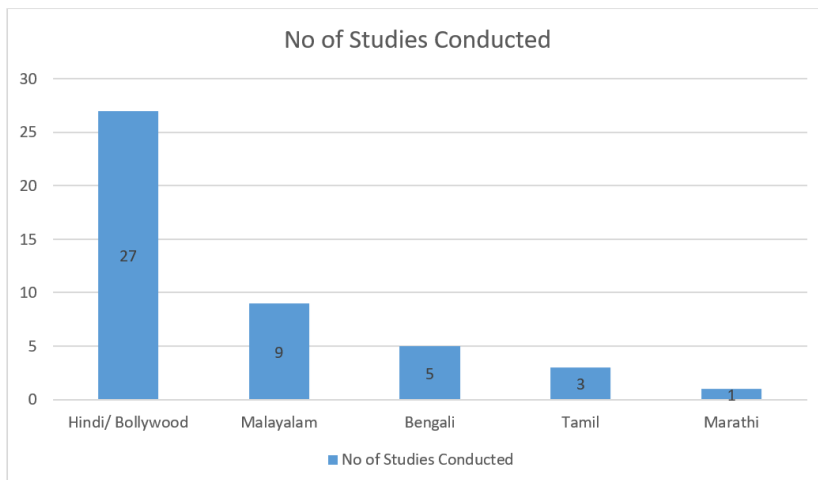


Figure 3: Number of studies conducted on Indian cinema.

The research methodologies employed in the studies reviewed in this systematic review vary significantly. Most utilized content analysis (n = 29), with findings synthesized narratively. Other methodologies included textual and discourse analysis (n = 1), thematic analysis (n = 1), multimodal discourse analysis (n = 1), and in-depth analysis (n = 1). Two studies employed mixed methods, combining content analysis, interviews, and surveys, while ten did not specify their methodology. The studies based on mixed methods were more inclined towards the impact of these portrayals on the attitudes of heterosexuals. This review postulates that content analysis is the predominant methodology employed in the studies. This methodology is often used at the expense of a more nuanced analysis of sexual minorities in films.

FACTORS AFFECTING PORTRAYAL

The contradictory portrayal highlights the intricate relationship between Bollywood's cultural myths and socio-legal developments. Enshrined societal biases influenced the cinematic discourse despite progressive court verdicts encouraging certain filmmakers to question established conventions. The systematic research shows that although there have been improvements in the realistic and sympathetic Portrayal of LGBT characters in Indian cinema, these developments have been patchy and frequently offset by regressive portrayals. The socio-political milieu, precisely the dynamic legal status of homosexuality, is a pivotal factor in molding these portrayals. The representation of LGBT issues in Hindi cinema is a crucial topic for ongoing academic investigation and discourse, given the significant influence of films on Indian culture. This is because the onscreen portrayal reflects broader societal attitudes and has the power to either challenge or reinforce preconceived notions.

The studies based on the impact and effect of Indian cinema's representation of sexual minorities reveal that these representations significantly impact the mental health of the LGBTQ community. The Supreme Court's rejection of specific rulings has exacerbated feelings of dejection among sexual minorities. Despite the progressive inclusion in non-traditional films, Bollywood still exhibits an absence of diverse and non-stereotypical LGBTQ characters, contributing to minority stress and societal stigmatization.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The systematic review indicates the need for ongoing advocacy and education to promote a more inclusive society through media representations. The review emphasizes the importance of integrating queer themes into local contexts and challenging prevailing stereotypes. The systematic review revealed that most previous empirical studies relied predominantly on the content analysis method. Approximately three studies adopted mixed methods, incorporating surveys, interviews, and content analysis to understand the subject matter comprehensively. A few studies employed multimodal discourse analysis and textual, thematic, and in-depth analysis.

The review indicates a significant opportunity for future research to adopt a broader range of discourse analysis methodologies, such as critical discourse analysis and multimodal discourse analysis. These approaches can enhance our understanding of cinematic representation by examining how language, imagery, and symbolism interact to convey meaning. Exploratory methods like ethnography are vital to understanding the everyday lives of LGBTQ+ individuals to evaluate their representation and highlight their issues. Simultaneously, audience studies need to be conducted to assess audiences' perceptions toward LGBTQ+ and concurrently gauge the impact of movies on their attitudes.

Moreover, this review has identified a limited use of theoretical frameworks in conceptualizing the representation of sexual minorities in Indian cinema. There is a potential for future research to benefit from using relevant theoretical perspectives, including auteur theory, film theory, frame analysis, and the concept of gaze. These frameworks offer a thorough and concrete understanding of how LGBTQ+ people are portrayed in movies. They influence audiences' perceptions, add to larger cultural discourses, and make it possible to understand an individual's style, framing techniques, narrative structures, and visual aspects of filmmakers.

Furthermore, incorporating relevant theories about audience response and media effects could help shed light on how these portrayals affect public opinions and LGBTQ+ people's experiences. Different methodological and theoretical approaches will improve scholarly discourse and contribute to Indian cinema portraying sexual minorities in a realistic, inclusive, and authentic manner.

Imperatively, filmmakers must strive to create more complex and authentic LGBTQ+ characters, avoiding stereotyping and tokenism. It can be helpful to dispel the myths and prejudices about LGBTQ+ people by surfacing their daily lives and personal struggles. This step could encourage empathy and understanding among audiences. Moreover, the authenticity of representation can be enhanced by incorporating diverse cultural and regional contexts. Researchers should explore how LGBTQ+ depictions influence public attitudes and contribute to the broader discussion on gender and sexuality in future research. A collaborative effort between filmmakers and LGBTQ+ communities is key to ensuring accurate, inclusive, and respectful representations while evaluating how these portrayals affect society's attitude toward sexual minorities in India.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS REVIEW

However, this review has some limitations. Due to the specific keywords searched in the study, some relevant articles may have been excluded inadvertently since they were not found in the databases of Google Scholar, Elicit, and other search engines. As a result, there is a possibility that the scope of the review might not cover all the relevant literature available on the subject. Furthermore, other reviews may use different criteria to determine the inclusion of articles in this review. These differences in standards, therefore, may lead to variation between the findings presented here and those of other studies. In interpreting the results of this study, it is crucial to consider the limitations mentioned above.

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**The Book as the Myth:
Genre as the Memory of the Novel in Italo
Calvino's 'If on a winter's night a traveller' and
Mario Vargas Llosa's 'Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter'
Gargi Bhattacharya**

ABSTRACT

In this article, I discuss the concept and role of 'genre', and how the postmodern novel uses it to render myth and memory into an interminable scopic narrative by double-coding myth into fiction and fiction into myth. I argue that instead of its radical disruptibility and piecemealness, a lot of postmodern work is actually an act of stretching across vast distances. Hidden amongst its be-all-and-end-all 'meta'-ness is an effort to de-historicise itself and embed itself in interwoven matrices of mythology and legends. In other words, I attempt to establish the postmodern novel's discursive nature, which is in opposition to its larger theorisation as a champion of pastiche and parody. Arguably, it does *employ* pastiche and parody but to a distinctly discursive/mythographic end. Genre, thus, becomes not only a typological category but also a documentation of the historical stages that fiction has gone through, becoming thus, a historical revisiting of the novel's own movements through time: 'genre' becomes the 'memory' of the novel.

Readers are implicated in this effort as gatherers of clues, who shall 'actualise' this myth, to which is added the myth of the authorial figure. This phenomenon adds to the dimension of mythographic transit and transience to the postmodern impulse and the way time as a category in postmodern fiction is treated in the light of its non-causal hinges in the contours leading from one temporal span to another, consequently creating an eternal epic-like mythological temporal continuum. I also argue that this unorthodox use of generic identities and the role of the author abides by the postmodern

penchant for slowing down time and regressing into a patently mythological time-scale. Postmodern fiction therefore (dis)integrates into a transit time scale, reiterating and reproducing itself eternally, since narratives may only end when they are causal.

Allen Thiher's contention, that postmodernism enables the author in the telling of tales chronicling "the stages in his own mind's history from prehistoric times to the present" and that this "historical development of the mind" (Thiher p. 203) displaces the logocentric discourse inherent in the received idiom of language that has mapped reality till the postmodern era is upheld in the way postmodern fiction plays with genre and inscribes the memory of its own development in its textual matrix. This is especially suggested by the way several mythologies surrounding the text—its title, origin, popularity, as we saw earlier in the chapter—accompany the text on its outside, mostly, I would propose, as the device of the *parergon*, mythologising the text and extending that mythology outwards, even via other media or channels.

However, I would also contend that through the device of mythification, the text itself is transformed and transmitted. The mythic text is also rendered into a receptacle that carries not only popular and/or repressed recollections but the is also the bearer of the memory of the novel. The postmodern idiom takes every opportunity to encode this memory in its corpus—this is part of its narrative design, and its oscillation between genres within the text. The novel preserves its own memory in the form of this generic play—going in and out of various stages of the development of the novel and acknowledging their presence and contribution. It has gradually constructed, in its own oeuvre, the myth of the novel itself, double-coding and ironically appropriating myth as fiction and fiction as a myth.

I shall consider the example of two seminal books in this regard (though numerous others come to mind)—Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller* (1979) and Mario Vargas Llosa's *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* (1977). The books could not have been more dissimilar in the plot, coherence and functionality of their respective diegetic worlds but embody the same audacious spirit of showing the reader what the term *fiction* can magically muster up its sleeve.

Vargas Llosa's book has been called one of the best examples of postmodern fiction—a fiction about the act of writing itself—a perfect metanarrative that has brought happiness and satisfaction to critics by fitting into their theories with graceful ease. However, one aspect of the novel is its elaboration of a genetic cipher—a chromosomal code embedded in the text, that takes the reader through the stages of the novel. Its memory is its myth of itself, recounting and following the stages of its own development: “My writings are preserved in a more indelible form than the printed page...they are engraved upon the memory of my ... listeners” (Llosa p. 141).

The text deftly weaves a mythographic narration, relating the way the novel and its author have reached the status of legend by the middle of the twentieth century. For instance, a passage describes what the young Mario thinks the life of a fiction writer entails, reminiscent of the lives of authors like Hemmingway:

I told her the whole story of my life—not my past life, but the one I was going to have in the future, when I lived in Paris and was a writer. I told her I'd wanted to write ever since I'd first read Alexandre Dumas, that since that moment I'd dreamed of going off to France and living in a garret, in the artists' *quartier*, dedicating my heart and soul to literature, the most marvellous thing in the world. (Llosa p. 93)

More than anything, the book is about this legend—the myth surrounding the production of a text, the act of writing and the figure of the author. The character of the legendary radio soap opera writer, Pedro Camacho, enhances this myth with his larger-than-life persona, his worshipful fan following and his quirky eccentricities. Following the legend of the true ‘artist’, Camacho is shown to be a role-player who has no affinity to either money or fame and who lives almost monastically, married just to his work. In addition, he uses the novelist's instruments: an “enormous ancient Remington, a big hulk of a hearse invulnerable to the ravages of time” (Llosa p. 14) and a book of quotations called “*Ten Thousand Literary Quotations Drawn from the Hundred Best Writers in the World*, with the subtitle: ‘What Cervantes, Shakespeare, Moliere, etc., have had to say about God, Life, Death, Love, Suffering, etc....’” (Llosa p. 53)—the stuff of fables and legends. Camacho is described as “an industry... He writes all the stage plays put on in Bolivia and acts in all of them. And he also writes all the radio serials, directs them, and plays the male lead in all of them” (Llosa p. 7). Pedro embodies the legend of the artist who

inhabits his characters' psyche, and his genius is extolled both for his fabled versatility as well as his prolificity. Mario equates his 'process' with other legendary practitioners of art:

How was it possible, at the speed with which his little fingers flew over the keys, for him to be *inventing* the situations, the incidents, the dialogue of so many different stories for nine, ten hours a day? And yet it was possible: the scripts came pouring out of that tenacious head of his and those indefatigable hands one after the other, each of them exactly the right length, like strings of sausages out of a machine. Once a chapter was finished, he never made corrections in it or even read it over; he handed it to the secretary to have copies run off and immediately started in on the next one. I once told him that when I watched him work I was reminded of the theory of the French Surrealists with regard to automatic writing, which according to them flowed directly from the subconscious, bypassing the censorship of reason. (Llosa p. 140)

The novel, simultaneously, acknowledges the stages of mimesis, realism, modernism, all the way to postmodernism. From "the time I was obsessed with the idea that fiction should be realistic" (Llosa p. 394) to "I write about life, and the impact of reality is crucial to my work" (Llosa p. 44) and "I work from life; my writings are firmly rooted in reality, as the grapevine is rooted in the vinestock. That's why I need this. I want to know whether that world there is or is not as I have represented it" (Llosa p. 50) to "you're like Romantic writers" (Llosa p. 51)—Llosa's text holds invisible traces of the novel's past and its origin, from the great realists to the neo-Romantics. He acknowledges the debts of the genre to romance and opera writers, to serials and vituperative and vulgar penny books, on his way to postmodernism: "I was going to entitle my story 'The Qualitative Leap,' and I wanted it to be as coldly objective, intellectual, terse, and ironic as one of Borges's—an author whom I had just discovered at that time" (Llosa p. 45). It describes the transition from modernism to postmodernism, ascribing to high modernists many of the tropes that postmodernism has taken credit for: "Didn't I tell you that that device of carrying characters over from one story to another was invented by Balzac?" (Llosa p. 300). What the novel remembers of itself does not get transferred in the form of a coherent, cogent, teleological history but through its own memory of itself—the high points, the myths and legends of the genre and its practitioners: from "Cervantes [and] of his useless arm" (Llosa p. 196)

to "...I suggested he follow the example of Victor Hugo and Hemingway and write standing up" (Llosa p. 210). These references, if we notice them closely, are not *intertextual* so much as they are *interpersonal*—recounting the many stories and rumours surrounding the illustrious practitioners of the genre. In certain cases, the author even *invents* these myths:

I spoke of the avant-garde, of experimentation. *I cited or invented authors* who, I assured him, had caused a sensation in Europe by introducing innovations very much like his: changing their characters' identity in the middle of the story, deliberately creating glaring inconsistencies to keep the reader in suspense. (Llosa p. 263, my emphasis)

This subtextual mythology of the novel includes the way the genius Pedro Camacho is shown to descent into madness and the utter chaos of his frantic, hyperactive imagination starts mixing up characters between his numerous radio soaps:

"Genaro Jr. thinks that the increase in the number of listeners is due to your idea of mixing up the characters of different serials, of linking up the various plots," I told him, whereupon he dropped the napkin, his eyes searched mine, and he turned white as a sheet. "He thinks it's brilliant," I hastened to add. (Llosa p. 263)

What adds to Camacho's legend is the fact that Llosa is trying to tell us that brilliant writers often stumbled across innovations completely by accident, and these innovations—the aberrant textual transitions—were inscribed into generic practice and became part of its evolution:

"They all drowned," the foreign woman put in. "The doctor's nephew Richard, and Elianita and her husband, Red Antúnez, that stupid idiot, and even the little baby born of the incestuous relation, Rubencito. They'd come down to the boat to see them off."

"But what's really funny is that Lieutenant Jaime Concha, who's from another serial, also drowned, especially since he'd already died in the El Callao fire three days before," the girl at the desk, who'd stopped typing, butted in again, dying with laughter. "Those serials have all turned into a tremendous joke, don't you think?" (Llosa p. 299)

In his bid to rectify his mistakes and start afresh, Camacho starts killing off his characters in what he calls "Dantesque slaughter" (Llosa p. 326). On the other hand, inadvertently, with these killings, his soaps became more and

more life-like and began to compliment real life news incidents broadcast on the Panamericana news channel:

I ... turned the job of preparing all the hourly bulletins over to Pascual, who was thus able to offer the radio listeners a veritable festival of accidents, crimes, acts of mayhem, and kidnappings that caused as much blood to be shed via Radio Panamericana as was being shed on the airwaves at Radio Central by my friend Camacho in his systematic genocide of his characters. (Llosa p. 300)

Added to this the lore of famous authors often claiming that once they create characters, the characters take up a life of their own and dictate their own trajectories and fates, even against the will of the author himself or herself:

“Something embarrassing is happening to me these days,” I finally heard him say in a very low voice, as though talking to himself. “I’m losing track of where I am in my scripts, I’m not sure of what I’m doing, and confusions creep in.” He looked at me in anguish. “I know that you’re a loyal young man, a friend who can be trusted. Not a word of any of this to the merchants!”

[...]

He raised his fingers to his temples. “My head is a boiling volcano of ideas, of course,” he declared. “It’s my memory that’s treacherous. That business about the names, I mean. I’m telling you this in all confidence, my friend. I’m not the one who’s mixing them up; they’re getting mixed up all by themselves. And when I realize what’s going on, it’s too late. I have to perform a juggling act to get them back in their proper places, to invent all sorts of clever reasons to account for all the shifting around. A compass that can’t tell the north from the south can lead to grave, grave consequences.” (Llosa p. 264)

The novel also displays a conscious effort to acknowledge the various narratological devices that have evolved over time: the text comes to us in two distinct parts, first, an autofictional part where Llosa automythologises his own romance with a distant aunt and his subsequent elopement and marriage to her, and second, the soap operas of Pedro Camacho, inexplicably coming to us in prose form, mediated by an omniscient narrator.

As the novel progresses, the plot of the autofictional section takes on more and more elements from the soap operas—scandalous romance, incest, secrecy, intrigue and elopement against one’s parents’ wishes, invention of melodramatic plots as excuses to that elopement, and finally a marriage

against the normative codes of society, while Pedro Camacho's hitherto melodramatic plots, which began in incest, rape and scandals, become more and more realistic:

In Pedro Camacho's soap operas there are hardly ever any love affairs or anything like that. Right now, for example, Olga and I are all caught up in the one that comes on at three o'clock. The tragedy of a young man who can't sleep because the minute he closes his eyes he starts reliving how he ran over a poor little girl and crushed her to death." (Llosa p. 186)

In this way, the novel obliquely acknowledges the presence of traces from other genres and the novel's debt to them as it evolved from an overarching matrix of gothic and romance novels, melodramas, plays and other generic manifestations of narratology. To complete the process of mythologisation, Llosa places the narrative in "those long ago days" (Llosa p. 1), a veritable mythosphere representing his youth, since "clock time means nothings where art is concerned" (Llosa p. 42). Amidst heaps of books of papers, what the readers are truly invited to look upon and marvel, is the myth of the novel writer across space and time:

An office had been set up for him in the concierge's cubbyhole. In this tiny room, with a low ceiling and walls badly damaged by the dampness and by the ravages of time and desecrated by countless graffiti, there was now a monumental wooden desk, so dilapidated that it was about to fall apart, but nonetheless as imposing as the enormous typewriter rumbling away on it. The outsize dimensions of the desk and the Remington literally swallowed up the little runt. He had put a couple of cushions on the seat of his chair, but even so, his face came up no higher than the keyboard, so that he was typing away with his hands at eye level, thus causing him to appear to be boxing. He was so totally absorbed in his work that he didn't even notice my presence, despite the fact that I was leaning right over him. His pop-eyes were riveted on the paper as he pecked at the keys with his two forefingers, biting his tongue. He was wearing the same black suit as on the first day, and had taken off neither his suit coat nor his little bow tie. At the sight of him, with his long hair and his attire mindful of a nineteenth-century poet, sitting there rigid and dead-serious, concentrating all his attention on what he was typing so furiously, in front of that desk and that typewriter that were far too big for him, in this den that was much too small for the three of

them, I couldn't quite decide whether the whole scene was pitiful or wildly funny. (Llosa p. 41)

The construction of such a mythology of the novel as well as the writer, albeit ahistorically, is similarly found in another text published two years later—Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller*. This novel, unlike Llosa's text which deals largely with the myth of the author, mythologise the novel in relation to the reader and the reader's relationship with texts. The narrative, in the form of a frame story, is about the reader trying to first buy and then read a book called *If on a winter's night a traveller*. Each chapter is clearly divided into two sections. The first section of each chapter is in second person, and describes the process the reader goes through to attempt to read the next chapter of the book he or she is reading. The second half is the first part of a new book that the reader (throughout addressed as "you") comes across. The second half of the chapter becomes a narrative that is invariably about something different from the previous ones, and represents the various sub-genres that the novel has developed and evolved over time within its own oeuvre—in other words, a nod to the novel's memory of itself.

The book is not merely, unlike most interpretations, about the 'constructedness' of the novel, which is shown to be fragile. Everything from bad binding to seminars that necessitate only part of the narrative to be analysed and discussed, may interrupt the apparent 'wholeness' of the text. However, this sense of irony and playfulness, evident in the construction of the frame story and the story-within-a-story effect, is not merely directed at a metafictional intention. The novel does much more. It signals the primacy of the readers is the precursor to ergodic literatures of the post-postmodern era that demand a non-trivial effort on the part of the reader to understand and value the intricacies of narrative devices. It recreates the universe of the reader, investing tremendous effort in imagining the reader as a mythical creature in the world of books. For the myth of the book to exist, this myth of the reader must exist too, for what is a text without a reader to unfurl and deduce its complex codes and signifiers? This is evident in the way parts of Calvino's text mirror Llosa's text—only, instead of the myth of the diligent authorial genius, there sits the myth of the diligent genius reader, whose devotion to the act of reading is equal to the creator's devotion to the act of signification:

On the terrace of a chalet in the bottom of the valley a young woman is sunning herself, reading a book. The two writers observe her with the

spyglass. “How enthralled she is! She’s holding her breath! How feverishly she turns the pages!” the tormented writer thinks. “Certainly she is reading a novel of great effect, like those of the productive writer!” “How enthralled she is! As if transfigured in meditation, as if she saw a mysterious truth being disclosed!” the productive writer thinks. “Surely she is reading a book rich in hidden meanings, like those of the tormented writer!”

The greatest desire of the tormented writer is to be read the way that young woman is reading. (Calvino: *If on a winter’s night a traveller* p. 174)

The text achieves, via a combination of the frame device and a direct address to the invisible, imagined reader as “you”, the transformation of the avid reader to an avid listener, a recipient of oral narratives. The structure of the novel mimics the oral tradition of storytelling, in the lines of *Arabian Nights* and the *Panchatantra*:

The romantic fascination produced in the pure state by the first sentences of the first chapter of many novels is soon lost in the continuation of the story: *it is the promise of a time of reading* that extends before us and can comprise all possible developments. I would like to be able to write a book that is only an incipit, that maintains for its whole duration the potentiality of the beginning, the expectation still not focused on an object. But how could such a book be constructed? Would it break off after the first paragraph? Would the preliminaries be prolonged indefinitely? Would it set the beginning of one tale inside another, as in the *Arabian Nights*?

(Calvino: *If on a winter’s night a traveller* p. 177, my emphasis)

This ‘time of writing’ is a world beyond time. The very beginnings of narrative experience. The text is therefore transporting the reader to a mythos where he/she can experience the origin of storytelling. The myth of the book takes place in this alternative mythotope:

Every time I sit down here I read, “It was a dark and stormy night. ..” and the impersonality of that incipit seems to open the passage from one world to the other, from the time and space of here and now to the time and space of the written word; I feel the thrill of a beginning that can be followed by multiple developments, inexhaustibly..

(Calvino: *If on a winter’s night a traveller* p. 176–7)

The *time of writing* is an endless, cyclical time loop, an enigmatic enunciation of timelessness, where innumerable versions of the same story can be created and

recreated, each being a new story. This interminable narrative is symptomised by the author's presenting various interpretations of a similar situation where two versions of a text supplied to this mythical reader by two different authors are conflated, in each interpretation, in different ways:

The young woman receives the two manuscripts. After a few days she invites the authors to her house, together, to their great surprise. "What kind of joke is this?" She says. "You've given me two copies of the same novel!"

Or else:

The young woman gets the two manuscripts mixed up.

She returns to the productive writer the tormented writer's novel in the productive writer's manner, and to the tormented writer the productive writer's novel in the tormented writer's manner. Both, seeing themselves counterfeited, have a violent reaction and rediscover their personal vein.

Or else:

A gust of wind shuffles the two manuscripts. The reader tries to reassemble them. A single novel results, stupendous, which the critics are unable to attribute. It is the novel that both the productive writer and the tormented writer have always dreamed of writing.

Or else:

The young woman had always been a passionate reader of the productive writer and has loathed the tormented writer. Reading the productive writer's new novel, she finds it phony and realizes that everything he wrote was phony; on the other hand, recalling the tormented writer's works, she now finds them splendid and can't wait to read his new novel. But she finds something completely different from what she was expecting, and she sends him to the devil, too.

Or else:

The same, replacing "productive" with "tormented" and "tormented" with "productive."

Or else:

The young woman was a passionate admirer, et cetera, et cetera, of the productive writer and loathed the tormented one. Reading the productive writer's new novel she doesn't notice at all that something has changed; she likes it, without being especially enthusiastic. As for the manuscript of the tormented writer, she finds it insipid like all the rest of this author's work.

She replies to the two writers with a few polite words. Both are convinced that she can't be a very alert reader and they pay no further attention to her.

Or else:

The same, replacing, et cetera.

(Calvino: *If on a winter's night a traveller* p. 174–6)

The technique of defamiliarisation of already known structures is evident in the passages, not unlike what Andy Warhol achieved in his Marilyn Diptych. This is the infinite idiom of the language of *différance*, which powers the interpretative mind of the reader to infinite dimensions. The interminable interpretative space, therefore, is shared by the avid reader as well as the tormented writer. They sit face-to-face, interlocked in a mythical universe, or perhaps, mythical parallel multiverses, where innumerable interpretations follow—a scene replicated by Calvino in his *Invisible Cities* where Marco Polo sits across Kublai Khan and narrates his endless narratives of non-existent cities. The myth of the narrative unfolds, therefore, not in the clock time of the present but in the endless, mythic time where a listener should sit enraptured by the mesmerising power of the narrative.

In this world, “reading is an operation without object; or that its true object is itself. The book is an accessory aid, or even a pretext” (Calvino: *If on a winter's night a traveller* p. 255). The *time of writing* and the *time of reading* finally merge by the time the narrative winds up. As the world hurries past outside this mythic time, the time inside stands still inside this bubble of “myths and mysteries” that “consist of impalpable little granules, like the pollen that sticks to the butterfly's legs; only those who have realized this can expect revelations and illuminations” (Calvino: *If on a winter's night a traveller* p. 254).

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Reconfiguring Bengali Masculinity in the Late Colonial Period: A Critical Literary Enquiry

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ABSTRACT:

Under colonial rule, the Bengalis were stigmatized as ‘effeminate’ and passive in comparison to the vigorous Western people who disseminated a set of assumptions regarding masculinity as an emblem of their superiority. In response, early Bengali writers like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay offered an idea of masculinity that has been seen as the semblance of its Western counterpart. However, with the Swadeshi movement, Bengali bhadralok reshaped their masculinity according to the needs of the hour. This paper shows how Byomkesh redefines masculinity as an ideological negotiation incorporating the ‘familial space’, much-discussed in the nationalist discourse of that time, into the construction of his masculinity, while primarily focusing on his intellectual prowess rather than physical vigour. Thus, the main thrust of my argument is that in the twilight of the colonial era, Byomkesh articulates an alternative and ideologically superior paradigm of manhood that is intellectual, moral, and sympathetic and that resists colonial stereotypes as well as the Western model of detective, eschewing the roughness and wildness which are often associated with it. This reconfiguration of masculinity by Byomkesh advances a moral autonomy from the cultural and ideological site of struggle in Saradindu’s texts.

Keywords: Masculinity, effeminacy, colonial stereotypes,
Byomkesh Bakshi, Detective fiction.

The British had categorized Indian men as the 'effeminate other' by using a gender hierarchy rooted in a specific Anglo-Protestant interpretation of manhood-Christian manliness- defined by values of martial prowess, muscular strength, rationality, and individualism. [Banerjee 2005, 2]

As academia is well familiar with the critical study of gender and femininity as a well-established discipline, the study of masculinity, in comparison, a recent phenomenon, has also gradually become a central focus in our understanding of gender relations and the role of men in society. What renders a male masculine is an age-old enquiry into human society, and the parameters have varied in different spatial and temporal locations throughout history. However, the tendency to be masculine was evident even in ancient times, as reflected in various historical and religious texts, ranging from the *Code of Hammurabi* to the *Hebrew Bible*. The famous Roman historian Publius Tacitus portrayed Arminius, the chieftain of the Germanic tribe, as a masculine hero for his bravery and violent nature. In short, masculinity, instead of being a fixed idea, is a socially constructed ethos that undergoes certain changes through various historical, ideological, and political forces. Additionally, instead of being a uniform idea, it emerges as a heterogeneous one, owing to its culturally specific connotation.

R. W. Connell, in her famous book *Masculinities*, contends that the concept of masculinity cannot be defined as a single, homogeneous idea; rather, it is much more culture-specific, rendering it a heterogeneous and elusive one. She refers to various types of masculinity that prevail in society, but the idea of which is never fixed: Hegemonic, Complicit, Subordinate, and Marginalized masculinity. Drawing on Gramsci's notion of hegemony, she explains how one particular group becomes dominant over women and other male groups, such as gay men. On the other hand, males who do not conform to the normative heterosexual group are regarded as the subordinate ones. Connell also maintains that the construction of masculinity is perpetrated through institutional practices, and this idea has a deep resonance in our study of the encounter between the colonizer and the colonized in India, and then the subsequent construction of the hierarchical male gender notion.

This trope of masculinity was a very contested arena in the colonial epistemology as the colonial master began to percolate the racial notion of masculinity, attaching it as a tag of their superiority over the native people, who were consequently portrayed as a foil to their idea of the notion. They

propagated the concept of 'effeminate Bengali' in relation to their virile Englishman as a sign of their racial superiority, which consequently conferred upon them the justification to rule over the native ones. From a socially defined idea, it became saturated with a political undertone, negotiating power relations between the colonizers and the colonized. John Rosselli observes that even this idea of the effeminate Indian goes back to earlier days when the colonizers first arrived here¹, as Richard Orme opined in his book *History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan* "...the general effeminacy of character which is visible in all the Indians throughout the empire, the natives of Bengal are still of weaker frame and more enervated disposition than those of any other province: bodily strength, courage, and fortitude are unknown: even the labour of the common people is totally void of energy" (Orme 5). According to Minalini Sinha, this discourse of colonial hierarchy of masculinity was played on the political plane. Instead of looking through the construction of masculinity on the psychological plane, as Ashish Nandy did, Sinha argues in her study that it was more of a historically and politically charged process, as with it are attached "...multiple axes of domination and subordination in colonial Indian society as a whole" (Sinha 11). The province of Bengal was the most important locus of the whole colonial edifice at its nascent time and was the door to the domination over India, and Sumanta Banerjee's observation rings true in this context:

All through the first half of the Nineteenth century, Calcutta and its outlying areas were going through the process of developing into East India Company's main metropolis and headquarters for both its increasing commercial activities and administrative responsibilities, which extended over an ever expanding territory in other parts of India that were gradually being brought under its control. (Banerjee 2006, 46)

People like Macaulay, who is famous for his 1835 Minute, very derogatively described the features of Bengali people in one of his writings:

The physical organization of the Bengali is feeble even to effeminacy. He lives in a constant vapour bath. His pursuits are sedentary, his limbs delicate, his movements languid. During many ages he has been trampled upon by men of bolder and hardy deeds. Courage, independence, veracity are qualities to which his constitution and his situation are equally unfavourable. (qtd. in Rosselli 122)

This type of stereotyping of the Bengali people cemented the stigmatized notion in the cultural fabric and collective consciousness of that time. Sinha also refers to Bishop Heber who noted that Bengalis were thought of as “the greatest cowards in India” and even the term “Bengali [was] used to express anything which was roughish and cowardly” (qtd. in Sinha 15). Even the colonial construction of masculinity is very much consistent with the image of Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, who operated during the heyday of the colonial regime. He establishes a benchmark of manhood that is accepted as the normative quality of the detective.

However, in this scenario, to erase this stigmatised emasculation, middle-class Bengalis made several attempts from the second half of the nineteenth century. Roselli has noted how various attempts had been made to revive the culture of *akharas* or gymnasiums in the latter half of the nineteenth century to reinforce a sense of pride in the physical vitality of the Bengalis². In the literary sphere, authors like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya attempted to contest this notion of Bengali effeminacy by invoking the golden past of the nation. His novel *Anandamath* (1882), considered as the Bible by the first generation of the nationalists, represents this vision of masculinity most powerfully in the form of *sanyasi* warriors, who evoke a sense of physical prowess and militant nationalism. J. S. Alter opines that this figure of the *sanyasi* was strategically formulated to “transform itself as a politically proactive, assertive, even militant, rebellious, and violent figure, at the same time incorporating an ascetic, celibate and thus ‘spiritually pure’ masculinity” (Chattopadhyay 272). However, on the other hand, Ashish Nandy is of the opinion that “The order of the *sanyasi* in the novel was obviously the Hindu counterpart of the priesthood in some versions of Western Christianity...In fact, their Western-ness gave them their sense of history...their acceptance of the Raj as a transient but historically inevitable and legitimate phenomenon in Hindi terms” (Nandy 23). Therefore, in the initial stage of this encounter, the Bengalis showed a tendency to ape the Western idea of masculinity that lies in physical prowess and vitality. Over time, the Bengali *bhadralok* shifted the central axes of their masculine ideal from physical prowess to intellectual strength.

In that contested terrain of detective narratives, Byomkesh was a successful retort to the idea of man and manliness, propagated by the Western episteme. He not only belongs to the literary field of the Bengali detective genre, but

also deeply imbues himself with the sense of nationalism, which is reflected in his portrayal of masculine traits that are closely aligned with the historico-political currents of his time. Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's Byomkesh operated in the heyday of anti-colonial movements, leading to the decolonization of the nation. As there were various experimentations with the anti-colonial struggles against the British, in that late colonial period, Byomkesh too redefined the ethos of Bengali masculinity which was though congruent with the nationalist notion of the Bengali *bhadralok* section, yet at the same time charted a different direction that asserted his individuality within this arena.

The most significant aspect of this notion of masculinity that Byomkesh embodies is the intellectual prowess that remains the defining benchmark of his detective persona. All the stories attest to this quality of the detective, yet here I will refer to a particular story to substantiate my point, as in this story, Byomkesh's intelligence was directly challenged by an elite Bengali *bhadralok* who seemingly embodied the Western ideology and lifestyle. In the story "Seemanta Heera" ("The Hidden Heirloom"), the intellectual game is played out more distinctly on a binary basis. At its core, the story is structured around three prominent personae- Byomkesh, Kumar Tridib Narayan Roy, and Sir Digindra Narayan Roy, but the tug of war prominently takes place between the detective and Sir Digindra, who happens to be the uncle of Kumar Tridib. Kumar informs Byomkesh that he inherited a family diamond from his ancestors, and they believed that if the diamond remained with them, they would not be harmed. His uncles repeatedly asked him to give it to him, but he respectfully declined his entreaties. But when Kumar Tridib took that precious diamond to a jewellery exhibition in Kolkata, it was missing mysteriously; and later he discovered through a letter, written by his uncle to him, that Digindra had stolen that diamond to keep it for his own possession. Kumar Tridib relied on Byomkesh to retrieve that valuable thing from his uncle and to restore it to its true heir. Byomkesh took that responsibility and reassured him.

Sir Digindra may be seen as a prototype of the Western rulers who embody the notion of hegemonic masculinity. He is a scientist and lives in Calcutta, and gets a good amount of allowance from the state. Kumar Tridib describes: "He is a strange man. If he was born abroad, he would have been recognised as a genius... In his young days he had discovered some unknown facts about the plaster of paris – he was knighted by the British Government" (Bandyopadhyay

27). While on the one hand, his act of usurpation aligns him more with the colonial masters who had drained native resources, on the other hand, his nephew Kumar Tridib stands as a colonized who has been deprived of his own property, a person symbolizing marginalized masculinity. Though Kumar was the *zamindar* of North Bengal within this colonial gender orientation, deeply charged with power relations, he was cornered as a marginalised emblem in the narrative. This directly leads us to Tanika Sarkar's association of manhood with that of property, arguing that the Bengali middle class was financially eroded by the new economic frameworks developed by the colonizers in the second half of the 19th century. By the Permanent Settlement of 1793, the rentier class amassed a fortune from ground rent³. However, from the 1870s onwards, the class faced a considerable decrease in their income from revenue owing to some factors as population growth, land division, and stagnation in agricultural development⁴. Later, there was a clear inclination towards government jobs, mostly clerical in nature – a phenomenon that reflected their professional inefficiency. Sumit Sarkar also opines that this involvement in petty clerical jobs led to the formation of a perception of effeminacy among the Bengalis⁵. Therefore, this point may be conveniently deduced that the idea of manhood or masculinity is also associated with access to property, which attests male authority in the colonial socio-political dynamics. Following this thread of argument, Kumar Tridib's loss of the diamond to Sir Digindra can very conveniently be interpreted as the domination of hegemonic masculinity over the marginalized one. The diamond was the symbol of ancestral wealth and an emblem of masculinity whose dispossession renders Kumar emasculated and bereft of power.

In this dichotomy, Byomkesh emerges as an intersection between them, embodying counter-hegemonic masculinity that resists the hegemonic one in its intellectual prowess. In their confrontation, when Byomkesh asked for only seven days, Sir Digindra replied, "Look here Byomkeshbabu, you think that you are very intelligent, isn't it? You think that you are the greatest detective this side of the Atlantic? I will not throw you out. You will have complete freedom to come in and go out of this house. Find out what you have come for. You have given your word that you will find it within seven days. I am giving you seven years – find it if you can and be damned" (Bandyopadhyay 36). This articulation of Sir Digindra is symptomatic of the internalization of colonial superiority by the native elites, an aspect which Frantz Fanon explores in his

Black Skin and White Masks. Just as the colonizers produced colonial discourse through their (mis) understanding and (mis) representation of the Orient, often at odds with the actual reality of the region, Sir Digindra, guided by his orientalist attitude, dismissed Byomkesh as a common native without any rationality and intellectual capacity. Later, he challenged Byomkesh saying, “You will grow old and die but you will never find the diamond. It is impossible for Byomkesh Bakshi to find what Digin Roy has hidden” (Bandyopadhyay 37). This encounter tacitly hints at the tendency of what Gayatri Spivak has termed ‘epistemic violence’, the colonizers’ attempt to render the colonized in such a way as to erase, silence, and distort the knowledge system of the marginalized people. Sir Digindra’s dismissive attitude towards Byomkesh’s intellectual capacity has the affinity of the colonial race’s reproduction of oriental knowledge through their own interpretive framework. Finally, Byomkesh succeeded in retrieving that diamond from Digin Roy’s house and restored it to Kumar Tridib. Byomkesh’s success is not merely the success of a detective; rather, it symbolically unsettles the hierarchies set by the colonizers and consequently reclaims indigenous agency. Therefore, within this contested terrain of Saradindu detective stories, the notion of hegemonic masculinity is effectively resisted, and an alternative version of masculinity emerges, closely aligned with the values of the Bengali intelligentsia.

Another crucial dimension that Byomkesh encompasses in the embodiment of masculinity is the much-discussed familial aspect that had played a significant role in shaping the nationalist thinking and informing the anti-colonial struggles. While detectives like Holmes or Dupin set an example of a lone individual immersed in their own respective world, Byomkesh, on the contrary, integrates the space of the family, represented by his wife Satyabati, into the idea of his manhood, which adds a unique layer to the reconfiguration of masculinity. Even the rhetoric of this familial space (home) is played out in Tagore’s famous novel *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World*), which critiques the fierce nationalism that erupted from the Swadeshi movement. Here the home is represented by Nikhilesh and his estate, whose centre point is Bimala, and this homely space embodies non-coercion, humanism, and patience. At the beginning of the novel, Bimala embodies the traditional values of domesticity and represents the inner purity of the nation, symbolically standing for the spiritual self. By contrast, the outer domain of politics, represented by Sandip, is hypermasculine, aggressive, and exploitative. Bimala’s involvement

with Sandip, a metaphor for the intrusion of the outer world into the inner one, destroys the sanctity of the spiritual self, leading to her mental dilemma and guilty feelings as she realizes that the home becomes the microcosm of the nation. My point of reference is that Byomkesh's masculinity is also firmly anchored in this familial space that gives him a moral foundation. By integrating this inner familial domain into Byomkesh's character, Saradindu deeply engages with the cultural discourse of his time, which also resonates with the theme of Tagore's novel. Partha Chatterjee very deftly discussed this matter in his book *The Nation and its Fragments*:

The discourse of nationalism shows that the material/spiritual distinction was condensed into an analogous, but ideologically far more powerful, dichotomy: that between the outer and the inner. The material domain, argued nationalist writers, lies outside us—a mere external that influences us, conditions us, and forces us to adjust to it. Ultimately, it is unimportant. The spiritual, which lies within, is our true self; it is that which is genuinely essential. (Chatterjee 120)

However, a nuanced difference persists between the Bengali bhadralok's incorporation of the female aspect in their nationalist imagination and Byomkesh's integration of Satyabati into the fabric of his being. The bhadralok section often invoked the female aspect symbolically as the embodiment of the tradition, the pure, inner world, but not as active agency. They became the symbol of domestic space, untouched by any foreign invasion. On the other hand, Satyabati was not a passive presence in the narrative and in Byomkesh's life; rather, she was educated, intelligent, vibrant, and often showed interest and involved herself in the narratives. Even before she was married to Byomkesh, in one story, she called upon the detective to protect her brother from the false charge of the police and thereby earned Byomkesh's respect for her bravery. Therefore, there is a subtle difference between the inclusion of women into the idea of Bengali bhadralok masculinity and Byomkesh's incorporation of familial space, embodied by Satyabati, in the formation of his masculinity. Another aspect in which Byomkesh drifted apart from the bhadralok section is the professional choice. While the bhadralok section inclined more towards the government jobs, in some lower posts that reinforced their professional dependency, Byomkesh, on the contrary, set an example of the independent venture that did not rely on government sanction. In this way, by choosing a path of self-reliance, Byomkesh not only

differed from the Bengali bhadralok ethos in regard to the profession, but also embodied a subtle ideological resistance to the whole edifice of colonial discourse. Another aspect of his character is the non-violence that deeply imbues him with the Gandhian notion of masculinity. He rarely carried a gun with him, except in two cases, but never fired.

The primary contention of this article was to explore the ethos of masculinity that Byomkesh Bakshi embodies at a particular historical juncture and thereby to show how he enacts an ideological resistance to the hegemonic conception of masculinity that the colonizers propagated. Despite being located in the Bengali bhadralok section, Byomkesh carves out an individual niche for the subjective formation of the notion of manliness that was intellectual, ethical, moral, and familial. This subjective formation symbolically locates him in the anti-colonial struggles against the British. Thus, emerging from the narrative periphery of the detective fiction, Byomkesh attains the status of a cultural icon, ideologically embodying the anti-colonial tension into his character.

Notes:

1. See John Rosselli's "The Self Image of Effeteness: Physical Education and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal" for a detailed discussion.
2. *Ibid.*
3. For a detailed discussion on Permanent Settlement, see Ranajit Guha's *A Rule of Property for Bengal*, Mouton, 1963.
4. The point has been discussed in Mrinalini Sinha's *Colonial Masculinity*, page 5.
5. See Sumit Sarkar's, "Kaliyuga", "Chakri" and "Bhakti": Ramakrishna and His Times', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27: 29 (18 July 1992), 1543-66.

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Vulnerability and Precarity: The Plight of Women Domestic Workers in Kolkata

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ABSTRACT:

The female domestic workforce in Kolkata epitomizes a highly vulnerable segment within the informal labour sector, marked by precarious employment, inadequate legal protections, and socio-economic marginalization. Despite their critical role in urban households, these women face systemic exploitation characterized by low wages, absence of formal contracts, and lack of social security benefits. The vulnerability theory framework elucidates how intersecting factors-gender, migration status, economic dependency, and socio-legal invisibility-compound their exposure to insecurity and abuse. Empirical studies reveal that most female domestic workers earn below the government-mandated minimum wage, endure excessive work hours without overtime pay, and suffer from arbitrary dismissal without notice. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed their fragile livelihoods, with many losing jobs abruptly and lacking access to healthcare or financial support. Living conditions exacerbate their vulnerability, as many reside in overcrowded slums with poor sanitation and limited access to medical care, which is intensified by gendered domestic burdens and discrimination. The absence of formal recognition and unionization perpetuates their marginalization, reinforcing power imbalances where employers wield disproportionate control over their labour and personal lives. Vulnerability studies emphasize the necessity of contextualized, participatory approaches to empowerment that address these multidimensional inequalities. Current policy frameworks in West Bengal exclude domestic workers from essential social security schemes, underscoring the urgent need for inclusive labour reforms that guarantee minimum wages, regulated working hours, and social protections. Organizing domestic workers into unions and ensuring

legal recognition are pivotal steps towards mitigating their vulnerability and fostering sustainable empowerment. This critical analysis argues that addressing the structural and contextual vulnerabilities of women domestic workers in Kolkata is imperative for achieving equitable labour rights and social justice.

Keywords: Women Domestic Workers, Vulnerability, Informal Labour, Kolkata, Labour Rights.

The case study, “Vulnerability and Precarity: The Plight of Women Domestic Workers in Kolkata” presents a rigorous and critical examination of the deeply rooted marginalization confronting female domestic workers within the informal labour sector of Kolkata. The analysis begins by foregrounding the indispensable contributions these women make to urban household management, yet it reveals that their labour is devalued by systemic exploitation. Predominantly, their work is characterized by substandard and unpredictable wages, the absence of written contracts, and a pervasive lack of social security provisions—elements that create and reinforce layers of vulnerability¹ (Banerjee 24; Sengupta and Pal 319).

The repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic serve as a case study for amplifying these vulnerabilities. The sudden cessation of employment and income for many domestic workers, compounded by the absence of accessible healthcare and any formal social safety networks, revealed the precarious foundations upon which their livelihoods rest (Kundu and Phadke 77). In addition, their residential environments—overpopulated slums rife with inadequate sanitation—are identified as loci of additional risk and hardship. These spatial conditions, coupled with the gendered expectations of unpaid care and domestic work, further entrench their marginalization within the urban socio-economic milieu (Gothoskar 198).

1 Employing the theoretical lens of vulnerability studies, the paper interrogates how gender identities, migration status, and entrenched economic dependencies intersect to heighten these workers’ susceptibility to multifaceted exploitation and abuse. A central concept here is socio-legal invisibility: domestic work is institutionally overlooked, effectively rendering these women “unseen” in policy and regulatory discourses. Empirical findings substantiate this claim, illustrating that a majority of female domestic workers habitually earn less than the prescribed statutory minimum wage, endure onerous work hours with no overtime compensation, and are subject to arbitrary termination without due process (Bhowmik 93; Neetha 152).

Institutional neglect deepens these challenges. Domestic workers in West Bengal are systematically excluded from government-administered social security schemes, and the informal character of their employment impedes efforts for collective organization. The article highlights that in the absence of unionization and formal recognition, employers maintain extensive authority over not just working conditions, but also over the personal domains of the workers' lives (Ray and Qayum 115). Such power asymmetries are both the consequence and perpetuator of entrenched precarity.

Advocating a comprehensive approach, the paper calls for multidimensional, participatory policy reforms informed by vulnerability theory. This entails designing labour protections that guarantee minimum wages, enforce contractual rights, regulate working hours, and provide access to social security schemes. It further posits the formation of domestic workers' unions and the formal legal recognition of their occupation as critical steps in dismantling cycles of oppression and facilitating sustainable empowerment. The concluding argument insists that the full realization of equitable labour rights and genuine social justice in Kolkata, and India at large, demands the holistic recognition and redress of both structural and contextual vulnerabilities affecting women domestic workers² (Sen and Sengupta 411).

The environments in which these women live and work comprise overlapping domains of stress and adversity. Their residences—typically informal settlements—are marked by poor infrastructure and limited access to healthcare. Long commutes, financial burdens, and the expectation of extended work hours without days off further undermine their well-being. The threat of sexual harassment, verbal aggression, and physical abuse is persistent, with socio-economic disenfranchisement compounding these

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- 2 On a deeper level, the paper situates the plight of these workers within broader socio-economic and cultural contexts. Women domestic labourers are overwhelmingly recruited from marginalized backgrounds—lower-caste, tribal, or migrant communities—where poverty, limited education, and restricted livelihood options prevail. Domestic work is still culturally regarded as a natural extension of gender roles rather than legitimate employment, producing pervasive invisibility within statistical, policy, and legal frameworks (Neetha 155). The axis of exploitation is shaped by prevailing social attitudes: employers routinely treat domestic workers as subordinate, perpetuating hierarchical and often discriminatory relationships. While employment may afford some degree of financial independence, the lack of formal agreements exposes workers to arbitrary wage setting, dismissal, and the erosion of dignity (Gothoskar 199).

risks³ (Ray and Qayum 120). The pandemic revealed new vulnerabilities: abrupt dismissals, loss of income, and lack of compensation placed women in acute distress. Upon returning to work, women faced new institutional barriers including health documentation and medical testing requirements, inaccessible to those with limited literacy or identification papers. Simultaneously, household responsibilities intensified, compounding pre-existing burdens⁴ (Kundu and Phadke 81). Case Study 1: Asha's Experience—Wage Theft and Lack of Legal Recourse

Asha, a 29-year-old woman who migrated to Kolkata from Murshidabad district in search of economic stability, exemplifies the plight of many women in the city's domestic labour sector. Employed as a live-out domestic worker, Asha serves in three different affluent households in South Kolkata. Despite annual wage negotiations, she consistently receives less than the statutory minimum in each placement, with her total monthly earnings falling below ₹5,000. These wages are not enough to meet her own needs, let alone support her family back in her home district.

Asha's earnings are irregular and contingent on the whims of her employers: payment is sometimes delayed, and deductions are made for reasons ranging from perceived underperformance to minor breakages. The lack of any formal written contract exacerbates her insecurity, erasing the possibility of contesting unfair wage practices or arbitrary deductions.

3 Existing legal protections are either insufficient or ineffectually enforced. The West Bengal Domestic Workers' Welfare Board, for example, has failed to reach large swathes of the informal workforce due to its limited resources and restrictive eligibility criteria. Critical social security programs—including health coverage and maternity benefits—are generally out of reach unless employment is legally registered, itself a rare occurrence. Attempts toward collective bargaining and unionization are frequently thwarted by social stigma, logistical challenges, and the atomized nature of domestic work (Bhowmik 99).

4 Consequently, the paper enjoins policy interventions that move beyond piecemeal reform. It advocates for the legal recognition of domestic work, accessible complaint and redressal mechanisms, and culturally relevant training and awareness initiatives. Successful international experiences, such as those from South Africa and Brazil where domestic work is formally protected and regulated, serve as models for potential adoption in India (Sen and Sengupta 420).

Case Studies Illustrating Vulnerability and Precarity among Women Domestic Workers in Kolkata

Without documentation, Asha is excluded from legal protections and has little opportunity to seek redressal.

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic intensified these hardships. Two of Asha's employers, citing economic constraints and health fears, dismissed her without any notice or compensation. Suddenly jobless, Asha lost her primary source of income overnight. Without formal employment records or a written contract, she was ineligible for government relief packages introduced for registered workers in the informal sector during the lockdown.

Asha's vulnerability was further exposed as she attempted to seek help from local authorities and labour officials. Her appeals were consistently rejected on the grounds that, without proof of employment or registration, she did not qualify for intervention. Navigating bureaucratic systems was also a challenge, as she lacked digital literacy and updated identification documents often required in welfare application processes.

Deprived of income, Asha found herself unable to pay rent for her shared room in a congested slum, and she struggled to afford food and basic medicines. She took out high-interest loans from local moneylenders, pushing her further into debt. The absence of legal recourse, social security benefits, or access to affordable healthcare compounded her distress, underscoring the profound consequences of socio-legal invisibility and institutional neglect faced by women like her. Asha's case highlights the intersecting vulnerabilities of informal women workers in Kolkata: wage theft, employment insecurity, exclusion from social protection, and the lack of an institutional safety net. It reveals how the absence of written contracts and legal recognition systematically deprives female domestic workers of bargaining power and basic rights, entrenching cycles of exploitation and precarity.

Case Study 2: Sunita's Struggles with Gendered Burdens and Social Discrimination

Sunita, a 36-year-old woman from a rural background, has been employed as a full-time, live-in domestic worker in an upscale high-rise apartment complex in Kolkata for the past eight years. Her official responsibilities encompass cleaning, cooking, and maintaining the household, yet her role often extends far beyond these tasks. She is regularly expected to care for her employer's young children and elderly family members, including managing their daily routines, preparing meals tailored to their needs, and

providing companionship, all without any additional remuneration or formal acknowledgment. Sunita's work schedule is grueling, with no guaranteed weekly rest day. She typically works between 14 to 16 hours daily, waking before dawn and finishing late at night. The absence of regulated working hours or breaks exacerbates her physical exhaustion and jeopardizes her health. Despite the intensity and diversity of her labor, she is denied overtime pay or any form of compensation for extended work.

The workplace environment is further compromised by frequent verbal abuse and social discrimination. Sunita routinely endures caste-based insults that demean her on the basis of hereditary social status, reflecting broader societal hierarchies. Minor errors or delays in completing tasks provoke threats of immediate dismissal, creating an atmosphere of constant fear and insecurity. These abuses not only degrade her dignity but also reinforce power imbalances between domestic workers and employers. Sunita's living conditions are austere and intrusive. She resides in a confined storeroom adjacent to the kitchen, which serves as her sleeping space and offers negligible privacy. The room lacks basic amenities such as ventilation and natural light, underscoring the stark contrast between her living quarters and those of her employers. Moreover, she must request permission to leave the premises, even during limited hours off-duty, illustrating a striking invasion of personal autonomy and freedom.

The psychological impacts of these intertwined vulnerabilities are profound. The constant workload, absence of respite, verbal attacks, and social isolation contribute to chronic stress and emotional distress. Cut off from social networks and community support, Sunita experiences profound loneliness, and the hierarchical employer-worker dynamic reinforces her marginal position in urban society. Sunita's narrative exemplifies how gendered expectations of unpaid care within domestic work intensify burdens disproportionately borne by women. It also highlights how embedded societal prejudices, including caste discrimination, work in conjunction with exploitative labour conditions to perpetuate systemic inequities. Her case underscores that the vulnerabilities of women domestic workers are not only economic but deeply social and psychological, stemming from overlapping domains of work and home that offer little protection or dignity.

Case Study 3: Collective Action and Barriers to Unionization—The Srijoni Mahila Samiti

In 2022, a significant yet precarious attempt at collective empowerment emerged in North Kolkata with the formation of the Srijoni Mahila Samiti, an informal collective of female domestic workers. Driven by a shared desire to improve their working conditions, secure fairer wages, and gain access to social welfare benefits, the group initially attracted over 50 women who committed to regular meetings and advocacy efforts. This initiative represented a hopeful challenge to the entrenched power asymmetries and isolation characteristic of domestic work in the informal sector.

However, the collective's progress soon encountered multiple and interlinked obstacles that reveal the complexities of organizing within this sector. A primary issue was employer retaliation. Women suspected of participating in union activities faced threats of immediate dismissal or non-renewal of informal agreements. Given their economic vulnerability and absence of formal employment contracts, the fear of losing income proved a powerful deterrent, compelling many members to withdraw from active participation or distance themselves from the group altogether. Time poverty was another critical constraint. Domestic workers' long and unpredictable workdays, often spanning 12 to 16 hours without guaranteed weekly rest, consumed most of their physical and emotional energy. This exhaustive schedule, compounded by unpaid domestic labour and childcare responsibilities at home, left little temporal bandwidth for consistent attendance at meetings or sustained engagement in collective activities. For many, attending the Samiti's gatherings meant incurring opportunity costs in lost wages or unpaid chores, further complicating participation⁵.

- 5 Language and cultural diversity within the membership also posed challenges. Kolkata's domestic workforce draws heavily from various states, including West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, and Jharkhand, bringing a mosaic of languages and dialects. Communication barriers necessitated additional efforts in translation and interpretation, often straining the capacity of the group's informal leadership. These linguistic differences occasionally hindered consensus-building and the cohesive articulation of shared grievances and demands. Institutional neglect exacerbated these internal challenges. The Samiti operated without formal recognition or support from government agencies or established trade unions, limiting access to resources, legal advice, and broader labour networks. The absence of formal registration precluded participation in state-sponsored welfare programs or labour rights platforms, reinforcing the group's marginalization and inability to leverage institutional mechanisms for change.

Despite these formidable barriers, the collective achieved modest but meaningful victories. Negotiations led to wage increments for a small subset of members and raised awareness among local employers about minimum wage norms and working conditions. Additionally, the Samiti provided a crucial platform for women to voice their grievances publicly, fostering solidarity and consciousness about their shared struggles. Nonetheless, sustaining momentum proved difficult. Attrition due to economic insecurity, fear of employer reprisals, and the practicalities of daily survival dominated over long-term organizational goals⁶. Case Study 4: The Impact of Policy Exclusion during COVID-19—Meena's Struggle for Survival

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 precipitated an unprecedented crisis for informal sector workers across India, prompting the West Bengal government to initiate various relief programs aimed at mitigating economic hardship. However, these initiatives largely failed to accommodate the specific conditions of domestic workers, whose informal and unregistered employment status rendered them effectively invisible to official relief efforts.

Meena, a 42-year-old single mother residing in a densely populated neighborhood in Kolkata, epitomizes the plight of domestic workers excluded from pandemic-related social protection mechanisms. Employed as a live-out domestic worker for several years, Meena suddenly found her employment abruptly terminated when the lockdown was imposed. Her employers, working remotely from their gated apartment complex, barred her entry for several months, driven by fears of virus transmission and limited interaction with outside individuals.

With no formal contract or registration as a domestic worker, Meena lacked documentary proof of her employment status. This absence of legal recognition prevented her from accessing government relief packages, including direct cash transfers and subsidized food rations, designed for

6 The Samiti's experience illustrates the entrenched structural impediments that obstruct the unionization of domestic workers: informal, atomized employment; fear-induced vulnerability; socio-cultural diversity; and the lack of institutional frameworks designed to include such workers. Ultimately, the Srijoni Mahila Samiti case underscores that while collective action has transformative potential, overcoming the multi-faceted barriers to unionization among women domestic workers in Kolkata requires supportive policy frameworks, legal protection, resource allocation, and sustained capacity-building tailored to their specific socio-economic realities.

informal workers during the lockdown period. The bureaucratic processes for aid distribution frequently required proof of continuous employment or formal identification—criteria unattainable by many domestic workers operating outside formal labour registries.

Financially destitute and responsible for raising two children alone, Meena had no savings to fall back on. To secure food and basic necessities, she resorted to borrowing from local moneylenders at usurious interest rates, plunging her deeper into a cycle of debt and economic precarity. The mental and physical toll of food insecurity, mounting debt, and caregiving responsibilities under conditions of social isolation was severe.

Attempts to obtain ration cards and enroll in social welfare schemes were similarly fraught. The administrative hurdles, such as proving residency, family composition, and employment history, were compounded by Meena's limited literacy and lack of access to digital platforms, which had become essential for many relief applications during the pandemic. Discrimination and lack of awareness among frontline government officials also diminished her chances of successfully navigating the assistance systems⁷.

The case studies presented collectively substantiate and deepen the core argument of the study on Vulnerability and Precarity: The Plight of Women Domestic Workers in Kolkata by concretely illustrating how multifaceted structural and contextual factors intertwine to produce and perpetuate systemic exploitation, social exclusion, and economic instability among women domestic workers. First, Asha's experience of wage theft, abrupt job loss during the pandemic, and exclusion from government relief foregrounds the *economic precarity* and *legal invisibility* that characterize the sector. Her lack of formal contracts and documentation not only strips her of bargaining

7 Meena's experience highlights the critical shortcomings in pandemic response policies that failed to consider the realities of informal female domestic workers. The exclusion from social security nets not only jeopardized immediate survival but also long-term economic stability, amplifying the structural inequalities that these workers endure. Her story exemplifies how policy frameworks that do not integrate the specific vulnerabilities of women domestic workers perpetuate cycles of marginalization and precariousness, pointing to an urgent need for inclusive, accessible, and context-specific social protection measures. This case points decisively to the necessity for comprehensive reforms ensuring that all informal workers, regardless of registration status, have unhindered access to social safety nets—especially in crises—and that mechanisms for identification, entitlement, and registration are made more flexible and equitable.

power but also effectively excludes her from social protections, underscoring the core vulnerability that emerges from informal, unregistered labour arrangements. This exemplifies how *socio-legal invisibility* institutionalizes precarity and disenfranchisement, leaving workers exposed to arbitrary employer control and systemic neglect.

Sunita's narrative further accentuates the *gendered dimension* of vulnerability. Her extreme workload, absence of rest, verbal abuse, and constrained living conditions reveal how *gender norms and social hierarchies* intersect with economic exploitation, compounding psychological distress and undermining dignity. This case highlights that vulnerability is not confined to economic insecurity but is deeply tied to social discrimination—particularly caste-based prejudice—and the erosion of personal autonomy. The blurring of boundaries between workplace and living space intensifies these vulnerabilities, making domestic workers acutely susceptible to continuous exploitation.

The struggle of the Srijoni Mahila Samiti illuminates the formidable *structural and cultural barriers* to collective action and empowerment among domestic workers. Despite their shared grievances and aspirations, fear of employer retaliation, time poverty, linguistic diversity, and lack of institutional support hamper effective unionization and organized resistance. This case exposes how the *fragmented and atomized nature* of domestic work, combined with entrenched power imbalances, undermines worker solidarity and perpetuates precarity by denying domestic workers collective voice and bargaining power.

Finally, Meena's story during the COVID-19 pandemic starkly illustrates the *dire consequences of policy exclusion* and bureaucratic inflexibility. Her inability to access state welfare due to lack of registration or formal recognition reveals the critical role of inclusive and adaptive social protection schemes in mitigating worker vulnerability. The pandemic acted as a catalyst, laying bare the systemic absence of safety nets for domestic workers and how this exclusion jeopardizes their very survival, disproportionately impacting women who bear caregiving responsibilities and single-parent burdens.

Together, these case studies argue that vulnerability and precarity among women domestic workers in Kolkata are not accidental or isolated phenomena but are structurally embedded within the informal labour system, socio-cultural norms, and institutional frameworks. They demonstrate that

economic insecurity, social discrimination, inadequate legal protection, and exclusion from collective representation and public policy converge to create a persistent state of marginalization.

Consequently, addressing this crisis demands holistic and multidimensional policy interventions that formalize domestic work, guarantee enforceable labour rights including minimum wages and regulated working hours, ensure meaningful legal recognition, expand social security coverage, and actively support collective organization. Without such comprehensive reforms, these women will continue to experience systemic precarity and vulnerability, perpetuating cycles of exploitation that contradict the principles of equitable labour rights and social justice.

In conclusion, the vulnerability and precarity experienced by women domestic workers in Kolkata reflect a deeply entrenched intersection of socio-economic, legal, and institutional marginalization inherent to informal labour sectors. These women's contributions to urban households remain indispensable, yet their labour is systematically undervalued and unprotected, resting on informal agreements that fail to guarantee fair wages, job security, or social protections. The case studies illuminate various dimensions of this vulnerability: economic instability and legal invisibility typified by Asha's experience of wage theft and exclusion from social welfare; gendered exploitation and social discrimination revealed through Sunita's extended work hours coupled with caste-based abuse; the challenges in collective organizing highlighted by the fragile existence of the Srijoni Mahila Samiti; and policy neglect starkly illustrated by Meena's inability to access pandemic relief due to bureaucratic barriers⁸.

Addressing the plight of domestic workers in Kolkata is thus indispensable not only for achieving equitable labour rights but also for advancing broader social justice goals, as their precarity mirrors systemic inequalities permeating

8 Together, these narratives emphasize that the precariousness of domestic workers arises not merely from individual employer-worker dynamics but is compounded by structural factors such as caste and gender discrimination, state neglect, and the absence of enforceable labour rights. They underscore the critical need for multidimensional reforms that institutionalize legal recognition, enforce minimum wages and regulated hours, extend social security to informal workers, and foster collective empowerment through unionization. Furthermore, inclusive policy frameworks must be developed that respond to the specific vulnerabilities and lived realities of women domestic workers, ensuring accessibility to welfare and legal recourse.

India's informal economy. Holistic and participatory approaches—grounded in vulnerability theory—are imperative to dismantle the intersecting oppressions shaping their precarious existence and to promote sustainable empowerment and dignity within this vital yet marginalized labour sector.

In metropolitan centers such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore, domestic workers similarly grapple with insecure, informal employment lacking formal contracts and social security. However, variations emerge depending on regional labour policies and socio-economic dynamics. For instance, Delhi has witnessed more concerted unionization efforts and advocacy for legal protections, partly due to stronger civil society engagement and the presence of more institutionalized domestic workers' unions. Yet, like Kolkata, many women in these cities confront daily precarity linked to caste and class hierarchies and gendered expectations, illustrating the pervasive nature of vulnerability in informal domestic work across Indian urban contexts.

Beyond India, parallels can be drawn with female domestic workers in countries such as South Africa, Brazil, and parts of the Middle East. South Africa's post-apartheid labour reforms recognized domestic work as formal employment, granting minimum wage guarantees and access to social security, offering a legislative model that India's states, including West Bengal, could emulate⁹. This comparative perspective underscores that while Kolkata's context is shaped by local socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors, the core dynamics of invisibility, informal employment, and intersectional vulnerability are part of a global phenomenon in domestic work. It also highlights that partial reforms and isolated efforts, such as those seen in Kolkata or other Indian cities, must be integrated into a wider framework of comprehensive labour rights that transcend regional boundaries. Ultimately,

9 Nonetheless, enforcement gaps and persistent social stigma mean that many domestic workers there continue to face exploitation and precarious living conditions. Similarly, in Brazil, legal recognition and effective unionization have improved conditions for domestic workers nationally; yet, women—often from marginalized racial and economic backgrounds—remain vulnerable to abuse and economic dependency. In contrast, in Middle Eastern countries where migrant women predominantly serve as domestic workers, vulnerability is intensified by restrictive sponsorship systems (*kafala*), absence of labour rights, and high risk of abuse and exploitation. Though the socio-political landscapes differ significantly from Kolkata's, these cases converge in their illustration of how systemic exclusion, gendered labor segmentation, and limited legal frameworks sustain precarity for women in domestic roles globally.

this broader view affirms the critical necessity for policy interventions that are not merely regional or sectoral but globally informed and locally adapted. The experiences of women domestic workers in Kolkata serve as a microcosm of a global struggle for dignity, recognition, and equitable labour rights. Addressing their vulnerabilities effectively requires multisectoral approaches encompassing legal reform, social protection expansion, union support, and cultural change, attuned both to local realities and international standards of labour justice. Examples from around the world substantiate this imperative. The International Labour Organization's (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention (C189), adopted in 2011 and ratified by over 38 countries, sets a global standard for domestic workers' rights by guaranteeing minimum wages, regulated working hours, social security, and protection from abuse, thus formally recognizing domestic work as legitimate labour deserving of the same protections as other sectors (Human Rights Watch). For instance, the Philippines' Magna Carta for Household Helpers offers subsidized state schemes and collective bargaining rights, exemplifying how comprehensive legal frameworks can improve working conditions. Similarly, countries like Brazil have institutionalized mandatory social security coverage for domestic workers, resulting in expanded welfare benefits and greater labor protections at the national level (WIEGO).

Trade unions have been a crucial force in realizing these reforms globally. The International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF), a vibrant global union, has successfully campaigned for democratic trade union rights, secure minimum living wages, and limits on working hours for domestic workers worldwide, empowering women who often face marginalization due to gender and migration status (ITUC). These global efforts underscore the importance of union support in advancing domestic workers' dignity and rights. Additionally, culturally responsive interventions are essential as seen in how countries adapt policies to local circumstances while aligning with international labour standards. For example, some European countries like France and Belgium regulate domestic work through a combination of collective bargaining and legal protections, adapting the global framework to their socio-cultural context (ILO).

Together, these examples demonstrate that addressing the vulnerabilities of women domestic workers requires multisectoral approaches that combine legal reform, social protection expansion, union support, and cultural change.

The lessons from diverse international contexts offer invaluable models for Kolkata and similar urban centers to design inclusive policies that reflect both local realities and global labour justice standards, ultimately fostering sustainable empowerment and equitable labour rights for this vital yet historically marginalized¹⁰ workforce. Importantly, C189¹¹ also addresses the heightened vulnerabilities faced by migrant domestic workers by mandating regulation of private recruitment agencies, preventing exploitative practices such as charging excessive recruitment fees, and ensuring written employment contracts that are enforceable in the country of employment. The Convention explicitly prohibits child labour in domestic work and requires states to protect child domestic workers' right to education while engaging in work legally (Migrant Forum Asia). It also calls for measures to protect domestic workers from violence and abuse, recognizing the extreme isolation and risk many face in private homes (WIEGO).

Countries that have ratified and implemented C189 demonstrate tangible progress. For instance, the Philippines enacted the Domestic Workers Act¹², which extends legal protections including employment contracts, minimum wage rights, and access to health insurance to domestic workers. Brazil and South Africa have also introduced reforms aligned with C189 to grant domestic workers social security and legal protection, improving their access to justice and workers' rights (International Domestic Workers Federation¹³).

10 Legal reforms such as the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Convention 189 have significantly improved domestic workers' rights globally by formally recognizing domestic work as legitimate labour deserving of the same protections as other sectors. Before C189, domestic workers were often excluded from national labour laws, lacking protections such as limits on working hours, minimum wage coverage, social security, and protection from abuse and exploitation. The Convention, adopted in 2011, requires ratifying states to ensure domestic workers receive basic labour rights including regulated working hours, weekly rest days, minimum wage guarantees, overtime compensation, and social security benefits, including maternity protection (Human Rights Watch).

11 "C189 - 'The work that makes all work possible' finally recognised by international law," International Domestic Workers Federation, <https://idwfed.org/news/global-news/c189-the-work-that-makes-all-work-possible-finally-recognised-by-international-law/>.

12 "Domestic Workers' Movements and Global Advances for Labor Reform," Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/10/27/claiming-rights/domestic-workers-movements-and-global-advances-labor-reform>.

13 "Domestic workers," International Trade Union Confederation, <https://www.ituc-csi.org/domestic-workers>.

Trade unions and workers' organizations have leveraged C189 to strengthen collective bargaining and representation capabilities for domestic workers. The Convention enshrines the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, empowering domestic workers to organize, advocate for their rights, and negotiate fair labour conditions. International federations such as the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) have been instrumental in supporting this global movement, facilitating campaigns for ratification and legal reforms, and amplifying domestic workers' voices in policy arenas (ITUC).

While challenges remain—particularly regarding enforcement and extending protections to informal and migrant workers—ILO Convention 189 marks a historic and transformative milestone in securing dignity, equality, and fundamental rights for domestic workers worldwide. It provides a critical legal framework for governments to adopt nationally appropriate laws and policies that effectively reduce vulnerability and precarity in this traditionally marginalized labour sector¹⁴. India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) offers a 100-day guaranteed minimum wage employment¹⁵ to rural households.

14 Several countries have successfully implemented social protection measures that demonstrate effective strategies to support vulnerable populations, including informal workers and women. Brazil's Bolsa Família program, one of the largest conditional cash transfer schemes globally, has significantly reduced poverty and inequality by providing financial assistance to low-income families contingent upon school attendance and healthcare check-ups. This program has enhanced children's educational and nutritional outcomes while simultaneously empowering women as the primary recipients of transfers, strengthening their household status and decision-making power (Social Protection Floor Initiative).

15 This program emphasizes gender inclusion by mandating that at least one-third of the beneficiaries are women, providing them with wage employment close to their homes and childcare facilities, thus facilitating their labour market participation while accommodating gendered care responsibilities (IZA World of Labour). In South Africa, social protection is extended through child support grants and pension schemes, which have been essential in improving income security for women and the elderly in vulnerable households. The child support grant, in particular, has helped reduce child poverty and support women's caregiving roles financially (Social Protection Floor Initiative). Thailand's universal social pension and health insurance schemes also offer comprehensive coverage, reaching a wide spectrum of the population including the elderly and informal workers, enhancing social inclusion and health access across demographics.

Indonesia has implemented conditional cash transfers through the Program Keluarga Harapan, which targets poor households with stipends conditional on school enrolment and health check-ups. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this program was

These examples reflect that robust social protection programs combine cash transfers, employment guarantees, health insurance, and pensions tailored to local socio-economic contexts, while promoting gender equity and inclusivity. They highlight the necessity of political commitment to fund and institutionalize such programs to safeguard vulnerable populations effectively. The examination of the vulnerability and precarity experienced by women domestic workers in Kolkata reveals a profound and systemic marginalization embedded within the informal labour sector. These workers, despite their indispensable role in sustaining urban households, remain excluded from formal labour protections and social security systems, rendering them subject to low wages, exploitative working conditions, and persistent socio-legal invisibility. The application of vulnerability theory elucidates how intersecting factors such as gender, migration status, economic dependence, and institutional neglect intensify their exposure to insecurity and abuse. Empirical evidence demonstrates that these women regularly face sub-minimum wages, excessive hours without compensation, and arbitrary dismissals, conditions that were exacerbated markedly by the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed the fragility of their livelihoods and the insufficiency of existing social protections.

Moreover, the spatial and domestic contexts of their lives—characterized by overcrowded living conditions, inadequate sanitation, and the burdens imposed by gendered expectations of unpaid care—further compound their precarious existence. The absence of formal recognition and organized representation sustains power asymmetries, enabling employer domination over both the economic and personal spheres of domestic workers' lives. This structural disenfranchisement underscores the necessity of multidimensional and participatory empowerment approaches that address the multifaceted nature of their vulnerability. The exclusion of domestic workers from West Bengal's current labour policies and social security schemes exemplifies broader systemic failures requiring urgent rectification. Legal reforms that institutionalize minimum wage guarantees, regulate working hours, and extend

expanded to provide additional support, showing flexibility and responsiveness in social protection coverage (T20 India, 2023). Similarly, the Brazilian Auxílio Emergencial program provided emergency cash transfers to millions during the pandemic, demonstrating how social protection systems can act as critical stabilizers during crises (T20 India, 2023).

comprehensive social welfare coverage are critical for mitigating exploitation. Equally important is the facilitation of unionization and collective bargaining to empower workers and challenge entrenched inequalities.

In conclusion, confronting the structural and contextual vulnerabilities of women domestic workers in Kolkata is not only a matter of labour rights but a pivotal step towards advancing social justice and equity in India's informal economy. Sustainable empowerment of this workforce demands integrated policy interventions aligned with international labour standards, supported by grassroots organization and socio-cultural transformation. Only through such holistic engagement can the dignity, rights, and well-being of Kolkata's women domestic workers be restored and safeguarded within a just and inclusive urban labour framework.

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Daring the Patriarchy: Making of the New Women in the Novels of Shobha De

Sonia Ningthoujam

ABSTRACT

Indian English literature has been addressing issues of gender discrimination, women identity and the burden of patriarchy time and again over the years. Many writers have delved into the changing times and its impact on the Indian masses as tradition grapples with modernity. The Indian society which is a highly patriarchal gets a jolt when contemporary women writers like Shobha De boldly flaunt the daring elite women of urban Indian high class society. De's novels presents women who care two hoots for societal and gender norms. These women leave no stone unturned to assert their identity and independence and challenges and questions traditional gender roles.

This paper is an attempt to explore the lives of the new women in the novels of Shobha De and how they intimidate patriarchy by their choices in life. The paper analyses three popular novels of De, viz., *Socialite Evenings*, *Starry Nights*, *Sisters* and *Strange Obsession*. The study examines De's portrayal of women in these novels, going inside their struggles and challenges as they try to navigate their way in a male dominated social system. Feminist theories and perspectives are also taken into account in order to understand the new women which are emerging from her novels. This paper puts forth the argument that even though De's novels are focused on the lives of the ultra rich and glamorous urban women of India, a study in their lives reveal intense social and mental conflicts faced by these women as they are assertive and self reliant and a force to be reckoned with.

Keywords : Patriarchy, New Women, Shobha De, *Socialite Evenings*, *Sisters*, *Starry Nights*, *Strange Obsession*, Society

INTRODUCTION

Patriarchy is a social system where men dominate in all fields, be it social, political or economic, while women are given subordinate positions. In this system, women are expected to follow and conform to stiff rules, i.e., to obey unquestioningly the dos and don'ts laid down by society. The history of women does not have an organized structure and is mostly invisible, though it forms an integral part of the saga of civilization which was ruled by the patriarchal world of men. Patriarchy is a cross-cultural institution that penetrates national and loosely bound historical boundaries. It is a system promoting and nourishing the core value of control and domination in almost every human area of existence.¹

Ancient India also has a very strong patriarchal set-up, and the most revered and celebrated ancient texts like the Manusmriti, Mrichakatika, and the Kamasutra only prove the point that India's social set-up has always given a secondary place to women. It was only in the latter half of the 19th century that a wind of change blew in and forced its way into the very secluded world of Indian womanhood. It was at this juncture that Indian women writers came into the literary scene and responded to the change.

Women writers like Bharti Mukherjee, Namita Gokhale, Kamala Markandaya, Gita Mehta, Kiran Desai, Anita Desai, Geeta Hariharan, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, etc., made a fearless attempt to present the condition of Indian women through their bold and rebellious presentation, peering into the lives of Indian womanhood. Their writings echo the voice of social change, aiming to break the traditional, submissive image of women in Indian society. Their works often portray strong, independent women characters who challenge the patriarchal societal norms that have always kept women agonized and disrespected. Among these breed of women writers, novelist and columnist Shobha De has always been unfiltered and brutally honest in presenting the new bold and independent women of urban India in her novels. De's women are a complete opposite to the traditional women who have always been portrayed as docile, meek, and submissive. She explores the lives of women in urban upper-class society, especially the glamorous world of business elites, socialites, and the Indian film industry. Behind the glittering surface of this high-class society lies a hidden world of gender politics and emotional turmoil.

De's female characters frequently encounter gender discrimination, oppressive and unhappy marriages, and societal hypocrisy. Despite all the challenges, De's women are seen raising their voices against the male-dominated society where women were always denied the right to act freely or follow their aspirations and dreams. A set of fearless women are presented in her novels who dare to challenge the patriarchal social set-up. Her novels have often received hostile and unpleasant reviews. Her maiden novel *Socialite Evenings* (1989), for example, was branded as a "high society potpourri, bland and banal," bristling orgy-laced parties and "voyeuristic servings of souped-up, four-wheel sex-in-all-directions."²

Again, her second novel *Starry Nights* (1992), which with its brazen portrayal of sex and exploitation steals a march over the earlier novel, was described as a "confession of a man-eater."³ Despite all these negative comments, De's women characters stand strong and tall as they unflinchingly pave their way into the male-dominated social set-up. They question the authority of men and attempt to break free from all societal restrictions which have kept generations of women tamed and chained. De's women characters also show the conflicts of the so-called modern Indian society where modernization and patriarchal values co-exist.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To analyze the new women in some selected novels of Shobha De
2. To examine the struggles women go through as they carve a place in the Indian social system.
3. To shed light on the contribution of Shobha De's novels towards feminist discourse in Indian English literature, and more importantly on the New Women who are on the rise in Urban India.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on qualitative and analytical research methods. The primary sources are the novels of Shobha De, and the secondary sources comprise journals and articles in books and magazines.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Patriarchy is a social system that has historically bestowed primary power and privilege upon men in various aspects of society including economics and culture. Patriarchy's influence extends across many aspects of modern life, contributing to disparities in education, employment opportunities, and income between genders. It also plays a role in normalising gender based violence and control over women's reproductive rights. Patriarchy is a social construct where men predominantly wield power, and it existed for centuries dating back to the agricultural revolution. The shift from nomadic hunter-gatherer societies to settled agricultural communities marked the beginning of patriarchal system.⁴

The Indian social system have always prided in its social and cultural values which are based on patriarchal set up since the ancient times. Women's duties as good daughters, good wives, and good mothers are accepted as pivotal roles for women, by implication, those roles complete in themselves and women need not pursue any specialised discipline of knowledge, art or profession. The good woman is sweet, gentle, loving and caring and even sacrificing. The mainstream concept of the role of a woman seems to be best described in the anonymous Sanskrit couplet: "She (in relation to her husband) is like a mother while cooking and serving food, secretary while he is working, servant at his feet, courtesan in his bed and earth - like in forbearance".⁵

Women have long been subjugated to the definitions by men. As Sheila Rowbotham mentions in *Woman's Consciousness Man's World*, "Women have only the neutered dignity that men have allowed the women they have called 'good'". The indignity of femininity has been internalized for millennia."⁶ The evolution of women's literature, as mentioned by Elizabeth Lee quoting Elaine Showalter could be broken into 3 stages - the Feminine, a period beginning with the male pseudonym in the 1840s and until 1880 with George Eliot's death; the Feminist from 1880 till the winning of the vote in 1920; and the Female, from 1920 till the present day, including "a new stage of self-awareness about 1960."⁷ In Ellen Lewin's *Feminist Anthropology: A Reader*, society's unwillingness to accept any deviation from the prescribed gender roles are further stated as "Masculine women, who in the West would be probably be read as butch lesbians, see themselves as men, while others may interpret their behaviors as deviant lives because of their gender presentation

than because of their failure to perform expected roles of wife and mother.”⁸ Annis Pratt has observed that “Society considers the sex experiences of man as attributes of his general development, while similar experiences in the life of women are looked down upon as horrible calamity, a loss of honour and all that is good and noble in a human being.”⁹ Arundhati Roy’s “The God of Small Things” is regarded as a modern masterpiece in Indian literature. She describes a dysfunctional household in Kerala, a southern Indian state. The novel’s female protagonists refuse to allow themselves to be restricted by the rules and legislation of the novel’s awe-inspiring moderate society. In “The God of Small Things”, we follow a Christian Syrian family over four generations. Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, Ammu and Rahel are all great examples of how the book challenges the traditional gender roles that have been upheld in Indian culture for centuries.¹⁰

Another author who has shown the plight of women marginalized by patriarchal sexism is Nayantara Sehgal. In her works, she advocates for a future in which women’s strengths are recognised on par with men’s. The majority of her novel’s protagonists are women. Women’s liberation is a topic of her commentary. Her dissatisfaction with her marriage has further amplified her feminist message. From “A Time to be Happy” (1957) through “Mistaken Identity (1988), Sahgal’s protagonists have always been on a quest for independence.”¹¹

Elaine Showalter writes, “It was through the movement for the liberation of women that we began to draw links between our own jobs and our lives, and to recognise the disparities in the identifications as well as ambitions that had drew us, along with countless other women, to the research and teaching of writing.”¹²

ANALYSING THE NEW WOMEN IN SHOBHA DE’S NOVELS

The new women in the novels of Shobha De contrast or conflict with the traditional Indian women who occupies a subordinate position to men. They are fearless, independent, forceful and have the guts to take on the challenges of life with all its high and low points.

In De’s first novel *Socialite Evenings* (1989), De introduces the reader to the glittering life of Mumbai’s elite social circle. The female protagonist Karuna is a young middle class woman who enters the high class circle after her marriage to Bunty, a wealthy businessman. Karuna’s marriage got her the

high profile life she wanted but her husband's busy schedule left her feeling lonely, neglected and unhappy. She starts an affair with her husband's friend and eventually gets a divorce. This novel mirrors the lives of such housewives trapped in loveless marriages and engaging in extramarital affairs, their selfish husbands uses them more for social respectability and showcases them in fashionable parties. After her divorce Karuna pursues a successful career in advertising. Later in the novel, she starts maintaining distance from male friends.

The behaviour of men in society made her feel sick. Karuna attended parties without any male companion, so men started buzzing around her like bees having the thought that she would be reachable at any time. Karuna rejects the hierarchization of male values where the female factor is reduced to a negative and almost nullified.

Her affirmation of feminine consciousness is clearly understood by her statements. Her quest was to create a genuine female self in this male-oriented world. But her's is not a traditional one. It is an esoteric quest, something weird and grotesque on the part of an Indian woman. But Karuna never bothers about the social repercussions her quest might entail. She is isolated from the traditional Indian heritage and its social implications. Taking up a non-conformist stance, she adopts a radical feminist point of view all agog to demolish sex/gender system - the real source of women's oppression and to create a new society where men and women share equal rights. The novel ends with her intention to write a book.¹³

Shobha De's second novel, *Starry Nights* (1992) presents the glamorous yet exploitative world of the Indian film industry. It depicts modern woman's struggle and search for identity. Asha Rani is the protagonist in the novel, she is put into film industry when she was a small underaged girl by her mother to earn money. Since then, she was exploited by different men. Now she is a top star in the industry. She had affairs with Akash Arora and Abhijit Mehra, both are married men who never loved her but took advantage of her. She had a lesbian experience with her lesbian friend Linda. Later she departs for New Zealand by marrying a foreigner. She returns to India. Her mother puts her sister Sudha Rani in the film industry for money. She also becomes a successful star but she was also exploited by men around her, later she suffered an acid attack.¹⁴

Aasha Rani despite all the manipulation, betrayal and exploitation she faced from the powerful men in the film industry, she gradually learns to take control over her career and personal life. Her character shows resilience and determination in a heavily male dominated world of Indian film industry. In this novel, she exposes how the patriarchal system commodify women's bodies and exploit them.

De's another novel *Sisters* (1992) showcases the corporate world of the 1990s where two young business women, Mikki (Mallika) and Alisha Hiralal who happened to be half sisters struggled hard to retain their late father's multi million business empire.

The novel explores the themes of inheritance, power and independence. Mikki and Alisha's quest for identity centers the actions and major events of the novel. The novel discusses very sensitive sides of human life, reflecting social and psychological conflict in man-woman relationship. It investigates exploitative base of patriarchal Indian social structure. The pursuit gives birth to the new females. These new females are Mikki (Mallika) and Alisha Hiralal. The women rebel to break the confinement laid down by Indian patriarchal society. They become new women because they revolt against inequality and subjugation on the basis of gender. They plead that sex is biological and natural while gender is simply the result of patriarchal social pattern. Sex is related to nature while gender is related to nurture. The pursuit of Mikki and Alisha clarify this dichotomy when they prioritize nature for nurture. Their journey from femininity to femaleness proves that they speak the voice of new women.¹⁵

Mikki's marriage to Binny Malhotra fails as Binny turns out to be a womaniser and doesn't care for her. Despite Mikki's efforts to save the marriage it crumbled and ended in divorce. Mikki gets affected by T.B and Alisha becomes a drug addict. Mikki inherits Binny's wealth after his death, Mikki plans to go to London with her half sister Alisha. This departure is a kind of salvation from the corrupt world of business. In this novel Shobha De point out the change in the attitude of the young generation towards wealth. Now a days the rich young girls are only concerned with getting married to a rich man so that they can maintain their lifestyle. Shobha De says that they have forgotten the life in the lifestyle and it is only style and hell with everything else. As long as they get what they call 'lifestyle', they really don't care to whom they marry.¹⁶

The coming together of Mikki and Alisha and shifting to London shows their confrontation with patriarchal society and to establish their authority. It also brings in the strong point of female solidarity in resisting patriarchal domination.

Strange Obsession (1992) is another striking novel of Shobha De that highlights themes of lesbianism, power and psychological impact of repressed and traumatized childhood in a patriarchal social system. Like most of De's novels, this novel too explores the deceptive, dark and cruel reality of Mumbai's glamour world. The protagonist in the novel, Amrita, a naive, 20 year old young aspiring model arrives in Mumbai from Delhi with dreams of making it big in the world of modeling. Her meeting with Minx (Meenakshi Iyenger) as she fumbled on the streets on her way to one of her many auditions, set the ball rolling into a strange relationship that will finally leave her shaken and traumatised by the end of the novel. This novel runs like a psychological thriller and narrates the story with great dexterity and sharpness.

Minx became infatuated with Amrita and started helping in flourishing her career. She starts dropping and picking her for her shoots. All of these seemed okay to Amrita until she realized that Minx was turning out to be a strange creature, invading her privacy and doing just anything to grab Amrita's attention. Minx came to Amrita's p.g and stole her undergarments, told her landlady they were needed for a shoot, placed a black rose on her dressing table along with a sparkling diamond ring. The next morning, she cancelled her shoot with Karan, a great photographer with whom she once worked with earlier also. She slumped around her bedroom until midday, and when she went to the kitchen, she saw a dead piglet in the sink! Blood was smeared all over it. Amrita was horrified and this was just the beginning of what she had gotten trapped into. It was psychologically tormenting for her to experience all this alone in a new city, she couldn't even tell her parents about it as she knew they would worry a lot and ask her to return to Delhi. Her big dreams were starting to turn into her worst nightmare. She felt isolated in the midst of a bustling city.¹⁷

Amrita had love affairs with Partha and Rover despite Minx's obsession for her. Later in the novel Amrita marries Rakesh Bhatia to Minx's extreme heartbreak and jealousy that she starts tormenting Amrita by blackmailing her as she had made a blue film of her and Amrita and also her husband and Amrita. Amrita was finally free after Minx dies and Minx's father Mr. Iyengar

assured her that all films, recordings and photographs and other damaging images were destroyed. Initially Mr. Iyengar was scared of his lesbian daughter Minx as he says, "I was afraid of her --- scared of her rage, unsure of what she might do if I reacted --- But my men, the few I trust, kept an eye on her most of the time. But Meenakshi outwitted them also." ¹⁸

CONCLUSION

Shobha De's novels thus addresses the new women's voice fearlessly. These women dare to challenge the patriarchal Indian society by going out of the way and facing all the brickbats and hurdles to achieve their desired goals. The women are the polar opposites of the traditional Indian women who are meek and submissive. From Karuna in *Socialite Evenings*, Aasha Rani in *Starry Nights*, Mikki and Alisha Hiralal in *Sisters* to Amrita in *Strange Obsession*, the female protagonists are rejecting the traditional set up and refuse to bow down to the societal rules. These women represents the New Woman. These women look for self identity and achieving the same is their utmost goal. These women are not ashamed of their sexuality and satisfy their sexual urges in their own terms. The ideas of chastity, purity, virginity have no significance nor do they harbor guilt after indulging in varied sexual encounters. They are as reckless as the men presented in these novels.

Marriage is seen as a means to an end. These new set of women marry more often for riches and for climbing the social ladder rather than as a sacred bond between two individuals. The traditional Indian marriage takes a back seat as these women along with their counterparts failed to care about traditional values. The world is marked by personal liberty and freedom of choices, making them develop a very casual approach towards marriage and divorce. These women have no hassles in choosing even women as their sexual partners and also indulge in heterosexual extra marital affairs.

Shobha De has presented a very honest and brutal image of the new women in her novels. These women, despite innumerable hardships and challenges on the path to reach their dreams and goals, remained unhindered and succeed in making a mark for themselves, in the highly competitive and ruthless world of high society urban India. These new women came out victorious and strong, unfazed and unapologetic of their actions and ways. They left no stone unturned to reach their ultimate goals and desires. Finally, these women are here to stay and have become the flag bearers and beacons

to an increasing number of ambitious, educated young women of the present times who strongly feel their should be equality between men, women and other genders in the ever changing Indian society. These women are forces to reckon with and it's high time the patriarchal society acknowledge them and give them their space, for these women believe that the sky is the only limit to fulfil their dreams and desires.

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Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit*: A Critical Reading

Tapu Biswas

Town planner turned actor. Actor turned director and director turned dramatist. The man who breathed new life into theatre by taking it away from the confines of an auditorium and presenting it in the open under the sky, - he is Badal Sircar.

The Telegraph, Calcutta, 20.03.1995

ABSTRACT

Badal Sircar (1925 -2011) is one of the most influential figures in modern Indian theatre. He was an engineer and initially took up the job in construction company, gave it up very soon and became a lecturer of Engineering in the College of Engineering run by the National Council of Education, Bengal, which later became Jadavpur University. In 1992 he took a Master of Arts degree in Comparative Literature from Jadavpur University. Sircar's theatrical journey began with *Solution X* (1956), followed by his first original play *Baro Pisima* (1959). Over time, he produced more than fifty plays. Among his most notable works is *Evam Indrajit* (1963), which stands as a landmark in modern Indian drama for its departure from realism and its embrace of absurdist and modernist techniques. The play's protagonist, Indrajit, is not a singular character but a symbolic everyman—fragmented, elusive, and perpetually searching for meaning in a monotonous, mechanized society. Through Indrajit's interactions with the Writer and the trio Amal, Bimal, and Kamal, Sircar critiques the futility of ambition, the alienation of the educated youth, the cyclical nature of existence, the existential anxieties, alienation, and disillusionment of post-independence urban middle-class society in India. Drawing on influences, from Western playwrights like Beckett, Ionesco, Pinter, Sircar reconfigures this aesthetics to reflect Indian realities, thereby creating a uniquely indigenous modernism. The aim and objective of the paper is to explore Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* in the light of the history

of translation, adaptation, performance and in the theoretical framework of Western theory of absurd drama.

Keywords: Translation, adaptation, performance,
absurd drama, existentialism, alienation,
loneliness, third theatre.

Badal Sircar was born on 15 July, 1925 in Kolkata. His formal name was Sudhindra Sircar.. His father Mahendralal Sircar was by profession a professor of History at the well-known Scottish Church College in Kolkata, and later became the first Indian principal of this college run by British missionaries. It was in this college too that after the completion of his school education, the young Badal was at first enrolled. However, he later took admission in the Bengal Engineering College and in the year 1947 passed the Bachelor of Engineering Examination in Civil Engineering. After qualifying as a Civil Engineer in July 1947, Sircar took up his first job near Nagpur in a construction company but soon left the job as he missed Calcutta, his friends, and habitual activities and returned to Calcutta to join as an ill-paid Lecturer in Engineering in the College of Engineering run by the National Council of Education, Bengal which was later to become Jadavpur University. This allowed him sufficient time in the evenings, and so Sircar started to study in an evening Diploma Course in Town and Regional Planning from the University of Calcutta. After acquiring this diploma in 1952, he left teaching and joined Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) as an engineer in 1953 and continued to work in DVC till 1957. After 1957 he left for London to study and to work there. However, Sircar's thirst for education does not seem to have waned, for as late as in 1992 he finally took a Master of Arts degree in Comparative Literature from Jadavpur University.

Sircar's dramatic career began with *Solution X* (1956) an adaptation of a Hollywood film called *Monkey Business*, followed by his first fully original play, *Baro Pisima* [Elder Paternal Aunt] (1959). His early plays include *Sanibar* [Saturday] (1959), *Ram Shyam Jadu* (1961), *Thana Theke Aschhi* [Coming from Police Station] (based on J.B. Priestley's *An Inspector Calls*), *Samabritta* [Encirclement] (1961), and *Evam Indrajit* (1963). His other plays are *Ballavpurur Roopkatha* [The Fairy Tale of Ballavpur] (1963), *Saara Raat* [The Whole Night] (1963), *Vichitranusthan* [Variegated Programmes] (1963), *Kobi Kahini* [The Story of a poet] (1964), *Baki Itihas* [The Remaining History],

Bagh [Tiger] *Vichitrannusthan*, *Pore Kono Din* [Some Day Later], *Jodi Ar Ek Baar* [If only Once More], *Tringsha Satabdi* [Thirteenth Century], *Pagla Ghoda* [The Wild Horse] (1967), a dramatization of Samaresh Basu's novel *Bibor* [The Cave], *Circus* (1969), *Pralap* (1969), *Sagina Mahato* (1970), *Abu Hossain* (1971), *Spartacus* (1972), *Michhil* (1974), *Bhoma* (1975), *Sukhopathya Bharater Itihas* (1976), *Captain Hooray* (1977), *Monikanchan* (1977), *Hattamalar Oparey* (1977), *Gondi* (1978), *Bashi Khobor* (1978) etc. In this paper I attempt to pen my personal views on Badal Sircar's most important play *Evam Indrajit*.

I

Sircar's magnum opus *Evam Indrajit* which was conceived and partly written out over 1957 to 1958 in Sircar's diary and in the form of poetry, was completed in 1963. Sircar was living in Kolkata at this time, and the play was premiered at the Muktangan auditorium in Kolkata on 16th September 1965. It was performed by the members of the Souvanik theatre group and produced under the direction of Gobinda Ganguly. *Evam Indrajit* was to go on to become one of Sircar's most performed plays, for it was staged again and again in Bengali well into the 21st century, and not only on stage but also over radio. *The Hindusthan Standard* reviewer wrote on 22 October 1965: "In *Evam Indrajit* the Shouvanik performers employ their craft in giving shape to a piece of dedramatized drama, thereby evincing courage and self-assurance that may sustain them if aided by auditorial endorsement."¹

The performance was also received elsewhere with extremely positive reviews. The second production of the play took place still under the banner of Souvanik with the same director and actors. After the Souvanik production, came the staging of *Evam Indrajit* by the theatre group Krishti Samsad in the town of Krishnanagar on 11 October 1969 under the direction of Subimal Samadde. Some months later, on 31 January 1970, the play was again staged in the town of Balurghat by the group Tritirtha. The director was Harimadhav Mukhopadhyay. Another production took place in the town Balarampur where the Prantik theatre group staged the play in 1971 with Anjan Biswas as the director. The next recorded performance of the play enacted in Bengali was on foreign soil, in Boston (U.S.A), where the members of the Bengali diaspora in the city enacted it on 12 August 1972 under the banner of Probasi Bangali.

1 Review published in *The Hindusthan Standard* on 22 October 1965

Of the more recent productions of *Evan Indrajit* in Bengali, mention must be made of the one staged by the Kalyani Kalamandalam group in the town of Kalyani on 5 December 1998 in the Ritwi Sadan hall. The director was Santanu Das. Another performance was held in 1999 in Kalyani and in 2001 in NSD Delhi. Even more recently there was a performance of the play on 13 June 2012 in the town of Krishnanagar near Kolkata. This staging was produced by the group Krishnanagar Rupkatha under the direction of Trishit Maitra.

II

Ram Gopal Bajaj translated *Evan Indrajit* from Bengali into Hindi as early as 1967. The first show of *Evan Indrajit* performed in Hindi was staged at the Manzar theatre in Pragati Maidan, New Delhi, and subsequently at the Defence Pavilion on Mathura Road, Delhi, on September 23, 24, 29 and 30 in 1967. Repeat performances were put up the next month on October 1, 6, 7 and 8 under the banner of the Delhi theatre group "Yatrik". The production was successful, although a controversy broke out over whether the Hindi version of the play was faithful enough to its Bengali original. What had happened was that Mohan Maharishi had used his directorial discretion to not only leave out all the poems in the original text, but had also completely rewritten the third Act going to the extent of showing the Lekhak (Author) strangling Indrajit to death at the conclusion of the play.

Another Hindi translation was done by Ram Gopal Bajaj in 1967. An interesting fact relating to Bajaj's *Evan Indrajit* translation of 1967 was that it was never published. This was because Badal Sircar had given the translation rights to another translator, Pratibha Agarwal of Kolkata, who published her own translation in 1969.

Pratibha Agarwal's Hindi rendering of *Evan Indrajit* was published by Raj Kamal Prakashan in 1969 and a revised edition of the same was re-issued in 2008. In the "Translator's Note" ("Anubadak ki Kalam") appended to the first edition of this translation, Agarwal observed that the popularity of the play lay in Sircar's unique art of style, narration and characterization. Describing the play as "a very realistic description of the ambition of youth of today (and probably of every age) and their subsequent disillusionment and disappointment,"² she wrote that despite having no faith or belief or

2 Agrawal, Pratibha, translator. "Translator's Note." *Evan Indrajit*, by Badal Sircar. New

love, we must live on and “must continue working because the road is there before us” (my trans.; 5).³ That the translation was a quite faithful one was noted by a reviewer who reviewed the translation published in the journal *Natrang* in its April-June, 1970 issue. Pratibha Agarwal’s translation was used as the production text for the first performance of *Evam Indrajit* in 1968 in Kolkata. In the month of May in the same year 1968, a performance of *Evam Indrajit* in Hindi was put on in Delhi by a theatre group called *Amra*. But to return to the Kolkata production, this was staged by the Hindi language theatre group Anamika which had been established by Shyamanand Jalan and Pratibha Agarwal. The same production of Anamika’s *Evam Indrajit* was staged later in the year in Kanpur on 1 December 1968 at G.S.V.M. Medical College auditorium.

After Delhi, Kolkata and Kanpur, a Hindi version of Badal Sircar’s *Evam Indrajit* was produced in Bombay in March. Years later, in 1996, in the course of a round-table discussion on “Plays in a National Perspective” held on 28-30 November at the Bharatiya Bhasa Parishad Hall, Shyamanand Jalan himself stated that:

Our best audience and best response was at the show at Kalamandir, Calcutta, before a Bengali audience. That gave us so much strength because we were talking in Hindi and we had 100% Bengali audience and they responded to it.⁴

The Kolkata production referred to above by Jalan which was staged on 28th August 1971 at the Kala Mandir auditorium.

The next important performance of *Evam Indrajit* in Hindi came around in the next year on 15 March 1972. The occasion was the annual awards ceremony of the Sangeet Natak Akademi held over 13 to 19 March 1972 and Badal Sircar’s play was staged at the Auditorium in New Delhi under the direction of Satyadev Dubey who was honored with the Akademi award for direction.

In the same year (1972) there was a repeat production of Dubey’s production in Kolkata, while in the next year (1973) Shyamanand Jalan’s New Delhi production won him the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award. This production

Delhi: Raj Kamal Prakashan, 2017, pp. 5-7.

3 *Ibid.*

4 Jalan, Shyamanand. *Plays in a National Perspective: Round Table Discussion I, A Synoptic Report*. Kolkata: Natya Shodh Sansthan, 16-19 July 2009, p. 11.

was also telecast by Delhi Television. Jalan's "Director's Note" printed on the occasion, and later published in his book *Aj Ki Rangnatak* (1973) revealingly explained what had urged him to produce Badal Sircar in the first place:

On watching Badal Sircar's play [*Evam Indrajit*] being enacted on the stage [presumably a Bengali production in Kolkata] one felt the urge to rebel. It seemed that these plays demand a liberation being denied to them. My rebellion translated itself into my production of *Evam Indrajit*. Liberating it from the rigid technicalities of presentation, we tried to project the soul of the play before the public. The fact that people kept sitting and watching it indicated that we had been successful to some extent. (qtd. in Jain, p. 140)⁵

Evam Indrajit was also performed in Hindi under the direction of Mushtaq Kak at the main auditorium of the Sri Ram Centre, New Delhi on 15th and 16th September 2003.

III

Evam Indrajit was the first play and production that introduced Sircar's drama in Mumbai through performances. This was staged by Shyamanand Jalan in 1963 in Hindi. The impact of this production is best described through the words of Amol Palekar who said after watching Sircar's play that "My whole understanding of my life and theatre changed after that."⁶

Evam Indrajit was translated into Kannada by B.V. Karanth. This Kannada language version of this play was published by Akshara Prakashan of Saga (Karnataka) in May 1973 as an 82 page book. Another translation of *Evam Indrajit* in another south Indian language, Telugu, was done by Vasu Redd and Sita Devi and was published by Delux Publication, Vijayawada in July 1984. The text of this translation is 112 pages long.

As in the case of other Indian states like Maharashtra, the practice and teachings of Badal Sircar also affected the texture of the dramatic practice followed in the north-east Indian state of Manipur. It is possible to precisely date when this influence began in the year 1972. On 30 October 1972 was staged *Evam Indrajit*.

To introduce Badal Sircar to the Manipuri reading public, Maharajkumari Binodini Devi of Yaiskul, Imphal, translated and published *Evam Indrajit* in

5 Jain, Kirti. *Badal Sircar: Search for a Language of Theatre*. New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2016.

6 *Ibid*, p. 136.

her own mother tongue. Given the title *Amasung Indrajit*, Binodini Devi's translation was published in 1989. This translated version was however performed much earlier in 1973 by the Rup Raga theatre group in a production directed by Aribam Shyam Shama, who himself played the role of Lekhak. The role of Manasi was played by Yengkhom Roma in this Manipuri production of *Evam Indrajit*. About her translation, Binodini Devi said that "It was not very difficult for me to translate his *Evam Indrajit* into my mother tongue, but I am not sure about how close I have got to the original play *Evam Indrajit*. The difficult part for me was to translate his [Badal Sircar's] poems because he is a gifted poet whereas I am not." (my trans.)⁷

Apart from translations, the ideas and concept of Badal Sircar came to spread throughout the southern Indian states. This was not only because such plays as *Evam Indrajit* were translated into South Indian languages like Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam but also because Sircar had begun to visit these states for holding workshops from the 1970s onwards.

IV

Evam Indrajit was the first play of Badal Sircar translated into English. The first, and till date the only English translation of this play was done by the famous actor and theatre director and playwright Girish Karnad in 1974. Karnad left the title of Sircar's play unchanged, perhaps as an acknowledgement of the reputation of the play all over India and the world. However, since Karnad was not entirely comfortable with the Bengali language, he had used as a source text the two Hindi translations of *Evam Indrajit* done by Ramgopal Bajaj and Pratibha Agarwal. Karnad's decision to translate *Evam Indrajit* into English may also have had something to do with his experience of having watched the play in performance in Kolkata in the Shouvanik theatre group production of 1965. However, his decision to translate the play into English must have also been motivated by a desire to share the richness of *Evam Indrajit* with everyone familiar with English on both national and international levels.

The first production of *Evam Indrajit* in English, the worldwide premiere of the play, was by the Chennai based theatre group 'The Madras Players' at the Museum Theatre in April 1970. Established way back in 1955, the Madras Players was one of the oldest theatre group in India which grew out of the efforts of a band of theatre enthusiasts (mainly students), who were members

7 Devi, Binodini, translator. "Preface." *Amsung Indrajit*. Imphal: 1989.

of a play - reading circle encouraged by the British Council of Chennai to promote English language theatre.

A few years later, *Evam Indrajit* in English was also staged at the annual drama production of the students of Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay. Ten years later in 1995, *Evam Indrajit* in Girish Karnad's translation was performed by Campus Theatre at the Little Theatre Group Auditorium in Copernicus Marg, Delhi. Five years later in the year 2000 yet another presentation of *Evam Indrajit* in Girish Karnad's English translation was done by the students of Indraprastha College, Delhi. Directed by Pranab Mukherjee, the play which was staged in the month of December 2000, was reviewed by Prithwiraj Roy in the Delhi edition of *The Statesman* published on 29 December 2000.

The next performance of *Evam Indrajit* in English which as can be ascertained from the extant records, is that of the Actor Company Theatre's production staged in September 2004. The *Deccan Herald* of Delhi published a review of this staging which was written by the drama critic Balraj KN on 23 September 2004 under the heading "Truth and nothing but the truth!" The reviewer said that "*Evam Indrajit* is a thought provoking play which questions the meaning of existence. The quest for truth and a more important question - whose truth and the 'what' of truth?"⁸

Evam Indrajit was further performed in English by the Chennai based theatre group Evam in collaboration with "Madras/Chennai Players" in June 2005 in the Sivagami Pethachi Auditorium. The production was directed by Michael Muthu of the 'Madras/ Chennai Players.' The play was once again performed by the same two groups, viz the Madras Players and Evam Entertainment at Ranga Shankara in Bangalore in July 2005.

V

The field of Absurd Theatre has been more than adequately mapped with critics and observers arriving at a quite remarkable near-consensus on the nature of Absurd Drama. The entry on absurd drama in the *Cambridge Guide to World Theatre* states that the plays of the Absurd "presented man's metaphysical absurdity in [an] aberrant dramatic style that mirrored the human situation. Never a formal movement, the playwrights of the absurd were centred in post-war Paris but they soared to international fame with the

8 Balraj, K N. "Truth and nothing but the truth!" *The Deccan Herald*, 23 Sept. 2004.

unexpected success of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.”⁹ Absurd drama according to *Oxford Companion to Theatre* shows that “man's life is essentially without meaning and purpose and that human beings cannot communicate. This led to the abandonment of dramatic form and coherent dialogue, the futility of existence being conveyed by illogical or meaningless speeches and ultimately by complete silence.”¹⁰ In *The Reader's Encyclopedia of World Drama*, the concept of ‘Absurd plays’ is described in the following words:

There is no plot to speak of in an absurd play, not any ‘real’ characters in conflict; consequently, most absurd drama is not dramatic in the usual sense of the term. Although there is usually much physical activity, it is pseudo-activity, which does not really constitute an action; a great deal of movement relates the idea that no matter how one busies himself, nothing actually happens in his existence... The language of the absurd is often in conflict with the immediate action and is reduced to meaningless pattern to show the futility.¹¹

The drama critic whose path-breaking work *Theatre of the Absurd* brought into widespread circulation the concept of Absurd Drama, was Martin Esslin. Writing extensively on the plays of Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet and Harold Pinter, Esslin traces in his book (and originally in an essay published in the *Drama Review*) not only the innovations in theatrical technique achieved by the Absurdist but also their philosophical and ideational roots. The Absurd, declares Esslin¹², is “broadly based on ancient strands of the Western tradition and has its exponents in Britain, Spain, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Eastern Europe and the United States as well as in France.” It was quite natural for Absurd Drama to be born in Paris, according to Esslin, because the intellectual environment of the French capital was receptive to new artistic developments and was ideationally open and uninhibited. “That is why,” writes Esslin,

a cosmopolitan of uncertain origin like Apollinaire; Spaniards like Picasso or Juan Gris; Russians like Kandinsky and Chagall; Rumanians like Tzara and Brancusi; Americans like Gertrude Stein, Hemingway; and E. E. Cummings, an Irishman like Joyce; and many others from the four corners of the world could come together in Paris and shape the modern movement

9 Banham, Martin, editor. *Cambridge Guide to World Theatre*. Cambridge UP, 1990.

10 Hartnoll, Phyllis, editor. *Oxford Companion to the Theatre*. Oxford UP, 1983, p. 3.

11 Gassner, John. *The Reader's Encyclopedia of World Drama*. Crowell, 1969, p. 13.

12 Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Penguin Books, 1991, p. 26.

in the arts and literature. The Theatre of the Absurd springs from the same tradition and is nourished from the same roots. An Irishman, Samuel Beckett; a Rumanian, Eugene Ionesco; a Russian of Armenian origin, Arthur Adamov, not only found in Paris the atmosphere that allowed them to experiment in freedom, they also found there the opportunities to get their work produced.¹³

It may certainly be argued that the city of Kolkata in the 1950s and 1960s had a somewhat comparable cultural and intellectual environment. Historically, India's Independence had been won less than a decade before Sircar's writing of *Evan Indrajit*. The turmoil of Partition which had involved mass killings and rioting and had resulted in a massive influx of refugees from the erstwhile East Pakistan into the city brought about changes in social thinking and in political awareness. The unsettled, restless spirit of the time brewed a heady cocktail of avant-garde thinking and bold artistic innovations, all centered in the city of Kolkata. The proliferation of new amateur theatre groups and the rise of a new middle-class theatre-going public led to experiments in the writing and performance of new plays. There can be little doubt that Badal Sircar was a child of this age, but it is precisely here that we can identify the ways in which the Indian playwrights both conformed to and deviated from the practices of the Western writers of Absurd Theatre.

The Absurd movement in the Western world was born out of the social, philosophical and artistic climate of post-war Europe. Both after the First World War, and in a more pronounced fashion subsequent to the Second World War, western man started to lose faith in religion and even in the fabric of the social order itself. The triumph of fascism under Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini during World War II, and after it of large scale unemployment amidst crumbling national economies, the rise of Cold War politics, and a general disenchantment with ruling politicians and their governance resulted in widespread dissatisfaction, cynicism and doubt. One philosophical outlook that gained considerable ground during this period was that of existentialism, an idea that was centered on a refusal of belief in absolute meaning. The new philosophy called everything in doubt, based as it was on the dictum pithily expressed by the philosopher Jean Paul Sartre in his work *The Philosophy of Existence*: 'existence before essence.'

13 *Ibid*, pp. 26-27.

Badal Sircar as a playwright was of course up to a point somewhat physically and culturally distant from these perturbations that were affecting the consciousness of the inhabitants of Europe in the 1950s and the 1960s. As has already been indicated, India, and most specifically Bengal and Kolkata, was experiencing upheavals of a different kind. The spectre of unemployment, underemployment and poverty haunted the minds of countless Bengali middle-class individuals. Even as hundreds of thousands of families were struggling to rebuild their lives after their traumatic uprooting from their native lands in East Bengal (post-Independence East Pakistan), the middle class Bengali 'Bhadralok' continued to believe in the importance of the stability of a settled domestic life, remained committed to the practice of finding gainful employment of some kind, to marry, settle down in society and to raise families. It is this staid conventionalism of a middle class value-system that forms an interrogational staple of several of Badal Sircar's plays including *Evam Indrajit*.

Of course, middle-class or bourgeois respectability was never out of the range of Sircar's interrogation. Even in his first play, *Solution X*, Sircar had poked fun at the accepted and cherished norms of respectable behavior. In the play, the drinking of chemical-tainted water makes two highly respected scientists- and the wife of one – to behave in a completely unexpected, indecorous and ridiculous manner. In another early Badal Sircar play, *Sara Rattir*, an elderly man breaks open the shell of the conventional domesticity of a Bengali couple and seriously destabilises their relationship with each other. In *Sagina Mahato*, a working class man who is a naturally - born activist falls prey to petty middle-class values and vices and ends up by betraying the interests of his own class of people. Nevertheless, it is in *Evam Indrajit* that Sircar most starkly and vividly outlined the utter meaninglessness and absurdity of the middle-class outlook towards life.

In his well-researched book *So Near, Yet So Far: Badal Sircar's Third Theatre*, Manujendra Kundu has come to the conclusion that "A number of critics have created a space for debate by pointing to the influence of the theatre of the absurd and/or existentialism on *Evam Indrajit*, but neither his [Sircar's] personal life nor the play, which is a documentation of his desire, anger, despair, and dream, seemed to have elements of both."¹⁴ Kundu stresses that Sircar himself had said in an interview that he had read only one play written

14 Kundu, Manujendra. *So Near, Yet So Far: Badal Sircar's Third Theatre*. Oxford UP, p. 92.

by a Western Absurd dramatist, and that it was his ignorance of this genre of drama that led him to read Esslin's *Theatre of the Absurd* at a much later point of time. Another of Sircar's critics, Subhendu Sarkar, has criticized those who have "linked *Evan Indrajit* to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*." Sircar's conclusion is grounded in his observation that "while Beckett ends his play at waiting, Sircar determines to continue searching."¹⁵

Yet, conclusions like these are not entirely right, for they assume somewhat positivistically that drama may be compartmentalised in terms of West and East, and that Badal Sircar was a completely original and a totally isolated playwright who had crafted his theatre in the midst of an intellectual and theatrical void. The reality instead is that many diverse influences shaped the unique theatrical genius of Badal Sircar, and that even if almost none of his plays were direct imitations, their forms, shapes and textures were the result of his absorption of the norms, modes and values suspended at the core of the variety world drama. It may indeed be said that while the Western Theatre of the Absurd may not have directly impinged upon Sircar's consciousness, there exists sufficient common ground for attempting a comparative estimate between Absurd Drama and some of the plays of Badal Sircar.

It has already been noted that the climate of opinions in the 1950s and the 1960s in both Paris and in Kolkata were at least in certain respects similar. In both cities there was the existence of a cultural and intellectual avant-garde that was open to the reception of innovation and experimentation, particularly in the theatre. The creative writers of both the cultures were thinking individuals capable of interrogating the bases of human behavior thought to be normal by a large majority of the people, particularly those belonging to the strata composed of so-called respectable citizens. And quite significantly, the new emerging writers of the time regarded themselves as somewhat different, if not alienated, from the people around them. Individualistic, solipsistic and reflective, the new theatre writers, especially in the western world often wrote out of a sense of personal anguish.

While it would be over-simplistic to relate childhood experiences to a deeply philosophical outlook like Existentialism, the fact is that there appear to be certain links between the Theatre of the Absurd and Existentialist philosophy. This type of philosophy did not of course suddenly emerge in the 20th century, but had evolved over the centuries. Though first used by

15 Sarkar, Subhendu Sekhar. *Badal Sircar's Two Plays*. Oxford UP, 2010, p. 80.

the philosopher Gabriel Marcel in his book *The Philosophy of Existence* (1954) to categorize the ideas of Sartre, the term Existentialist has been generally defined by Cooper in his *Existentialism: A Reconstruction* (1990) in the context of “a response to alienation produced by mind-body dualism and science’s objective world.”¹⁶ Soren Kierkegaard, an early Existentialist thinker indicated that the individual had to be understood as being in the center of existence. “The individual as the particular is higher than the individual”¹⁷; he wrote in his essay *Fear and Trembling*. Like Kierkegaard, the philosophers Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers and Albert Camus went beyond Descartes’s theory that man’s consciousness was separate from the body. As Jean Paul Sartre quoted, “All consciousness is conscious of something... all knowing consciousness can be knowledge only of its object.”¹⁸

It follows from this, as Ronald Grinsly indicates in his work *Existentialist Thought*, that the existentialist philosophers were concerned with existence “not as an abstract general concept but in its individual and concrete manifestation.”¹⁹ It is here that the plays in the Absurd tradition may be said to join in with the trend of existentialist thought. The Absurd play is an enactment, perhaps an expressive embodiment of the fact of existence. As the actors on the stage play out their roles, and as the members of the audience watch their actions, a meaning is created which signifies a perception and an understanding of human existence itself. However, two caveats should be highlighted at this point. The first is that the so-called existentialist philosophers were not quite united in their thinking, for there exists great discontinuities between their thought. Albert Camus, for instance, declared that he was not an existentialist, and that he had nothing in common with Sartre:

No, I am not an existentialist. Sartre and I are always surprised to see our names associated. We think that one day we may publish a short statement in which the undersigned affirm that they have nothing in common and that they each refuse to answer for the debts that the other may have incurred... Sartre and I had published all of our books, without exception, before

16 Cooper, David E. *Existentialism: A Reconstruction*. Basil Blackwell, 1990, p. 8.

17 Kierkegaard, Soren. “Fear and Trembling.” *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 43, translated by Walter Lowrie, Chicago UP, 1990, p. 424.

18 Sartre, Jean Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes, Pocket Books, 1956, p. 11.

19 Grimsley, Ronald. *Existentialist Thought*. U of Wales P, 1967, p. 3.

becoming acquainted. Our eventual meeting only confirmed our differences. Sartre is an existentialist, and the only book of ideas I've written, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, is directed against the so-called existentialist philosophers" (qtd. in Foley, 2)²⁰

We need to realise that the term the Theatre of the Absurd is perhaps something of a misnomer, for the playwrights themselves evidently did not see themselves as part of a larger consistent dramatic movement as such. Rather, the playwrights themselves spoke in different tones and in different ways about their practices as dramatists.

Talking about his own childhood on one occasion, Samuel Beckett thus said that even at a time when he was a child, he "was more aware of unhappiness around him than happiness" (qtd. in Mallick, 7)²¹ It is a known fact that he suffered from frequent bouts of depression even when he was young. He is known to have said, "I had little talent for happiness,"²² and he often felt that he did not have feelings or emotions that were human. Rather similarly, Eugene Ionesco was preoccupied with the feeling that the world "was full of decay, corruption and meaningless repetitive action."²³ Conscious of the reality that death gathers everyone, much of his writing demonstrates a disgust at the inevitability of death. Arthur Adamov underwent equally painful psychological crises in his own life. Writing in his autobiographical narrative *The Confession (L'Avne)* in a section dated 1938, he noted: "What in there? I know first of all that I am. But who am I? All I know of myself is that I suffer. And if I suffer it is because at the origin of myself there is mutilation, separation. I am separated."²⁴ (qtd. in Esslin, 93) Another Absurd playwright, Jean Genet, too, was a victim of feelings of despair, aloneness and helplessness. Abandoned by his mother as a baby, he faced the ignominy of being accused of theft when he was ten years old, and he later became a delinquent who served several sentences in prisons in three countries. Significantly, the two other great European thinkers also associated with absurdism, Jean- Paul Sartre and Albert Camus also had unhappy childhoods. Sartre's father died

20 Foley, John. *Albert Camus: From the Absurd to Revolt*. Routledge, 2008, p. 2.

21 Mallick, Javed. "Introduction." *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts*, Oxford UP, 1989, p. 7.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

23 Ionesco, Eugene. *Fragments of a Journal*. Translated by Jean Stewart, Faber and Faber, 1968.

24 Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Penguin Books, 1991, p. 93.

when he was an infant, and he was often taunted for being short in height, cross-eyed and overly precocious as a boy. Camus also had had a conflicted and unhappy childhood as an adopted child. In a self-reflexive passage in his play *Improvisation*, Ionesco declared:²⁵

It is neither from the wretchedness of the poor nor the unhappiness of the rich that I draw the substance of my drama. For me, the theatre is the projection on to the stage of the world within – is in my dreams, my anguish, my dark desires, my inner contradictions that I reserve the right to find the stuffs of my plays. As I am not alone in the world – as each one of us, in the depths of his being, is at the same time everyone else – my dreams and desires, my anguish and my obsessions do not belong to myself alone; they are part of the heritage of my ancestors, a very ancient deposit to which all mankind may lay claim.

This feeling, this emotion, is common in the work of playwrights such as Ionesco, Camus, Sartre and Beckett. But insofar as this new trend of thought impacted the writing of drama, it was not restricted to ideation alone. It was rather given a dramatic embodiment in terms of a reactionary moving away from traditional dramatic form. In his “Author’s Preface” to *The Myth of Sisyphus* Albert Camus made this clear when he wrote²⁶:

After a rather long experience as director, actor, and dramatist, it seems to me that there is no true theater without language and style, nor any dramatic work which does not, like our classical drama and Greek tragedians, involve human fate in all its simplicity and grandeur. Without claiming to equal them, these are at least the models to set oneself. Psychology, ingenious plot-devices, and spicy situations, though they may amuse me as a member of the audience, leave me indifferent as an author.

It is possible that Badal Sircar had his first exposure to this new trend in Western European drama during his stay in England from 1957 to 1959. Subsequently, his theatrical horizons expanded during his later visits to America, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Russia in 1969, and then again his journey to USA. The influence of Absurd Drama on Badal Sircar seems to be both specific as well as generic, are the following discussion will try to bring out.

25 Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Penguin Books, 1991, p. 171.

26 Camus, Albert. “Author’s Preface.” *Caligula and 3 Other Plays*. Translated by Stuart Gilbert, Vintage Books, 1964, p. x.

One of the earliest of the so-called Absurdist, but a playwright who was born many years before absurd drama was given its name was Eugene Ionesco. Some of his plays are *The Bald Prima Donna* (first performed in May 11, 1950), *The Lesson* (1951), *The Chairs* (1952), *Amedee* (1954), *Rhinoceros* (1958), *Exit the King* (1962), *The Cop* (1966), *The Killing Game* (1970), *The Man with the Luggage* (1975), *Anti Dots* (1977) and *Journeys among the Dead* (1980). Ionesco wrote plays about the absurd nature of the human existence. In *The Bald Prima Donna* for instance, Ionesco highlights the practices of human banality, incongruity and the destruction of meaning in the manner of a surrealist painter. He had attempted, claimed Ionesco, "To make the mechanism of drama function in a vacuum."²⁷ Describing his method as "An experiment in abstract or non-representative drama," he declared that he had aimed at the realizing of "dramatic tension without the help of any proper plot or any special subject. The progression of purposeless passion, a rising crescendo that is all the more natural, dramatic, and exciting because it is not hampered by content, and by that I mean any apparent content or subject which conceals the genuine subject from us: the particular meaning of a dramatic plot hides its essential significance."²⁸ These words are significant because they indicate that Ionesco seems to have been interested more in the structure of theatre than in its content. Speaking about *The Bald Prima Donna*, he stressed that he had tried "to render the strangeness and the farcical, the prosaic and the poetic, the realistic and the fantastic, the strange and the ordinary as a basis for a new dramatic structure."²⁹ He confessed that his first play had "started off as an attempt to parody the theatre,"³⁰ and hence to parody a certain kind of human behavior, by plunging into banality, by dreaming about sense taken from the hollowest clichés of everyday language. Needless to say, there is no character in the play who is even remotely related to a prima donna. The Martins, a husband and his wife, visit the home of another couple named the Smiths. Only, they appear to be strangers to each other till a series of "coincidences" including the fact that they both have a daughter named Alice, leads them to conclude that they are husband and wife. A clock in the house strikes at random hours, including sounding seventeen times on one occasion. The

27 Ionesco, Eugene. *Notes and Counternotes*. Translated by Donald Watson, Grove Press, 1964, pp. 180-81.

28 *Ibid*, pp. 180-81.

29 *Ibid*, p. 28.

30 *Ibid*, p. 28.

door bell rings but no one is found at the door till a Fire Chief appears and confesses that he had been ringing the bell and then hiding himself. Mary, the maid of the Smiths, recites a poem which is a farrago of nonsense, and the Fire Chief claims her as his long-lost lover. Rather, the action is about the Martins and the Smiths scream out irrelevant clichés at each other till the lights go out and their shouts suddenly subside into silence.

Alfred Schwarz observes that by translating “the breakdown of communication into the automatic give and take of the English Language Manual, he [Ionesco] calls attention to his detached comic view of man totally lost (or to use his own word, steeped) in his social environment”³¹. In another of Ionesco’s plays, *The Chairs*, a play which is subtitled “A Tragic Farce”, an Old Man and an Old Woman-, a couple who have apparently been married for a long time, receive a great number of invisible visitors for whom they arrange chairs till the room is overfilled with chairs. At the end arrives an Orator who ultimately proves to be dumb, and an Emperor who is also invisible but whose presence prompts the old couple to plunge to their deaths in the sea outside. The play concludes with an empty stage filled only with sounds of the laughter and the coughing of the invisible people on the stage. The proliferation of the chairs in the play marks the absence of flesh and blood characters and of language itself. A different kind of conclusion figures in Ionesco’s *The Rhinoceros* in which all human beings but one turn into rhinoceros. The absurdity of men and women willingly embracing rhinocerosism reflects not only on the notion of conformity, but also on the absurdity of the wish to conform, or equally not to conform.

Absurdity is the essence of Camus’s play *Caligula* too. First performed in Paris in the Hebertot Theatre in 1945, the play has been described by John Foley as a “historical *Homo absurdus*.”³² The action of the play begins with the social and political fallout caused by the death of the Emperor Caligula’s sister and mistress Drusilla. From being a near-perfect ruler, the emperor is transformed into a murderous tyrant. However, more than the event of the death of Drusilla, what transforms the Roman emperor Caligula is the truth he discovers upon her death, a “ ‘childishly simple, obvious, almost silly truth, but one that’s hard to come by and heavy to endure’, the truth

31 Bloom, Harold, editor. “Alfred Schwarz on Ionesco’s Theater.” *Bloom’s Major Dramatist: Eugene Ionesco*, Chelsea House, 2003, p. 31.

32 Foley, John. *Albert Camus: From the Absurd to Revolt*. Routledge, 2008, p. 22.

that 'men die, and they are not happy'.³³ He is suddenly made aware of the absurdity of the fact that "between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints"³⁴ there lies a vast gulf of absurdity. The other character in the play who appreciates this sense of the absurd is Caligula's antagonist Cherea who appreciates the power of the absurd and realizes that the absurd can "transfix lives, like a dagger in the heart".³⁵ And at the end of the play, the death of Caligula is spotlighted as a climax of Absurdity. "My freedom isn't the right one...",³⁶ Caligula realizes moments before he is assassinated. And at the explosive conclusion of the play, Camus shows Caligula shrieking out in a final gasp both laughing and choking, "I am still alive!"³⁷

Three years before *Caligula* was staged in Paris in the month of month of June 1945, Camus published the essay which is considered to be the cornerstone of the absurd philosophy. This essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) defines the absurd as proceeding from the gap between our desire to make a world that makes sense and the reality that the world is unreasonably silent. According to Camus the consciousness about the absurd proceeds from the awareness that even the assumed truth value of scientific facts end up as being no more than mere imaginary hypotheses, As he argues :

You tell me of an invisible planetary system in which electrons gravitate around a nucleus. You explain this world to me with an image. I realize then that you have been reduced to poetry . . . that science that was to teach me everything ends up in hypothesis, that lucidity founders in metaphor (qtd. in Foley, 7).³⁸

In his understanding that even the matter of fact ideations of science are no more than metaphors or tropes, Camus contends that man is shaken out of his complacency about the logical coherence of world around him, and so he is compelled to come face to face with the absurdity in which he exists. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Sisyphus, according to Camus, represents a two-fold realization of the absurd, as both epistemic and ontological. The latter involves the realization that human existence itself is meaningless, while the former leads to an acknowledgement that nothing in existence has any coherence or

33 *Ibid*, p. 23.

34 *Ibid*, p. 23.

35 Camus, Albert. *Caligula*. 1945. Translated by Stuart Gilbert, Vintage Books, 1958, p. 51.

36 *Ibid*, p. 73.

37 *Ibid*, p. 74.

38 Foley, John. *Albert Camus: From the Absurd to Revolt*. Routledge, 2008, p. 7.

significance. Yet, it is important to note that in Camus' ideation there is a realization that a man of the absurd may lead men into living "in harmony with a universe without future and withoutness. This absurd, godless world is then peopled with men who think clearly and have ceased to hope,"³⁹ writes Camus. This is why Camus and subsequent absurdists could write plays embodying the sense of the absurd as a central and defining moment.

The Absurd proved to be fertile field in dramatic writing even beyond France in the decades that followed Ionesco, Camus and Adamov. In America, one of the most noted absurdist playwrights was Edward Albee whose play *The Zoo Story*, written over a span of two and a half weeks, is regarded as a landmark in Absurd Theatre. Set in a public park, Central Park in New York one Sunday afternoon in summer and featuring two park benches and two characters, the play is about the absurdity of life lived through a language devoid of meaning and purpose. There is an intimation of absurdity right at the beginning of the play when Jerry, one of the two men who has evidently gone to seed, informs the other man named Peter who is a successful executive that he has been to the zoo. Jerry reiterates that he has been to the Zoo a number of times without however explaining anything about what he did there. Peter's interjection⁴⁰ "...Were you talking to me?" indicates his initial indifference which later changes into puzzlement, and then into a reluctance to continue the conversation. Ultimately however, Jerry intrudes into Peter's consciousness till he begins to control the motives and instincts of Peter culminating in Jerry's suicide, an act in which Peter becomes an unwilling accomplice. Significantly, the word 'Absurd' occurs in the play twice, even as the two men begin to argue and fight over sitting on a park bench. Jerry's dialogue mentioning the word 'Absurd' runs:

You have everything in the world you want; you've told me about your home, and your family, and your own little zoo. You have everything, and now you want this bench. Are these the things men fight for? Tell me, Peter, is this bench, this iron and this wood, is this your honour? Is this the thing in the world you'd fight for? Can you think of anything more absurd?⁴¹

The point at issue here is the confrontation between the norm of normality represented by Peter who leads a respectable life with a job, a wife, daughters,

39 *Ibid*, p. 11.

40 Albee, Edward. *The Zoo Story*. 1958. *Absurd Drama*, Penguin Books, 1984, p. 159.

41 *Ibid*, pp. 181-82.

cats and two pet birds, and Jerry who is (according to Peter) “stark raving mad.”⁴² What Albee apparently wishes to indicate is that ‘normal’ existence of Peter is just as devoid of meaning as Jerry’s absurd act of the giving up of his life. *The Zoo Story* in fact foregrounds the meaninglessness of everything that human beings believe to have significance- family, employment, honor, and the instinct of retaliation.

An early absurdist play, Luigi Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* has been often related to the practices of literary and cultural modernism, and to its interrogation of all forms of objective reality. Robert Borstein has opined that Pirandello in his play illustrate how “truth” can never be “grasped” by human beings, especially because truth is in “a continual state of flux”⁴³, and also because apperceptions of reality vary from person to person. The core issue of perceptions never being the same is highlighted by the Father in the following words:

Don’t you see that the whole trouble lies here? In words, words. Each one of us has within him a whole world of things, each man of us his own special world. And how can we ever come to an understanding if I put in the words I utter the sense and the value of things as I see them; while you who listen to me must invariably translate them according to the conception of things each one of you has within himself. We think we understand each other, but we never really do!⁴⁴

The sense of the Absurd lies in the fact that human beings regard themselves as existing in the world around themselves in terms of given realities and set finitudes while actually being blind to the truth that there is no fixed reality but only our very divergent attitudes towards it. Pirandello said as much when he wrote in his essay “Umoreismo”, “that objective value which we commonly presume to attribute to our knowledge of the world and of ourselves does not exist; it is a continuous illusory construction.”⁴⁵

In the play itself, the idea of the illusion involved in construction is evoked structurally through the application of techniques of metatheatricity. In

42 *Ibid*, p. 183.

43 Brustein, Robert. *The Theatre of Revolt: An Approach to Modern Drama*. Little Brown, 1964, p. 295.

44 Pirandello, Luigi. *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. 1921. Translated by Edward Storer, New York: E. P. Dutton, 1922, pp. 18-19.

45 Pirandello, Luigi. “Umoreismo.” *Modern Drama: An Authoritative Texts*, edited by Anthony Caputi, Norton, 1966, p. 470.

many places the actors and the characters take on each other's identities and the fluidity of action and causality is deliberately fractured. The Six Characters come on stage to ask the Manager to help them out by scripting their play, an action which he consents to perform, but which results in an unexpected reaction:

L'Ingenue: Vanity! He fancies himself an author now.

Leading Man: It's absolutely unheard of. If the stage has come to this...well I'm...

Fifth Actor: It's rather a joke.⁴⁶

Later in the play, the Stepdaughter usurps the function of the Manager as the director of the play as she issues instructions to Madam Pace about how to play herself, and even tells the Father how to make his entry, how to speak out and so on. At one point, the characters on stage become the audience the actors play to, and vice versa. At the end of the play the whole issue of unreality of reality is underscored by the death of The Boy and The Girl. At the opening of the play the Characters had unambiguously declared that they were the immortal creations of an author. Hence the death of these characters emerges as something deeply ambiguous. Indeed as Ann Balakian has indicated, "a real life event- the actual drowning of a girl and the suicide of the boy-brings art and reality into collision, violating the created reality of the fixed characters."⁴⁷ What Pirandello's play really indicates is that it would be absurd to assume the existence of a determinate as an absolute truth. As the play itself shows that both the characters and the actors in it are embodiments of illusions, or are non-existentialist entities, it illustrates through its "relationships between life and art that we discover our own slippery truths through confrontations with our inventions of selves in art."⁴⁸

The playwright most identified with the term absurd is of course Samuel Beckett, whose play *Waiting for Godot*, is, even seventy years after its writing taken to be emblematic of the 'Theatre of the Absurd'. This play drastically broke with the most established of dramatic conventions and seemed to be resistant to the imposition of signification itself. What is new to *Waiting for*

46 Pirandello, Luigi. *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. 1921. Translated by Edward Storer, New York: E. P. Dutton, 1922, p. 35.

47 Balakian, Ann. "Pirandello's Six Characters and Surrealism." *Bloom's Major Dramatist: Luigi Pirandello*, edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House, 2003, p. 63.

48 Gilman, Richard. *The Making of Modern Drama*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974, p. 180.

Godot was the way in which Beckett essentialized the stage as an arena of an action which was significant in terms of its lack of meaningfulness. For instance, the stage direction at the beginning of the play which specifies the place as "a country road" is significantly devoid of specificity. Neither is the time of the unfolding action precisely mentioned. Chronologically, the setting of the play (and also) other plays of Beckett are non-specific. The action of the plot unfolds against a backdrop of a generalized geographical background, and the passing of time is not a chronological progression but simply a series of temporally undifferentiated events.

Waiting for Godot is a play that self-consciously reflects on the theatricality of long established stage-routines, whether vocal or visual or comic or tragic. The play in its entirety is mimetic not in a realist way but in a parodistic way. Beckett clearly intends to explore the possibilities of the stage, stage action and stage dialogues in the communication not of a meaningful action but of the presence of any meaning at all, the embodiment not of significance but of absurdity itself. What makes the play striking is Beckett's use of long established theatrical conventions in order to highlight the absurdity of believing that drama can and may represent a meaningful reality.

Beckett's inverted and introverted exploitation of the resources of the theatre may also be seen in other plays. In *Endgame* the first character Clove climbs up a step-ladder to draw back the curtains in two windows before taking off a sheet of cloth which covers two ashbins, and before uncovering the figure of Hamm who is seated in an armchair. This action obviously brings into prominence the propson stages which are the two ashbins and the armchair with a man seated on it. The uncovering of the props is a ritual gesture comparable to the rise of the curtain before the commencement of a theatrical performance. Only, in the play the human characters on stage do not use the props as an actor would a chair or a table by sitting on it. Instead, the ashbins contain the actors Hamm and Nagg. The title of the play itself which refers to the ending of the game of chess suggests an action, a sequence of events leading up to an invariable conclusion. But, Beckett's play deliberately violates the whole point of traditional theatre which is to move from exposition to complication to resolution since there is almost no physical movement in *Endgame*. Indeed, there is no final point indicating a meaning in the play but only a performance which stresses the absurdity of human life.

The connection between Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* and the Theatre of the Absurd can be noted on various levels, including an emphasis on a sense of alienation. Common to both Absurd Drama and *Evam Indrajit* is recognition of man's suffering from a sense of isolation and separation from other human beings. As in the other absurd plays, in *Evam Indrajit* too we may find a sharp critique of the monotony and the meaninglessness of a humdrum existence, equally as a sense of frustration and angst. Certainly Badal Sircar's dramaturgy is different from that of Beckett's in that he depicts a contrariety of realization through a set of characters who represent conformity and orthodoxy, and another unusual individual who stands for a radical divergence from the template of normality. This, in a sense, is exactly what the American absurdist Edward Albee depicted through the character of Peter and Jerry in *The Zoo Story*. Thematically too *Evam Indrajit* embodies the conditions of the Absurdist agony about the lack of the meaning of life. *Evam Indrajit* is a play about four ordinary young Bengali names named Amal, Vimal, Komal and Indrajit. They express an unexceptional trajectory of human growth and development from adolescence to middle age and beyond. In diverse segments of actions, we see them as college students, cricket fans, lovers of Hollywood films, literature, etc. Only, Indrajit has a yearning for interests beyond "cricket, cinema, physics, politics and literature."⁴⁹ They dream about going to "some place... somewhere far-away a world outside geography somewhere far away-outside- beyond."⁵⁰ These four characters in the play are contextualized by a writer who wants to write a play but discovers over and over again that he has nothing to write about. At one point, he hopes that Indrajit who is friendly with a girl will provide him with some material, but this also does not come to fruition. The mundane existence of the four men and the girl whom the Writer names Manasi amounts to a circular nullity as the Writer declares: "One, two, three... and Indrajit."⁵¹ This notion of circularity of action is a marker of much absurd drama and it may be said of Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* what Adamov said that the "Impersonality of circularity of movement is enhanced by mechanism of the play."⁵² There is a parallel also in the structure of *Evam Indrajit* and those in Adamov's plays *Off Limits*, *Ping Pong* and *The Parody*. In

49 Sircar, Badal. *Evam Indrajit*. 1963. *Three Modern Indian Plays*, translated by Girish Karnad, Oxford UP, 2008, p. 19.

50 *Ibid*, pp. 20.

51 *Ibid*, pp. 32.

52 *Ibid*, pp. 19.

all these plays the idea that the characters appeared to move while in reality being stuck in the same situation is a staple of not only *Waiting for Godot* but also, the repetition of the action amounts to being a performance of a ritual which underlines and intensifies the impression of stasis and inertia.

What strikes the attention first about *Evan Indrajit* is that, like many other instances of Absurd Drama, it is in a sense an 'anti-play' in that it eschews the traditional dramatic conventions of having a developing line of action or progression of plot. Sircar's play instead opens with a Writer who is trying without any success to write a play. His exertions are however perpetually interrupted by an 'Auntie', an older woman representing maternal affection and concern, who repeatedly asks him to leave his 'scribbling' and to come and eat his food. After Auntie exits, the Writer is joined by a girl whom the Writer refers to as 'Manasi'. The dialogue between the two has the Writer confess that he has nothing to write about since he knows too few people and even less about them. At this point, he suddenly notices a foursome of late arrivals in the theatre hall, and impulsively asks them to join him on stage.

The names of these four men are revealed by them to be Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Nirmal. Only, as the Writer expresses his disbelief about the name Nirmal, this man reveals that his real name is Indrajit. The point at issue here is that Indrajit is the exception among the banal conventionality represented by the other three men, Amal, Vimal and Kamal. What had led him to give a false name, says Indrajit, had been his fear about not conforming. As he says:

INDRAJIT: I'm older now. Age is afraid of joy, of happiness. It only wants comfort. Peace. Now Indrajit only wants the comfort of a dark cloudy sky.⁵³

Through the voice of the Writer, Sircar makes it clear that these men, who collectively represent the college-educated, middle-income Bengali intellectual elite class, are the living dead whose monotonous existence knows no novelty, no drama, no change and no excitement. All of them had been born, educated, found employment, married and raised families without exception. Only, perhaps, Indrajit is different, for he protests against all 'rules' of conformity, and wants to tear the rope of rules into shreds, to "Bring down all these walls which surround us."⁵⁴

⁵³ *Ibid*, pp. 5.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 21.

There is an interesting disconnect between the theme of *Evam Indrajit* and dramatic technique and the structure of the play in that while the first Act is centered on the measured development of the characters (in the words of the Writer):

WRITER: One-two-three! Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit and Manasi. From home to school. From school to college. From college to the world. They are growing up. They are going round. Round and round and round. One-two-three-two-one. Amal, Vimal, Kamal. And Indrajit ...⁵⁵

The pattern of this development is indicated neither chronologically nor logically but through a series of disconnected flashes of dramatic action. For instance, the four individuals by turn play-act as college professors and students, even as Indrajit's roll number, 'thirty-four', remains a constant. Other dialogue indicate them as being youngsters interested in cricket, Hollywood films and contemporary film personalities like Yul Brynner, the theories of Einstein and the plays of Bernard Shaw. But as the Writer indicates, all this is a part of an inexorable fate that leads "From school to college. College and examinations. Examinations and results. And then the world." (19-20)

"The world" of Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit is depicted in Act II of the play *Evam Indrajit*. This world is one of the routine responsibilities of working in an office, epitomized by files passed around from table to table. Indeed, as the Writer puts it, it involves the same sound of monotonous circularity played out in a different way:

After the files, tea. Then files. Then snacks. Then files. Then tea. Then files. Then tram-bus-train. There are bigger offices where even more important business is transacted. There files- then tea- then files- then lunch- then files- then coffee- then files and then office transport, taxi, car.⁵⁶

Hence the Writer is left wondering if 'Birth, marriage, and death' (36) is all that human existence is about. Such speculations are of course beyond the imaginings of Amal, Vimal and Kamala who worry, respectively, about promotions, transfer and money/finances. And even Indrajit vacillates between deciding to marry Manasi and not marrying her. The Act ends with the Writer mouthing a poem about inertia and thanatos, the death-wish:

I am tired- I am very tired.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 32.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 36.

Let all these rapid questions be.
In the mute enveloping darkness let me just go to sleep.
What's the use of all these words?
Why fling arguments in the wild winds?
I am sick of reasoning now.
Alone, in the depth of shadows, let me just go to sleep.⁵⁷

The theme of circularity is stressed upon too at the beginning of the Third Act of *Evan Indrajit* which shows Amal, Vimal and Indrajit as playing an endless round of a card game, each hand of which is accompanied with a series of dialogues which range from the general to the local, more from a mentioning of larger issues like colonialism, imperialism, democracy, corruption in politics, to smaller and more personal concerns like the lack of professional advancement, bad living quarters, failing business, a son's failure at school, a father's death, and so on.

Counterpointed against this ritual circularity of existential trivia is Indrajit's realization that the "past and the present are two ends of a single rope. They are apart because the dream is alive. Otherwise the future could easily be broken down and thrown into the arms of the past."⁵⁸ Having understood the undeniable truth of the farcicality of life, Indrajit bursts into laughter. Only, Indrajit too is shown by Badal Sircar to have a conformist streak in himself. Like Amal, Kamal and Vimal, Indrajit in one of his multiple avatars gets married to a woman whom he introduces to the Writer as Manasi, though not the Manasi of yore. To her, the Writer explains that his play will never be finished because in it "there isn't much difference between the beginning and the end [since] it's a circular play"⁵⁹ like the meaningless round of existence in which Amal, Vimal and Kamal are inescapably caught, and from which coil there is no escape. Nevertheless, as the Writer tells Indrajit at the play's conclusion, "You and I can't be Nirmals. For us there is only the road- so walk on. We are the spirits of Sisyphus. We have to push the rock to the top- even if it just rolls down..."⁶⁰

Arup Ratan Ghosh in his book *Bangla Absurd Theatre* published in 2003 has taken note of this allusion and has referred to the commonality between

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 239-40.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 59.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 59.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 59.

Camus's use of the Myth of Sisyphus and Badal Sircar's reference to the same myth in *Evam Indrajit* and has concluded that Sircar's play is part-embodiment of Camus's thesis⁶¹. An earlier scholar, Ajit Kumar Ghosh, further claimed that there are several aspects of parallelity between the absurd tradition and Badal Sircar's play. Ghosh noted that Indrajit's observation in the play about the meaninglessness of life and existence and even, the Writer's apprehension of nullity is similar to Samuel Beckett's realization of nothingness in *Waiting for Godot*. Ghosh noted too that in both *Evam Indrajit* and *Waiting for Godot* there is a concern with linguistic incoherence and the breakdown of human language, and that there is iteration in the words of the Writer in *Evam Indrajit* of a sense of exhaustion that is similar to Vladimir's anguished "I can't go on."⁶² Ajit Kumar Ghosh went on to assert that the pronouncement of a death wish in *Evam Indrajit*, is in keeping with a similar sentiment to be seen often in Absurd Drama, that *Evam Indrajit* and Absurd Plays feature an absence of the exposition- development-conclusion pattern, and that Sircar's violation of location and chronologicality is in keeping with Strindberg's declaration in the Introduction to *A Dream Play* that "Time and space do not exist"⁶³. Beyond this, it may be said of *Evam Indrajit* that it follows in spirit not only what Adamov described as the "Impersonality of [the] circularity of movement", but also employs "Such vague nomenclature as enables character to skip effortlessly into their ascribed position in the recognizable mechanism of the play."⁶⁴ (Adamov) In keeping with this, in Sircar's text the characters are fluid and easily changed from being Amal to Kamal, Vimal to Indrajit, Indrajit to the Writer and so on and so forth. There is also a parallel noticeable between the structure of *Evam Indrajit* and the dramatic format of such of Adamov's plays as *Off Limits*, *The Ping Pong* and *The Parody*. In all these plays the idea that the characters appear to move while in reality they are stuck in the same situation is to be found repeated over and over again.

Interesting too is the fact that while Badal Sircar may have been ignorant of the thought and ideas of Albert Camus at the time of writing *Evam Indrajit*, he appears to have struck many identical keynotes of thought already sounded by this great litterateur and philosopher. In *Evam Indrajit*, the Writer's unending

61 Ghosh, Arup. *Bangla Absurd Theatre*. Lekhoni, 2003, p. 104.

62 Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts*. Oxford UP, 1989, pp. 124.

63 Strindberg, August. "Introduction." *A Dream Play*. 1907. *Strindberg: Five Plays*, U of California P, 1983, p. 205.

64 Theatre III. Paris: 1966, p. 95.

endeavor to write a play brings to mind Camus's words: "The absurd joy *par excellence* is creation."⁶⁵ Even more striking is the fact that Sircar's conclusion appears to highlight the statement in Camus's understanding that it is the typical feature of the individual's awareness of the absurd "to live in harmony with a universe without future and without weakness"⁶⁶ and that "it is not the discovery which is interesting but the consequences and rules for actions which can be drawn from it."⁶⁷ Indeed, the very stuff of *Evan Indrajit* as a play seems to be in keeping with Camus's statement that "This absurd, godless world is then peopled with men who think clearly and have ceased to hope."⁶⁸ At the very conclusion of *Evan Indrajit* it is shown that the Writer and Indrajit and Manasi are such men and women, for at the play's end they intone together:

And hence
There's no end.
There's no hope
Of fulfillment
By the holy shrine
At journey's end.
Forget the questions...⁶⁹

Yet, apart from Beckett and Camus, there are two other absurdists in the light of whose work *Evan Indrajit* may also be regarded. These are Ionesco and Genet. An obvious point of contact between Sircar and Ionesco may be identified by noting that Indrajit's words "One invites unrest by breaking the norm"⁷⁰ are similar to Daisy's declaration in Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, that "It's the world that's right- not you and me"⁷¹ and "People who try to hang on to their individuality always come to a bad end!"⁷² In *Evan Indrajit* too there is a reflection of what Martin Esslin has called "Genet's game of mirrors."⁷³ This,

65 Foley, John. *Albert Camus: From the Absurd to Revolt*. Routledge, 2008, p. 22.

66 *Ibid*, pp. 11.

67 *Ibid*, pp. 6.

68 *Ibid*, pp. 11.

69 Sircar, Badal. *Evan Indrajit*. 1963. *Three Modern Indian Plays*, translated by Girish Karnad, Oxford UP, 2008, pp. 60.

70 *Ibid*, pp. 5.

71 Ionesco, Eugene. *Rhinoceros*. 1960. Translated by Derek Prouse, John Calder, 1962, p. 103.

72 *Ibid*, p. 107.

73 Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Penguin Books, 1991, p. 211.

in the praxis of theatre involves the changeover of one character into another, as in Genet's *The Maids* a lady and her maid unexpectedly switch identities, the lady Solange whom we had seen in the opening sequence turning into Clair the maid in a subsequent movement. In keeping with this, in *Evam Indrajit* there are similar change-overs or role-swapping between the various characters, particularly in the first two acts of the play.

According to Albert Camus, "The Absurd is born [from the] confrontation between human need and the unreasonable silence of the world. This must be clung to because the whole consequence of a life can depend on it. The irrational, the human nostalgia, and the absurd that is born of this encounter –these are the three characters in the drama that must necessarily end with all the logic of which an existence is capable."⁷⁴ These words of Camus were written in his monumental *The Myth of the Sisyphus* twenty to thirty years before Badal Sircar started his career as a playwright. However, they have an uncanny resonance with the dramatic accomplishment of Sircar for in such of his plays as *Evam Indrajit*, *Baaki Itihas*, *Pagla Ghoda* and *Sesh Nei*; we find dwellings on the past, on human nostalgia, and the circles of rationality which form human existence. The jury may be still be out on whether Badal Sircar was an absurd playwright, but there can be little doubt that he knew and wrote of the angst that souls may feel when pitted against a spectacle of chaos.

The point of identity between the French philosophers like Albert Camus and Sartre and the playwrights writing in the absurdist mood is a common speculation on the lack of significance of human life and existence. This interrogation is in a sense a hermeneutic concern since it turns on the idea of interpretation. Thus did Camus in his *Caligula* illustrate what the dramatist himself called "The story of a superior suicide."⁷⁵ As Camus wrote in his "Author's Preface" (December 1957) to his play *Caligula*, Caligula "depopulates the world around him and, faithful to his logic"⁷⁶ kills himself. "Caligula accepts death because he has understood that no one can save himself all alone and that one cannot be free at the expense of others."⁷⁷

74 Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. Translated by Justin O'Brien, Random House, 1991, p. 28.

75 Camus, Albert. "Author's Preface." December 1957. Translated by Justin O'Brien, *Caligula & 3 Other Plays*, Vintage Books, 1958, p. vi.

76 *Ibid*, p. vi.

77 *Ibid*, p. vi.

This research ends with impinges on a focal area of Badal Sircar studies, the vexed question of whether there are any linkages between the Indian dramatist and practitioners of Absurdism in European theatre. Since this is an issue that has been debated for a long time by Sircar's critics and commentators, in this paper, the present researcher has researched a parallelism between the socioeconomic and cultural contexts in post-World War II Europe and post-Partition Bengal. A brief consideration of the theoretical writings of Camus and Sartre, and of the dramatic texts of the European dramatists Pirandello, Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov, Albee et al have also been adduced to sketch the cyclorama of Absurdism against which Badal Sircar's works has been the oretically foregrounded. An interesting point that this research has thrown up is that some of Sircar's plays like *Evam Indrajit*, *Baki Itihas* and *Sesh Nei* echo the sentiments of the European dramatists of the Absurd in being critiques of the monotony and meaninglessness of everyday life, and in technically being "anti-plays" that discard the conventions of traditional drama as either empty or incompetent in the matter of the expression of a modern existentialist angst. It has been also demonstrated that while Sircar claimed to be largely ignorant of Absurd Drama, references to the theme of repetition and circularity as also to figures such as Sisyphus (used by Albert Camus in his *The Myth of Sisyphus*) are not infrequent in Sircar's writings.

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A Conceptual Exploration of The 7E Model In Fostering Inquiry-Based Learning

Richa Chimulkar & Anna Neena George

ABSTRACT

Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) is a pedagogical style that is transformative and student- centered, and it motivates thinking, exploration, and curiosity. The 7E instructional model (Elicit, Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, Evaluate, and Extend) is another among many instructional models that facilitate IBL, since it is based on constructivist learning theory. The paper presents the prototype effectiveness and classroom-level of the 7E model based on the secondary information sources such as the institutional reports, national surveys, and scholarly materials. The synthesis of quantitative usage trends and qualitative knowledge connected to each of the phases of the model was done using documentary analysis of the different phases of the model. As demonstrated in the findings, there is a considerable focus on the initial stages, i.e., Engage, Explore, and Explain, whereas the subsequent phases, namely Evaluate and Extend, have been used. This study uses data tables and visualisation to show how the 7E model can lead to more research-based learning and how there is a disconnect between theory and practice in the classroom. Instead of outright banning inquiry-based learning, educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers can use the study as a road map to improve inquiry- based literacy in all types of classrooms

Keywords: 7E, instructional model, inquiry-based learning, constructivist, pedagogy, educational, practice, phase-wise implementation, secondary data analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, the educational sector has experienced a paradigm change as far as the conventional, lectured type of teaching is concerned

and this has given way to a more dynamic, student-focused learning facility. This switch indicates a new realization that people learn best when they are creatively engaged in building their own knowledge as opposed to acquiring information. In that regard, Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) has become a potent teaching model, which motivates the learners to ask questions, explore the ideas, and practice critical thinking and problem-solving. IBL is based on constructivist theory of learning and therefore enhances comprehension since it enables students to utilize their background knowledge, discover new things, and co-create answers to practical problems.

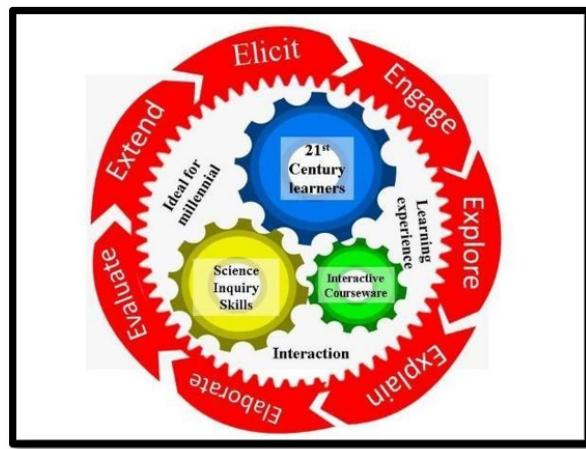


Figure 1: Enhanced 7E Instructional Model

Among those instructional models that can facilitate the IBL process, the 7E instructional model, which provides a comprehensive framework that can be used to fulfill the learning process in seven interconnected steps: Elicit, Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, Evaluate and Extend, can be singled out. All the stages are crucial in the development of concepts and provoking inquiry. The Elicit stage is aimed at activating the available knowledge of the learners, and the Engage stage arouses curiosity and the frame of the learning. The Explore and Explain phases work to help students engage in investigations and hypothesis building or knowledge construction, but the Elaborate phase works to further the student understanding by relating the new information to bigger concepts. The Evaluate stage is a source of complaint and evaluation

of learning and the Extend positive side initiates students with the application of the knowledge in fresh, valuable situations. A dynamic learning cycle that sustains the learning's cognitive, emotional, and social components is provided by the 7E model when implemented holistically.

The 7E model is likely to be rather different in the practical context than in the theoretical framework. A number of research findings and school surveys have shown that although teachers tend to focus on the early stages- Engage and Explore, the late stage- Evaluate and Extend is not utilized well or in a shallow manner. Besides, numerous teachers share the opinion that they do not know how to organize the model and make it consistent with curriculum guidelines and the procedures of assessment. These issues explain the necessity of an in-depth recognition of the way the 7E model is implemented in the classroom and its real opportunities in terms of supporting inquiry-based teaching.

Considering this, the current research looks at instructional model 7E, which is one approach to building Inquiry-Based Learning, from both a conceptual and data-informed perspective. The study relies on secondary data analysis derived from educational reports, institutional surveys, and references in the peer-reviewed literature rather than direct field work. To find out which parts of the 7E model are most and least used, as well as how effective the model is at encouraging inquiry-based learning, this study aims to examine how effectively the model has been integrated into teaching practice. In doing so, the research may be able to apply theory and offer a set of recommendations to help educators, curriculum developers, and lawmakers who are interested in improving inquiry-based pedagogy learn more effectively.

Research Objectives

The study aims to:

1. Analyze the conceptual framework and theoretical foundation of the 7E instructional model.
2. Examine current educational surveys and reports to determine patterns in the implementation of the 7E model to support inquiry-based learning.
3. Use information gathered from secondary sources to assess how well each part of the model is judged to have worked.

4. Identify gaps or inconsistencies in the practical implementation of the 7E model in educational settings.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Bantaokul and Polyiem (2022) conducted a quasi-experimental study to examine the effectiveness of integrating the 5E inquiry-based learning model with gamification techniques in improving science achievement among Grade 8 students. Especially when it came to grasping abstract ideas—where more conventional approaches frequently fall short—their results demonstrated a marked improvement in both student performance and engagement. The combination of inquiry and game-based strategies—through rewards, competition, and interactive tasks—made the learning experience more engaging and student-centered. Although the 7E model was not explicitly used, the study highlighted the cognitive benefits of inquiry frameworks like 5E, reinforcing the principles shared with the extended 7E model.

Ngozi and Hyacinth (2021) explored how a 7E learning cycle module might help chemistry students in secondary school strengthen their critical thinking skills. They relied on the controlled experimental design to randomly assign students to experimental and control groups and compared their results using standard measurement of Critical thinking tests. The students who were familiarized with 7E model performed much better especially on those tasks that required synthesis, evaluation, and practice. Elicit and Extend phases, which are commonly overlooked by the traditional classroom environment, were found particularly effective in order to activate prior knowledge and induce independent learning. The paper also gives convincing empirical ratification of the effectiveness of the 7E model when it comes to developing higher- order thinking skills.

Harrell et al. (2023) examined the impact of an inquiry-based learning (IBL) on the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) of Earth science instructors participating in a long-term professional development program. Results showed that participating teachers were better at creating student-centered lessons, using open-ended questions, and offering exploratory learning. The study used a mixed-methods approach and included classroom observations, interviews, and surveys. The purpose of this study was not to conduct an exhaustive analysis of the 7E model; rather, it aimed to draw attention to the importance of ongoing professional development to effectively employ

inquiry-based frameworks like the 7E model through exploring the why and how of inquiry instruction.

Lara-Alecio et al. (2018) examined how middle school pupils from low-income backgrounds and those learning English fared in science classes that included literacy-integrated, inquiry- centered lessons. Students who participated in student-led inquiry cycles that were both vocabulary-rich and based on the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) outperformed their counterparts in more conventional classroom settings, according to the mixed-methods study. Although there is no direct correlation between the instructional design and the 7E model interventions, it is based on their principles. The Engage, Explore, and Explain parts of the model are particularly relevant to the idea of designing inquiry-based, culturally responsive instruction.

Adam et al. (2022) investigated the 7E learning cycle model's efficacy in introducing ecological ideas to secondary school pupils. Based on the results of a pre- and post-test control group design, this study found that students taught utilising the 7E model outperformed their traditional method of instruction in both factual and applied knowledge. Notably, students' ability to make connections between what they learnt and their real-life experiences improved during the Elaborate and Extend stages. According to the research, the Elicit and Extend phases are the most important ones. Since these two phases together led to substantial learning outcomes and student motivation, it would be counterproductive to implement only a few of the seven phases of the model.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To examine the theoretical adequacy and practice configurations of the 7E instructional model regarding the Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL), this research takes a systematized and orderly methodological paradigm. Instead of adopting the primary data collection approach of field- based data collection, Institutional surveys, government reports on education, and scientific, peer-reviewed studies are examples of reputable, authoritative sources upon which the study relies for its secondary data collection. The research methodology will allow obtaining both the quantitative direction of the changes and the qualitative information that can be analyzed and interpreted to obtain an

insight into how the different phases of the 7E model are being translated into the real classroom activities.

Research Design

The research is based on the descriptive and interpretive design, which was reasonable to the conceptual investigation and evidence-based analysis. Using a descriptive research methodology, we can see how teachers are now implementing the 7E model in their lessons, and then we can utilise interpretive analysis to get a better understanding of the pedagogical effects of these changes. By breaking the process down into its parts, we can learn more about the model's reach and how it impacted inquiry learning based on secondary sources of information. The design is consistent with the research aims of assessing perceptions, instructional techniques, and issues concerning the 7E framework.

Data Sources

The study is based only on the secondary data retrieved from a carefully selected and appropriate list of authoritative and well-developed sources. These include:

- Learning Outcomes Reports by NCERT: These reports offer information regarding the national levels concerning learning standards, teacher practices, and school-based curriculum in India.
- ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) Reports: The ASER reports are published by the Pratham Foundation and contain large-scale survey data on student learning, classroom situations, and learning situations.
- The OECD Reports, e.g., the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), give a comparative view of inquiry-based pedagogy implementation across the world.
- Academic journals and educational case studies that are peer-reviewed and contain survey results documented together with qualitative feedback of teachers and students connected to the 7E model.

Data Collection Method

This research study was conducted using a documentary analytic approach, which entailed a comprehensive review and systematic selection of data from published articles and archived studies about educational surveys. By taking this tack, we were able to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, including

implementation-related reflections, policy suggestions, and difficulties, as well as percentages of use of the 7E instructional model and specific instructional strategies. Using the seven steps of the 7E model—Elicit, Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, Evaluate, and Extend—a predefined coding system was employed to categorise data to attain consistency and rigour throughout different parts of the investigation. This thematic classification stage allowed us to combine disparate data sets into a unified analytical narrative. The data collected from the documents was analysed, compared, and presented in tables and graphs to show patterns, profiles, and discrepancies. This helped to create a fair picture of the model’s application in the classroom.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The thematic organization of all the data obtained via analysis of multiple secondary sources, that is, NCERT Learning Outcome Reports, ASER surveys, OECD TALIS data, and peer- reviewed educational literature, took place based on the seven stages of the 7E instructional model: Elicit, Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, Evaluate, and Extend. This data included both quantitative data, which was the frequency of the phases used and the percentage of teachers who used them, and qualitative data, which was the reflection of teachers, reported difficulties, and the policy-based observation. The framework of coding was implemented to code and cross-analyze the content regarding its relevance to each stage, which made it possible to identify the patterns that were repeated, the strengths related to each stage, and the gaps between classroom implementation. The results were also summarized and presented in the form of graphs and tables to provide a visual and reliable aspect of this study, and provide a clear picture of the effectiveness and prevalence of each phase in supporting Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) implementation, at various educational settings.

Table 1: Frequency of Emphasis on 7E Phases in Classroom Practices

7E Phase	High Usage (%)	Moderate Usage (%)	Low/Neglected Usage (%)
Elicit	30	40	30
Engage	70	25	5

Explore	65	30	5
Explain	60	30	10
Elaborate	45	35	20
Evaluate	35	40	25
Extend	20	25	55

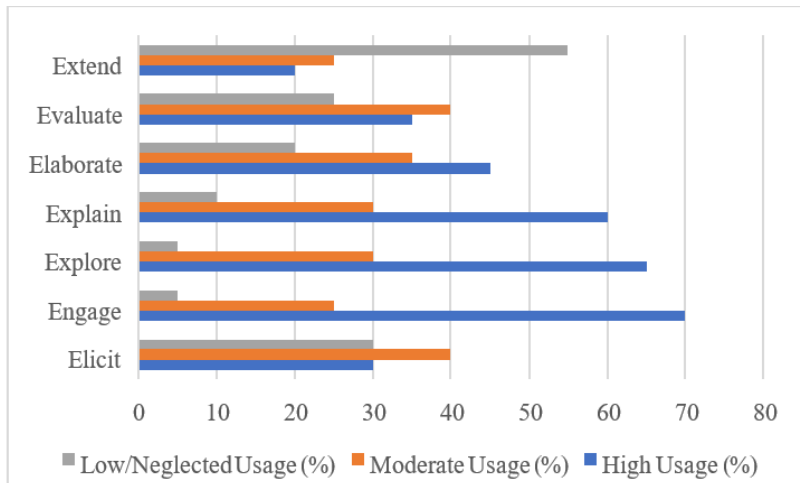


Figure 2: Visual Representation of Phase-Wise Implementation

As seen in Table 1, there exist marked gaps in the prioritization of the various stages of the 7E instructional model, where the synthesized data provided by NCERT, ASER and OECD TALIS reports are reviewed. The Engage and Explore phases show the highest levels of implementation, with 70% and 65% of teachers stating that they use them frequently, respectively. This suggests that educators are most at ease with strategies that can grab students' attention and initiate primitive exploration, especially since these stages are not complicated and do not require a lot of resources. The Explain phase is also strongly adopted with 60% high usage, and this leads to the need to affirm the self-reinforcement of traditional and teacher- dependent delivery of instructions about explaining concepts. Advancing on the contrary, such stages as Elicit when students are encouraged to recall their existing knowledge, are given smaller value with only 30% responding that they utilize it frequently and 40% respond that they are moderate users thereof

showing that many teachers do not realize the importance of preconception activation before presenting new content. The least frequently and marginally employed are stages Elaborate and Evaluate, with 45 and 35 percent usage of high implementation, respectively, perhaps because of the extra adventure in planning an instruction, scaffolding, and incorporation of formative evaluation. Most worrying is the Extend phase, where, with only a fifth of teachers applying it regularly and a surprising 55 percent of the gatekeepers claiming to use little or none, a major gap in the process guiding the learner to realize his/her knowledge in the real world or other say interdisciplinary area is apparent. Overall, despite partial inclusion of the 7E model into classroom activities, regular and balanced implementation of the model in all its stages is a big problem, and the issue of more thorough pedagogical assistance and system-based changes is associated with this fact.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section will synthesize and interpret the evidence obtained by documentary examination of quality secondary sources, such as NCERT Learning Outcome Reports, ASER Surveys, data in TALIS provided by OECD, and peer-reviewed sources of literature. The main objective is to find out the way the 7E instructional model is put into practice in educational contexts and assess how to improve its contribution to the Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL). The results are explained with references to phase-wise use, implementation issues, and pedagogical implications.

Phase-Wise Implementation Analysis

Analysis was done in a thematic coding framework, which divided data into phases of the 7E instructional model, that is, Elicit, Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, Evaluate, and Extend. Table 2 shows the frequency distribution of the level of usage of each phase, whereas Figure 3 depicts the same data in a grouping bar chart form to be understandable.

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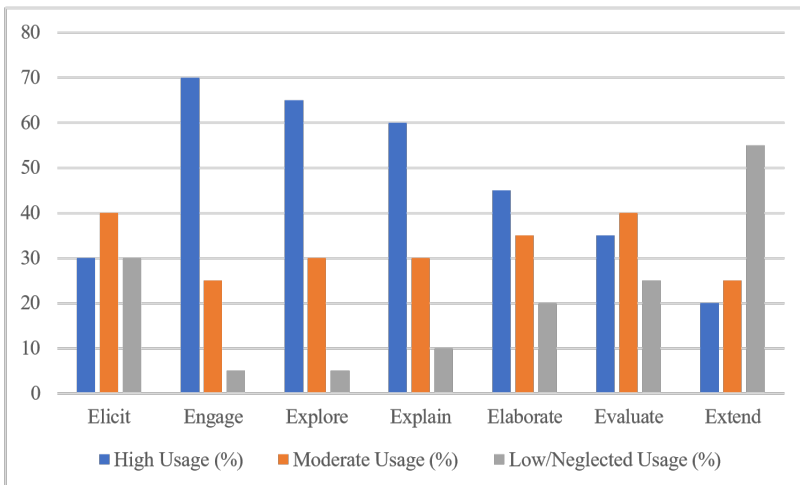


Figure 3: Phase-Wise Implementation of the 7E Instructional Model

Discussion of Findings

The components of the 7E instructional model that demonstrated the highest frequency of usage were the Engage and Explore phases, with 70% and 65% of teachers, respectively, reporting high implementation. This reflects a strong educator preference for initiating lessons with interactive, attention-grabbing strategies that stimulate curiosity and encourage learners to begin the inquiry process—an essential feature of Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL). Explain Usage in this phase was also high (60% high) reflecting a certain comfort with traditional direct instruction, but in this case it could reflect a high usage which may indicate that we have some overemphasizing of explain usage which can reduce student led exploration opportunities depending on

how one balances with other inquiry elements. The Elicit stage showed a more balanced set of use (30-high, 40-moderate, 30-low) that indicates the irregularity when teachers engage prior knowledge or discuss misconceptions, erasing that aspect as the overlooked and yet essential part of contextualizing new knowledge. The assessment of the Elaborate and Evaluate phases revealed low-level integration, but with high usage of 45 percent and 35 percent, respectively, implying that a significant portion of the teachers are working to bring higher levels of thinking and reflection to other teachers to the point of becoming commonplace. The most troubling is the Extend stage, at which 55 percent of teachers said they use knowledge at low levels or not at all; this is the stage where teachers take knowledge and apply it to real-life or new problems, which is essential in long-term retention and transfer of learning. The fact that it is missing reveals systemic problems like strict curriculum frameworks and assessment-oriented culture that cannot allow inquiry-guided education in all its dimensions. Overall, the numbers indicate that although some of the aspects of the 7E model have become widespread amongst practitioners, comprehensive and balanced implementation of the model at all stages of the process is difficult to implement in existing educational environments.

Emerging Patterns and Pedagogical Gaps

Table 3 presents a qualitative summary of phase-specific challenges as documented in the reviewed literature.

Table 3: Summary of Common Challenges in Implementing 7E Phases

7E Phase	Reported Challenges
Elicit	Lack of time; limited training in diagnostic questioning
Engage	Resource constraints for hands-on or multimedia activities
Explore	Difficulty managing open-ended student inquiry
Explain	Overemphasis on teacher-talk; limited formative feedback
Elaborate	Low alignment with textbooks and standardized testing
Evaluate	Narrow focus on summative tests; lack of reflective practices

Extend	Minimal opportunities for project-based or interdisciplinary learning

Figure 3 provides a detailed overview of the most common challenges that teachers face when implementing the various stages of 7E instructional model into the classroom and identifies some of the pedagogical and systemic limitations that hinder the successful inculcation of Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL). The Elicit phase is often ignored due to time limitation and inadequate preparation of teachers on how to ask diagnostic questions to make the most use of the opportunities to extend the knowledge of students. Regardless of its popularity, the Engage phase does not allow meaningful student engagement because it is not accompanied by interactive resources, multimedia tools, and engaging classrooms. The Explore process is the one that poses difficulties in terms of management since it requires regular scaffolding and being flexible, which is not facilitated in any rigorous curriculum. This is particularly in the classroom of big classes or time limits. The Explain phase presents relatively fewer chances of interaction between students and active construction of knowledge because this stage employs too much teacher-centered instruction and has no formative assessment. Teachers are discouraged from expanding learning beyond curriculum boundaries during the Elaborate phase due to the strict textbooks and poor alignment with standardised testing. Summative evaluations predominate in the Evaluate phase, marginalising reflective practices that are critical to inquiry-driven learning, such as peer review and self-assessment. The biggest obstacle facing the Extend phase is that most schools do not have the time, resources, or structural capacity to support project-based, interdisciplinary, or real-world applications of knowledge, which hinders the transfer of learning. All of these challenges highlight the critical need for curriculum reform, improved teacher preparation, and institutional support to fully realise the 7E model's transformative potential in promoting in-depth, student-centered learning.

International Comparisons

Despite countries like Sweden and Finland embracing all seven E's to a balanced degree, India leans more towards meeting, exploring, and explaining, according to data from the OECD TALIS studies. The complete adoption of several inquiry-based models, like 7E, is necessitated, as this

parallel implies, in addition to system-wide pedagogical reform and capacity-building of teachers.

Implications for Inquiry-Based Learning

The uneven implementation of the 7E model—especially the neglect of Elicit and Extend—limits the potential of IBL to fully flourish:

- Continuing education for educators that fills in knowledge gaps in the 7Es of inquiry sequence design
- Curriculum alignment that supports inquiry beyond rote learning.
- Policy-level interventions that promote reflective evaluation and real-world application (Evaluate and Extend).

CONCLUSION

This analysis offers a comprehensive, conceptual, and evidence-based understanding of the 7E instructional model as an effective framework for advancing Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL). Drawing from secondary sources such as NCERT reports, ASER surveys, OECD TALIS data, and peer-reviewed studies, the findings reveal a consistent pattern of selective phase-wise implementation, where Engage, Explore, and Explain phases are widely practiced, while Elicit, Evaluate, and particularly Extend phases remain significantly underutilized. Inadequate teacher preparation, strict curricula, a dearth of formative assessment methods, and a lack of support for project-based or interdisciplinary learning environments are primary causes of these disparities. The study underscores that partial or fragmented use of the 7E model undermines its potential to foster deep, inquiry-driven learning. For the model to be truly effective, it must be implemented holistically across all its phases, requiring synchronized efforts in classroom practice, curriculum development, and educational policy reform to create a supportive ecosystem that fully embraces the inquiry-based paradigm.

Given these findings, it is proposed to give the following recommendations:

- Schedule consistent teacher training on the full-cycle use of the 7E model, but pay special attention to the underexploited stages (Elicit, Evaluate, Extend).
- Reengineering of curricula to include learning outcomes and tasks consistent with each of the seven steps of the 7E model.

- Enhance learning through project-based pedagogy and interdisciplinary work so that the Extend phase would be improved and the real-world use of the knowledge could be stimulated.
- Create formative and reflective assessment forms that can aid the evaluation phase in the module, instead of just a traditional summative test.
- Make the resources available (digital/multimedia, experimental kits) to facilitate interesting and discovery-based teaching techniques.
- Make sure that teachers have a lot of leeway in their lesson plans so that they may cover all of the stages of the curriculum in a meaningful way, without feeling rushed.
- Support implementation of the 7E model at the policy level to entrench it as a uniform model of advancing inquiry-based pedagogy in schools and teacher education programs.

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Literary Studies at the Crossroads: An Ecological Study of William Blake's "The Lamb" and "London"

Tilok Naskar

Starting from the last few decades of the twentieth century to literary studies in the first quarter of the new millennium, literature is today negotiating a good number of cross roads. Literary studies today has opened up into a multidisciplinary scenario in which inputs are being taken from disciplines like economics, social and human sciences, philosophy, deconstruction and strong ecological perspective. Even as a whole new body of literature is being produced and read, canonical works of literature are being revisited and re-appraised. This paper will thus discuss two lyrics of William Blake entitled "The Lamb" and "London" which were written towards the end of the eighteenth century when as Keith Thomas rightly observes, "a combination of literary fashion and social facts had created a genuine tension between the rebellious progress of civilization and the rural longing to which an increasing number of people were subject. These longings provided a clear indication that there were many who felt that, although the natural world should be tamed, it ought not to be completely dominated and suppressed. ... Sentimental though they are, such feelings reflect the unease generated by the progress of human civilization; and a reluctance to accept the urban and industrial facts of modern life." (253-54)

Back in 1789 the English poet William Blake published a volume of poems entitled *Songs of Innocence*. One of the most important lyrics in this collection is the poem "The Lamb". The title of this lyric ostensibly refers to a lamb, but the poem is not only about a lamb for it is spoken by a child narrator. Blake makes clear in his poem that the lamb represents Jesus Christ equally as an animal and also a human child since he writes "I a child and thou a lamb / We are called by his name".

In other words, the lamb in the lyric possesses various levels of signification. First, there is Christ who represents divinity, and then there is the child-speaker who represents humanity, and next there is the lamb which represents the non-human level of the animal, and finally there are references to the world of nature for Blake writes in his verses about the stream and the mead (or the meadows) and the vales (or the valleys). These four levels – that is the levels of divinity at the top, the level of humanity below that, the level of animal existence after this, and finally the world of nature constitute a kind of hierarchical Great Chain of Being in Blake's imagination.

A new way of critically appreciating this lyric would be to read it from an ecological perspective. It is possible to understand that Blake's indication of the world of nature as representing a living, complex continuum constituted of the divine, the human, the animal and the natural is actually signifying the world wide web of existence that ecologists talk about. The lyric shows Blake's visionary ideas about symbiotic relationships among divinity, humanity, nature and animal world limned against the degenerate, mechanical and soulless industrial society. Blake's projection of a symbiotic ecosystem is not artificial but a natural one inasmuch the lamb gets both food and shelter from living nature, and grazes freely 'By the stream and over the mead'. On its part, the lamb is said to delight nature with its sweet voice. This may be seen from the following lines of the lyric which run:

Little lamb who made thee
Dost thou know who made thee
Gave thee life and bid thee feed.
By the stream and over the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing wooly and bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice!

Blake's lines give us an idea of a simple and joyful pastoral setting and of a nurturing environment which is simultaneously peaceful, pure and harmonious. But more, the lines also portray an image of a reciprocal relationship in which nature and animal sustain each other. Further, the soft, wooly and bright clothing of the lamb indicates that they are God given blessings, and that any violation of nature is tantamount to denying God. The poem's pastoral setting is implicitly contrasted with the background of the

city, which Blake regarded as a corrupting environment due to the effects of industrialization. The natural world represents a freedom and a joy that is lost in the miasma of restrictive and dangerous city life.

The child speaker gives us an idea of an interconnected unspoiled natural world of peace, harmony and tranquility, a green aspect of life as opposed to the rapidly degrading environment caused by the effects of the industrial revolution. This vista of an unspoiled natural world is composed by Blake again in the following lines:

He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a lamb;
He is meek and he is mild,
He became a little child,
I a child and thou a lamb,
We are called by his name.

The sense of the harmony of innocence present in “The Lamb” is however totally absent in the lyrics related to Blake’s state of Experience. In the lyrics of the *Songs of Experience* there is no sense of sharing, no celebration of joy, no participation, and no sketching of oneness. Rather, there is enmity and suspicion, pain and suffering, joylessness and violence. The lyrics of “Experience” actually embody Blake as an acute social critic. The issues raised in these lyrics are articulations of sentiment against societal prejudices and human injustices. The industrial revolution produced a great impact upon the social, economic and cultural fabric of England. As Charlotte Waters has written, “[t]he productive power of the human unit had grown tenfold, riches seemed to be pouring forth in a never slackening stream, with endless supplies of clothes, furniture, ornament, of everything that differentiates the outward life of civilized man from that of the savage. A nation which had quadrupled her foreign trade in less than a century must surely be on the high road of prosperity”. (358) On the other hand, common people lost their land, the farms they worked on, and were often deprived of their occupation and liberty. Dislocated from nature, they were forced to labour for sixteen to eighteen hours a day in factories and to become slaves to both their masters and to machines. Women were also compelled to follow their husbands and became factory hands as their husband’s wages were not enough to keep them alive.

On innumerable occasions, industrialization in English society resulted in alienation and the destruction of the human spirit. In the lyrics which Blake

included in the *Songs of Experience*, the poet gives us pictures of an ecological fall where human beings, nature and the environment have all been subjected to decay and degeneration.

This is illustrated in several poems of *Experience*, and most graphically in “London”. In this lyric, Blake’s reiterated use of the word “charter’d” in the poem’s opening lines is indicative of an economic realization – that the increasing proliferation of contemporary commerce and world trade had led to the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer. Charlotte Waters has clarified in this context that:

It is obvious that no share of the new wealth of the nation was going to the men whose hands produced it. The collective wealth of the nation increased at a rate that struck the upper classes dumb with admiration, but left the poor worse off than ever before. All the increased wealth went to the men who provided either the money or the brains or both; the manual labourer ceased to be a human unit, and became raw material to be bought like cotton or wool in the cheapest market. (360-362)

It is because of this that every face seen by the narrator of this poem has “Marks of weakness, marks of woe”. But economic issue is not the only issue here. The word “ban” in the second stanza refers to the repression of liberty in England which was implemented immediately after the French Revolution. The nature of the drudgery, the degree of brutality and the inhumanity to which ordinary people were subjected to, and the reality of the contemporary repression of liberty has been pointed out by Witt Bowden in the following words:

Thrust into the crowded and miserable lodgings of the shabbiest and most neglected quarters of the town or of the mill and mining centers; buffeted about by industrial vicissitudes; and enervated by deadening mechanical and administrative routine unrelieved by leisure or by opportunity for recreation and pleasure not connected with their work - it was under these conditions that the heterogeneous masses of workers who manned the new industries were forced to live. From these brutalizing conditions, no genuine relief was attainable. The inevitable result was resort to spurious relief in the forms of pleasures themselves more brutalizing - drunkenness and sexual excesses, giving rise to successive generations of workers each more numerous and more deeply submerged in poverty and degradable than its predecessors. (281)

Blake's phrase "mind-forg'd manacles" suggests just the kind of self benumbing forgetfulness which Englishmen imposed upon their own minds and thoughts.

Blake's critique is also evident in the third and the fourth stanzas of the lyric. In the third, there is reference made to Chimney sweepers who were little boys forced to clean chimneys. While this is reflective the prevalence of child labour in late eighteenth century England, it was also a fact that children also had to go to labour in the mills at the age of five or six and were frequently employed to collect cotton waste by creeping under the machines. The tragic condition of countless children born into poverty is a well-documented reality. As one historian writes:

The story of the chimney-sweeps has often been told, perhaps because the callousness that sacrificed the lives and happiness of children to the aesthetic taste of a few rich men strikes us more than that which was excused on the ground of England's commercial supremacy. The boy sweeps were apprenticed young, at four or five years old, and were usually paupers or children people wanted to get rid of. They were forced up the dark suffocating windings by the still greater fear of cruelty, some masters even lighting a fire behind them! Their elbows and knees broke into sores, and it was months before the flesh got hard and callous. They lived in soot, slept on bags of soot, and were very lucky if they were washed once a week - many were never washed at all. Always there was danger of falling and being suffocated in the pile of soot that they had swept past them to the bend. Often they were sent up to extinguish a chimney-fire. Many of them became deformed. (Waters 368-70)

While young boys suffered, young girls too faced exploitation of the worst kind. In "London", the telling phrase "youthful Harlot" refers to young girls who were forced into prostitution due to hunger and destitution in eighteenth century England. The word "plagues" is a reference to the existence of sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis in the society of the time. The last four lines of the lyric effectively encapsulate the dystopic condition of life in the city of London:

But most thro' midnight street I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the marriage hearse

Notable scholar and critic Professor Subir Dhar has explained that:

In the case of 'London' and its protestor figure denoted as 'I' (a pun is perhaps implied here, since the protester eyes everything), the grounds of his protest and his perception of iniquities configure his role as a semi detached observer who increasingly gets more and more concerned and angry over what he sees and hears being played out in the streets of London from the daylight hours (when he can observe the 'marks' on the faces of the Londoners) to midnight time when he hears the harlot's curse. Stylistically, a movement up a scale of concern and anger on the part of the narrator is achieved by tonal changes effected from the slow, long, open vowels of 'I wander thro' each charter'd street', through the faster paced trochee of 'Runs in blood down palace walls', to the final explosive flurry of tetrameter verse, short vowel-sounds and consonant-resonant Anglo Saxon monosyllables in 'Blights with plagues the marriage hearse'. (5-6)

It is beyond doubt that Blake was a radical lyricist who re-cast the lyric tradition afresh and left behind a unique and unparalleled body of lyric poetry. Kathleen Raine has rightly stated that:

Blake was the supreme poet of the industrial revolution; but that is not to say that he saw in it the dawn of his new age: on the contrary, he developed and denounced the enslavement of 'the myriads of eternity' to the 'mills and ovens and cauldrons' made in the image of a mechanized nature: with sorrow he wrote of the Giant Albion, 'his machines are woven with his life'. The enslavement of men and women and children to industry he condemned not only or principally because of the town wages, the 'pittance' of the 'crust of bread' for which they must sell their humanity; above all the dehumanizing nature of the work itself filled him with wrath. He would have welcomed those who call for an end to our destructive use of the resources of the world and a return to 'the simple rules life' by which the living earth sustains all her creature. (107)

Critics who have read literature in an ecological turn have rightly identified that imaginative writers even of previous centuries had realized the importance of the role of nature in nourishing human life. The new recognition is that in many works of canonical literature there is a celebration of the myriad-mindedness of life in the world. The two poems of William Blake examined above form a duality that is inclusive of both a joyous and happy realization of the human spirit in the world of nature, and contrarily an awareness of the dark consequences of a denial of the natural and the holistic. Vision and

counter vision, joy and despair, man as part of a shared environment and the human subject devoid of the energies of the natural is what these poems indicate. The idea of ecology and even the coinage of the word “ecological” was still distant when Blake wrote his volumes *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1794). Vision and nightmare, night and dark, happiness and despair through a linkage with an ecological consciousness and a break away from an appreciation of ecological vitalness is what Blake sketches through his lyrical lens.

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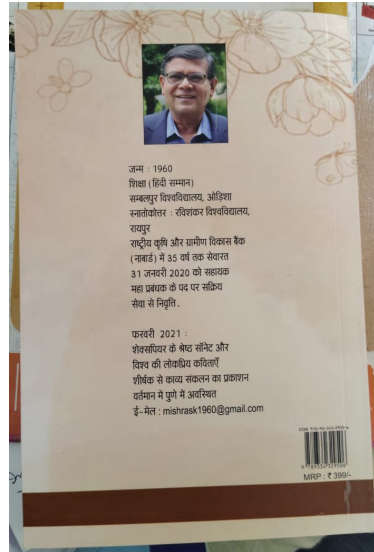
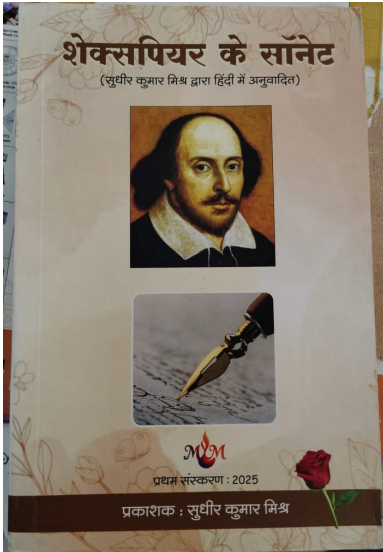
Sharmistha Chatterjee

Before I begin, I thank SSEI, Prof. Subir Dhar, Prof. Tapu Biswas for thinking of me and because they have bestowed their faith that I would do justice to this beautiful anthology of Shakespeare's sonnets in translation: "Shakespeare Ke Sonnet" translated in Hindi by Sri Sudhir Kumar Mishra published in 2025 by Bharatiya Mudran, Bhopal. I remain grateful to them for giving me this opportunity to discuss this important 2025 publication. I am deeply moved when I remember on this occasion how great an enthusiast Lt. Prof. Amitav Ray was in mentoring Hindi translations. I remember him with utmost respect.

I guess we need not mull upon the idea, as to why did Sri Mishra choose to translate into Hindi, Shakespeare's sonnets and not any other more fashionable and contemporary, poet/ author whose texts have already been translated into innumerable languages. Could he be the first choice for translation? Yet as Shakespeare addicts we know, an act of translating Shakespeare is an act of joy and passion which surpasses any logic. But we also do understand, there is perhaps 'a method' in 'all madness'. And Sri Mishra yet has once again proved, that he has not merely translated the sonnets of the bard but has responded to the call and necessity of rereading poetry like all other art. His act of reading, because all translators are readers too- makes Shakespeare and his poems a recyclable and sustainable resource in the contemporary world which harps on the idea of the balancing act of being eco friendly.

In this sense his translation is an act of ecotranslation too, once again consolidating and endorsing that eternal truth etched by the bard:

"So long as men can breathe or eyes can see



So long lives this, this gives life to thee” (ll 13-14)

Mishraji reads the lines as:

जब तक मानव की साँसे चलती रहेगी और
आँख देख सकेगी,
तब तक यह कविता जीवति रहेगी
और तुमको नरितर जीवन प्रदान करती रहेगी,

In translating the bard one does a service to not a culture but to the humanity- a household name which is known by the most common and ordinary people on this earth wherever he or she be located - to reach Shakespeare and his thought in one more language is perhaps an act disseminating a training to humanity to enable them to sustain and float in all situation of life, for in Shakespeare we do get the panacea of every worry under the sun. This not very expensive edition in Hindi, and with a valuable preface and foreword by two renowned academicians, this is sure to cut across the country and beyond.

Traditionally we might look into the act of translation in moral light and borrow an old sexist quip that a “translation is like a woman, either beautiful or faithful but not both” (used by Prof Sukanta Chaudhuri in his insightful book *Translation and Understanding*, page 1) to understand the same. But, if we do away with the pangs of guilt and stigma associated with this quote, we

might understand the truth it holds. Mishra, however, has been able to keep a fine balance between the beauty and faithfulness factors.

Say for example, in Sonnet 147 the tradition upholds the idea of beauty rather than fidelity. The original lines are cited, followed by the translation.

I draw attention particularly to the line:

My thoughts and my discourse as madman's are

At random from the truth vainly expressed (Line 11-12)

सत्य की दृष्टिकारी बातें उसे बलिकुल नहीं सुहाती

Yet there are many sonnets in which is translator is faithful to the original, especially in ones in which the act of cross-cultural negotiation of the images is perhaps inappropriate

Say in sonnet 29:

(Like to the lark at break of day arising

From the sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate (II 11-12)

मेरे मन उषा काल में लार्क चड़िया की तरह

भुल धरती की पीड़ा स्वर्ग द्वार के पर गीत गाते हुये बन जाता।

Here the translator while keeping the haunting beauty of the lines has resorted to transliteration: so lark remains as lark.

Yet in no way should we think that the translator lacks the resources of a cross-cultural voyage which remains the objective of all true translations.

Say as in Sonnet 153:

Cupid laid by his brand and fell asleep (I -1)

The Indian knowledge system has an equivalent in Kamdev for Cupid. So in Hindi the line comes as the following:

प्रेमदेव कामदेव ने अपना मशाल रखा और सो गए

On reading more, I delightfully observed how Sri Mishra could maintain often the conversational, colloquial style of some of the sonnets:

Say for example the apostrophe of sonnet 123:

No! Time thou shalt not boast that I do change (1-1)

translated as:

नहीं ! समय, यह गर्व न रखना कि मैं भी बदला तुम्हारे साथ

In this case the attempt to be accurate adheres to the principal objective of keeping intact the style.

At times the complexities are simplified for lack of cross cultural parallels as in,

Sonnet 18. "summer's lease hath all too short a date" (1-4) or,

Sonnet 73: "Death's second self that seals up all in rest." (1-8)[seal- Coffin or the falcon's eyes being stitched]

In both cases the concepts of 'summer's lease', the contract or the idea of sealing the coffin or the bird's eyes are made easy.

The image of bare ruined choirs too are averted to create an impression of familiarity. In these cases, the principle of beauty sustains rather than the principle of accuracy. Just like it is possible that the translator takes the liberty of simplifying an image or an idea s/he might add on as well to recreate the text to make it a binary. As scholars would opine "It extends its being; it threatens its being..." The threat can take many forms, from inept mimicry to a manifestly richer compound; from reverting to the irresolutions the original had left behind, to achieving a synthesis it could not reach. But it is difficult to measure the progress if at all from chaos to order:

I again take you back to sonnet 18 where in a reverse mode the translator's touch and transformation of the lines:

Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,

When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:

The addition in translation of the phrase अपने संतति precisely achieves a closure of irresolutions left behind in the original, if we may like to accept it and realize that the trajectory of departures and innovations redefine the original.

Again in Sonnet 141- 'who leaves unswayed the likeness of a man' (1-11) translated as:

‘जो पुरुषत्व की गरिमा को छोड़करा’। The idea of the likeness of a man being translated as the sense of being a male, is possibly carefully curated for the readers, reading in Hindi.

Harold Bloom would term this as creating misreading under 'Anxiety of Influence' often known as 'misprision' - the anxiety of being too close to the source text and conversely about deviating too much from it. So in a way

this becomes a revisionary approach in the same way as T.S. Eliot would link tradition with individual talent.

Slips, ambiguities, occasional antagonism as these are common, where 'reeks' in Sonnet 130 becomes, खुशबू, 'treading' becomes फुक-फुक के चलना or 'cautious walking' if we translate फुक-फुक further. 'Damasked' similarly becomes मशिरण.

To borrow Bhabha: 'Ambivalence and antagonism accompany any act of cultural translation because negotiating with the "difference" of the other reveals radical insufficiency of our own systems of meaning and signification.'

I would conclude by quoting the invaluable words by Ankit Jaaware in defence of this brave book beautifully crafted by Sri Sudhir Kumar Mishra:

"One has to de-spirit one's own language first, one has to dispossess oneself of the spirit of one's own language, and then re-inspire the benumbed body with another Spirit. Entirely to be dispossessed of one's world- such is the risk in translation. There is always a possibility that one's own benumbed body may fail to house a stranger spirit. This body can move about only awkwardly, strangely somewhat inhumanly," and to these epithets I add, but with dignity and new vigour. (28)

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165	International Journal of Cultural Studies and Social Sciences	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2347-4777	NA	from January - 2020 to Present	View
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