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## Editor's Note

An age in which machines have been happily conceded a part of our liberties, it is interesting to debate the concept.

Liberty as an idea has been fervently explored by many since long. From the likes of Isiaah Berlin's and John Stuart Mill's seminal analyses to the contemporary push and counter push given to it by the agitators and containers of agitators, the idea has engendered layers of explication and differentiation.

The abiding engagement with the idea underscores how it is networked with the key institutions and the way it has marked human endeavour to survive, sustain and push forward. As perceptions on disciplines and ideologies splinter and expand, and when these variations are taken to the fold of the accepted notions, liberty asserts itself. We are part of a world order today which parades waxing and waning instances of liberty. While fascist urges masquerade as Nationalist upsurges on the one hand, the old school popular resistances take to the streets, showcasing the might of the civil liberties on the other.

In the middle is the vicious yet smooth threat of takeover of humanity by technology unfolding around us. Digital technology is assuming alarming dimensions with its proprietary virtual tendons encircling our lives, punching massive holes through the divides of the private and public. With Google gate keeping everyone's liberty for information and choosing our choices for us, who we are what we do are smoothly manipulated to corporatised perfection.

Variations on the definitions of motherhood, exploration of bodily rights of intersex children, analysis of spirituals of American Civil Rights Movement, critical perceptions on surveillance/violence: this first issue of SICON Liberty special volume carries interesting cross lights on a number of questions and concerns around us. The breadth and depth of the idea of liberty is reflected in the writings this issue carries.

The liberty to debate liberty must be one of the key liberties. The two SICON Liberty issues will be indulging in that.

P. K. Babu., Ph. D  
Chief Editor

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## The Dialectical Paradigm of Resistance and Incorporation: A Study of *Trinjan* Songs from Punjab

### Abstract

*A study of the folksongs of Punjab uncover a complex web of negotiations between hegemonizing forces of patriarchy and the sporadic spontaneous outbursts of resistance by women, which though are effectively contained by the frequent insular resurrections of religious myths and icons. One such example taken up in this paper are the songs associated with trinjan, wherein women bonded, while spinning the charkha, songs of joy, songs of separation and more importantly songs of angst against shared oppression by patriarchy. Amorphous and of undistinguishable origins, these songs sung by amateur singers in gay abandon may appear simplistic and uncouth, but instead as this paper foregrounds, there is a serious and significant discourse deeply embedded in these songs, as women forge bonds to battle barricades erected and entrenched by patriarchy. These are socially sanctioned spaces wherein those marginalized by patriarchy and rigid hierarchical kinship practices give vent to their frustration against oppressive structures and norms. Both cathartic and therapeutic, these folksongs from Punjab, insidiously interrogate and attempt to deal with parochial structures through laughter and ridicule, camouflaging their angst and suppression which could not be expressed openly.*

**Keywords :** Patriarchy, Folksongs, Punjab, Gender, *Trinjan*

Arnold van Gennep established the foundation for the study of rites of passage across cultures in his seminal work *Les Rites de Passage* in 1909 and was the first to analyze ritual behaviour and ritual modes of communication in relation to the dynamics of identity formation. Ceremonies, rites, and rituals accompanying 'life crises' are a part of one's existence, much before one is born and continue much after death. Some are more ceremonial than others and some more religious than profane, yet their overpowering presence cannot be denied even though their impact has diminished with the move from an agrarian economy to a more modernized i.e. industrial and post-industrial one. Not only was he the first to analyze ritualistic modes of communication and the dynamics of formation of social identities through them, but also revealed the complex function these rites play in 'social control'. While these ritualistic engagements are explicit and overt in ensuring compliance for the collective good through creation of a state of gnosis, it is the folksongs sung along with some of these rites that uncover the complex web of negotiations between hegemonizing forces of patriarchy and the sporadic spontaneous

outbursts of resistance by women, which though are effectively contained by the frequent insular resurrections of religious myths and icons. One such example are the songs associated with *trinjan*, wherein women bonded, while spinning the *charkha*, songs of joy, songs of separation and more importantly songs of angst against shared oppression by patriarchy. Amorphous and of undistinguishable origins, these songs sung by amateur singers in gay abandon may appear simplistic and uncouth, but instead there is a serious and significant discourse deeply embedded in these songs, as women forge bonds to battle barricades erected and entrenched by patriarchy. These are socially sanctioned spaces wherein those marginalized by patriarchy and rigid hierarchical kinship practices give vent to their frustration against oppressive structures and norms. Both cathartic and therapeutic, these folksongs from Punjab, insidiously interrogate and attempt to deal with parochial structures through laughter and ridicule, camouflaging their angst and suppression which could not be expressed openly.

They inhabit Bakhtin's world of laughter and subversion which creates a prism through which the world is seen perhaps more profoundly than from a serious standpoint, articulated as it is through a language, which is unofficial and seditious, negotiating the uneasy terrain of 'resistance' and 'incorporation' in its course. Official and authoritarian language, serious in nature, often prohibitive and intimidating, seeks to instill order through fear, which can be resisted and subverted through negotiations in and through laughter. An element of ambivalence, a minute of hesitation, is enough to stave off the internalization of hegemonic orders. And it is in these moments of hesitation and ambivalence that hegemonies are negotiated with; it is here that mediation with authoritarian control reigns supreme; and calibrations of collective identities take place. These though do not pose a threat to the hegemony of patriarchal forces as “[the] carnival keeps the official axe, ever-ready to descend on the unruly heads of the folk, in a state of uncertain hesitation, and in that moment of authority's hesitation is the triumph of the carnival” (Eliott 131). Hegemony and social control are rooted in folkloric discourse and the carnivalesque is just one space amongst many others, where dialogic interventions and attempts at resistance take place as is evinced in the following study of select songs associated with *trinjan*.

Associated with every chore and relation, these are an intrinsic part of the quotidian of women in rural Punjab. There is no training imparted to teach these songs and they have survived primarily through oral transmission, each family having their own personal favourites amongst the vast repertoire of such songs. Collections and compilations by Devendra Satyarthi and Mohinder Randhawa (1960), Nahar Singh (1998) and N Kaur (1999) are amongst the best and by far the most exhaustive. While these compilations were earlier available only in Gurmukhi, constricting its reach and audience, there are now compilations available with transliterations in Hindi by S Dan Singh Komal (1985) and Prabhsharan Kaur (2012) and in English by Amrit Kent (2008). This is perhaps the

largest slice of the Punjabi folk pie, as it is produced and consumed by nearly all Punjabis. This is also largely the domain of women and the intended audience is usually the intimate circle of familial relations. There are no specific costumes associated with these genres, nor do they require multiple instruments. Clapping marks the tempo and at times a clay pot would suffice to maintain the rhythm. They innovate and create an orchestra for themselves by adding little bells to their *charkha* (spinning wheel) as they sing while spinning or a few bells to their *madhani* as they churn, pound or grind. Though Gibb Schreffler rightly states in his article titled 'Music and Musicians in Punjab: An Introduction to the Special Issue' of *Journal of Punjab Studies* (2011) that, "Performance in this world is done by people who are not culturally considered to be performers" (6) i.e. they are not paid for their performance, unless they are Mirasis who lead such performances at key rites of passage ceremonies; but his next statement is problematic. "What they do is either considered to be a ritual act or else one of 'no great consequence'..." (6). While it is true that the songs of the 'amateur world' may appear simplistic and uncouth, he does not take into account the complexities and the undercurrents that are an intrinsic part of this apparent "of no great consequence" singing.

A communitas of woman gather together to spin the *charkha* (spinning wheel) sometimes all night long (*raat katni*). Devendra Satyarthi in his seminal work *Meet My People: Indian Folk Poetry*, (1987) describes the significance of the *charkha* in a Punjaban's life,

Ever women's company he keeps, yet a thorough saint is he: swift as a wind is he, yet the hero never steps forward: to the entire world he supplies clothes, yet himself ever unclothed: behold his five heads, brother, and his single, good hand. (89)

He quotes his mother while spinning,

I draw songs from my heart as I draw yarn, sitting at the wheel I became a new woman. Sometime the spindle goes wrong, but I can soon mend it, accompanied by some tune that seems to hang on my lips. Long live the spinning-wheel, I say, as it moves. (90)

These spinning marathons, the *chiri charoonga* usually took place in winters, either in the day from daybreak to sunset, or in a room with an oil-lamp to guide them or an all night *jagrata* which began after the day's chores were over, furiously spinning away, laughing at the one who falls asleep, "*Charkha ve hasse uste, jo tinjan de vich oonghe*" (Even the spinning-wheel laughs at the napping spinner in the spinning-bee) (Satyarthi 92). The winter cold being no impediment, "*Tinjan noo ki dar pale da*" (Satyarthi 92), the *trinjan* songs sung over the *charkha* were the private space wherein the punjaban voiced her angst against rigid hierarchies and social tyrannies, reassured in their shared experiences. Veiled heads and hennaed hands engage in dialogic banter, repressed longings found expression, apprehensions gave way to exultation as women irrespective of age and relation sat together weaving and singing, reflecting on life and their own predicament.

Traditional knowledge and craft were also transmitted along with shared experiences, voices of caution against repression and harassment too got enunciated. The songs of *trinjan* reflect on life with the charkha being an embodiment of the life cycle and the passage of time. The small bells attached to the charkha set the meter for these songs. As mentioned above, these songs come naturally to the women who had heard them in their childhood only while imitating the movement of spinning. Satyarthi quotes an old peasant woman, “they [the Trinjan songs] remain hidden from me while my hand is away from the handle of the spinning wheel” (93). A popular song sung at *trinjan* goes thus:

*Har charkhe de gere, Yad awen toon mitra*  
*Nit nit vagde rahn ge pani,*  
*Nit patan te mela,*  
*Bachpan nit jawani bansi,*  
*Te nit katan da mela,*  
*Par jo pani aj patano langda, Oh pher na aonda valke,*  
*Ber da phool Trinjan dian koorian, Pher na bethan ral ke.*

With every spin of the wheel, I miss you my friend  
Streams flow from day to day  
And folks at ferries meet  
After childhood is youth  
And Trinjan must repeat  
But waters gone ahead, their backward flow restrain  
Boat crews and Trinjan girls, shall never meet again. (allaboutsikhs)

Traditionally, women have been the more assertive voice in the folk songs of Punjab, as these native folk expressions facilitated the process of articulation and negotiations with repressive patriarchy. Pushed to the margins, the folk songs lent a medium wherein through resistance and incorporation, attempts were made to excavate and explore their identities in the private sphere. Hidden from the piercing eyes, or in this case ears, of the dominant ideology, women bonded over shared tyranny to negotiate hegemonic discourse.

Listen, O sun,  
Listen, O moon,  
Tears roll down my eyes,  
The world enjoys,  
I spin my sorrows. (Satyarthi 90)

Confused and apprehensive, the young girl wonders, whether she should move to her father-in-law's house to join her husband who is still a minor, her fate at the hand of her mother-in-law being an overpowering concern,

I spin a fine thread, O bridal veil,  
My mother-in-law has sent a bridal basket, O bridal veil,  
I opened, on a dark night, O bridal veil,  
There came out a black snake, O bridal veil,  
I threw it across the river, O bridal veil... (Satyarthi 95)

Contrariwise, the basket from her mother contains, a *naulakha haar*, a precious necklace, which she wears with pleasure. The married women, on the other hand, look at their *charkhas* adorned with ivory, gold or silver and miss their mothers with whom they had shared many such nights.

*Charkha mera rangla, vichh sone dian mekhan,  
ni maan tenu yaad karan jad charkhe val dekhan...*

My spinning- wheel is multi-coloured, inlaid with nails of gold,  
Oh Mother, I think of you, whenever I see my spinning- wheel... (Bedi 130)

The new bride is gently teased into untangling the yarn, to choose between her conflicting yearnings for her brother and her increasing attachment to her husband. “*je veer pyaara khol de, je khasam pyaara tor de*” (If your brother is dear to you, untie it, if your husband is dear to you, break it”) (Satyarthi 93). The new bride would pretend valiantly to untie the fragile thread knowing fully well that it was destined to break. These tangled threads, the metaphoric bonds, signify her potent attachment to her natal links. The songs reach out to the moon and the stars, their companions during the event, patient listeners who lend a sympathetic ear as the girls vent out their fury, deal with their isolation while the *mahiya* (beloved) is away, *Mera charkha uthe hi lai chal, jithe tere hal wagde*, or fondly remember their freedom in their parental homes. Similar strains are visible even while embroidering the phulkari,

*Phulkari saadi reshmi, utte chamkan mor  
Gallan tuadian mitthian, andro dil ne hor* (Bedi 131)

(Peacocks shine on my silken phulkari  
Your talks sound so sweet, but you are false within)

*Kaul phul main kad ke, kardi han ardas,  
Chheti a mil sajjanan, bhul chuk kar de maaf* (Bedi 131)

(After embroidering the lotus, I say this prayer  
Come soon and meet me dear, forgive me my errors)

Folksongs were the matrix for a dynamic struggle between culture and power and are essential to formations and transmissions of gender struggles in rural India. Though neither the songs nor the other ritualistic symbols overtly seek to subjugate or control certain segments of society, yet rituals and ritualistic engagement are rooted in power and control. Catherine Bell in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992) asserts, “Closely involved with the objectification and legitimation of an ordering of power as an assumption of the way things really are, ritualization is a strategic arena for the embodiment of power relations” (170). The dialogic negotiation and calibration of the *communitas* i.e., the anti-structure and the structured ordered communal space is clearly evident in the folk songs accompanying the rites of passage. Both are independent and yet inter-dependent, opposing yet essential forces. While the former is defined by Turner in *The Ritual Process* (1969) as,

an unstructured or rudimentary structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders ... (And the latter i.e. Society as) a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of 'more' or 'less'. (96)

Theorists on ritual and social control have examined the inherent dynamics of hegemonies and counter hegemonies in the ritual space. The four main theses that emerge as encapsulated by Bell are as follows: The social solidarity thesis, the channeling of conflict thesis, the repression thesis and definition of reality thesis. The first, “suggests that ritual exercises control through its promotion of consensus and the psychological and cognitive ramifications of such consensus” (171). The rites and songs of the seasonal celebrations celebrate solidarity and collective harmony accentuating consensus and brushing aside any hint of a counter ritualistic space with the potential to dislodge the firmly ensconced patriarchal structures. Turner acknowledges the dialogic banter of the dialectical forces of structure and anti-structure and prefers to foreground rituals as a medium of channelizing angst against repression and thereby containing conflict to restore social equilibrium. The songs associated with the birth of a child, the lullabies and the mourning songs are negotiations with limiting structures in liminal spaces, which are channelized and contained within iconographic symbols of 'ideal' read 'patriarchal' *punjabiyat*. Bell though finds efficacy in the last discourse, the reality thesis, in which rituals, particularly the folk songs associated with them, model society instead of controlling it. “Proponents of the definition of reality thesis seek to finding ritual a single central mechanism for the communication of culture, the internalization of values, and the individual's cognitive perception of a universe that generally fits these values” (176).

These songs of *trinjan* do not simply communicate shared meaning or a collective

worldview nor do they reflect an insular ideology. These are negotiated meaning of consent which reflect the grudging foregrounding of patriarchal punjabiyat, which women resist but accept as a legitimate discourse, which validates the premise that these songs are rooted in strategies of control and power, negotiated meanings of resistance and incorporation, and are the common venn between the structure and anti-structure. Singing and feasting is accompanied with cross dressing and trans-gendering of roles, even under the piercing gaze and ears of patriarchy, this gives women a vent, wherein, underlying forces create a collective purgation. These negotiations in these fleeting moments are not ephemeral but palpable. They may be temporary but even in that split second moment, a minuscule shove has been achieved; whereby resistance makes its presence felt momentarily, albeit only to be incorporated by rigid structures again.

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## Role of Gender and Language in Narrating the Corporeal Body and Its Desires: A Study of KR Meera's "The Deepest Blue"

### Abstract

*Desires are not desires unless it remains unfulfilled. It can be silly, creative, hazardous, innovative, sexual and even an overreacher. Often, people receive appreciations to share and discuss their desires and even get lots of suggestion to achieve those. But all of those discussions come to a halt or at least fall into background in regards to the corporeal desires. The same trend would extend to its literary manifestations as well. Often literature or movies which depict the bodily desires are either categorized as erotic production or marginalized as to read or watch in private. In the matter of women, expressing bodily desires or having a discourse about it, are more difficult and problematic. Generally, both the corporeal desires and its expressions are sexed and gendered. This paper examines the Malayalam novella 'The Deepest Blue' written by KR Meera and translated by J Devika to study the role of gender and language in narrating the corporeal body and its desires. The novella juxtaposes the desiring body of a married woman and the spiritual body of an ascetic. The woman falls in love with the ascetic and chases her transcending love and desires denying the social norms and cultural prejudices in a morally strict society like Kerala. This paper is composed of two parts. The first part analyses how the body is pictured as desiring and sexed and how the body repels from the sociocultural construction of gender and its demands. The second part reflects on the erotic aspect of the text. This part discusses how writing frankly about bodily desires and thoughts make the text erotic and what kinds of narrating techniques or methods have been used to narrate the desiring or sexed body in/to a society that believes in the virtue of chaste wives and monogamous men. This study examines how transgressive desire is conveyed in a socio-political situation that does not allow it. The paper closely studies the metaphors or other kind of suggestions, silences or gaps and the brazening out instances in the text which make the text appealing to the morally high audience but at the same time alluding the eroticism. This paper argues that it is arduous and complicated to narrate a desiring body to a society that keeps strict moral rules and the convention of stereotypical gender roles and sexed body.*

**Keywords :** Gender, Body, Desire, Language, Eroticism



Corporeal desires are treated differently from other desires. Those are not welcomed with a warm chest and open hands. Instead, those are crimped of social stereotypes and cultural prejudices. Society is always reluctant to express and listen to the bodily desires of people. But considering the biological need of the human body, a way to quench the bodily yearnings have been found, that is marriage. Marriage allows men and women to fulfill their bodily desires to some extent. But, generally, society does not appreciate the dissatisfactions from it. Major social systems usually do not appreciate the polygamous relationships and do not address the questions regarding the desires which arise from outside of the marriage system. The same trend would extend to its literary manifestations as well. Often literature or movies which depict the bodily desires are either categorized as erotic production or marginalized as to read or watch in private. In the matter of women, expressing bodily desires or having a discourse about it, are more difficult and problematic. Generally, both the corporeal desires and its expressions are sexed and gendered. In this context, women's writings about women's desires are more significant.

This paper analyses the Malayalam novella “The Deepest Blue” written by the famous novelist K. R. Meera to study the questions of gender and language to the corporeal body and its desires: the gendered body as sexed and desiring, and the written text as an erotic production. This paper argues that it is arduous and complicated to narrate a desiring body to a society that believes in the virtue of chaste wives and monogamous men. And it examines the narrative techniques, metaphors, and images that the text has used to picture a desiring or a sexed body in/to such a society.

Her novella “The Deepest Blue” taken from the book *The Angel's Beauty Spots* is about a married woman who is in love with an ascetic. She chases transcending love and desires denying social stereotypes and cultural prejudices in a morally strict society like Kerala. At the beginning of the story itself, she starts to talk of her “silver of experience- of love” (130). A languid serpent symbolises her transcending love. The writer has interconnected the women's bodily desires and her yearning to own a house similar to the house she was born and raised in. That house had been wiped out by lightning along with her father. While wandering to buy a house, she finds both the house and the love she was waiting. She falls in love with the owner of the house even if she knows that he has devoted his life to asceticism. In her novella, Meera gives voice to a desiring woman. The text handles the theme of a dispute between the desiring body of the woman and the spiritual body of the ascetic. Later the text showcases how the desiring body succeeds over the spiritual body and how it teaches the lessons of actual asceticism that is supposed to be roosted in the soul from the physical body.

The text uses the image of a languid serpent to express the love the woman has in her mind and on her body. That serpent always sheds its skin as she shed one love for another. And about her each love she says to the readers, “Each time it was a mistake I made. I mouthed; I left behind each of them. To those who tried to hold fast, I gave my decaying

old scaly skin” (130). She frankly reveals to the readers that she had not tried to stay in one relationship, because, her body or her mind was not satisfied with those. So, she is on a journey to find the love which transcends the time. Women who brazen out her love life would usually face lots of dissents from the patriarchal society. She would be treated as a loose woman with immoral identity. But Meera's character denies all of those consequences and proclaims that the authority of her life is she. The writer carefully weaves an overlap between the protagonist's corporeal desire and the desire to own a house. The woman needs an old *naalukettu* house, which is exactly like the house she was born and raised in. Her dream house always traps the wind that gets into it through the opened windows as her desiring body always likes to trap the love that wanders around her. Meera has wisely used these metaphors to point out the truth that the marriage has destructed the women's bodily desires as the lightning had wiped out the old house by its razing fire. Here the lightning has been pictured as an outside intervention that tries to slay each corporeal desire for the sake of collective morality of the society.

She continuously reminds the readers that how unjustifiable are some marriages.

“The unmarried have keener eyesight. Ones you are married, it diminishes. When he was my lover, my husband wrote four or five whole essays about a small birthmark I have on the little finger of my right hand. That trivial was indeed an exalted one! Subject too much unnecessary coddling, it turned into a movement. But the moment- the thali- the marriage pendant- was noosed around my neck, it reverted into being a humble birthmark” (133).

Meera condemns the situation of women in the marriage systems. The misogynist society limits the meaning of womanhood to procreation and composes a patriarchal language to objectify her body. The marriage system acts as a fertile ground for this patriarchal language.

Each time when they see a house, her husband asks her why she does not buy that one. She simply replies that is not she has on her mind. The husband who is the representative of male chauvinist society thinks that the comforts, he has given, has satisfied her and believes that women are not supposed to desire more than society allows them. The thought that women's desires are only a fantasy enforces normative gender beliefs. The patriarchal society is not willing to accept that women's desires are real. The author intensifies the sufferings of the desiring body of a woman through the inner conflicts of the protagonist. The established gender norms and behaviours even intervene in her expression of emotions.

When she first sees the ascetic, her body blooms as nature welcomes the spring, and she explicitly tells that the blood in her body races through its tiny rivulets, the jasmine bursts into bloom, as it from a sudden thrill. She narrates every detail of the changes that

happened in her mind and body when she saw her love standing in front of her. Then Meera draws the sacred body of the ascetic in contrast with the desiring body of the woman. The ascetic's body is narrated through an aesthetic comparison with the old *naalukettu* house, "The tile-roofed gateway, the kili tree, the wild jasmine. A hundred flowers with no one to pluck. Another wild world inside the gateway. The retreating sunlight outside. The languid dusk inside. Outside, the clamor of folk returning from the market. Inside the silence of roosting birds" (135). When the woman tries to open one of the windows of the house (windows of the house are the windows of the body to the mind), the ascetic warns her not to open it and says it cannot be closed again if she does. Meera alludes that corporeal desires cannot be repressed once it has been exposed. The desiring body of the woman and the so-called desireless body of the ascetic interchanges several conflicts in the text.

Formatting a creative work about corporeal desire or gender is a challenging activity in a highly restricted society, especially for a woman writer who hails from a rigid moral society like Kerala. A text cannot describe bodily desires without being erotic itself. Even if an author is highly conscious not to write an erotic book, but as long as she/ he is writing to/in a society which keeps strict moral rules, the text transforms to an erotic production. These situations lead to the excessive use of allusions in the literary manifestations of corporeality. Here, Meera uses several narrative techniques, some theoretical aspects of Psychoanalysis and Indian mythology to deepen her written words. Through an uncommon convention of putting an advisory notice at the beginning of fiction, Meera ridicules the society which blindly executes the moral laws and principles. Indirectly, she expresses her disagreements with the patriarchal notions through this advisory.

"It is the readers; responsibility to hold tight to their chastity and peace of mind so that these do not fall in a heap on the floor. Reading ahead may adversely affect children, pregnant women, heart patients, and my husband; they are advised against venturing any further. Only the firm-hearted are advised to proceed" (130). After putting the advisory notice, Meera draws the image of the languid serpent which lay coiled and still, lounged upon its own body, biding its tie, and lying in wait. The application of euphemism happens with the serpent image which cannot inactively wait for love. It lounges upon its own body as humans explore their own body while doing masturbation. Meera cannot help narrate a body that sometimes seeks pleasure from its own body. Instead of using an 'immoral' word masturbation, Meera replaces it with the image of a self-pleasuring languid serpent. Despite some unexpected actions of the woman that a morally strict society refuses to accept, the text usually does not narrate vivid images of the erotic description of the body or the sexual acts. But the close reading of the novella reveals the naked body of both the woman and the ascetic, along with the detailed narration of their body parts and the sexual fantasies of them. "This is the house I knew. The tile-roofed gateway built of sandstone blocks. The curving doorway. The rough, gravelly village

road. Paddy fields opening out on the other side. The water- channel running by the road in which tiny fish swam” (132). This description of the old *nallukettu* house is not an erotic one unless it is not connected to the human body. That is how “the curving doorway” loses its independent existence with the house and it resembles the curves of the body of the ascetic. The paddy field represents the reproduction aspect of the body. The author interconnects the image of semen with the water channel or the river and the sperm with the tinny fishes swimming in it. This is how “The Deepest Blue” becomes an erotic text and at the same time, Meera succeeds in covering the eroticism by the play of words.

The novella gives plenty of pieces of evidence to substantiate the woman's craving for the river. Whenever she yearns for a house, she yearned to have a river beside the house, where plenty of fishes swim calmly. When the ascetic forced her not to open the decaying window, she insists to see the river from the same window. The ascetic gives her another option to see the river. He says, “Go around through the front door... that is easier” (136). But she is sure that she would only see the river from this same window or the very same body of the ascetic. Here she is deliberately trying to open the window which the ascetic does not like to be opened. This window also stands as an erotic image in the next paragraph.

“Do not open it. It cannot be closed again if you do. He tried to stop me.

But before he could finish, how wonderful, the bolt loosened. The door opened. He looked a bit startled. And then, back to his detachment, smiled.

“Oh... so it opened?”

“It did...” I stood there triumphant.

“It has been years. The bottom must have decayed...”(136).

The ascetic's compulsion not to open the decaying door and his emphasis on the decayed bottom of the window resembles the inactiveness of the bottom of his body. It implicitly shows the inertness of his sexual organ and sexual instincts.

The narrating technique of juxtaposition of the love and the image of a languid serpent implies another layer of meanings as well. The comparison of the woman's interest in several love affairs and the shedding of snakes' skin allow the writer to present the uncertainty of women in love affairs and assure leaving a relationship is as normal as a serpent sheds its skin. Comprehensively, she has used the image of snakes to normalize the image of a craving body of the woman. The languid snake helps readers to relate the intensity of the desire of the woman. In addition to this, the same snake gives the glory of Indian God, shiva, to the story. Bringing the God images to the text is a tactic way of narration which makes the story more acceptable among the common readers. The languid serpent, mentioning of Shiva, his blue colour, and worshipping Tripura Sundari

play an important role in the novella and also they act as a lubricant in the text which helps to dilute the intensity of the topic it deals with. Meera writes about the love of the woman who craves for someone “who would not die of her fang. Who was a deep blue by birth. The three-eyed one” (130). There is a deliberate act of equating the ascetic's body with Lord Shiva, through which Meera tries to avoid the impending controversies. In the Indian context, though the society is high and rigid on its moral values. People accept the woman who loves and craves for God. Through the reconciliation of God and the desire, the writer describes the woman's body without being an erotic narration.

The house she was born and raised in symbolises the epitome of her love. This is the main reason why she looks for a similar house to live the rest of her life. But for her, the previous house that was wiped out by lightning is not only a physical structure but a place where her father is burned and died. Here the father-daughter relationship comes into the discourse. Carl Gustav Jung introduced the term, Electra complex, in an article in 1913 in the *Jahrbuch für psychoanalytische und psychopathologische*, to denote a state in which the girl subconsciously exhibits a sexual affection towards her father (Oxford Reference). The woman in the novella appropriates her sexual conceptions in order to reunite with the dead father. Looking for a house similar to the previous house and being in love with the owner of that house assures the traits of Electra complex in her.

Even though this paper discusses the bodily desires, there is no difference in the treatment of other desires of women in any society. This is why Meera is forced to give an advisory notice before her creative work about a woman. This is the same reason why she alludes the eroticism of the text. She fakes that she is inside the Lakshmana Regha, but extends her creativity beyond that line. “The Deepest Blue” becomes an artwork which exhibits the corporeal desires of a sexed body and the complications in writing a text about bodily desires in a morally rigid society.

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## Claiming and Defining Liberal Spaces: Freedom Writing from Room 203

### Abstract

*Richard LaGravenese's Freedom Writers (2007) is a film that depicts modern-day social and cultural conflicts that stem from racism and how they shape the young demographic of Long Beach, California. Through a close-reading of the text, this paper scrutinises the divisions of physical space and how it is linked to liberty. The subjects of this discourse belong to some of the most disadvantaged communities in the United States –a champion nation of Liberty and Democracy –both then and now. The conclusions drawn from this research suggest that the division of space is attached to social, cultural, and economic privilege. Such unilateral divisions tend to cause one group –the centre –to enjoy an abundance of liberty, and the other –the periphery –to suffer a dearth. This means that, to these communities, social mobility and consequent entry into the centre is out of the question. Therefore, by claiming both old and new spaces, and thereby asserting power, those in the fringes can claim or reclaim their liberties. The common thread of liberty (or the lack of thereof) runs through all narratives of oppression and liberation, regardless of cultural or geographical settings. Therefore, from an etic perspective liberal spaces like that of Room 203 retain their significance in human life.*

**Keywords :** Liberal Spaces, Demarcations, Physical and Intellectual Confinement, Claiming Spaces, Diverse Stories and Expressions

### Introduction

The meaning of 'liberty' upon which there is general concurrence is to be free from constraint, to be free. Liberty also entails being subject to the rule of law and the consequent rules and regulations drawn up for general welfare. The term 'general welfare', however, tends to be multifariously interpreted depending on various factors such as power relations, the political landscape, and cultural perspectives. Humankind is not new to this scenario; this requires no further proof or illustration. This paper concerns itself with the interpretation of liberty as being a prerogative that is limited to certain spaces alone. This is followed by an illustration of how this notion can be challenged and subverted. For this purpose, Richard LaGravenese's film *Freedom Writers* (2007) is chosen as the primary textual reference. This is the story of the Freedom Writers, a group of at-risk students, and Erin Gruwell, their English teacher at the Woodrow Wilson Classical High School, Long Beach, California. Through a close-reading of this film, this paper demonstrates that the exercise of liberty –personal and civil –is predicated upon the

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access to an accommodative space.

In the backdrop of the Los Angeles riots of 1992, racial tensions in the United States skyrocket. Jeff Wallenfeldt describes the LA Riots as which made the riots “one of the most-devastating civil disruptions in American history.” Meanwhile the Woodrow Wilson High School is transformed into a reform school and voluntary integration is introduced. The students in Room 203 –the at-risk class –at the school grapple with the harsh realities of their lives knowing fully well that the school is not a safe haven for them. Erin Gruwell, an inexperienced English teacher with vision, struggles with the dilemma of how to form a rapport with them. In due course, with the help of Ms Gruwell, the students chronicle their experiences in diaries. This proves to be cathartic for them, and the experience leads them to personal liberation.

### **Divided Spaces: The Cause, The Effect, And The Answer**

What the viewers witness in Room 203 in the beginning and in Woodrow Wilson High School in general, is a reflection of the general social order in Long Beach, California, in the late 1990s and early 2000s:

My PO doesn't understand that schools are like the city, and the city is just like a prison, all of them divided into separate sections, depending on tribes. There's Little Cambodia. The Ghetto. Wonder Bread Land. And us, South of the Border or Little Tijuana. That's just the way it is, and everyone knows it. (*Freedom Writers* 00:13:14-00:13:37)

The physical space is demarcated into two –the centre and the periphery or the margin which is a space further divided within itself. The demarcation between the centre and the margin creates two different demographics that differ from each other in terms of lifestyle, aspirations, and entitlements. The demographic that live in the peripheral spaces of the city- Black, Latinx, and Asian communities- are considered the outsiders based on their race, class, and the language they speak. The reality of their existence is that they are deemed subhuman and uncultured; and therefore, not entitled to freedom and liberty. This reality is thrust upon them because they belong to the margins. This social order is problematic at its core because these spaces were never born out of common consent. They were decided by the rich, white, and privileged communities that occupy the central space, to perpetuate class and race superiority, as J. S. Mill observes, “Wherever there is an ascendant class, a large portion of the morality of the country emanates from its class interests, and its feelings of class superiority” (Mill 16). In being confined to these spaces, and in spite of sharing a collective memory of oppression, their lives are consumed in the struggle to resist discrimination and injustice. Marcus is vocal about the perceived reality of their lives, “Lady, I’m lucky if I make it to 18. We in a war. We’re graduating every day we live, because we ain’t afraid to die protecting our own” (*Freedom Writers* 00:34:36-00:34:44). It is frightening to see how even the premature death of a teenager is

normalised. These human beings are constantly dehumanised; their lives become inconsequential, and they ultimately become crime statistics. Jamal Hill narrates his experience in his diary:

At 16, I've seen more dead bodies than a mortician. Every time I step out my door, I'm faced with the risk of being shot. To the outside world, it's just another dead body on the street corner. They don't know that he was my friend. (*Freedom Writers* 00:52:04-0000:52:19)

Without social privileges, education, and social and economic mobility is of mythical dimensions. Without social mobility, the outsider demographic remains in the marginal spaces. They are denied entry into the centre. At Wilson High, Ms Campbell's character suitably demonstrates this by putting up departmental resistance against Ms Gruwell's co-curricular activities. This is a vicious cycle, a typical catch-22 situation. Marcus' words resonate the reality of inequalities entrenched in society, "When I look out in the world, I don't see nobody that looks like me with their pockets full, unless they're rapping a lyric or dribbling a ball" (*Freedom Writers* 00:34:17-00:34:23). Without any kind of privilege, people are forced to live in spaces where their civil liberties are questioned, violated, and at worst, ignored. They are unable to choose the course of their lives, because it has already been decided for them. They need to play their prescribed roles mainly for survival and that leaves them no room to be free, to get an education, and to move up the social ladder.

The said spatial demarcations are maintained through systematic racism, police brutality, and mass incarceration. Eva Benitez's witness account of her father's arrest is proof to what it means to have no liberty even when people stay within the boundaries that separate the margins from the centre:

I saw white cops shoot my friend in the back for reaching into his pocket! His pocket. I saw white cops break into my house and take my father for no reason except because they feel like it! Except because they can. And they can because they're white. (*Freedom Writers* 00:33:39-00:33:57)

Above is a demonstration of how the marginal spaces are further devolved and dehumanised versions of the Foucauldian village where even if the people stay within the prescribed boundaries, they have slim chances of survival because violence will still be perpetrated against them, sometimes even by the State. Many of these teenagers have been to prison and/or Juvenile correctional facilities themselves, "I spent the next few years in and out of cells. Every day I'd worry, 'When will I be free?'" (*Freedom Writers* 00:51:28-00:51:33). One of the students, Sindy Ngor, recounts her experience in the Cambodian refugee camps, and its long lasting effect on her life in America, in her diary:



During the war in Cambodia, the camp stripped away my father's dignity. He sometimes tries to hurt my mom and me. I feel like I have to protect my family. (*Freedom Writers* 00:52:19-00:52:27)

Room 203 is simply a forceful alternative to correctional homes for these students at Woodrow Wilson High School. They are not present there of their own volition but have been assigned that space by the system that is biased in their disfavour. Room 203 is the at-risk class, a position which further forces them into a restrictive space where they enjoy no liberties. As a result, in the beginning, each of the teenagers expresses reluctance to be there.

If it was up to me, I wouldn't even be in school. My probation officer threatened me, telling me it was either school or boot camp... He thinks that the problems going on in Long Beach aren't going to touch me at Wilson. (*Freedom Writers* 00:12:59-00:13:12)

The cumulative effect poses a more serious problem: the inability to think and act freely beyond communal obligations, which in this context have more damaging effects. They do not have the liberty to behave like normal teenagers with dreams, aspirations, and entitlements. They are confined within a narrative itself that has conveniently repeated to keep them in those spaces. Narratives gain more power when they are constantly repeated. In the case of these students, they are the victims of a narrative that caged them in spaces where they are denied liberty of existence and liberty of thought. These spaces come to be not of their own choice, but are socially constructed for them. The oppression that they have faced is historical and systematic.

Where there is excess and unlawful exercise of liberty by the dominant group, the marginalised people need to claim the space. When they do so, the power dynamic is altered. "Claiming space implies the desire or agency to assert power and a sense of belonging within physical, subjective, or discursive terrain." (Caylor 3) It's an act of agency. The students of Room 203 claim and define a space for themselves where they have the freedom of individuality and expression. The students of Room 203 choose to express themselves through writing; they empower themselves by telling their own stories:

We were writers with our own voices, our own stories. And even if nobody else read it, the book would be something to leave behind that said we were here, this is what happened, we mattered. Even if it was just to each other. And we won't forget. (*Freedom Writers* 01:52:54-01:53:11)

Furthermore, they give themselves a name-the Freedom Writers. This name is inspired by the Freedom Riders, a group of American civil rights activists who rode buses to the segregated Southern states of America to fight against segregationist laws. Naming

something gives the one who names power and claim over who or what is named. Naming themselves only increases the students' power over themselves. By doing so, they outgrow the labels that were thrust upon them and the spaces to which they were confined. They are no longer a group of social pariahs. They identify themselves with freedom and liberty as opposed to physical and intellectual confinement:

Talking with friends about last year's English and our trips, I began to feel better. I receive my schedule and the first teacher is Mrs Gruwell in Room 203. I walk into the room and feel as though all the problems in life are not so important anymore. I am home. (*Freedom Writers* 01:14:19-01:01:14:39)

The Freedom Writers assert their power by claiming Room 203 as *their* space and effectively define what it means to them- freedom, safety, belonging, and most importantly liberty:

Ms G, this is our kick-it spot... Everybody's cool with everybody. Everybody knows everybody. This is the only place where we really get to be ourselves. There's no place like this out there for us. (*Freedom Writers* 01:44:13-00:44:25)

This is testimony of the capacity of an accommodative space to empower someone. They become capable of thinking independently and finally liberate themselves. J. S. Mill echoes the sentiment when he says, “Not that it is solely, or chiefly, to form great thinkers, that freedom of thinking is required. On the contrary, it is as much, and even more indispensable, to enable average human beings to attain mental stature which they are capable of” (Mill 62). *Freedom Writers* is, therefore, a counter narrative that asserts the important role of liberal spaces in the existence of a more free, democratic, and egalitarian society where everyone has a voice.

This begs the question: can the example of Room 203 be extended so as to arrive at a conclusion from an etic perspective i.e., can the arguments presented here be applied across the board in a different cultural setting? This question doesn't have a straightforward answer. Whether or not the model of room 203 will be a successful one in a different cultural or geographical location is entirely dependent on the social, cultural and economic circumstances from which the students come. The definition of 'at-risk' factors in on the student's power of articulation, as we have seen with the different characters in the film. Disadvantage varies in degree and in kind. Characters such as Eva Benitez, Andre Bryant, Jamal Hill, and Marcus belong to one end of the spectrum, while Brandy Ross, Sindy Ngor, and Gloria Munez belong to a different end. Each of them has their own stories of struggle and liberation. Each of them is motivated by a variety of causes. Extending a local narrative and raising it to an axiomatic status poses the risk of diluting it and in turn, classifying it under hypernymous categories. Black communities, people of colour, and immigrant communities share a cultural memory of racism and

prejudice against them. However, it is wrong to group the localised experiences under said hypernymous categories. The specific example of the Freedom Writers of Room 203 alone doesn't have enough scope for a trans-cultural application. However, minorities all over the world find themselves as being constantly pushed into the fringes. The problem is not endemic to Long Beach, California, but ubiquitous to the modern world. Every country, every ethnicity, every culture, fosters divides –both physical and metaphorical –within its larger boundaries, separating the “insiders” and the “outsiders.” This is a historical social phenomenon, albeit unjust and hence, resisted. Therefore, the idea of creating liberal spaces and liberating people through those spaces, which the Freedom Writers propose, is indisputably valid across cultural and geographical borders.

## Conclusion

When spaces are divided into the centre and the periphery, the borders define not only physical freedom, but also civil liberty and the liberty of thought. These boundaries are set in place and enforced using tools such as biased policies, policing, and mass incarceration. This is iterated enough to be the ascendant narrative. When the oppressed minorities responds to this by claiming spaces, there is a shift in power relations. *Freedom Writers* adequately upholds this argument. However, the text by itself is a localised narrative. Local narratives or stories are a result of localised determinants. While they may bear resemblance to each other, they are not one and the same. So if the understanding and the implications of liberty were to be condensed into a single specific story, or cause, or motivation, it would be equivalent to being stripped of its essence which is the capacity to accommodate a multitude of diverse stories and expressions. For this reason, the story of the Freedom Writers and Erin Gruwell, per se, is not entirely universal. However, the spirit of liberty and the significance of liberal spaces are pervasive and have universal implications. At this point in human history, they are a critically urgent concern.

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## The Cultural Trajectories of *Ramayana*, a Text beyond the Grand Narrative

### Abstract

*Ramayana, the mythical story developed into a grand narrative as Valmiki Ramayana at a particular point of time in a social context, is a cultural text that contained acknowledged and unacknowledged responses to the epistemes of historical periods. Though the popularity of the grand narrative and power structures disseminate the knowledge that Ramayana is a singular narrative, studies proved this understanding wrong. Many Ramayanas produced across the centuries questioned the unilateral theories of fixing Ramayana to a solitary text and the production of the text to a single author. Not only the diversity was associated with historical periods, but also Ramayana found its oral, written and performing renditions across geographical terrains. The current paper examines the multiplicity of Ramayana narratives that contribute to the liberated reading of Ramayana as a text beyond the grand narrative. The objectives of the paper include stating the rationale for promoting the multiplicity of Ramayana, unraveling the plurality of Ramayana by introducing texts across times, geographies and religions and juxtaposing different Ramayanas with varying perspectives and focus. The paper also depicts the way how the knowledge of multiplicity contributes to the thoughts on tolerance and dissent.*

**Key words :** Ramayana, Plurality, Dissent, Culture

Ramayana, the epic that survives the centuries and revisions, though essentially is plural narrative, has been projected as a singular grand narrative and conceived in that particular mode in the popular perception. The politics behind such a formulation about limiting a narrative into a single thread and propagating the belief that the exceptions and diversions are to be erased is the work of hegemony which is to be contested on several grounds. Primarily the idea of legitimizing Ramayana into a single body of literature is a gross blatant untruth derived from a propaganda with the intention to generate and disseminate a particular ideology which is not inclusive of the marginalized communities and perspectives. The second issue is that the cultural messages it transmits are not progressive enough to transform the society to the good though the pretensions of the text display otherwise. The third explanation for promoting multiplicity of the narrative is the micro and macro level violence embedded in the texture of the grand narrative probably normalize aggression and hostility. A fourth motive for considering the articulations of plurality is a historical understanding of the potential consequences of the singular

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narrative. The fifth reason is indeed the new insights derived from renaissance that the tendency of hegemonic existence of a certain narratives is to be contested. The visibility of canonical narratives and inevitability of hiding of marginal narratives are the epistemological project of the powerful. The current study, addressing the plurality of Ramayana, history and culture of production of the narratives and the question of dissent, is an attempt at unraveling the various contours of deliberations on *Ramayana*.

In its interactions with the times and cultural discourses, *Ramayana* manifests itself into umpteen oral, written and performing forms across the historical periods, geographical terrains and, of course, religious spheres. *Valmiki Ramayana* being the first full length work based on the “ path of Rama” was the most acclaimed source of the Ramayana stories though even before its production innumerable stories narrated in *Ramayana* existed in *Vedas*. The basic thread of Valmiki's work was the quality of virtue as evolved in the layers of the tale of Rama, a man, the elder prince of Ayodhya , son of Dasaratha, who married Sita, was destined to abandon the palace and separated from his wife, who killed Ravana, the ruler of Lanka, to restore his wife abducted by him, who later abandoned his wife on the chastity debate in the society and lived a life based on a particular set of ideals legitimized in the society. The story was narrated through seven sections namely *Balakanda*, *Ayodhyakanda*, *Aranyakanda*, *Kishkindhakanda*, *Sundarkanda*, *Yuddhakanda* and *Uttarkanda*. Though sometimes twisted in discussions on the paradoxes of prudence, the work engages the reader with the ideal of sacrifice whether the recension followed is the Bengal edition of *Valmiki Ramayana* reprinted in the Gorresic edition, Bombay recension printed by Nirnaya sagar press, or Gaudiya and Western Indian recension of Dayanand Mahavidyalaya. (Sakalani 58). Some critics were of the opinion that Utterkanta, telling the grief stricken plight of Sita, was a later addition to *Valmiki Ramayana*. Though Valmiki cannot be considered as the exclusive author of *Ramayana*, “Drona Parva” and “Shanti Parva” of *Mahabharatha*, *Balakanda* , “Phala sruthy” of *Yudhakanda* and *Utharakanda* of *Ramayana* contained substantial evidence to reckon Valmiki, as the writer of the narrative, Ramayana. (Bulcke 47,53). Still in *Ramakatha* of Camille Bulcke and in the essay “Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five examples and Three Thoughts in Translation” by A K Ramanujan, we encounter a large number of Ramayana tales which sometimes are radically different in content and approach. In addition to the variant endings such as the one with the return of Rama and Sita to the capital of Ayodhya, an ideal episode of reunion, coronation and peace, and the other tragic one with the grief stricken life of Rama and Sita after the slander spread on their return to Ayodhya as seen in Kampan, the texts on Ramayana showed less resemblance in their beginning too. (Richman *Many Ramayanas* 39, 40). Another difference lies in the way how different characters are treated with intensity: while in Valmiki Rama is the focal point of discussion, in Bengali *Chandabati Ramayana* Sita is the focal point. Vimala Suri's Jaina Ramayana and Tai Ramayanas Ravana's adventures were prioritized better than Rama's virtue.

Explorations into the diverse texts on Ramayana tale can be divided on the basis of religion, geography and language. While seeking the variety of *Ramayana* one has to proceed with the fundamental notion that the scope of *Ramayana* extends beyond Hindu tradition. Probably the redundant narrow essentialist views of reducing Ramayana as an exclusive Hindu religious text can be contested with such an argument. The impact of such an alternative knowledge is that it makes visible a flexible cultural text of the tale. Buddhist Ramayanas, Jain Ramayanas, Muslim Ramayanas, Dalit and Tribal Ramayanas are the pertinent texts beyond the versions of Valmiki, Kampan or Tulsidas. A few notable Buddhist texts are *Dasaratha Jathakam*, *Anamakam Jthakam* and *Dasarathakathanam*. Being based on Jathaka tradition of telling and related to the incarnations of Buddha, the content of these texts touched upon the three basic cultural questions in relation to the tale: 'the cultural scenario of narration, the aspect on which the story is narrated and the aspect that rationalizes the narration' (Bulcke 74). In Jain Ramayanas, Rama did not kill Ravana as he practiced ascetic life of nonviolence. Also Ravana was not a demonic king in the Jain texts. Instead Rama, Lakshman and Ravana are "Thrishastimahapurush" as the eighth Baladeva, Vasudeva and Prathivasudeva respectively. (Bulcke 80). *Hikayat Seri Rama* written in the Islamic tradition from Philippines propagated the belief that Ravana attained the boon to rule four worlds from Allah. Asees Tharuvana in his description in *Vayanadan Ramayanam* stated that the genealogy of Dasaratha, the father of Rama can be describe as follows: "Adamnabi, Dasaratharaman, Dasaratha, the ruler, Dasaratha" (Tharuvana 180). Keeping Rama, Sita, Hanuman and Surpanaka in the cultural dynamics of Kerala Muslim context, *Mappilaramayanam* was composed in the form of Mappilappattu. T.H. Kunhiraman Nambiar identified this anonymously written text and M.N. Karassery popularized it. There are divergent stories circulated among the Dalit and tribal communities such as Birhors in Bihar, Santhals in Bihar and Bengals, Pardhans around Narmada, Agariya in Madhyapradesh and Irula in Kerala.

Ramayana stories could also be identified in folk oral renditions of Kannada literature. This subversive tradition exists in parallel to the canonical Sanskrit tradition initiated by *Valmiki Ramayana*. Probably the intentions of the rulers in eleventh and twelfth centuries to provide a fertile soil to Vaishnava tradition lies behind the Bhakti turn of Ramayana tradition and the incorporation of theological doctrines to it. Propagation of the theological texts of Ramayana in Sanskrit made it as a book of reverence rather than a literary work so much so that the critique of it would be treated as blasphemy. This Bhakti turn interpreted Ravana's abduction of Sita as an act from Ravana to attain salvation (Bulcke 168). Texts like *Adhyathma Ramayana*, *Ananda Ramayana* and *Adbudha Ramayana* were the inevitable productions of the theological indoctrination of the literary work. 'Ramayana was considered as a text used to destroy Dravida culture by demonizing Ravana', observed M.S. Purnalingam Pillai, a scholar on Tamil antiquity representing non-brahmin intelligentsia (Pillai ii). *Krittivasi Ramayana* or

*Sreeramapanchali* of Krittibas Ojha and *Chandrabati's Ramayana* were two notable Ramayanas written in Bengali Language. Considering the Urdu literature one would get surprised to see a certain texts such as *Ramayana Maseehi* written by a poet named Mulla Maseeha during Jahangeer's time in which references on Jesus and Maria were included. *Iramacharitham*, *Kannassa Ramayanam*, *Ramayanam Chambu* and *Adhyathma Ramayanam* are a few among the notable Ramayanas in Malayalam literature. Geographical boundaries rather than limiting *Ramayana*, in fact, provided plural manifestations for the text. The tradition spread across Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Myanmar, Indo-China and Japan resulted in the renditions namely *Ramayanakakawina*, *Hikayat Seri Rama*, *Sri Rama Pathayani Ramayanam*, *Ramakelinga*, *Serathkandam*, *Khotani Ramayanam* that configure the life of Rama and Sita in varying cultural frameworks.

The very knowledge about diversity of Ramayana will be instrumental in eradicating the biases and prejudices arise out of unilateral explanations. Negotiations on plurality of Ramayana invalidate the argument that Ramayana texts are the literary re-appropriations of *Valmiki Ramayana*. Ramayana is emerged as an open text which could appear in varying forms based not only on the prerogatives of the producers of the text. It could assimilate varying dimensions focusing on class, caste, gender or religion, as responses to the subtle paradoxes of existence. This perspective is vital while engaging with the deliberations on *Ramayana* as Romila Thapar rightly commented in her essay, "The Ramayana Syndrome": "If we are to be aware of at least this strand of our cultural tradition then the debate and the dialectic embedded in these various versions should be more openly discussed." (Thapar 1)

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## SurViolence: The Preoccupation with Surveillance and Entrapment in Ken Liu's "The Perfect Match" and Tony Tulathimutte's *Private Citizens*

### Abstract

*Historically, Asian immigrant communities in the Western World, especially in the United States of America, have faced discriminatory immigration and citizenship laws as well as social exclusion and persecution from the mainstream white majority communities and even from the federal government itself. This alienation continues into the new millennium, and is manifested in many of the contemporary Asian-American cultural representations. In Chinese-American writer-translator Ken Liu's speculative short fiction "The Perfect Match", a young man and woman unsuccessfully confront a corporate technology giant by attempting to sabotage its omniscient Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based personal assistant. In the novel *Private Citizens* by Thai-American writer Tony Tulattimutte, an Asian young man is manipulated by his girlfriend into submitting to a 'life-casting' experiment for her start-up website, leading to disastrous consequences. These two fictional narratives by Asian-American authors represent a microcosm of the contemporary globalized world, where the apprehensions of the alienated immigrant are aggravated with the proliferation of technology-aided surveillance mechanisms. Drawing from the notions of 'objective violence' and 'violation' as propounded respectively by eminent philosophers Slavoj Žižek and Newton Garver, the proposed paper envisions the constant surveillance of ordinary individuals as a kind of non-physical violence, and examines its implications upon the lives and minds of racialized subjects in the selected literary works. The paper argues that, as minority subjects in 'the Free World,' characters in the selected works suffer from a fear of being 'watched' by a dominant force. The preoccupation with surveillance and entrapment in these works is seen as a manifestation of the historical as well as contemporary experiences of racial hostility and otherness faced by transcultural Asian immigrant communities in the western world.*

**Keywords :** Surveillance, Entrapment, Immigration, Racism, Asian-American fiction

Historically, Asian immigrant communities in the Western World, especially in the United States of America, have faced discriminatory immigration and citizenship laws as well as social exclusion and persecution from the mainstream white majority communities and even from the federal government itself. This has also been manifested

in much literary and cultural representations by authors hailing from these communities. Many literary works by Asian American authors consist of themes of racism, exclusion and incarceration, including references of time spent under detainment at Angel Island or the WWII Japanese internment camps. In Chinese-American writer-translator Ken Liu's speculative short fiction "The Perfect Match", a young man and woman unsuccessfully confront a corporate technology giant by attempting to sabotage its omniscient Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based personal assistant. In the novel *Private Citizens* by Thai-American writer Tony Tulathimutte, an Asian young man is manipulated by his girlfriend into submitting to a 'life-casting' experiment for her start-up website, leading to disastrous consequences. In the present paper, I consider the above-mentioned fictional works to examine the implications of constant surveillance upon the lives and minds of racialized Asian subjects. Drawing briefly from the notions of 'objective violence' and 'violation' as propounded respectively by Slavoj Žižek and Newton Garver, this paper envisions the constant surveillance of ordinary individuals as a kind of non-physical violence. I argue that, as minority subjects in 'the Free World,' characters in the selected works suffer from a fear of being 'watched' by a dominant force. The preoccupation with surveillance in these works is seen as a manifestation of the historical as well as contemporary experiences of racial hostility and otherness faced by transcultural Asian immigrant communities in the western world.

Renowned philosopher Newton Garver, in an article published in *The Nation* in 1968 titled "What Violence Is," offers a broadened definition of violence in which it is considered as "much more closely connected with the idea of violation than it is with the idea of force" (Bufacchi 196). He further elaborates it to refer to a violation of personal rights – either of the body or of personal dignity. Therefore, for Garver, violence could be not just physical, but also psychological. Denying people of their personal rights by some sort of a threat would thus come under the category of "covert or quiet" psychological violence, as opposed to "overt" physical violence (qtd. in Betz 340). Slavoj Žižek makes a similar argument in *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, in which he introduces the notions of "subjective violence" and "objective violence". According to Žižek, "subjective violence" is that which is "performed by a clearly identifiable agent". It is a visible departure from or the disturbance of the "'normal,' peaceful state of things," whereas "objective violence" is "inherent to this 'normal' state of things" and is hence "invisible" (1-2). Objective violence consists of two kinds according to Žižek: "symbolic violence" and "systemic violence". Symbolic violence is in fact a term introduced by Pierre Bourdieu to refer to the "*censored, euphemized*, i.e. unrecognizable, socially recognized violence" as opposed to "overt (physical or economic) violence (Bourdieu 191). For Žižek, however, the "symbolic" violence is that which is "embodied in language and its forms" (1) and "systemic violence" is that which is "inherent in a system: not only direct physical violence, but also the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence" (9). So Žižek's

systemic violence is close in definition to Bourdieu's symbolic violence, and they both refer to covert, non-physical forms of violence.

Etymologically derived from French *surveiller* meaning 'to watch over', the word 'surveillance' in its modern sense refers to a system which 'watches over' or tracks individuals or a group of people to extract information of different kinds. The data thus gained is often used by the state or the capitalist systems for the purpose of exercising varying degrees of power and control over the individual or the group. The degree of control over an individual or a group depends on various factors, including their social and political environment, race, class, caste, gender, sexuality and religion among others. Depending on these factors, surveillance systems can create or maintain “societal differentiation” among people. Torin Monahan explains the two different ways in which surveillance systems aid this differentiation: “social sorting”, in which they “diagnose someone's 'proper' place in society” and “pressure people not to deviate from their assigned categories” through capitalist measures like “preferential treatment of the relatively affluent in domains of commodity consumption”; and what he calls “marginalizing surveillance,” in which individuals belonging to different social groups are exposed to different levels of surveillance. This “demonstrates an explicit power relationship of enhanced control of populations considered risky, dangerous, or untrustworthy” (9-10). The attribution of “riskiness” and consequent surveillance comes as a double-bind on the monitored subjects – the attribution legitimizes the perceived need for their surveillance, and the surveillance itself further legitimizes and consolidates these attributed characteristics. The marginalizing surveillance that these racialized groups receive on part of the institutional apparatus, made worse by stereotypes propagated through dominant culture and media, also makes them the object of the alienating dominant gaze from the white majority public. Thus, such differential surveillance of already marginalized races in a multicultural context like that of the United States, fosters a relationship of domination and subordination between the gazers and the gazed at. Such a precarious dominant-subordinate relationship is at the heart of the concept of the non-physical objective violence as advanced by Žižek. Thus, marginalizing surveillance of minority groups is both a 'violation' of personal privacy, as well as a form of a non-physical objective violence that sustains the unequal racial relationships in a given multicultural, multi-ethnic society.

### **'SurViolence' of Asian-Americans**

As early as in 1875, the United States Federal Government enacted the Page Act, an extremely discriminatory immigration law which effectively prevented the entry of Chinese women into the country. The Republican representative Horace Page, after whom the Act was named, was infamously quoted as having wanted to “end the danger of cheap Chinese labor and immoral Chinese women”. Under the law, East Asian men who were brought as 'coolie' labourers and East Asian women who were labelled as potential

prostitutes were all considered “undesirable” immigrants. The law was “supposed to comprise the legislative tool needed to stop the flow of the 'yellow peril' to American shores” (Peffer 29). Later in 1882, the federal government completely banned all immigration of Chinese labourers by the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which remained in place till 1943. In 1910, the government established the Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay, which was the most important gateway for the Asian immigrants to enter the United States. The Immigration Station was infamous for the stringent enforcement of discriminatory immigration policies against Asians including Chinese, Filipinos and Indians. Asian immigrants were detained there for weeks and subjected to stringent physical examinations as well as interrogations (Yung and Lee). Between 1942 and 1946, many thousands of Japanese Americans were forcefully relocated and incarcerated in concentration camps, due to unsubstantiated suspicions of them remaining loyal to their ancestral homeland of Japan, the United States' major enemy in the WWII, especially after the incident of Pearl Harbor. There were also many instances of non-Japanese East Asians being mistaken for Japanese, and subjected to discrimination and acts of hate crime. People of Chinese descent famously used labels saying 'I am Chinese' to distinguish themselves from the Japanese at the time (Chan 212). Time and again, especially after the communist revolution in China, the Korean War and the Vietnam War, Asians, especially the Chinese, have been subjected to suspicions of espionage and their daily lives have been often marred by covert and overt attempts at tracking as well as discrimination. Similarly, after the incident of 9/11, Muslims, south Asians and Arabs have found themselves under the gaze of institutional as well as non-institutional surveillance and suspicion. The refugee crisis accentuated by the United States' own policies of war on terror has arguably worsened this predicament. Finally in 2020, with President Donald Trump's verbal attacks on China regarding the Corona virus pandemic, the East Asians in the country once again found themselves on the receiving end of xenophobia, with many incidents of hate crimes and hostility being reported against Asian-looking people across the United States. Such repeated instances of xenophobia as well as the attitudes of surveillance and tracking from both the governmental sources as well as from general public has historically caused much anxiety and alienation among the Asian American communities (Chiu A.). The above instances of historically repeated 'marginalizing surveillance' of the Asian American peoples follow a similar pattern. First comes an attribution of otherness, with their visual appearance serving as the marker of both difference and similarity – difference from the white majority, and similarity towards other Asian ethnicities. Then comes an affixation of potential danger or suspicion – of espionage, insurgency or questionable loyalties in the aftermath of war or terror attacks, or of being potential carriers of infection during an epidemic like the SARS or the Covid-19, or even as immigrants who take away the jobs and opportunities the dominant majority are supposedly entitled to. It is followed by an increased monitoring and surveillance of the subjects through different channels

including discriminatory immigration laws like the Chinese Exclusion Act, forced exclusion and internment like that of the Japanese Americans in the 1940s, and surveillance by means of social media, and other technology-aided mechanisms. In her book titled *Scrutinized! Surveillance in Asian North American Literature*, Monica Chiu studies the themes of surveillance, mystery and espionage as a literary response to extended periods of monitoring of Asian North American subjects in select novels of writers from the United States and Canada. By examining works by authors like Don Lee, Nina Revoyr, Susan Choi, Suki Kim, Kerri Sakamoto and Mohsin Hamid, Monica Chiu discusses about the issue of “simplistic racial categorization” based on how one looks – the racialized Asian subjects are constantly visible and subject to the dominant gaze as the physically different other, “but, paradoxically, invisible subjects politically and legally” (3). Their visible physical difference from the average white American, the suspicion cast upon them even from the official channels at different points in history, and the lack of adequate representation of Asian Americans in the political, legal and cultural realms render them as perpetual aliens, no matter whether they are new immigrants, first- or subsequent-generation Americans. The Asian-American subject always remains under the gaze of the dominant white Americans as a foreigner, one who has come 'from' elsewhere and hence belonging a little less to 'the land of the free' than themselves.

### **The Perfect Match**

“The Perfect Match” is a science-fiction short story by Chinese-American speculative fiction author and translator Ken Liu, included in his 2016 collection, *The Paper Menagerie and Other Stories*. The story is set in a near-future world where Artificial Intelligence technology has considerably advanced and the fictitious internet technology giant Centillion and its AI personal assistant named Tilly, has pervaded every aspect of the daily lives of the common people. The scenario is not difficult to imagine for a contemporary reader, as Centillion and Tilly are eerily reminiscent of the contemporary real-life technology giants and their AI personal assistants. The story follows a short period in the lives of neighbours Sai and Jenny, who undertake an unsuccessful mission of sabotaging the AI-assistant Tilly, which they realize, has infiltrated the privacy of every individual and group that has been using it. While the racial identity of Sai is left ambiguous, the name suggests a possible Asian-origin. His tech-phobic and eccentric neighbour Jenny, it is revealed, is a first-generation immigrant from China, the supposedly monstrous surveillance state the 'free-world' media loves to hate. At the outset of the story, the reader is introduced to Sai who is completely dependent on his AI personal assistant Tilly for his day-to-day affairs starting from his wake-up time which Tilly optimally sets “right at the end of a light sleep cycle,” the wake-up music he listens to and the shoes he wears to work that day. Tilly has even arranged a romantic date for him after work, according to his tastes and interests which she claims she knows the best. Sai is apparently so dependent on Tilly that he cannot even decide what to eat for breakfast

without asking her for recommendation. He is so used to asking Tilly for suggestion regarding every little detail of his everyday life that he thinks it completely normal to accept her recommendations without question, even against his own instincts:

“But I suggest you go to this new smoothie place along the way instead – I can get you a coupon code.”

“But I really want coffee.”

“Trust me, you'll love the smoothie.”

Sai smiled as he turned off the shower. “Okay, Tilly. You always know best.” (Liu)

It takes a not-so-friendly talk with his neighbour Jenny, for Sai to begin realising that perhaps Tilly was interfering too much in his life, and that he was perhaps being enslaved to Tilly rather than her being his assistant. Jenny is pictured as eccentric, wearing a winter coat, goggles and a face-covering scarf even on a sunny morning, and picking a quarrel with Sai over his installation of a security camera on his door overlooking their shared hallway. Sai's initial response to her concerns is of typical dismissal asking her what she had to hide. However, her comment on how Tilly does not just tell him what he wants but actually plants ideas into his mind, effectively telling him what to *think*, is what unsettles Sai for the first time regarding his unnatural dependence on his AI-assistant. Thereafter, Sai's actions reveal his growing distrust of Tilly, as he more often switches the assistant off, disregarding its warnings “...that in order to make the best life recommendations, I need to have complete knowledge of you. If you shut me out of parts of your life, my recommendations won't be as accurate...” (Liu). Further discussions with Jenny manage to convince Sai how the tech-giant Centillion virtually “owns all of” him, regulating where, when and how he spends his own money, what kind of news he reads and even deciding who he has a relationship with. More data privacy breaches, and unscrupulous interferences of Centillion are revealed, like how “it managed to topple three countries' governments just because they dared to ban Centillion within their borders,” selling to the public the impression that those were repressive governments (Liu). The final straw in Jenny's argument against Centillion which convinces Sai is that the real estate listings in Centillion's search algorithm had aided and worsened the city's racial segregation, which made it “easier for the politicians to gerrymander districts based on race” which resulted in black and other minority races getting stuck in the more decrepit parts of the city. Jenny finally manages to convince Sai on how Centillion's algorithm has put people in “little bubbles,” preventing them from asking any questions and accepting Tilly's judgment on the most trivial to the most important things in their lives (Liu).

Jenny and Sai's quest to sabotage Tilly by introducing a virus to Centillion's servers, is as doomed as Winston Smith and Julia's rebellion in Orwell's dystopian classic *1984*. Tilly is revealed to be not just an omniscient AI-assistant, but like the Telescreen from *1984*, she spies on Sai and reports his apparently strange behaviour to Centillion. Sai's

Tilly is eventually complicit in his capture by “the strange men” who produce him before Christian Rinn, Founder of Centillion, who has no qualms admitting that they have been “organizing information” to enable cultural imperialism by America all over the world. The story ends on a bleak note with Sai and Jenny silenced and forced to comply with Rinn's demands of working for them to make the perfect algorithm.

Ken Liu presents a contrast of these two characters Jenny and Sai, one who grew up knowing the need to keep secrets and the other who always mistakenly thought he was free, and therefore has lost all his sense of privacy and personal space. Jenny's detection of everything that is going on with Centillion admittedly owes much to her upbringing in China where the government constantly monitored everything people did on the web, but she says they never made it a secret that people were being monitored. However, in the United States, Jenny tells Sai, people always thought they were free, which made it difficult for them to figure out how they were at the mercy of corporate powers like Centillion. Jenny's consequent attempts to stay off the grid exposes her to the dominant gaze as an eccentric, and limits any chance she could have to truly belong and mingle with the others who are way too engrossed in their virtual lives. Her racial identity as a Chinese also puts her in a difficult position, which is revealed in her uncomfortable reaction to Christian Rinn's question on whether they would like a Chinese company to replace Centillion. Through this story, Ken Liu debunks the myth of America as 'the land of the free' and declares that surveillance and censorship exist even in the free world in invisible forms, and therefore put people in a more precarious position than if they actually knew they were being monitored. As people do not realise that they are being tracked on every move they make on the network, they do not think twice on what information they reveal about themselves, and end up being ensnared in the algorithms of companies like Centillion, to the extent that their servers have become an extension of people's minds – Sai could not remember his mother's contact details, or even what had happened in the world the previous day, without Tilly's help. Liu also puts forward a scenario wherein such tech-giants may be involved in a propaganda of a different kind, whereby information is filtered through their algorithms to make political leadership of other countries look oppressive by American standards, and even get involved in toppling governments that do not toe their line on business policies. Liu also exposes how corporate surveillance like that of Centillion adversely affects minority races by bringing in the instance of racial segregation in the city aggravated by the way Centillion's algorithm listed real estate search results. In the last line of the story, Liu makes it clear that there is no 'switching off' of Tilly or any similar technological device – even when the user thinks she has been switched off, “a red light continued to blink, slowly, in the darkness” (Liu). By severely manipulating its user's choices and invading their privacy without consent, such surveillance is clearly a form of covert objective violence towards the unsuspecting users. The only solution the story seems to offer for the predicament is to be more aware and guarded in the use of such emerging technologies.

## Private Citizens

In the 2016 novel *Private Citizens*, Thai-American novelist Tony Tulathimutte captures the self-conscious anxiety of the average Asian-American citizen upon constantly being the object of the dominant white gaze, in the character of Will, one of the four narrators of the novel. Set in San Francisco in the first decade of the new millennium, the novel follows the life of four young narrators Cory, Will, Henrik and Linda, just out of Stanford University, as they grapple with the challenges of the big bad millennial world. Will is a young and affluent technology-afficionado, a Stanford graduate who dates a smart, ambitious and very attractive white young woman Vanya Andreeva, who happens to be physically disabled. On the surface, it would seem that Will is living the American dream; however, he is also of Thai-descent, and this very racial background seems to have rendered him extremely self-conscious and anxious despite his apparent accomplishments in his career and romantic life. He comes across as a very insecure romantic partner as he constantly muses over his own worth as Vanya's boyfriend, considering himself as lucky to have got her as a girlfriend. In the one year of their ongoing relationship, Will has strived constantly to prove himself worthy of Vanya, not “competing with other guys so much as with Vanya's entire life... It was easy to imagine another twenty-four years passing before he met a girl of Vanya's caliber, one who was moreover willing to date a short Asian guy” (Prologue). Will's deletion of his own childhood and youth photographs signifies his desire to erase all traces of his pre-Vanya life, when he was generally perceived as just another emasculated Asian guy, excluded from “the toxic alpha-male rat race” of the mainstream white youth (ch. 2). It is the wish to reprogram the dominant gaze on himself by the white American viewer, that drives Will's resolve to destroy all his past photographs which show stereotypical racialized images of himself as a typical unattractive Asian guy. It is this same wish that makes him want to put more effort into maintaining his and Vanya's relationship: “The only thing tangibly refuting his stereotype was Vanya” (ch. 2). Will projects his own anxiety and insecurity on to his girlfriend as he virtually stalks her by going through her personal journals in her absence, looking for forbidden information from her past. Reading from Will's perspective, Vanya comes across as an ambitious, supremely attractive woman typically unattainable for someone like him. For Will, she becomes a symbol of the dominant mainstream America he desperately wants to belong to; attaining and maintaining her affection becomes the only way for him to belong within the mainstream white American community. In his fixation or anxiety of being *seen* or “pigeonholed as another Asian castrato” (ch. 2), he overlooks the fact that Vanya, although a member of the dominant white community, has had to face challenges of her own, being a paraplegic wheelchair-bound woman. Will's insecurity and anxiety regarding his relationship with Vanya leads him to remote-monitor her using improvised sousveillance set-ups he fashioned by himself using web-cameras and videocall, as Vanya worked from her New York office. His preoccupation with their relationship becomes so addictive that he “fed himself on the



cookie crumbs of Vanya's web presence. He got push notifications on her social networking activity, search alerts on her name, an RSS feed on her blog” (ch. 5). Vanya is portrayed as a confident, ambitious woman who wants to become the next big thing in the start-up world in the flourishing Silicon Valley, and would stop at nothing to achieve her goal even if that means using her own disability as a selling point. She enthusiastically signs an agreement with investors to turn her blog to a “lifecasting” show, putting herself “on camera all the time: the life of a young disabled female tech entrepreneur, twenty-four-seven!... Like a reality show, but *real*” (ch.2). Vanya's offer of making him a partner in the show is met with initial enthusiasm from Will as he speculates on how he could improve and help her with the technical aspects of it. However, this enthusiasm is short-lived, as Vanya's demand that he get an image makeover for better online presence, and shorten his long Thai surname to make it easier for white people to pronounce it, triggers an outbreak of all the racial anxiety that had been pent up in him all along. Will's compromise on adopting a shortened screen-name is not however the only compromise he makes: the more their life-cast blog progressed, the more changes Will made to his life according to what Vanya thought her audience would like – including his social media presence, his hair his lifestyle. He ultimately even agrees to get himself an eyelid surgery to make him look less Asian, a procedure which goes wrong as he ends up losing both his eyes instead.

It is clear that the effects of their continued self-imposed surveillance are felt differently on Vanya and Will – while Vanya takes their rising fame and the curious looks from the public with calm and enthusiasm, Will grows more anxious as their fame increases. The gaze that he had felt all his life as an Asian, a non-white, non-black 'other' in the midst of the whites and blacks, combined with the newly-imposed constant surveillance in the form of life-casting, and the hostile comments he received from the internet-audience, serve to only increase his racial anxiety of being *seen*, *watched* and stereotyped. Will's eventual violent reaction to a white teenager trying to woo an Asian girl on a bus by showering her with Asian stereotypes, is a direct psychological response of his increased anxiety of being watched and stereotyped by the mainstream population. The videos of the incident are posted online and become 'viral' as “Chinese Guy MELTDOWN on Bus during Live Webcast” (ch. 11), and Will is made an object of jokes, memes and much parody, also leading to an angry fight with Vanya. Vanya attributes Will's violent behaviour to what she calls his “persecution complex” and suggests, as a solution, that Will should get an eyelid surgery to make him look less Asian, and to manage his “projected self-image” (ch. 11). The bone of contention in Will and Vanya's relationship comes from the problem that both regard the other as privileged, and show no concern for each other's feelings or challenges – Will considers Vanya privileged for being an attractive white woman, while Vanya considers him privileged for being an able-bodied man. As a representative of the dominant white community, Vanya is unable to understand the historical anxiety of being watched and monitored that Will feels as a

member of the Asian community, while Will himself is too preoccupied in his own insecurities to understand the possible challenges Vanya herself would have gone through to establish herself as a disabled woman in tech industry. He is unable to consider that Vanya too has suffered exclusion in the able-centric world of Silicon Valley, and that it is perhaps her desire for inclusion in the mainstream that pushes her into the life-casting experiment. For Will, the relationship with Vanya is more like an anchor to tie himself to the world of the mainstream white America that he so desperately wishes to belong to, than based on any actual love. Through the character of Will, Tony Tulathimutte deftly portrays the historical anxieties and insecurities of an Asian man in America, who is paradoxically rendered invisible and overtly visible at the same time due to his physical appearance – invisible in a political, legal and cultural representational sense, while being overtly visible as an object of stereotypes, jokes, racial violence and parody by the mainstream culture. Will is conscious of the decades of differential surveillance and monitoring that the Asian community has faced in white America, and this historical anxiety, coupled with the personal anxiety of remaining in the perpetual watchful gaze of the mainstream white audience, are what push him to violent behaviour as well as the eyelid surgery which ultimately leads to him losing his eyes themselves from infection.

Both published in 2016, these two fictional narratives by two transcultural Asian-American authors represent a microcosm of the contemporary globalized world, where the apprehensions of the alienated immigrant are aggravated with the proliferation of technology-aided surveillance mechanisms. The characters Jenny and Sai from “The Perfect Match” and Will from *Private Citizens* represent these apprehensive immigrants in a supposedly multicultural America, who cannot truly belong in the 'land of the free' unless they give themselves up into the melting pot. Their preoccupations with the gaze and surveillance are clearly linked with their racial history of being tracked and monitored – be it Jenny's past experience of institutional surveillance in her homeland or Will's lingering consciousness and anxiety of being judged and stereotyped because of his racial identity. The bleak endings of both narratives seem to suggest that there is hardly an escape in sight from the predicament of the surveillance gaze, especially with fast-developing surveillance technologies continuing to ensnare more and more of the world's population into the panopticon. In the contemporary world wherein reports of racial violence against minorities have intensified, the situation of the racialized minority citizen continues to remain precarious especially in the present post-pandemic context wherein surveillance of ordinary individuals has become the norm and almost legitimized.

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## **“Dear is this love of identity” – Exploring Identity through the Gorkhaland Movement and Indra Bahadur Rai's *There's a Carnival Today***

### **Abstract**

*The paper explores certain aspects of the Indian-Nepali identity, which are central to the Gorkhaland movement, as can be located through a study of Indra Bahadur Rai's novel *There's a Carnival Today*. It will look into the history of the struggle of the people to assert their right to liberty within the Indian State and a self-contained sense of identity – opposing the perceived cultural and political displacement which lies at the heart of the Gorkhaland movement and the discontentment of the people of the Darjeeling hills. The novel *There's A Carnival Today* delves deeply into the history of the Indian-Nepali community as well as their socio-cultural and political standing in India. References shall also be made to other works of fiction and non-fiction to succinctly provide a brief history of the Gorkhaland Movement – the key reasons in its birth, its rise in prominence towards the end of the 1980s as well as the current state of the movement amongst the Indian-Nepali community in the face of contemporary resurgence.*

**Keywords :** Liberty and Literature, Liberty Politics and Power, Gorkhaland Movement, Nepali Literature, Identity

“Someone really ought to have written a novel about the old Darjeeling” (Rai 155) quips the aging Janak, the stalwart protagonist of Indra Bahadur Rai's seminal Nepali novel *There's a Carnival Today*. Rai had written the book in the 1950s before it was finally published in 1964 and it reflects the time incredibly accurately – one may almost feel the mellow wistfulness of the characters if one is well acquainted with the streets upon which they walk. Darjeeling, where the novel is based, may have changed drastically in the intervening years yet there is much which remains very much the same. Indeed, this characteristic ability to reflect themes and ideas which echo through decades of Darjeeling's past right up to its present is the hallmark of much of Rai's body of work. His influence on Nepali literature is immense, not only as one of the finest exponents of Nepali prose but also through being a founding member of the *Tesro Ayam* or 'Third Dimension' movement which employed Modernist techniques to bring about an evolution in Nepali writing as a whole. Apart from his musings on the nature of literature, the lives of the Nepalis of Darjeeling would provide the theme for much of his writings. In this regard, this paper will discuss the prominent themes in his most celebrated work with particular reference to the ideas of identity and belonging.

## 1.1 The Gorkhaland Agitation

In order to understand the struggle to strongly assert the idea of self which has been a central aspect in the lives of the people Rai wrote about, it is necessary to briefly discuss the idea of Gorkhaland and the Agitation for it. Gorkhaland has been a vociferous demand throughout the Darjeeling hills –the political strife which has sporadically burst into life through the means of violent protest, civil disobedience and clashes between the common folk i.e. protestors and the law enforcement agents of the government has largely dictated the manner in which this small hill station ensconced in the Northern part of the state of West Bengal has carried out its day-to-day affairs. Many of the scars which the Nepali speaking/ Gorkha community in India bear are deeply entrenched in the idea that they have been consistently marginalized, a deep-seated anxiety which has taken root in times predating even the nation's own independence. This has also translated into a state of ambiguousness towards the Indian state – hence the agitation over a separate territory which the Nepali community may call their own and thus adjust their fears by investing the proposed area with all the traditional markers of their unique culture and heritage, establishing a space of one's own.

Vimal Khawas observes that nationality is an issue which the Nepali speaking populace of India have been facing for some generations now (Khawas 176). Indeed, one of the major objectives of the Gorkhaland Agitation movement of the 1980s led by the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) under the leadership of Subhash Ghising was to find a solution to this problem. Amongst the primary demands of the GNLF were a separate state of Gorkhaland within the Indian Union and the inclusion of the Gorkha language in the Eight Schedule of the Constitution (ibid). Apart from this, there was a demand for the abrogation of Article 7 of the Indo-Nepal treaty of 1950. This provides citizens of the nation of Nepal to freely cross over into India, reside, own property and even conduct commerce, which the GNLF alleged had jeopardised the position of Indian Nepalis - they were often mistaken for citizens of Nepal and consequently faced eviction or harassment. To stress the distinction between the Indian Nepalis and Nepalese of Nepal the term 'Gorkha' and 'Gorkha Bhasha' were increasingly used in place of Nepali and Nepali language respectively (ibid). The proponents of the agitation actively began to employ the term 'Gorkha' simply to differentiate themselves with their foreign counterparts and avoid any confusion or subsequent negative connotations.

The Government of India eventually acquiesced in the matter of the language issues and included Nepali along with Manipuri and Konkani languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India in 1992, which went a long way in gaining some relief for Indian-Nepalis in reassuring the community's sense of belonging within the rich diversity of India. However, most of the demands of the separatist movement of the 1980s have never been close to being met. While the movement served a purpose in bringing the issue of Darjeeling to the mainstream, the unease and lack of understanding between the residents of the region and their perceived persecutors remained and arguably festered

over time. Khawas claims that while some scholars argue for the need to rewrite the history of Indian Nepalis in order to clear misconceptions recorded in the larger public consciousness, there are other pertinent matters to be dealt with – the challenge ahead is to re-conceptualize the very concept of community representation and the institutional arrangements often envisioned with reference to the region and the people therein (Khawas 181).

Michel Foucault explains the concept of 'heterotopias' as “places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable”. They are “counter-sites” (Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 178) that are at once located and dislocated, real and unreal, composites of material and metaphorical space. The heterotopia “has the ability to juxtapose in a single real place several emplacements that are the politics and poetics of space incompatible in themselves” (181). Foucault uses the example of a ship as the perfect representation of this concept – “a piece of floating space, a placeless place” (184-85). The phrase “located and dislocated” is intriguingly close to how one would describe the situation of Gorkhaland. The proposed state is simply that – a proposal which, despite years of demand and the creation of several other states within India based on similar demands of historical, cultural, linguistic and anthropological differences, is yet to be realised through any form of political nor bureaucratic sanction. And yet, upon conversing with the people of Darjeeling or even upon entering the district of Darjeeling where one is greeted by signs declaring 'Welcome to Gorkhaland' at the point where the jurisdiction of Siliguri ends, one might be led to believe that Gorkhaland is either a living reality or one that is very much on the verge of coming into existence. Even the name of the semi-autonomous administrative body for the region – the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration - indicates a deep irony. The West Bengal government has recognised the area known as 'Gorkhaland' but has actively sought to prevent the formation of the same. It remains, in a sense, “a placeless place”. It is thus only fitting that this sense of dislocation and the desire for belonging are at the very core of *There's a Carnival Today*.

### **1.2 *There's a Carnival Today* and the assertion of identity**

The 2017 publication of the Indra Bahadur Rai's only novel features translation into English by the noted Nepali author Manjushree Thapa. She is keenly aware of Rai's standing as a stalwart in Nepali literature as one of the cynosures for the '*Tesro Ayam*' movement which brought abstract modernist aesthetics and daunting non-narrative features to the field, often alienating most readers. By contrast, she observes that *There's a Carnival Today* is entirely approachable thanks to the “keen intelligence to the art of storytelling” which Rai brings to his observations of life and land. It is to be noted that much of that accessibility is maintained by Thapa through her meticulous translation and her desire to accurately reflect the period of the novel both in terms of local idiosyncrasies in speech and place as well as references to obscurities in order to maintain the integrity of the original text. The period which Rai writes of was gripped in the turmoil of a small town gripped with the task of coming to terms with harsh reality in the wake of the glory

of Independence. It reflects the struggle to assert a distinct political ideology with the rise of the unions reflected keenly in the plight of the tea gardens which is a key point in the progress of the plot. The author masterfully encapsulates the strangeness of being displaced – Darjeeling was a region unsure of its place in the new Republic of India. There remained a scepticism of the new administration as well as the excitement of the dawn of an era:

... his [Janak's] mother would say, “How could the British ever quit a Raj so grand? That's just people talking.... The British made all these cities, roads, buildings; how could they just stop caring and leave?”

One day, fifteen or sixteen summers later, after a huge struggle, India became independent... Millions of joyful banners were going to flutter from each house all over India the following day.

“Janak, is our country really free, then?”

“That's what they say”. Janak had changed.

“Thank the Lord! My life has proven meaningful,” his mother said. (Rai 4-5)

As fascinating as it is as a study of character and period, it is ultimately the use of space which Rai employs that brings out the real essence of the novel. The characters inhabit a world that seems only to keen to reflect their inner states of being, and each description that fills the book is designed to evoke not simply a vivid image of buildings and sites as we continue to read but in actual fact also convey the meaning and significance of the very corners where the characters choose to stand, converse, lament.

Rob Shields describes certain towns and regions which have been 'left behind' in the race for progress in the modern world as marginal places (Shields 1). Such regions often evoke a deep fascination due to the narratives that are associated with them – “being the Other to a great cultural centre” (ibid). They are not necessarily geographical peripheries but have been placed “on the periphery of cultural systems of space, in which places are ranked relative to each other” and carry the images and stigma of their marginality. This discourse of centres and narratives can easily be traced in terms of the Darjeeling that Rai portrays in his novel and the differences between the town that is emerging and coming to grips with the advent of the modern age and the tea garden and rural community which are its foundations. The tea gardens, an inimitable part of the identity of Darjeeling, perhaps is most symbolic as the most prominent keystone of cultural shifts. What once was perhaps the central lifeblood of the entire community now finds itself not only in turmoil but perhaps facing the anxiety of a post-colonial subalternity; they are distrustful of even their own fellow natives for having received the benefits of modern urbanity – they feel exploited by those who they would once have perceived as kin. This idea of marginality is of course worked upon on an entirely different level once the perspective shifts from the microcosm of Darjeeling to the larger canvas of the region of Darjeeling and how it stands in comparison to the rest of the Indian mainland.

The people of Darjeeling have historically maintained their distinctive identity by referring to how the region they inhabit has never truly been integrated with the state of West Bengal which holds all of the administrative authority. The entire movement for the separate state of Gorkhaland is predicated on the notion of the cultural disparity and the distrust of the discourse which has always placed the region as an 'Other' – this may be reflected in the description of Nepal, which Darjeeling has always felt a closer kinship with:

Janak and his relatives, who were Indian, were thrilled to be stepping on Nepali soil for the first time, brimming with the anticipation of the folksong... the hills seemed to vanish into the clouds high up in the sky as the haze lifted in the evening... Janak had seen pictures of Sailung's pastures and the misty villages below, pictures brought back by those who had been there. He believed that he'd go there someday and meet blood relations and see the ancestral homeland of the Yonzons ... It was maybe the unfulfilled desire to go there that gave Janak's life such delicious dissatisfaction. (Rai 15)

This delicious dissatisfaction has great significance when viewed through the lens of the separatist movement – it typifies the general feeling towards the idea of Gorkhaland which many of the natives possess.

Miriam Wenner has analysed the idea of Gorkhaland in terms of an imaginative geography – she focused her research on the manner in which territory takes precedence over ideas of community or race with respect to this particular movement and how certain factors have been emphasised to mobilize the movement to the extent that the Indian-Nepali community of the Darjeeling region have already appropriated the geospace of a territory which is yet to come into existence and are willing to sacrifice their lives for it. Interestingly, Wenner references the words of H.B. Chettri of the ruling Gorkha Janmukti Morcha party brings a direct relation between the body and the land through his assertive statement – “Everything that Darjeeling is today is the blood and sweat of our ancestors; it is not some Banerjee or Chatterjee who created Darjeeling” (Wenner 118). It is fascinating to note how deeply entrenched the firm notion of distinction from the mainland from which the local subject has always felt a sense of prejudice and exclusion and the notion that language could form the keen sense of community prevalent even to this day. The emotional bond between people and place is exploited to create the notion of a space invested with great meaning, once more borne out by the character of Janak whose words effectively spell out the entire ideology behind a movement –

Darjeeling is ours and we are Darjeeling's. All the houses and shops in the four square miles of town, the tea plantations beyond that, and all these lands and trees, they may have once belonged to Bardhaman or Cooch Behar, and now they belong to the government or maybe the



Bengalis and Marwaris will buy them and make it theirs; and yet Darjeeling is ours ... It can't be anyone else's. Whoever this soil gives to, that place is theirs, the rest can only live here in hope' ... 'countless Nepalis carried loads on their foreheads, broke their backs, fell ill and died during the construction of those buildings. It is they who made Darjeeling...' (Rai 170-71)

It is clear that Rai's novel carries in it the many aspirations and ideological sentiments which the community of Darjeeling still carry to this day. Despite being written several decades ago, the novel and its situation seems to reflect largely the same issues which is even borne out by the translator's note which makes a reference to the recent troubles involving civil disobedience and violent unrest that marred the region as recently as 2017. As the late author himself notes in the brief preface to the original text he completed in 1958 – “There is no literature greater than reality... There is no literature greater than existence”.

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## The Mythicised Moustache : Caste and Body Politics in S. Hareesh's “Moustache”

### Abstract

*Growing a patch of hair on one's face is a seemingly personal everyday activity but such an act grows into mythical proportions as it was performed by Vavachan (a Dalit Christian fictional character) during a period when growing a moustache was mostly the privilege of upper caste men. Vavachan, the protagonist of the novel moustache, is a lower-caste man belonging to a fishing community in Kuttanad. He grows a spread-out moustache in order to play the role of a police man in a musical drama. Though the character was a minor one with no dialogues in the drama, his moustache terrifies the mostly upper caste audience as it revives in them the memories of Dalit power. This minor act of self-expression disrupts the rigid caste hierarchies of that time while emancipating Vavachan and he refuses to shave off his moustache that has become a symbol of identity and agency for him. Vavachan's Moustache becomes a metaphor of Dalit self-assertion that distinguished him from the other marginalised people of his community. Vavachan was accused of theft and haunted both by his upper caste opponents and by the agencies of the state(police). He becomes a dreaded imaginary threat to the community as his moustache becomes an emblem of resistance against the existing caste hierarchies. As he grows his moustache, he was simultaneously mythicised by the people through the discourses of folk songs, stories and gossips.*

*Bodies are invested with meanings and they act as the site core of identity and political power. In Moustache, Vavachan's caste body (moustache) becomes a site of power struggle where the active marginalized subject refuses to submit itself to the oppressive feudal caste mechanisms. This paper proposes to critically explore the politics of the body that asserts its caste agency by refusing to either be caught or be defeated by the oppressive system. The prevalent caste structures of Kerala society at that period of time (more than half a century ago) considered the Dalit body as an inferior entity, but Vavachan defies this oppressive societal authority. This paper also proposes that the mythification of Vavachan was a defence response/mechanism from the upper caste people who failed either to destroy Vavachan's moustache or to comprehend/ cope with the disrupting reality of his resistance.*

**Keywords :** Caste, Body Politics, Dalit, Resistance

Growing a patch of hair on one's face is a seemingly personal everyday activity, but such an act grows into mythical proportions as it was performed by Vavachan (a Dalit Christian fictional character) during a period when his people are traditionally banned from growing moustaches. Vavachan is the protagonist of the novel *Meesha* (2018) by S.Hareesh which was originally published in Malayalam and the translated into English by Jayasree Kalathil. Vavachan belongs to the Pulaya community, which was considered as lower caste in the feudal Hindu caste hierarchy and he accidentally gets a chance to perform the role of a police man in a regional musical drama because of his moustache. Though the police man was a minor character with no scope for delivering lengthy dialogues, the very presence of the moustached Dalit man on the stage revives the memories of Dalit power in the mostly upper caste audience and they were terrified.

On the one hand, this minor act of self-expression threatens the hierarchy of the caste privileges and creates anxiety in the upper caste audience and on the other hand Vavachan started feeling empowered through the new visibility and refuses to shave off his moustache. Vavachan becomes the moustache and the moustache becomes his identity. Vavachan's Moustache becomes a metaphor of Dalit self-assertion that distinguished him from the other marginalised people of his community. Vavachan was accused of theft and haunted both by his upper caste opponents and by the agencies of the state(police). He becomes a dreaded imaginary threat to the community as his moustache becomes an emblem of resistance against the existing caste hierarchies. As he grows his moustache, he was simultaneously mythicised by the people through the discourses of folk songs, stories and gossips. Throughout the course of the narrative their search for Vavachan continues and he was not found out either the local men or by police men. Vavachan's life was inflicted by multiple forms of caste violence – his home ruined, family scattered, father got killed, his woman gang raped and he was forced to live a life of invisibility.

Bodies are invested with meanings and they act as the core of identity and political power. In *Moustache*, Vavachan's caste body (moustache) becomes a site of power struggle where the active marginalized subject refuses to submit itself to the oppressive feudal caste mechanisms. Nadia Brown and Sarah Allen Gerson (2017) observe that the subjection of body to systemic regimes as a method to ensure that those bodies do behave in a socially and politically accepted manners. In *Moustache*, Vavachan's is consciously transgressing the existing social and political boundaries. What happens when the subaltern subject asserts its agency by transgressing the prevalent caste order of the community that considered the Dalit body as an inferior hence controllable by them? This paper ventures to address this question and propose to explore the politics of the caste body that refuses to be defeated by the oppressive caste system and it will also explore how the prevailing ideologies of that period (more than half a century ago) respond to the caste body that transgress the set normative boundaries. This paper proposes that the mythification of Vavachan was a defence response/mechanism from the upper caste people who failed either to destroy Vavachan's moustache or to comprehend/ cope with

the disrupting reality of his resistance. Even the mythification of the moustache set itself free from the clutches of dominant ideologies to create a plethora of diverse significations.

Karl Max theorised that the human body was marked with the person's economic class and he also argued that this demarcation affects the individual's experience. Michael Foucault (1977) argued that the human body has been historically disciplined and it is a central point for analysing the shape of power. The human body itself is politically inscribed and is shaped by practices of containment and control. The human body becomes a site for the negotiation of power between the individual's autonomy and the society in which s/he lives in. The power at play may include institutional power structures (like government and laws), disciplinary power exacted in economic production discretionary power exercised in consumption, and personal power negotiated in intimate relations.

Body politics is defined as the practices and policies through which powers of society regulate the human body, as well as the struggle over the degree of individual and social control of the body. *In Moustache*, both the upper caste people of the society and the institutional power structures including high ranking police and administrative officials are involved in this powerplay and they try to impose their oppressive control over Vavachan who belongs to the marginalized section of the society. Vavachan's body was marked as inferior and hence expected to be submitted to the power of the upper caste society however his act of resistance and defiance both disrupts and challenges the existing dominant ideologies of the society. Vavachan's caste location was used as the rationale for denying him the right control his own body by growing a moustache. Vavachan's caste body becomes a site of power negotiations and a critical inquiry into this fictional representation gives us an opportunity to examine the fluidity of privilege and marginalization.

### **A Moustache that Disrupts the Caste Pride: The Politics of the Facial Hair**

Moustache in the Indian society is not just a fashion statement of men but it has some deep-rooted associations with caste too. Who can sport a moustache has been a question that yielded an answer based on the person's caste location. In 2017, some Dalit youths of Gujarat were attacked by upper caste men for sporting a moustache. The rationale behind this attack was that moustache was a traditional privilege of upper caste men. This discriminatory act of violence was condemned by the Dalit people of India by posting “moustache selfies” on the social media. Vavachan lived in Kuttanad more than half a century ago and his spread-out moustache becomes the centre of power negotiations. Moustache is a very political novel that depicts the multi-layered manifestations of caste and body politics.

The novel is set in Kuttanad, a below-sea-level farming region on the South -West coast of Kerala in the first half of the 20th century and it narrates the subversive history of

the land and its people. Kuttanad which comprised of three districts in Southern Kerala was ruled by Thiruvithamkur princely kingdoms that accepted British supremacy and submitted to their authority. Fishing and farming were the major occupation of the people in the area and lower caste people like Pulayans were mostly engaged in agriculture. Caste was a major signifier of worth and dignity in Kerala at that point of time though the traditional social and cultural milieu was transformed by factors like missionary activities, English education and social reforms. The author comments about the social and political implications of caste in his preface to the book as,

... at the time period covered in the story, the impact of caste on everyday life was felt even more acutely. It controlled every aspect of people's lives-- the jobs they did, the cloths they wore, the food they ate and who they ate with, how they socialised, who they touched, who they married or had sexual relationships with, the rituals of marriage, birth and death, what and how they worshipped, the type of housing they lived in, etc. Caste rules disallowed people of lower castes from being physically seen by people at the top of the caste hierarchy, and specified the distance of people of one caste had to maintain from people of other castes... (P 6)

Vavachan was a converted Pulayan but he is never shown as associated with church and his caste status remained as that of a Pulaya. Traditional Hindu ideologies based on Varnashrama dharma imposed many social disabilities upon the Pulayans who were placed at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. The concept of purity and pollution was central to the caste structure and Pulayans were treated as untouchables. There were many restrictions on wearing upper garments and jewellery and they were not allowed to enter into public roads. Though they were agricultural labourers they had no rights to own property. Further, the body of Pulaya men and women were treated as if they were the property of the upper caste people for whom they toiled as agricultural labourers. Violence inflicted upon the Dalit bodies are narrated in *Moustache* Vavachan's family was destroyed and his hut was destroyed by the upper caste people.

Vavachan grows up in an impoverished environment as one of the six children's of Pavian and Chella. As he has a moustache, he was chosen to play a minor police character in the play *Kudiyam* authored and directed by Ramanujan Ezhuthachan who hailed from Malabar. Ezhuthachan finds it hard to find a man with a moustache and Damodaran explains the reason for this as:

it's not banned or anything, but people here generally don't have moustaches. The maharajas of Thiruvithamkur used to have them. Marthanda Varma and Rama Varma had great big imperial moustaches. And the prime ministers- the Dalawas-like Raja Kesavadasan and Velu Thambi, also grew them. So, people copied

them, especially the upper caste Nairs. Then Maharaja Swathi Thirunal shaved off his moustache. Some say he did it because he was depressed from having to deal with the British. Or maybe he thought a moustache was not something that was appropriate for an artist like himself. The kings who came after also had no moustaches; the current king doesn't have one either. So now the Dalawas, other officials and the Nairs have also stopped growing them (P 48)

Moustache was associated with power in Thiruvithamkur history and since the King and upper caste men stopped growing moustache that has become a norm in the society. That's why Vavachan's moustache creates an uproar in the society. Even after finding Vavachan who has a spread-out moustache, Barber Govindan refuses to trim the moustache of a Pulayan and hence Pathrose Pulayan was brought to do the trimming. The play was performed in Neendoor in front of a mostly upper caste audience and the performance of Vavachan (mostly grunts, piercing looks and angry roars) evokes "terror and tremor" in them. Even Damodaran who casted Vavachan for the role of the policeman felt a fear inside his mind. His appearance was described as " his naked shins glistened like ebony wood that had been soaked in water and debarked. No one dared look at his face with its bloodshot eyes. It cast ten shadows in the confused light of the numerous lamps hung around the stage, giving him the appearance of Ravana, the ten headed king of Lanka." (P 51). Their irrational fear of the suppressed Dalit power made them fled the venue of performance.

The accidental opportunity to his own power transformed Vavachan and he identified himself with the moustache from then on. He refused to shave off the moustache that gave him a new visibility in the community. The moustache added an element of mystery to his face and Vavachan felt no need to communicate with the world except through his moustache. This single act of resistance was the source of numerous imaginary stories about his strength and defiance which was orally transmitted in the community. Though there was no evidence to his misdeeds, because of his caste identity and skin colour he was referred as makkan, mad elephant and as a black spirit.

The upper caste men threatened by the newly recognized power of Vavachan started searching for Vavachan after falsely accusing him of many criminal activities. One specific reason that catalysed their anxiety was an incident in which the landlord Keshava Pillah was frightened by seeing the shadow of Vavachan. They young Nair men were avenging the disgrace they had suffered indirectly through what happened to Keshava Pillah. Their real anxieties are revealed during their discussion, " Still, we have to teach him a lesson. The Pulayans are getting to brazen. The other day, one of their women sat down to take a piss in the middle of the paddy. I gave her a good kick right on her belly"(P62) From then on, they were finding justifications for the future violent acts they were going to inflict upon the Dalit community. They have beaten down men, exploited

women and destroyed their property. They avoided confronting Moustache because of fear but boasted about their adventure at night as :

They sat in a circle in a patch where the clay had dried, and began to discuss the day's adventures. Even in the dark, their faces glowed with a sense of pride in having accomplished a valiant deed in service of their community and society, and their words reflected the confidence that their achievement would be remembered and celebrated for a long time, perhaps even by their progeny (P 62).

As the first phase of search fails, the upper caste anxieties about Vavachan resulted in new coalitions between the land-owning people of the area such as Keshava Pillah, Matha Mappila who decided to join hands to capture Vavachan. Their discussions reveal the suppressed anxieties about Dalit power through comments about the great grandfather of Vavachan whom they described as a shapeshifter and as a practitioner of Blackmagic.

The institutions of government and law also joins hand with the upper caste/class people to hunt down the innocent Vavachan. Pravathyar Shankunni Menon, who was not sure about the accusations raised against Vavachan, submits an emergency report to Tehsildar in order to save his face. The report goes on like this :

It is known that contrary to the customs of the land and in a manner unsuitable to the hereditary work of Pulayans this man has established a great big moustache on his face. Personal enquiries have verified this fact and also the states of affairs that is discouraging women and children even from undertaking their daily ablutions because of this man's untimely comings and goings through public paths and compounds/ On the nineteenth of last month the priest of Arpookara Subrahmanian temple on his ways to begin the devotions at four in the morning carrying a vessel full of water was caused to faint near Villunni from the terror of seeing a shape that may have been the Pulayan-Christian referred to herein thereby causing displeasure to the God and dstress to the People.(P 66)

This report accuses him of “unlawful activities” without any evidence about his deeds and he was even blamed for disturbing religious ceremonies where as the real Vavachan spent all his time in wilderness to protect his life from the upper caste men who were searching for him.

Another important individual to act against Vavachan was Pallithanam Luca Mathai, a member of the Sree Moolam Praja Sahba. Though Luca Mathai(who brought social reformer Ayyankali to his house as a “great show of pomp and splendour”) was openly supportive of Pulayans, he also belongs to the Pallithanam family that owned

many acres of Paddy fields in Kuttanadu. Hence, he shared the sentiments of the landed people than that of the landless people. His speech in the Popular Assembly goes like this,

....but because of a man with a moustache. I have no idea where he is from, or what caste he is. It is unlikely that he's from the lands so ably ruled by His Majesty. I am concerned that there is a gang of people with him, armed with knives and guns. Or else, how would he be so brazen? I beg you to please do the needful so that we can farm without fear in this time of famine, harvest our yields and take them home."(P 154)

As a result of these administrative and political pressure to arrest Vavachan, special Inspector Thanulinga Nadar was appointed to arrest Vavachan. The state machinery also collaborates with the upper caste ideologies and employs police force to find Vavachan. Both the state machinery and the caste machinery fail to capture Vavachan as he tries hard to escape the reality of poverty and violence by escaping to his dreamland Malaya. He never gets any proper employment because of his moustache and he lives hiding in the wilderness of Kuttanadu. He is trapped to live invisibly in the land and he was stuck to his reality. Vavachan is an active subject who confound the dominant discourses of the society from a marginal position by opposing the prevailing ideologies. When the feudal caste system has inscribed a set meaning to the caste body of the Dalit Pulayan, he refuses to stick to the pre-given caste subjectivity and his defiance threatens the caste privilege of the society and as they could not come into terms with the reality of the caste body that acts on its own terms and they make a myth out of Vavachan and the myth lives a life of its own.

### **The Mythicised Moustache and it's Diverse Universe**

As the institutions and upper caste people fail to capture Vavachan after searching for a long time, he was turned into a myth by the upper caste society who find it hard to understand the reality of the politics of the caste body. From the very day he refused to shave off his moustache, stories about him started germinating from different people and all these stories were built around the fear the audience felt when they witnessed the performance of Moustache on stage. This section will closely analyse how does the transgressing individual is mythicized by the upper caste men who failed to tame him and in turn, how does this myth take a life of its own through folk songs, stories and gossips.

The folksongs presented a mixture of reality and imagination and the living person Moustache was turned into a myth which has a larger than life significance. Some facts from his life like his association with Seetha are represented through the songs. In the songs, Moustache comes in multiple forms, from different castes (Vaalan, Parayan or Chovan) and from different places around Neendoor. Some songs portrayed his strength and bravery where as other songs made fun of him. Some song portrayed him as a



desirable male figure where as some other portrayed him as a shapeshifter. One song goes like this:

Here he comes  
Moustache of Kaipuzha  
He's a bull that defies the plough  
Hopping over hills he comes  
Striding through yards  
His moustache brushes the rainclouds  
His arms fondle the earth  
Behold his moustache, here he comes  
Like a swarm of birds' dark against the sky (P 229)

The moustache becomes some magical element that holds mysterious powers and it embodies the Dalit power. Vavachan grows as a legend which has nothing to do with the reality of Vavachan who is an ordinary youth in his twenties, he becomes a spectacle when he returns from hiding. The boatman who has come to drop Vavachan wants to touch his moustache and he says, " Is it true that women can't control themselves when they see you? Can you really dig a well with your bare hands in rocky, barren soil? That's what folks are saying about you." (P 137). In reality Vavachan was driven away from the normality of everyday life and he could not even find his woman Seetha. What people saw in him was not his reality instead they saw the mythicized moustache. In one interesting scene, as he reaches Kumarakom to meet Avarachan women and children are looking at Vavachan the hero of their songs, "but like everyone else, they too did not see Vavachan, only his moustache." (P 251) The same scene repeats when he got to the River of Pamba to realize that "he was not as scary as they imagined".

There are only three characters in the narrative who could see through the reality-myth binary : Seetha, Avarachan and Pachu Pillah. Seetha was fearless when she encountered Moustache the description goes like this, "Seetha saw, clearly, the shiny, shapely, impossibly thick moustache with its ends tapering to a point, and the grains of good quality Kochathikkurali rice stuck in it along with droplets of rice water." (P 113) Even when Moustache finds her for a second time she is fighting with him and is not afraid of him. Avarachan was familiar with the myth of Vavachan but as a nonconformist and rational person he questions the gap between the myth and reality of Vavachan. He asks, " Looking at you, you don't seem that old. But the songs...They make you seem about a hundred and fifty years old." (P 257) Pachupillah was another person who was well aware of the popularity and constructed nature of the folk songs and the implications of the Moustache myth. Though he was a self-made wealthy man, he has no fame hence he

insinuated himself into the songs as the helper and guru of Vavachan with the help of folk singer Panakkan and his wife.

The mythicized moustache was invented and reinvented through multiple oral narratives and Vavachan was turned into a larger than life figure in the process. The myth which stemmed from the “terror and tremor” among the upper caste audience evolves through popular imagination and the myth manifests in multifarious forms and like Vavachan it also defies the prevailing dominant narrative.

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## Period Shame: Dismantling the Stigmatised Discourse on Menstruation

### Abstract

*The paper titled “Period Shame: Dismantling the Stigmatised Discourse on Menstruation” focuses on the realistic challenges faced by menstruators. The primitive men's fear of menstrual blood is greater than their fear of death, dishonour, or dismemberment. The measures he has taken to avoid this 'mysterious' substance have affected his mealtimes and his bedtimes. While the menstruating woman was 'taught' to feel helpless because she was unable to separate herself from her blood, she was fed with the idea that she needs to be dependent upon society for her safety as well as the safety of the entire society. The taboos as taboos were reinforced by men, who connected this 'mysterious' phenomenon with the cycles of the moon, the seasons, the rhythm of the tides and so on. Thus, the patriarchal world tended to make the menstruation phenomenon appear something dreadful and disgraceful. As a result, in primitive societies, the menstruating woman is excluded from the most ordinary life for four or five days every month. They were restricted from many ordinary activities whereby they were unable to plant, harvest, cook, associate with her husband, or wander freely around the village, instead, they were sent to menstrual huts. It is strange that the vestiges of these undesirable practices still persist in modern times. In this modern era, though one feels that these taboos have been eliminated from the society, in reality, they do, very frequently in the form of 'period shame.' One gets to see the period shame subtly in the representation of menstruation in the visual media such as advertisements and social media like Instagram. These representations were strongly criticised by women such as Rupri Kaur, Instapoet and Kiran Gandhi, renowned musician. Following these incidents, many menstrual movements and period activism began across the world.*

**Keywords :** Advertisements, Menstrual Movements, Menstruation, Menstruators, Period Activism, Period Shame, Social Media, Taboos.

Menstruation is a phenomenon unique to menstruators. However, it has always been surrounded by taboos and myths that exclude menstruators from many aspects of socio-cultural life even today. Indeed, that is the reason why we still have issues like Sabarimala, where activists have to fight to strike down a ban on women of menstruating age from entering the temple because they were perceived as impure during menstruation. Recently a shocking incident took place in a hostel in the western Indian state of Gujarat where college students were made to strip and show their innerwear to

female teachers to prove that they were not menstruating. The sixty-eight young women were pulled out of classrooms and taken to the toilet, where they were asked to individually remove their knickers for inspection (Pandey “Period-shaming”). This incident clearly establishes the fact that the discrimination against women on account of menstruation is widespread in India, where periods have long been a taboo and menstruating women are considered impure. They are often excluded from social and religious events, denied entry into temples and shrines, and kept out of kitchens. Increasingly, educated women have been challenging these regressive ideas. In the past few years, attempts have been made to see periods for just what they are—a natural biological function.

From a holistic viewpoint, the topic is still a taboo. Such taboos about menstruation in many societies impact girls' and women's health, lifestyle, and most importantly, mental state. The challenge of addressing these cultural myths and taboos about menstruation is compounded by the low level of awareness and understanding of puberty, menstruation, and reproductive health among men and women in society. It is evident that the menstrual taboo is entwined with misogyny and patriarchy.

One of the biggest menstruation-related taboos is that it is still perceived as unclean or embarrassing. Even now most of the people comprehend 'periods' or 'menstruation' as nothing more than a source of inconvenience and embarrassment and the mention of menstruation whether in public (in the social media and advertising) or in private (among friends, or one's intimate ones, or with men) is inhibiting. The paper aims to discuss early menstruation-related cultural myths and taboos and scientific narratives prevalent in the world and their impact on women's lives through a detailed analysis of the book *Heavy Flow: Breaking the Curse of Menstruation* written by Amanda Laird.

In her comprehensive study *Heavy Flow*, Amanda Laird discusses a wide spectrum of issues related to the menstrual cycle, with topics ranging from political relevance to practical physiology and nutritional support for people who menstruate. Laird points out that the menstrual cycle is the fifth vital sign that functions as a barometer of health and wellness which is as telling as one's pulse or blood pressure. But there is a 'general notion' given to periods as 'Bad periods.' Meghan Cleary, the founder of the website Bad-periods.com used the term 'bad periods' to define as a “condition enshrined in mystery, myth, cultural shame, taboo, and clinical gender bias” (Wing). She remarked that even in this 21st century, menstruation is looked upon as 'something bad' and tagged as a taboo in society. Despite all the advances made by the human species, menstruation is something that remains a relative mystery for many humans. One among many misconceptions that paved the way for the creation of taboos in society, is that while all other mammals in the world reabsorb the lining of the uterus, the female human being menstruates. This remained a relative mystery since the primitive men.

Though one feels that there are no menstruation-related taboos in the society anymore,

in reality, it does and very frequently in the form of 'period shame'. In her book *Heavy Flow*, Laird says, "We live in a culture that seems to have no taboos left, yet periods shame persists. In a world where the minutiae of our lives are live-tweeted, posted on Instagram and enshrined online, we wouldn't dare update our status to menstruating" (12). She adds that to avoid the risk of shame of having their menstruation exposed, many of the girls and women stay home from school and workplace.

In her research, Laird discovered that the menstrual cycle is a vital sign, both as a promoter and indicator of good health. Until then she had been presented with the idea that period pain is not normal by society. She argues that the impact of the menstrual taboo is entwined with feminism, patriarchy, and gender constructs. She also reveals that talk about menstruation is like a sister to a conversation around hormonal birth control; cousin to female sexuality, fertility, pregnancy, and abortion. Through her book *Heavy Flow*, Laird proposes to break the curse by unpacking the centuries of shame and taboo that have kept menstruation a mystery to both menstruators and medical professionals as the first step.

Laird discusses some of the earliest menstruation-related cultural myths and taboos in her book *Heavy Flow*. The earliest writings about menstruation depicted it as a mysterious or strange and at times magical, bodily function: something that differentiates females from a male. Women bleed surprisingly that they do not die from menstrual bleeding; they do again about a moon's cycle later. Primitive men probably noticed that bleeding stopped with pregnancy. Menstruation's connection with creation meant that it was powerful; maybe even divine, ensuring that it was met with both fear and reverence. Laird says:

By 77AD, Pliny the Elder, a Roman author, and naval commander, had this to say about menstruation in his thirty-seven-volume tome *Natural History* that contact with the monthly flux of women turns new wine sour, crops touched by it becomes barren, rats die, seeds in gardens are dried up, the fruits of trees fall off, the edge of steel and the gleam of ivory are dulled, hives of bees die, even bronze and iron are at once seized by rust, and a horrible smell fills the air; to taste it drives dogs mad and insects their bites with an incurable poison. At the same time, Pliny also wrote that the antidote to crop failure was to have a menstruating woman walk naked through the field, given that menstrual blood had fertilizing properties. (18)

These contrary viewpoints that existed in ancient times highlight the paradox of menstrual blood as venomous or sacred and as possessing the property to create or destroy. This paved the way for the 'widely accepted' notion that menstrual blood is impure and dirty. Much of the fear and mysticism that has surrounded menstruation for ages is the result of the limited knowledge of how the body works. In Pliny's era, as cited

in *Heavy Flow*, not much was known about the complexities of organisms, not just female bodies and menstruation.

Laird discusses the early scientific narratives too. The menstrual blood was commonly believed to be noxious until the twentieth century, says Laird. In 1920, a Viennese researcher published a paper titled “The Menstrual Poison,” which elaborated several experiments that ‘proved’ that menstruation blood is toxic. They found that menstrual blood was menotoxins that could kill flowers and would inhibit the rising of bread dough. Similarly another experiment at Harvard University in 1952 brought an inference that menstrual blood contained harmful bacteria: mice injected with menstrual blood died, while those injected with a mix of menstrual blood and antibiotics did not. It is interesting to note that further studies were unable to replicate these findings. Based on a few experiments, even most famous universities concluded that menstrual blood was deadly but in reality, it is not so. Another misunderstanding regarding the purpose of menstruation was introduced by Margie Profet, a controversial evolutionary biologist, who published a paper in the *Quarterly Review of Biology* in 1993. It theorized that menstruation existed as a way to rid the female body of the disease brought in by the men's sperm. This theory found little support from experiments or the scientific community. Laird claims in her book that although all the theories associated with menstruation were later disproved or debunked, the notion that menstrual blood is dirty, poisonous, or toxic is still pervasive. People get surprised when they come to learn that menstrual blood is the ‘same’ as the blood in the rest of our bodies. While menstrual theories evolved throughout history, they had a common idea that menstruation is the sign of a woman's otherness and her inferiority. As medicine advanced, science was used to rationalize her oppression. Menstruation remained a mystery for so long because men did not menstruate.

Laird points out that when one hears ‘menstrual myths’ one tends to think about the various ways in which the menstrual taboo has been interpreted in other cultures around the world. For example, in parts of India, women are still barred from entering temples or from touching certain foods while on their period. In parts of Africa, many believe that it is dangerous for others to see a woman's menstruation blood. And in rural Nepal, many girls and women still have to sleep in menstrual huts.

In the west, Laird points out, one might be able to move about as one pleases during menstruation and no longer handing over discrete coupons in exchange for menstrual pads to avoid having to ask for them in a drugstore, but women in India are hardly liberated from period shame. Taboos may exist to protect human beings from danger. However, menstrual taboos exclude women from many aspects of socio-cultural life. Such taboos about the menstruation that persist in societies harm girl's and women's physical as well as mental state. Amanda Laird quotes the words of Janice Delancy et al to foreground the deleterious impact of persisting taboos on menstruation even in this 21st century.

Women continue to suffer the taboos of centuries. Law, medicine, religion, and psychology have isolated and devalued the menstruating women menstruation is a factor in the control of women by men not only in ancient and primitive societies, where knowledge of physiology is rudimentary at best but also in our post-industrial world. (*Heavy Flow* 21)

Menstruation is at once a political issue, a cultural issue, a class issue, a public health issue, and most importantly a social issue. It is underpinned by centuries of shame and taboo, fear and reverence, misunderstanding and symbolism and all these still exist. The technological and scientific advancements could not help in removing the conventional as well as orthodox practices and beliefs associated with menstruation. This chapter tries to explore the dark politics behind the subtle way of representing the menstruation in Indian television advertisements. It also brings under analyze the development of the menstrual movements such as #HappyToBleed social media campaign, the Red Cycle Movement and the Pad Project through various sensational incidents that took place in recent times including Rupri Kaur's Instagram post and Kiran Gandhi's marathon run that paved the way for the burgeoning of the latest genre known as “menstrual poetry” or “bleeding poetry.”

In her book *Heavy Flow*, Laird observes, “I need to hide; that if anyone saw the blood that had soaked through and stained my jeans, it would have been the ultimate embarrassing moment. Social suicide. Death by period stain”(15). The shame that is associated with menstruation subjugates women in many socio-cultural aspects of life. The content-makers of the advertisements use this 'shame' as a medium to propagate their ideologies so that they can make a profit. They indirectly make women feel that this 'shame' exists and they need to get rid of the shame by using these menstrual products.

Abbey Norman, the author of *Ask Me About My Uterus* remarks that even the worst enemy who was always mean to you, if she bled through her clothes you would tell her because that is considered to be the ultimate girl code as if this could be 'the worst thing' that can ever happen to somebody. It is this embarrassment that makes women tuck a tampon or pad in a newspaper on the way to the bathroom or buy the crinkle-free pad, a specially designed new tampon that would fit in the palm of your hand to ensure that it would not be seen on your way to the bathroom. Sanitary napkin companies make women opt for odour-free protection sanitary pads and condition them to talk about menstruation in euphemisms like 'it's that time of the month' or 'aunt flow is on her way', instead of just saying that 'I'm menstruating.'

Brene Brown, a renowned shame researcher and the author of several books on the subject, defines shame as “the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging: something we've experienced, done, or failed to do makes unworthy of connection” (Bluestein 89). When it comes to

menstrual shame, the thing that women have 'done' to make them unworthy is a perfectly natural bodily process. Shame is born from the idea that menstrual blood, and in turn menstruating bodies are gross, dirty, and disgusting.

If one can spend time with a young girl child, one can easily understand that shame is not something that is born with rather it is imposed upon by external influences such as social norms and structures. It is obvious that one is 'taught' to be ashamed of something like menstruation. A little girl moves about in this world as if it is truly her oyster particularly when she is naked. She is beautifully, wonderfully, free of any shame about her body or its functions because she has not yet learned to feel ashamed about them. There is nothing inherently shameful about menstruation. It is a perfectly normal, healthy function of the body. It is just the process that involves tissue mixed with blood and mucus, exiting in the body. The shame, along with the stigma and taboos of menstruation, is something that women learn from along the way, often before we have even reached menarche, the first menstruation. Girls learn about menstruation through the lens of advertising on TV, in magazines and social media where it is rarely presented in the right manner.

The women in menstruation-related television advertisements are mostly depicted as independent and freewheeling professional workers who go after their dreams even on the rough times like first-day periods. The content creators portray the women, not in their decorative role of women in family roles but a very sophisticated role purposefully to subvert the usual idea of woman as passive and docile and to make her imbibe the idea that using these products can only make her independent and enhance her confidence level. It is also interesting to analyze the change in recent advertisements. There was a time when menstruation advertisements were strictly concerned with the description of the technical aspects of the sanitary napkins or pads simply because menstruation was regarded as 'taboo.' Though it is still considered to be a 'taboo' in the Indian context, the way in which these are conceived and presented has taken a very different angle. The recent menstruation-related advertisements impose a 'shame' concept upon a girl or woman and make her feel that she is insecure without the menstrual products. Menstruation is regarded as shameful or disgusting which is evidenced by the fact that we still find the assumed blood spilt in the pads being shown in blue colour in the advertisements.

The marketing strategy of sanitary pads is concocted under one theme i.e. women empowerment. But is that what happens? The way in which the menstrual products are represented in Indian TV commercials has much to do with how society perceives menstruation in the first place. These advertisements depict society's stigmatised view of menstruation as being filthy and taboo and also further validate it. Advertisements are made with the sole purpose of selling the product. They manifest the negative cultural perceptions surrounding menstruation, and, as a result, strengthen the stigma attached to women's bodies. The fact that the advertisements assume that a woman is somehow



compromising with her true identity, or is always low on self-esteem when she's on her period makes menstruation look like some kind of disease.

Perhaps Indian advertisements could start addressing menstruation directly, without shame or hesitation, and not dehumanise menstrual flow as they do currently. They can employ a direct conversation between the mother/father and daughter without using any euphemism. Maybe they could even involve the brother or father in the dialogue, and stop adolescent girls from being embarrassed about a normal, physiological process they undergo every month.

One advertisement that strayed away from the usual template format was Libresse that set out to break a common taboo associated with menstruation. Libresse-Let's Get Real is a sanitary pad producing company that uploaded their advertisement on Youtube on 20 May 2017. It broke away from the traditional way of the depiction of women. This advertisement tries to mock the exaggeration made in other menstrual-related advertisements such as Whisper, Stay-free and so on. The Libresse advertisement broadens the viewer's understanding of how some menstrual product companies mislead customer's intuitions about menstruation and highlight the concept of 'shame' in the menstrual-related advertisement for their profit. The Libresse advertisement mocks how most commercial sanitary advertisements show happy women in white pants during their periods laughing and having fun all-day which in reality is not so. The Libresse advertisement makes a point that sanitary pads cannot promise women the world projected in the advertisements, but only can promise to give one a really good fit in order to avoid leaks. That is what all matters, they conclude.

Visual media is an umbrella term used to designate different types of mass communication like TV, movies, photography, digital paintings, and so on and not merely confined to TV advertisements. Social media such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat come under the realm of visual media. Now, let us look into the representation of menstruation in social media, especially Instagram and blogs. In her book *Heavy Flow*, Laird says, "It all started with an Instagram post" (22). Early in 2015, the high-profile Instagrammer, artist and poet Rupi Kaur posted a self-portrait on her Instagram page. This post was considered a not unusual activity for a young woman of the time. In the photo she posted, Kaur is lying on the bed with her back to the camera, which reveals bloodstains on her grey pants and the bedsheets. This photo was part of a larger series titled "periods." These series include photos like a hot water bottle clutched to an abdomen, a used pad dropped into a wastebasket, and a streak of blood leftover in a toilet bowl.

Instagram not once, but twice removed the photo of Kaur and the bloodstain for violating the social media photo-sharing platform's community guideline-policy that prohibits photos depicting sex, violence, or nudity. There is nothing explicit in the guidelines about menstrual blood. She posted her response on Facebook in which she thanked Instagram for providing her with the exact response her work was created to

critique. Kaur argues that the “periods.” series was designed to challenge menstrual taboo. The fact that Instagram removed the photo proved that it was successful.

In her book *Heavy Flow*, Laird raises a pertinent question on Kaur's incident: what was so offensive about the images of a woman curled up in bed with a period stain on her pants and sheets? The photo posted by Kaur is not an image that was offensive. Given the nature of the photo, it is an image that simply shows Kaur's gall to post it in public. Laird tries to explain the incident. She says:

On Instagram, my search for #blood yields 8.4 billion results. I find a gallery of images that run the gamut from surgeries to the bloodied faces of UFC fighters, gory special effects makeup, vampires, selfies snapped while giving blood, and a handful of disturbing self-harm images that do barely violate Instagram community guidelines. In the first couple of hundred images that I scroll through, menstruation is noticeably absent. Despite being tagged with #blood, the pad is unused and there is no blood in the picture. Images of blood dominate mainstream media in the news, movies, and on television. A massacre at the Game of Thrones Red Wedding depicts the brutal murder of several characters, blood spurting, gushing, and leaking all over the screen. By the time it is over, the wedding feast is literally swimming in blood. More than 6.3 million viewers tuned in to watch the episode. (23)

This difference in the way the media establish different kinds of blood is significant. Breanne Fahs, a professor of Women and Gender Studies at Arizona State University, highlights how blood is 'gendered' in her book *Out for Blood: Essays on Menstruation and Resistance*. Men pass down bloodlines, sacrifice their blood, blood in battle and during wars and these are regarded as heroic. Women's blood and menstrual blood are considered as 'dirty,' and 'offensive.' It is not the blood that the media finds offensive rather it is women's blood that is considered offensive with its paradoxical association between life and death.

Another image of the menstrual blood that caused a sensation on the internet was Kiran Gandhi's free bleeding picture that she posted on her blog. This act propelled Kiran Gandhi on to the front pages around the world followed by the Kaur's “periods.” series. Kiran Gandhi, an artist and musician who performs under the moniker Madame Gandhi ran the 2015 London Marathon on her periods without any menstrual products, opting instead to prioritize her own comforts to “free bleed,” a term coined to describe the act of menstruating right into your clothes instead of a product to soak it up.

Following the marathon, Gandhi wrote about the experience on her blog along with the striking photos of her blood-stained tights. She wrote about how she felt empowered

and also connected to those women around the world who do not have any access to these menstrual products to manage their flow. Laird says:

The fact that so much of conversation centred around the image of a bloodstain and not on the fact that this young woman had to run a marathon, an incredible feat of physical strength, is a perfect example of the period paradox, a term introduced by Elizabeth Yuko, bioethicist and writer, in her 2016 essay for *The Establishment* "Period Pain Must Be Taken Seriously-But It Also Shouldn't Define Us." The period paradox ensures that there's no chance of your period holding you back from accomplishing amazing things in your life-just as long as no one has to see it or hear about it. (24)

One group of students at a medical school in Southern India wanted to encourage girls and women to speak up about their periods, so they turned to a particularly expressive form of communication 'period poetry'. The students, members of the school's literary club, solicited haikus and short poems from the school and all around India, shared them widely on social media and even collected the best in a magazine. They were inspired by the #HappyToBleed social media campaign that took India by storm in 2015. The campaign is called The Red Cycle. A bunch of haikus about menstruation will not give millions of women access to tampons and pads, but period poetry could help chip away at the attitudes about periods that often make those female hygiene products more difficult to access.

This menstrual poetry or bleeding poetry is remarkable as it really encapsulates the breadth of the menstruation experience good and bad. For instance, a haiku written by Greshma for #HappyToBleed campaign at Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences reads thus:

Just remember,  
A man bleeds for death, for agony, and for misery.  
Do you know why a woman bleeds for?  
She bleeds for glee.  
For happiness  
And to create a new life. ("Periods Gone Public")

The Period.org is a social campaign that fights to end period poverty and period stigma through service, education, and advocacy. On October 19, 2019, they created history with the first-ever national period day which was marked by sixty rallies in four different countries. All these rallies were united by the same #menstrualmovement manifesto demanding an end to period poverty and stigma. They made a new trend on twitter and also had five presidential candidates publicly endorse #nationalperiodday, and engaged

the largest grassroots mobilization in the history of period activism.

The UN experts argued that more movements to be done globally to deal with the menstrual health needs of girls and transform the systems, norms, and attitudes to support women's and girls' menstrual health and well-being, stating that a worldwide shift in cultures is required to respect menstruation, acknowledge it as a person's right offering and eliminate discrimination, shame and stigma too often attached to it.

In an interview, Amanda Laird, the author of *Heavy Flow*, observes that even though billions of people experience, have experienced, or do experience menstruation, a normal biological process, it remains a subject shrouded in embarrassment, misinformation, and taboo (“Open Book”). To conclude, this paper is an attempt is made to underscore Laird's perceptions on the importance of periods as a barometer of health and wellness that is often ignored by the world. The paper also studied that the misogynistic roots of fear and shame around periods and the incorrect information regarding people who menstruate are often 'taught.' The paper sought to dismantle those wrong notions and teachings and to lift the veil on menstruation.

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## Unveiling the Posthumanist Strands in the Novel *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang

### Abstract

*Primarily the woman-plant and/or nature connection comes under the ambit of ecofeminism and even ecocriticism. Several readings of the novel "The Vegetarian" by Han Kang under the mentioned axes have taken place. This paper titled "Unveiling the Posthumanist Strands in the Novel The Vegetarian by Han Kang" is an attempt to analyse the text under the lens of posthumanism. Posthumanism espouses a complex multi-layered subjectivity as opposed to the humanist principles that argued for the centrality of man as a critical category. Posthumanism has recognised that man is no longer the privileged centre and posits an embodied and embedded existence with nature. Posthumanist philosophy constitutes the human as physically, chemically, and biologically enmeshed and dependent on the environment. Yeong-hye, the protagonist's eschewal of her human condition is a profound statement of her posthuman condition. This paper will consist of an introduction to posthuman philosophy and what it entails. This will be followed by an in-depth analysis of the text from a posthumanist angle. This will be followed by the observations and conclusions arrived upon after the analysis.*

**Keywords** : Posthumanism, Speciesism, Anthropocentrism, Interconnectedness, Vegetarianism.

Our human civilization has been riddled with several humanistic, anthropocentric and dualistic practices that resulted like various oppressive and exclusionary practises like slavery, casteism, patriarchy, speciesism and so on. The blatant exploitation of nature is so severe that the current age is termed as the anthropocene. However, active steps are taken to combat the harm done to our ecosystem. Thus, it is high time to move away from the hierarchical speciesist notions and recognise that they we are a node in the large web of life. The protagonist of the novel Yeong-hye comes to this awareness of shared existence with nature. Thereby, she becomes the perfect candidate to analyse via the posthumanist lines.

Posthumanism is an exciting new field that brings to question the humanist, anthropocentric and dualistic practices and envisions an inclusive world.

Francesca Ferrando, a theorist in this field, points out that "posthumanism" has become an umbrella term which includes in its fold Cultural, Critical and Philosophical posthumanism. As for Cultural Posthumanism, "The posthumanist turn, as enacted within the field of literary theory in the 1990s, was also embraced by cultural studies..."

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which has been defined as Cultural Posthumanism” (Ferrando 26). Critical Posthumanism is the posthumanist strand that was developed within the ambit of literary discourses and theory. In literature it usually centres around the theme of the “radical decentring of the traditional sovereign, coherent and autonomous human in order to demonstrate how the human is always already evolving with, constituted by and constitutive of multiple forms of life and machines” (Nayar 11). Thereby it envisions a highly inclusive definition of what it means to be human. More specifically as Maureen Mcneil states “it rejects both human exceptionalism (the idea that humans are unique creatures) and human instrumentalism (that humans have a right to control the natural world)” (qtd. in Nayar 19). It is highly critical of humanism and views humans as “co-evolving, sharing ecosystems, life processes, genetic material, with animals and other life forms; and technology not as a mere prosthesis to human identity but as integral to it” (Nayar 19).

Philosophical posthumanism draws its principles from both Critical and Cultural posthumanism. “Philosophical Posthumanism can be defined as a post-humanism, as a post-anthropocentrism, and as a post-dualism” (Ferrando 73). To elaborate on each term: post-humanism undermines the centrality of man and implies the plurality of human experiences. In other words it recognises that human is not one but many. “Post-anthropocentrism refers to decentring the human in relation to the nonhuman” (Ferrando 73) whereby there is no hierarchical arrangement of species with humans at the top. In other words it rejects speciesism. “Post-dualism relies on the awareness that dualism has been employed as a rigid way to define identity, based on a closed notion of the self and actualized in symbolic dichotomies, such as “us”/“them,” “friend”/“foe,” “civilized”/“barbarian” and so on.” (Ferrando 73).

*The Vegetarian* (2015), is a novel by the Booker Prize winning South Korean novelist Han Kang. It consisting of three parts namely “The Vegetarian”, “Mongolian Mark” and “Flaming Trees”. The novelist takes the readers along a visceral journey in the life of an extraordinarily ordinary woman Yeong-hye and her sudden transformation into a vegetarian and the subsequent uncanny desire to turn into a tree.

Yeong-hye the protagonist of the novel undergoes an all-round transformation. From being a conventional housewife, she has journeyed to become a more vocal and highly self-aware woman. This paper aims to find out the reasons for the change in her ideologies and tries to understand her desire to forgo her human form and all kinds of human ties like food and language and her inexplicable aspiration to transform into a tree.

The first part of the novel “The Vegetarian” presents Yeong-hye like any other human being at least in the snippets of memories her husband has, prior to her sudden turn over to vegetarianism. The catalyst of her drastic change had been her recurrent nightmares that affected the very core of her being. Till that point she was actively participating in the various activities of ordinary life. She is not to blame as she has been ideologically

moulded to conform to such systems to function in this world. Two such major fields emerge after careful analysis of this section. The first being the ever present forces of patriarchy and resultant oppression and objectification of women. And the second, which is a bit more insidious than the first is the meat industry.

The two major patriarchal figures in the first section of the novel are her husband Cheong and her old-aged father who forces Yeong-hye to eat meat at the family intervention. Cheong though a modern man, still holds onto several regressive sexist attitudes. He is still very traditional considering the roles of a husband and a wife. Cheong's masculinity is also underscored by the fact that he is an avid meat eater. Jacques Derrida coined the term *carno-phallogocentrism* which “is an attempt to name the primary social, linguistic, and material practices that go into becoming and remaining a genuine subject within the West. He suggests that, in order to be a recognized as a full subject one must be a meat eater, a man, and an authoritative, speaking self” (Adams 6). Cheong ticks all these boxes. In the episode where Yeong-hye is engrossed in tossing out all meat and animal products from their refrigerator, Cheong gets mad and upset because Yeong-hye didn't iron his shirt nor assist him in getting ready for work. Though irritated he never stopped to ask what was really bothering his wife. He says, “In the five years we'd been married, this was the first time I'd had to go to work without her handing me my things and seeing me off” (Kang 18).

This traditionalistic mind set is even more evident when he complains that Yeong-hye denies him sexual gratification and one night after getting drunk he forcefully has sex with her without her consent. He completely ignores his wife's deteriorating physical and mental condition and only worries about maintaining his ordered existence.

Another aspect that is closely entwined with this patriarchal oppression is the practice of meat eating. Feminists have made the link that animal brutality and women's oppression often go hand in hand. This is a shocking connection made by Carol J Adams, a vegetarian ecofeminist, in her seminal work *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990). She “examines the historical, gender, race, and class implications of meat culture, and makes the links between the practice of butchering/eating animals and the maintenance of male dominance” comments Ms. (qtd. in Adams 3). The novel which is set in South Korea, harbours strong patriarchal sentiments which reflect in the food they consume. Crystal Tai in an article titled “Erection wine and penis fish: The Changing Perceptions of “manly foods” in South Korea” gives a list of gendered food like dog meat stew (*bosintang*), garlic or chives, eel soup and *gaebu* or “penis fish,” a species of marine worm that resembles the male appendage, rice wine that are recommended to enhance male sexual performance. Hence the tie between patriarchal notions and consumption of meat becomes more evident in South Korean lifestyle. Thus Yeong-hye's new found vegetarianism definitely challenges social and cultural set up of the society in which she lives. As for her feeling that she is a tortured animal is never explicitly articulated, but her



dreams speak volumes. In those dreams she herself feels like a piece of meat, butchered and consumed by her egoistic husband.

She eventually arrives at the horrid realisation of the violence she commits on a day to day basis. The readers primarily get a glance into her psyche via her several dream sequences. In her very first dream she identifies herself as a murderer of an innocent animal and she herself feels reduced to the status of a mound of flesh.

Across the frozen ravine, a red barn-like building. Straw matting flapping limp across the door. Roll it up and I'm inside... Try to push past but the meat, there's no end to the meat, and no exit... My bloody mouth... Pushed that red raw mass into my mouth, felt it squish against my gums, the roof of my mouth, slick with crimson blood.  
(Kang 20)

This is a pivotal moment, a first step towards adopting an anti-humanist stance, a position that critiques both sexism and speciesism. Finally, it has dawned upon her as an individual, how she has been caught up in this quagmire of inequality, cruelty and oppression. This propelled her to take active measures in her own fashion to combat the negative forces at work. Her blood curdling dreams were her wake up call. Having realized the unnamed suffering of the numerous mute animals, she decides to opt for a completely vegetarian, almost a vegan diet. She unknowingly became the mouthpiece for the muffled cries and a champion of the unseen bloodshed of numerous innocent lives. Yeong-hye thus arrives at the conclusion that animal lives are in no way inferior to the human species. Her identification with the helpless animals grows stronger. This marks a crucial juncture in her journey towards a posthumanistic turn. She becomes a staunch vegetarian following her dreams and no one could deter her from her chosen path.

A catalyst towards her radical denunciation of her human self occurs in the second part, "Mongolian Mark". The catalyst was the paintings of the vibrant flowers and vegetal vines drawn on her body by her brother-in-law. Her brother-in-law being overtly obsessed about her blue-green Mongolian mark fantasised about the nude bodies of a man and woman covered in painted flowers having sex. Apart from being a weird kink, the images he conjures up and Yeong-hye's willingness to participate are quite telling. The same body that caused her endless anguish and night terrors was sublimated in the hands of the artist, something more than a mere carbon form designed to perform mere human activities.

First of all the focal point in the second part of the novel as the title suggests is Yeong-hye's Mongolian mark, a blue-green birthmark. To philosophise upon this mark, its colour is bluish-green, a hue that is most commonly associated with the green pigment commonly found in plants. Could it be that the Mongolian mark signifies our primitive unbreakable bond between humans and the natural environment? At least the brother-in-law seems to make this vegetal connection almost unknowingly. His dreams of having

sex with her, is not a mere pleasure of the flesh alone. It is not just a superficial act but rather he envisions Yeong-hye's body almost magically transform into a verdant form that escapes human comprehension. He describes his dreams thus:

Her skin was a pale green. Her body lay prone in front of him, like a leaf that had just fallen from the branch, only barely begun to wither. The Mongolian mark was gone; instead, her whole body was covered evenly with that pale wash of green... A green sap, like that which oozes from bruised leaves, began to flow out from her vagina when he entered her. The acrid sweetness of the grass was so pungent he found it difficult to breathe. When he pulled out... A blackish paste was smeared over his skin from his lower stomach to his thighs, a fresh sap which could have come from either her or him. (Kang 103)

Yeong-hye resonates well with the flowers on her body feeling that they can bring an end to her nightmarish dreams. She says to him:

"I thought it was all because of eating meat," she said. "I thought all I had to do was to stop eating meat and then the faces wouldn't come back. But it didn't work"... "And so...now I know. The face is inside my stomach. It rose up from inside my stomach." ..."But I'm not scared anymore. There's nothing to be scared of now." (Kang 122)

With the flowers on her body, she feels more attuned to the natural world around her. Her Mongolian mark represents that innate life-giving source by which the entire universe runs. This is stamped onto her body almost as a reminder that she is not a separate being but a being that is a nodal point in the vast ever evolving organic network. An element that is as vital as biotic and abiotic components that constitute our ecology. This is exactly what posthumanism suggests. In other words, the boundaries we have set up and the definitions of what it is to be human are challenged by posthumanism. We begin to understand that the human subjectivity is not a unique and distinctive one. In fact these notions have propagated several debilitating dualisms between the superior human and the inferior nature and causing severe ruptures.

Yeong-hye's growing feeling of oneness is certainly a right step towards this direction. Thus her encounter with her brother-in-law incited her to move beyond the first steps of foregoing meat and thereby becoming a feminist and an activist in the process to the larger enlightenment, that she is engaged in a mutual relationship with every biotic and abiotic component that make up the universe. Lucas Valera writes:

In the posthumanist thought, the human is no longer [...] the adoption or the expression of man but rather the result of a hybridization of man with non-human otherness. Posthumanism, therefore represents the vertex of a parabola that began well before the modern age, to which

man is nothing other than merely one of living creatures that inhabit the Earth. (483)

The idea of the intermixing of man with non-human is even more evident in the part of the novel entitled “Flaming Trees”. In the final section of the novel Yeong-hye is admitted to a mental hospital in the hope of reviving her and getting her back to normalcy. When she first steps into the hospital she expresses a strange reason why she would want to stay there, “Yeong-hye, who at the time was just beginning to speak again, cast her gaze toward the zelkova tree on the other side of the window and said, “Yes...there are big trees here” (Kang 149). The tall majestic trees that surrounded the hospital intrigued her and perhaps she felt more at home at the hospital set at the foot of a mountain range with teeming green trees all around than her home in the concrete jungle, in the city. Earlier the very sight of meat revolted her but now she wouldn't eat any type of solid food. She drastically dropped weight to dangerously low levels and stopped speaking all together. She wouldn't respond if anyone talked to her and wouldn't touch a morsel of food. In addition to renouncing food she also eschewed language.

Language is one of the primary categories that define the human. Language as Derrida stated has eternally been phallogocentric, foregrounding masculinity or the phallus through language. This language is largely symbolic and is wielded by men to communicate and express themselves. Yeong-hye as established before has moved on beyond the basic premises of being a woman in the patriarchal society with her new found vegetarianism. Now she takes a step further disavowing the phallogocentric language which as a woman cannot employ for her own personal and intimate forms of expression. Julia Kristeva, the Bulgarian-French philosopher semiotician, psychoanalyst and feminist makes the distinction between symbolic language and semiotic language.

Terry Eagleton explains, “the semiotic is fluid and plural, a kind of pleasurable creative access over precise meaning, and it takes sadistic delight in destroying or negating such signs” (163). Thus the semiotic language is closely allied to the feminine and refers to that aspect of the connotative spectrum and not the denotative meaning of the language and thereby it is heterogeneous. Eagleton further explains:

For language as such to happen, this heterogeneous flow must be as it were chopped up, articulated into stable terms, so that in entering the symbolic order this 'semiotic' process is repressed. The repression, however, is not total: for the semiotic can still be discerned as a kind of pulsional pressure within language itself, in tone, rhythm, the bodily and material qualities of language, but also in contradiction, meaninglessness, disruption, silence and absence. (163)

Clearly Yeong-hye opts for the semiotic language which is incomprehensible to the people around. Her language is not words but rather her actions and the choices that she makes which speak volumes through her silent protestation. In other words, she speaks a

wordless language, a language that Luce Irigaray notes is employed by the vegetal world. Irigaray in the chapter “What the Vegetal World Say to Us” writes:

The vegetal world speaks a language without words...Plants talk without articulating and naming— as life does. They do not use language as a tool, or a technique...They say through shaping their own matter...Plant language is not selfish or egocentric. Its wording corresponds to a celebration of what it received from the elements and from its comprehensive environment. It...expresses its gratitude by growing, coming into flowers, bearing fruits— a way of celebrating...and of sharing what it got...And, once more, its discourse is action, its word is becoming, without fixing it in any terms, which could interrupt the motion of growing. Its specific incarnation, taking shape, or producing from what it appropriated of the elements, of the world, is acknowledgment, in every sense of the word. As such, to stop for gazing at a tree can grant us a soul...and that experience can bring us back to a living soul, made of energy, breath, memory, gratitude, which thus corresponds both to a gathering with ourselves and being in communion with the living. A thing that renders us capable of finding our place in the world among other living beings. This way, we can dwell on the earth and try, for our part, to embody what suits our human destiny. (129)

This is something that Yeong-hye precisely understands and enacts. She realises that the forces of culture and civilization have actually inhibited her organic growth. As a result, she turns to nature, verdurous and vibrant. She adopts the peculiar wordless language of plants which accentuates that human life exists in tandem with other forms of life on this planet. This furthers herself towards a posthuman awareness.

Several times in the novel, references are made about Yeong-hye's habit of taking off her clothes and standing in the warm sunlight. This idiosyncrasy of hers has puzzled everyone around her. Her brother-in-law wonders “Why did you use to bare your breasts to the sunlight, like some kind of mutant animal that had evolved to be able to photosynthesize?” (Kang 98). Whilst in the hospital, in addition to unbuttoning her hospital gown and baring her breasts to the sunlight, Yeong-hye developed another habit of standing upside down on her head with her feet in the air. She could do this for at least thirty minutes or more. When In-hye, her sister, visited Yeong-hye a few days before she disappeared into the forests, she came across the sight of Yeong-hye performing this headstand. Giving her a little nudge she falls over and finally responds to In-hye. On enquiring about this practice of hers and her rejection of food, Yeong-hye had this to say:

“Sister...I don't need to eat anymore.”... “Sister, did you know” “I thought trees stood up straight...I only found out just now. They

actually stand with both arms in the earth, all of them... “All of them, they're all standing on their heads.” Yeong-hye laughed frantically... “Do you know how I found out? Well, I was in a dream, and I was standing on my head...leaves were growing from my body, and roots were sprouting from my hands...so I dug down into the earth. On and on...I wanted flowers to bloom from my crotch, so I spread my legs; I spread them wide”... “I need to water my body. I don't need this kind of food, sister. I need water”. (153-154)

Prior to this incident, Yeong-hye had wandered off deep into the mountains and was found several hours later by one of the nurses “standing there stock-still and soaked with rain as if she herself were one of the glistening trees” (131). Yeong-hye seemed to have been attracted by the trees and the voice that emanated from the heart of nature called out to her. Yeong-hye says “Sister...all the trees of the world are like brothers and sisters” (150). Yeong-hye had always been a country girl living in close communion with nature. Once she moved into the city to improve her prospects, her ties with nature began to break and recede. However she had always been haunted by the urge to return to that primordial state of oneness with the natural environment. Her Mongolian mark that was etched into the fabric of her being marked the supremely innate bond that was a constant reminder of the symbiotic relationship of human and nature.

The presence of the Mongolian mark is a compelling point that designates her as a posthuman being. In this regard the nexus of posthumanism and ecology is to be considered. Posthuman philosophy emphasises the innate bond and merging of human life with those of other life forms. This is what is termed as “contamination of the living being with other forms of life” (Valera 483). Thus there is a harmonious existence between mankind and other living and non-living beings. Hence the goal of posthumanism is not simply to create a technologically advanced human body but rather to liquefy the differences between human beings and various life forms, thus realising that man and nature are but one.

This is further emphasised by Yeong-hye's words “leaves are growing out of my body, roots are sprouting out of my hands...they delve down into the earth. Endlessly, endlessly...yes, I spread my legs because I wanted flowers to bloom from my crotch; I spread them wide” (133). Her ability to think like a plant while retaining her human form displays her acceptance that she is not simply a merely individuated being in the human spectrum but also is a crucial nodule wherein different forms of non-human life intersect and merge. She recognises the living pulse in all forms of life like animals and plants and she feels for them as well. She can no longer entertain the idea that she enjoys a sovereign subjectivity. She is not a disjointed being, sharing similarities with a few members of the human species. No longer autonomous but a dependent life form in the universe of innumerable life networks. Yeong-hye envisions that she is shareholder in this vast

unified organic matter which is not simply 'life' but 'zoe'.

Posthumanism “rests on a neo-materialist philosophy of immanence, which assumes that all matter is one (monism); that matter is intelligent and self-organizing (autopoiesis); that the subject is not unitary but nomadic; and that subjectivity includes relations to a multitude of non-human 'others'. In this framework 'life' is not only defined as bios, but also as a zoe-centred, non-human process” (Braidotti 340). According to Braidotti “zoe—the dynamic, self-organizing structure of all living matter” (60) — is at the heart of posthuman enquiry. For Braidotti, “a zoe-centred approach seeks to create an affirmative bond between all living organisms, and in doing so it challenges the distinction between the male subject and his human and non-human counterparts” (50). Braidotti also insists that to be posthuman does not mean to be indifferent to the humans, or to be de-humanized. Posthumanism thereby envisages an embedded and embodied self.

As mentioned earlier her rejection of meat as way to escape from any complicity in violence launched her to an antihumanist arena whereby she was able to subvert the dominant and oppressive forces and ideologies around namely patriarchy. Such practices and ideologies define what it is to live like a human being. Thus by subverting them Yeong-hye steps into a larger, more inclusive state of existence. “A complete posthumanism, thus, coincides with the annihilation of all the boundaries that make “human” a human being” (Valera 483). Then further on, she began to feel the pain of the innocent lives slaughtered as her own. As she progressed she also renounced language and speech the two main tools of power in an anthropocentric world. In the world of semiotic representation she wove a new form of communication that was unintelligible to many around her. But she delved deep into her core and was able to revive that primeval connection of man and nature. She began to think and feel in terms of other non-human life. She became a partaker of 'zoe' that life force found in all matter, both organic and inorganic.

Thus Yeong-hye is a representative of “the culmination of the posthumanist philosophy [which] is not reached in the denial of anthropocentrism...but in a return...to that time in which the research on man and nature was but one” (Valera 483).

Hence, Yeong-hye's unconventional stance of refusing all meat products was a strong blow to this rather insidious hold of patriarchy. She proclaims in her radical choices to be a feminist or more specifically a vegetarian ecofeminist. Owing to the nightmares that gave her countless sleepless nights, she was able to realise the violence she committing and identifies herself with the helpless animals. She thereby challenges all notions of speciesism, thus aligning herself with the posthumanist spirit. Further on she feels a strong kinship with the nature around her and feels she is a pulse in the rhythms of nature. She forgoes all types of solid food and language and begins to think like a plant and adopts a wordless language. Yeong-hye further underscores with her radical decisions that she is

not a mere distinct and disjointed individual but rather one of the building blocks in the circle of life. She champions the ideas of the primitive body and mind that once existed in an inextricable bond with the environment, a bond that slowly eroded away when man became self-centred and power hungry. This realisation which dawns upon her is a clarion call for all of us to be mindful of our embedded existence in this universe.

What Yeong-hye achieves in the course of her life, is to think of the non-human and to reconnect with the basic energies that bind everything on this planet which is in fact the ultimate aim of posthumanism. Valera writes:

The real goal of posthumanism, is not so much a hyper-technological appliance of the human being, but, rather, a progressive elimination and fluidization of the differences, as expressed effectively by Rosi Braidotti. What Braidotti refers to as the posthuman predicament, or living in the times of the posthuman, requires humans to think beyond their traditional humanist limitations and embrace the risks of becoming-other-than-human beings. (483)

The awareness that human beings are not superior to rest of the species and a reassessment of our exclusionary practices and ideologies that oppress the 'others' and the environment is crucial in our modern times. Our current practices are no longer feasible and if left unchecked can endanger our very existence. What we have to aim for, is a holistic approach to development, keeping in mind our shared existence in this planet of ours so as to ensure a harmonious existence between all forms of life.

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## Documenting Distress in the Comics Genre: Trauma and Resilience in *Vanni: A Family's Struggle Through the Srilankan Conflict*

### Abstract

*The comics being an inherently interpretive medium with a hybrid language which involves words and images operating in conjunction, has been identified as an appropriate medium to document distressing realities of human existence. Set in the northern region of Srilanka, the graphic novel Vanni: A Family's Struggle Through the Srilankan Conflict exposes overlooked and hardly reported atrocities and miserable plights of people trapped in the conflict between the government and LTTE. Based on testimonies collected from survivors of conflict and hundreds of official reports, Lindsey Pollock and Ben produced an exquisite piece of comic book remaining faithful to the complexity of the project. For this purpose they anonymized those survivors and chose Antony's fictionalised family to play out their stories. The appalling war crimes that ensued and the sordid truths of persecution, poverty and struggles for survival are told from the perspective of the Ramachandra family illustrated in black and white. The artist manipulates the visual space of Vanni to interrogate precarious realities of the everyday occurrences and their consequences. The representation of the Internally Dispersed People on the run for lives, their bleak prospects, the portrayal of their frustration on living cheek to jowl and an unrelenting focus on their vulnerable bodies and expressions make Vanni an exceptional piece of comics documenting, which is counted as the most feasible means to represent trauma.*

*This paper tries to analyse how far the graphic pages of the Vanni are successful in bringing together words and images to surface the trauma and desperation of Tamils in the face of civil war. The paper draws from key theories of comics propounded by Scott McCloud and Hilary Chute and the concept of the impossibility of the representation of trauma put forward by Cathy Caruth, among others. The study also borrows from Judith Butler, Susan Sontag and Edward Said to scrutinise the efficacy of the comics medium in comparison with photographs.*

**Keywords :** Comics, Trauma, Subjectivity, Internally Dispersed People.

History being fluid and polyphonic can always be retold with a difference. With individual memories criss-crossing the history, already existing chronicles of events are reconfigured. Set in the northern region of Srilanka, the graphic novel *Vanni: A Family's Struggle Through the Srilankan Conflict* exposes overlooked and hardly reported



atrocities and miserable plights of people trapped in the conflict between the government and LTTE. This paper tries to understand how far the graphic pages of the comic book successfully surface the trauma and desperation of the Tamils in the face of war. The appalling war crimes that ensued the conflict and the sordid truths of persecution, poverty and struggles for survival are told from the perspective of the Ramachandra family illustrated in black and white panels of comics book.

Based on testimonies collected from survivors of conflict and hundreds of official reports, Lindsey Pollock and Benjamin Dix produced an exquisite piece of comic book remaining faithful to the complexity of the project. For this purpose they anonymized those survivors and chose Antony's fictionalised family to play out their stories. Scott McCloud in his work *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* illustrates how cartoon figures work in comics. He writes, "By de-emphasizing the appearance of the physical world in favour of the idea of form, the cartoon places itself in the world of concepts. Through traditional realism, the comics artist can portray the world without, and through the cartoon, the world within. When cartoons are used throughout a story, the world of that story may seem to pulse with life" (41). *Vanni* employs comics techniques to expose the vicious acts of Sri Lankan government which used its forces to quell the Tamils claim to respect and equality.

Ideally established to restore the rights of Tamil population in Sri Lanka which was denied access to political and economic power under discriminatory policies, and Sinhala Only Act passed by the Sinhalese government, the LTTE movement attracted Tamil people across the land who yearned for a better social standing. Conflicts between the government and the LTTE movement escalated as calls for creation of independent ethnic states became stronger and violent conflicts followed. Tamils steadfast loyalty to the movement was inspired by their longing for a better life. But as the civil war reached its peak and LTTE started to lose its grounds, they violently recruited children and women to the movement without consent and Tamils who were already running for lives to safe grounds felt deceived by the movement which they had trusted would better their lives. These incidents are graphically represented in the book based on true accounts from victims. In the concluding chapters people are disillusioned, scattered and devastated as they cannot find any force that can bind them together and restore their lives. In the aftermath of the struggle which spanned for decades, desperate Tamils migrated to different parts of the world to forge together a life afresh.

In the Afterword to the graphic novel, Benjamin Dix points out the cold response of the Sri Lankan government toward human rights violations happened in the territory. When the government finally brought out an internal enquiry report, "the findings of the report concluded there were very few failings by the Sri Lankan Army and instead painted a picture of the successful liberation of civilian hostages from the clutches of a ruthless terrorist organization" (260). In saying this he also emphasises the significance of the

graphic novel *Vanni* as a site which offers a competitive memory in giving voice to the injustice suffered by the people.

As we look into details of the Sri Lankan conflict depicted in *Vanni*, we come to realise that its tone, black and white panels, subject matter and narrative style are much in line with the pioneering works of testimonial documentary graphic novels by Joe Sacco in which he addresses the horrendous affair of war and genocide in the Palestine-Israel conflict, which in turn was inspired by the path breaking autobiographical work of Art Spiegelman, *Maus*. J. Maggio writes in “Comics and Cartoons: A Democratic Art form”, “Comics as opposed to many other narrative visual art forms – leave a large cognitive space for the views/reader to interpret their meaning” (257). Comics provide a distinctly alternative vision which is possible only through active interaction with the text. How is this interaction possible in the visual space of comics where images and words colligate? Applying the Derridian approach to analysis of comics, Ronald Schmitt in “Deconstructive Comics” contends that “signification and stable meaning is continually deferred as the eye instead of scanning left to right in even, linear patterns, jumps between words and pictures, spiralling zig-zagging and often interrupting the entire process to re-scan the information in a new way(158). Thus the visual space of comics is pregnant with cues or connotations that can hardly be achieved through language. It cannot be decoded by rushing through speech bubbles, rather it requires conscious effort on the part of the reader to understand the layers of implications. The combination of word-image text does not result in a collision of dialectical opposites rather it is a self–inflicted double writing, collapsing traditional strategies for reading word and picture texts (Maggio 238).

The vulnerability of Tamil people, their helplessness in the phase of state mediated violence and resilience to navigate through life are represented in the visual space modulated consciously to capture the mood of the scenes. For instance the initial pages of the graphic novel sketches the idyllic life in Chempiyanpattu a seaside village which is soon followed by the scenes of tsunami ravishing the shore killing thousands of people and leaving the rest homeless and in the relief camps they suffocate in debilitating anguish. The normal course of well-defined panel frames break into a splash page foregrounding the chaos created by the tsunami and traumatic emotions of the characters.



Fig 1: Dix, Benjamin, and Lindsay Pollock. *Vanni: A Family's Struggle Through the Sri Lankan Conflict*. Penguin Books, 2019. p:48

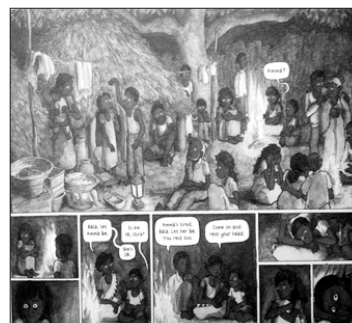
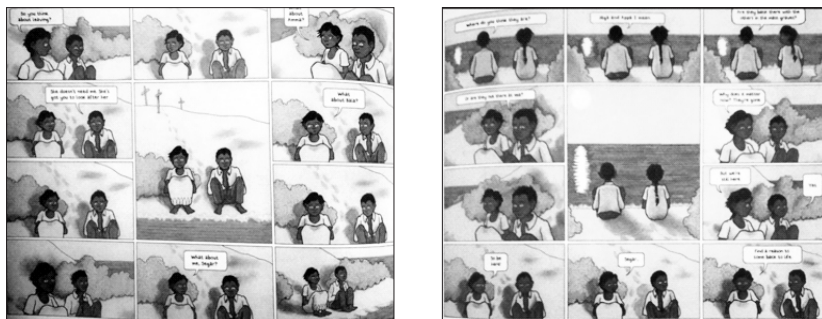


Fig 2: Dix, Benjamin, and Lindsay Pollock. *Vanni: A Family's Struggle Through the Sri Lankan Conflict*. Penguin Books, 2019, p: 53

Fig.1 shows the members of Choglar family the mother and three children on the roof of the local church witnessing the tsunami washing away two of their family members in front of their eyes and in documenting the incident the artist manages to represent it without losing the weight of emotions. Fig: 2 portrays the disbelief and shock of witnessing the tragedy is illustrated in following pages.

Fig 3: Dix, Benjamin, and Lindsay Pollock. *Vanni: A Family's Struggle Through the Sri Lankan Conflict*. Penguin Books, 2019. p: 62,63.

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The awful expression continues to haunt the pages from this point and silence plays a remarkable role in voicing the unnerving experiences of destitution and emptiness in their lives. This stillness in their lives is portrayed in fig 3; no action takes place and the characters on the shore are gazing into the sea. Except for random dialogues the pages are infested with markers of death, the graveyard, chilling silence, perplexed looks and hopelessness. The book is rampant with similar instances in which characters look woebegone, defenceless in the face of merciless war.

Judith Butler in *Frames of War* says, “the frame does not simply exhibit reality, but actively participates in a strategy of containment, selectively producing and enforcing what will count as reality” (Butler xiii). She said this in the context of photography, but it has a major drawback which Butler herself cites while discussing Susan Sontag she mentions, “Sontag argued that photographs have the capacity to move us momentarily, but that they do not have the power to build an interpretation (Torture 43). Whereas the comics artist rightly manipulates the visual space to interrogate precarious realities of the everyday occurrences and their consequences in the form of a compelling narrative rather than a dissociated piece of photograph which lack details and can easily be misinterpreted once it is used out of its particular context. The comics medium confers agency to the artist to probe into serious issues and exercise conscious selection to choose the elements that constitute the frame, each of which have profound effect on the inference. Another example for this can be seen in fig 4, which surfaces images and words in a pattern that reminds us of a chessboard.



Fig 4: Dix, Benjamin, and Lindsay Pollock. *Vanni: A Family's Struggle Through the Sri Lankan Conflict*. Penguin Books, 2019. p: 36.

Words and images are interspersed on the page very much like the alternating squares in black and white on the chess board, portraying miseries of Jaga, Nelani's son who has returned home after he loses his leg in action during his service in LTTE and his family. It is a shock for the whole family and this page wonderfully shows how Jaga tries to cope with his new reality while his family especially his younger ones tries to keep up their spirits, pretending not hearing him while he cries out loud with overwhelming pain. Towards the end of the page the narrator writes, “Looking up at a poster of the glorious leader, a question struck Bala.. Why Jaga lost his leg. For what?”. The implication of what he says in words is vividly visualised using the chess board matrix of the page thus reiterating the larger truth that these young men who sacrifice their lives fighting for a homeland and those families who support the cause are but pawns trapped in the game of power struggle. In the end, among six members of the family only Nelani survives.

Internally Dispersed People on the run for lives in the backdrop of civil war, their bleak prospects and the frustration of living cheek to jowl are portrayed with unrelenting focus on their vulnerable bodies and gestures, clearly shows why comics documenting is counted as the best medium to represent trauma and suffering.



Fig 5,6: Dix, Benjamin, and Lindsay Pollock. *Vanni: A Family's Struggle Through the Sri Lankan Conflict*. Penguin Books, 2019. p: 92, 93

For example there is an instance in which a man named Indran who is temporarily living with his family in one of those semi-permanent camps advising people coming in to build bunkers to keep themselves safe from shells flying across the lagoons. People say he worries too much but having seen what explosions can do, he wants to be watchful and is gripped with panic even when explosion is at a distance. The horrendous memories he had of surviving a shell shock is depicted in the splash page, Fig 5, in which his recollections and petrified expressions are represented in a spectacular way. Those harrowing memories of violence make him irksome and he forces his family to remain in bunkers for hours or even days together. There are several such instances in the work in which the stony expressions of characters in the face of traumatic recollection leave the reader breathless. It is in this context that we should ponder on the defining feature of trauma: events “are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares and other repetitive phenomena” (Caruth 91). Unable to comprehend or assimilate them, victims are not in a position to articulate those traumatic experiences and this make it all the more difficult for people who try to represent them. Words fall short and language cannot contain the gravity of those experiences. Comics with its hybrid language in which images and words complement each other has the ability to surpass the limitations of the figurative language in representing the unrepresentable.



Fig 7: Dix, Benjamin, and Lindsay Pollock. *Vanni: A Family's Struggle Through the Sri Lankan Conflict*. Penguin Books, 2019. p: 133

Fig 7 is a perfect example, in shows a young boy rescued by an old man and his wife who had seen his mother killed in the shelling while attempting an escape to safe grounds like them. The couple takes charge of the young boy but he is in shock as he cannot assimilate what has occurred and is not hearing or responding to them. He is lost in recollection, in the process trying to piece together the memories of his parents and horrific incidents that happened. These recollections are in the form of images that haunt the grim black and white panels of the page, his stony expression and the helplessness of the couple trying to ease his pain, together have a poignant effect on the reader. There are innumerable instances of this kind scattered throughout the book.

The graphic novel *Vanni* sketches the heart wrenching images of the unfortunates, their resilience to get on with life leaving behind their homeland and separated from their loved ones in the darkest hours of life desperately fighting with hunger, fatigue and anxiety amid multitudinous sorrows, in order to hold on to what remains of their families. A remarkable achievement of the work is the attention given to minute details in each of its frames. In certain cases in order to underscore the predicament of a character, his/ her face is foregrounded in rows of back-to-back panels detailing his gestures, dialogues, flashes of emotions and thoughts. The dark, grim pages of the graphic novel evoke the panic, horror and trauma of the situation and the starlit nights that depict days before the war are replaced by bleak, turbulent nights with shells raging the sky. The speech balloons in those panels also contribute to the horror of the situation. As seen in Fig 8, multiple speech balloons of varying size and fonts are crammed into panels overlapping one another or bleeding out of the panel reflecting the cacophony. The refugee camps, attacks on civilians, rape and murder of young girl escaping the LTTE following its downfall, interrogation and torture of innocent civilians to extract information about the connections with LTTE, hunger, death and destitution are portrayed with staggering realism. Such techniques are employed to invite the readers to recognize the exigency of a resolution to the alarming issues of injustice represented in the graphic novel.



Fig 8: Dix, Benjamin, and Lindsay Pollock. *Vanni: A Family's Struggle Through the Sri Lankan Conflict*. Penguin Books, 2019. p: 170

The graphic novel highlights the consequences of a brutal scheming of the Sinhalese government which in the guise of an attempt to wipe out terrorism vandalize the lands of Tamils and muzzle their claims to living a normal life. Images are compact, motivated signs which communicate meaning through a visual language. Edward Said writes in his introduction to Joe Sacco's work *Palestine* writes,

As we also live in a media-saturated world in which a huge preponderance of the world's news images are controlled and diffused by a handful of men sitting in places like London and New York, a stream of comic book images and words, assertively etched, at times grotesquely emphatic and distended to match the extreme situations they depict, provide a remarkable antidote (ii).

The comics trope of *Vanni* reverberates the urgency of the issue, accentuate the unspeakable woes, and help raising consciousness regarding the human rights violations, exposing the glossed over realities of the civil war. The 'unspeakable' traumatic events find space and visibility in the comics medium with an uncompromising focus on the mental anguish and corporeal existence of victims and survivors. The reader gets a vicarious experience of the events that unfold on the graphic pages of comics which trigger interest in deliberations on issues related to human rights, justice and liberty.

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## Consent and Bodily Integrity: Mapping the Regulation of Bodily Rights of Intersex Children and its Representation in Vijayarajamallika's Poems

### Abstract

*Brian D Earp defines infringement to bodily integrity in terms of a series of intentional acts including penetration into bodily orifices, breaking of the skin or alteration of a person's physical form. The notion of 'consent' defines, distinguishes and labels these infringements as violations and 'plausible' interferences. However, the ability of citizens to give consent depends on their position in the spectrum of autonomy. This position of autonomy is defined by law, and often cultural codes to an extent. Consent on behalf of non-autonomous and temporarily autonomous individuals is sought from other autonomous persons of 'ability'. When it comes to children who are temporarily non-autonomous citizens, the parents or other adult guardians are conferred with the power of giving consent. In case of intersex children, the infringement of bodily integrity is often irreversible as it includes physical alteration conducted to satisfy gender paradigms. The gender politics underlying this infringement, thus, determine the modes of social production of sexed corporeality. Vijayaraja Mallika, the first transgender poet in Malayalam, represents the resistance towards such modes of social productions that results in the 'othering' and exploitations that a transgender individual survives in everyday life. This paper seeks to problematize the connection between positionality of being a consenting individual and bodily integrity with reference to the themes of liberty and right against infringements of bodily integrity of intersex children in Vijayarajamallika's poems and other works.*

**Keywords :** Bodily Integrity, Infringement of Bodily Integrity, Consent, Autonomy, Gender, Intersexuality

Judith Butler in *Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and allegories of Transsexuality*, while making a point on the question of power and law, refers to 'workings of certain regulatory regime, the one that informs the law, also exceeds the law' (183). Although the counter powers work together to frame a contraposition that restructure and free the law from the restraints, the hegemonic power continues to regulate the scenario. The sex reassignment surgery of intersex infants and children being a significant example for such a scenario mirrors the interplay of regulative powers Butler refers to. A major interference that bridles this power play emerged when the Health and



Family Welfare department under the government of Tamil Nadu, referring to the recent directive of Madras high court, issued an order in the month of August, 2019, banning the Sex Reassigning Surgery of intersex children, except in 'life threatening medical circumstances'. Thus, Tamil Nadu government becomes the first Indian state, and third in the world to acknowledge the right to bodily integrity of intersex infants and children. Considering this verdict as the milestone, this paper deals with certain socio-cultural notions related to bodily infringements and its gendering, the historical struggle or resistance it produced, and the place occupied by Vijayaraja Mallika's poems when the history of this struggle is analysed.

Right to bodily integrity, plausibly the most significant of all human rights as it comprises of a decisive power on any external interferences into one's own body, fortifies the otherwise vulnerable body from physical or sexual abuses and other non-consensual touching. Brian D Earp defines Bodily Integrity (BI) as 'the physical state of being all in one piece, unbroken, undivided' (1), and 'A violation to a person's BI is any infringement of their BI that wrongs them' (2). Bodily integrity as a 'right' began to confer upon an individual, marking his transfiguration from the 'subject' in a sovereign state, to the 'citizen of rights' in a liberal democracy that facilitates the production of the discourse of 'rights'. Ludbrook's quoting of Blackstone's juridical comment in 1765 that 'the law cannot draw the line between different degrees of violence, and therefore totally prohibits the first and lowest stage of it; every man's person being sacred, and no other having the right to meddle with it, in any the slightest manner' (2), shows the assertion and reassertion of right to bodily integrity by the courts for more than two centuries. Although an autonomous person's bodily integrity gets violated by any kind of infringement, the decisive factors the law adopts to interrogate whether it wrongs the person or not, comprise the 'consent' of the subject and 'intention' of the interferer. Only those who falls into the closet of 'sanity' and adulthood pass as individuals capable for granting 'consent'. Thus, children inherently fix a position outside this closet, placing an independent adult to 'consent' on their behalf. Now, the independent adult decides on the permissibility of intention the interferer exhibits, based on the nature of the infringement. It could be arguably stated that 'the mature and sane adult' often stands within the contours of socio-culturally and religiously abiding preoccupations that generate a facile consent.

This paper identifies four significant realms in which the autonomous adult consents or sometimes demands the infringements, on behalf of the child. Such socio-culturally accepted or demanded infringements on children's bodily integrity often constitute several layers of hegemonic forces. First and foremost, many of them mark a person's belonging to certain cultural identities. The scarification initiation rituals practiced by some of the communities in Africa, circumcision in Jewish and Muslim communities and tattooing of Gods, religious symbols or scripters on children's bodies in some Indian castes exemplify irreversible infringements that assert one's cultural or religious identity. These are permanent and irreversible infringements that become problematic if the child,

when turns to an adult wishes not to relate to that community or undergoes a change of faith. Secondly, the infringement to the child's body attains consent from the autonomous adult when it becomes part of rituals. The body piercing of children in the '*Kuthiyottam*' ritual as part of '*Bharani*' festival in *Chettikulangara* Temple of Kerala, baby tossing rituals in Karnataka (Garland 3) and cheek piercing rituals in Tamil Nadu are conducted with the complete consent of parents, despite the criticism from child welfare bodies and the interference of law itself. These are temporary and reversible infringements.

The third category of infringements to bodily integrity identified here produces sexed bodies and facilitates the formation of gendered spaces as it includes the interferences capable of producing bodies with inscriptions asserting the gender paradigms prevalent in a particular community. Many communities around the world practice certain infringements that would create a clear cut differentiation between male and female children in the community. Such practices include both reversible and irreversible interferences grading from ear piercing to amputation. The most obvious example being the compulsory nose piercing of girls prevalent in many of the Indian communities as per the belief that a woman without a nose ring remains tough, difficult to control and haughty. Men refuse to marry such women as they might lack the ability to become an ideal home maker. Similar to this, the women of Apatani community of Arunachal Pradesh undergo scarification on face and enlarge the nose holes in childhood itself to make them look less attractive to escape from their abduction by men from other tribes. Similarly, Dani tribe women of Indonesia face a compulsory amputation of small finger if a close relative dies (Wynarczyk 2). All these infringements produce gendered bodies and gendered social spheres. This sphere is structured by material realities and cultural codes which in turn inscribe the subjects placed within. Understanding the politics underlying children's positioning in a gender sphere through the violation of bodily integrity informs their perspective and enables them to resist dominant discourses of power. One of the social realities animating these spaces is entwined with the politics of infringements to bodily integrity of children in a community, in the name of ritualistic practices. Dissecting and decoding the nature of this politics helps to identify the modes of articulation the bodily infringements and gender politics encapsulated in the formation of subject positions.

Fourth consensual infringement comprises of the medical interferences that plausibly seem permissible to the independent adult and are not considered as the infringements that violate the bodily integrity of the child as the 'local harm to specific bodily tissues is instrumental to, even necessary for, and above all, clearly outweighed by expected benefits' of the interference to your body as a whole (Earp 3). But the medical interference violates a child's bodily integrity when its purpose is merely confined to satisfy socio-cultural demands and to fit the child in the closet of gender binary. Sex Reassignment surgery of intersex infants and children being one of the most common examples of medically conducted violation of BI often becomes the 'demand' from parents as they do

not want the child to face the discomfort of not passing as one among the majority. To put it in Butlerian terms, the parents attempt to bring 'intelligibility' to the child's body in a society that is structured by cultural codes and material realities pertained to cisgender hetero sexuality. Parents as autonomous bodies possessing the right to consent, act here according to the conditions of intelligibility by which 'the human emerges, by which the human is recognized, by which some subject becomes the subject of human love that are composed of norms, of practices, that have become presuppositional, without which we cannot think the human at all' (Butler 183). The working of what Foucault calls 'the politics of truth', according to which the body of an individual is constrained to become what the norms have presupposed (184).

The parents' decision to have their children undergo complex medical procedures often results from the collusion of medical gaze with the regulative powers of gender binary system. Times of India, dated on 2<sup>nd</sup>. December, 2019 reports the response of Indian Association of Paediatric Surgeons to the order issued by Tamil Nadu government banning SRS of intersex children. Dr Santhanakrishnan, the president of the association says:

If a child has partially developed male or female organs, it is in their interest that we operate so that they can lead normal lives. It is important to understand that these are not gender reassignment, but gender reinforcement surgeries on under expressed male or female children. We also believe that correcting the sex of the child early on averts social stigma and mental trauma that they may face. (Chakrapani 2)

Doctor Santhanakrishnan's account that promotes norm-abiding gender bodies, exemplifies the politics of medical gaze that creates a subject position of intersex bodies as 'under expressed' or a 'wronged body' that is to be corrected. While he vibrantly talks about the 'mental trauma' of intersex children caused by the regulative patterns of cisgender-heterosexual gaze, he sounds oblivious of the trauma they face if they do not identify with the surgically assigned sex when they grow up. Another question emerges at this point hovers around the choice of the sex assigned. When parents decide to have their children undergo the complex medical procedures of SRS, in choosing which sex the child wants, do they outweigh any one particular sex over the other? Dr.R Rajendran and Dr. S Hariharan, in an article titled *Profile of Intersex Children in South India* published in the journal of *Indian Paediatrics* gives a detail account on the sex 'preference' proposed by the parents of intersex children . When thirty five children were admitted to their clinic in past ten years, 31 of them fall between one month and two years of age. 'Parents prefer the intersex children to be reared as male possibly because of the less social stigma attached to an impotent male than to sterile female, and because males are socially independent'(1). This records that the preferences and choices pertained to the sex

reassignment surgery of an intersex child is 'heavily loaded with the cultural and societal patterns, rather than the child's wish to have chosen a comfortable gender' (1).

The order issued by the Government of Tamil Nadu marks the culmination of a community's decades old struggle. And in many other places outside Tamil Nadu, the resistance against not letting the children to keep all the body parts they are born with, unless there emerges a life threatening circumstance is prevalent even after the issuing of this order. The literary works of Vijayaraja Mallika, the first transgender poet in Malayalam literature could be posited within the realm of this resistance. Vijayaraja Mallika's writings mark the struggle of a community that was denied representation in the history of Malayalam literature. Her first collection of poems published in the title *Daivathinte Makal* renders a series of rhetorical questions and self-assertions that reveals the flip side of the often foregrounded notion of 'progressive' Malayali consciousness.

The poem *Janimrithrikal* makes use of the image of fried fish to criticise the reluctance of the mainstream Malayali consciousness to accept gender variance, and its effects on those who fall outside the binary. Mallika says 'nobody worry about the gender of the favourite fish fried served on the dining table. They could be male or female, sometimes neither. Nobody thinks about it, though we keep on consuming it. But the thoughts of our own gender pricks deep down into the throat as thorns' (69). She points out the socio-cultural hypocrisy that encapsulates the dialectic between faith and material reality through the poem '*Shikhandi*' in which she addresses the mythical character Shikhandi as 'sissy bro' whose 'life period was 'aiwaa', but 'we who experience your childhood, teenage and youth are unlucky' in life (59). Another poem titled '*Ardhanaari*' foregrounds the contrast in worshipping *arthanareeshwaran*, when *ardhanaari* (half women) are trodden down (71) by the cisgender heterosexual mainstream perspectives. Most of the poems record the struggle Mallika underwent to assert her identity. Within this context, resistance against infringements to bodily integrity, being another underlying theme of her poems, occupies an obvious space when the historical struggle for the right to bodily integrity of intersex children and infants are concerned.

In a society manipulated and commanded by the regulative powers of gender binary, she pens down poems like *Neela Mambazhamaakaruthe Nee*, *Jeevalokam* and *Aanalla Pennalla* as a tribute to her own struggle. While all the three poems analysed in this paper are addressed to infants, *Analla Pennalla* becomes the first lullaby ever written for an intersex child in the history of Malayalam literature. The poem, released on social media on International Intersex Awareness day, begins saying: 'Not a boy or a girl, darling, you are my honey' (Cris 1), and the last stanza says 'you are not a curse or a sin, darling' (*shaapamalla, paapamalla omane nee*). The poem primarily lends motivations for those intersex children who experience severe mental trauma for possessing atypical sex organs, and enlightens the parents of such children. The poem, written from the perspective of a mother, asks her child to grow, and think beyond the boxes of sex and

gender (*kallikalkkappuram nee valaru*). Mallika, having experienced the struggles of an intersex person herself, gives confidence to the child to grow up embracing choice and the essence of its identity (*nee neeyaayi thane nirayenam*). The mother in the poem, does not intend to cause any kind of infringements that bring violation to the child's bodily integrity. At the same time, considering the temporarily non-autonomous state of the child, she waits for it to become mature enough to make her own decision. Like *Aanalla Pennalla*, the poem *Neela maambazhamaakaruthe Nee* also comprises the theme of a mother speaking with her infant. The mother in this poem is keen on bringing up the child without any gender prejudices as she says 'not only male and female, there are infinite more' (*aanum pennum maathramalla, Ananda saagaramee prapancham*). She motivates the child to inculcate tolerance against issues in life and not to 'insult' or 'mock' anyone. In the last stanza, Mallika points out the absurdity in living a life comprised of other's choices (*moodu padangal venda kunje, moodatham alle athathrayum*). The third poem, and the shortest among the three, *Jeevalokam* points its finger against, as Mallika criticises in the introduction to this poem, the tendency to declare the gender of the child immediately after its birth. The poem asserts that *Jeevalokam*-the world of living things- does not constitute male and female alone.

Her most recent work, a solo drama titled '*Nalekkai*' (For Tomorrow), performed by Mallika herself as the mother of an intersex child, determined to bring up her child despite the father's compulsion to kill or sell the child, stands as a strong resistance to all kind of medical, social, cultural interferences that violate the bodily integrity and right to live, of an intersex child. In this solo drama scripted and enacted by herself on the international intersex awareness day, Mallika reasserts the insignificance of identifying a child as male or female immediately after its birth. As the drama ends announcing that 'Intersex children no need to be fixed, they are just perfect as they are', Mallika insists on the fact that body modification brought through surgeries in childhood would lead to severe mental trauma if the child would not relate to the surgically assigned sex, when grown up. She moulds a strong resistance against the social presumption that an individual 'must' pass as or fit into any of the two mainstream genders foregrounded by the cisgender heterosexual regulative measures.

In short, it could be concluded that, in a system dominated by regulative powers that create and, exceed the law, a person's right to give consent and bodily integrity, pertains to the autonomous nature of the body. The politicising and gendering of a body begins from birth itself. Usually, there is a background cultural norm in the person's group that attaches perceived or intended social, aesthetic, systematic, prophylactic or spiritual benefits to its being altered or removed'(Earp 6). At the same time, a counterproductive power emerges resisting these norm-abiding perceptions, and the initiation taken by Tamil Nadu government stands as a legal resultant marking a significant historical moment of this resistance.

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## **Negotiating Queer Mothering Desires: Analyzing the Dialectics of Resistance of the Adoptive Maternal Body in Nancy Abram's *The Other Mother: A Lesbians Fight for Her Daughter***

### **Abstract**

### **Introduction**

*Lesbian adoptive motherhood goes beyond the critiques of patriarchal motherhood to locate and investigate feminist maternal practices as sites for women's empowerment and social change. Scholars see “lesbian adoptive mothering” as practices of mothering that challenges and changes the norms of patriarchal motherhood that are oppressive to women. For many lesbians, practicing feminist mothering offers a way to disrupt the transmission of sexist and patriarchal values from generation to generation. Many lesbian motherhood memoirs confirm to these anti-traditional values.*

### **Objective**

*The ambiguity of the adoptive mother as a “real” maternal body, as dictated by Nancy Abrams in her memoir, *The Other Mother: A Lesbians Fight for Her Daughter* provides opportunities for adoptive mothers to subvert the dominant mode of mothering. As long as the adoptive mother does not procreate, she is considered a close relative to Eve Sedgwick's “nonprocreative adult” and thus a 'queer' adult body. In resisting genetic reproduction, the adoptive maternal body chooses when and how to become a mother. Seeking to analyze the patterns of motherhood that is more inclusive than monomaterialism and serial maternalism, the adoptive mother argues for an ontology of motherhood that embodies what Caroline Whitbeck describes as a “self–others relation”—an ontology that will encourage an adoptive mother's attempts to respond to an often complex configuration of familial relationships.*

### **Research Methodology**

*The research methodology for the proposed thesis intends to study the significance of deconstruction of adoptive motherhood, of sexuality, gender, and the female body. Critical theories that will be focused here will include *Queer Theories, Motherhood theories and Life Writings*, with special focus on memoirs.*

## Conclusion

*The adoptive maternal body is a potentially queer body from which one might gain a queer perspective on mothering more generally. Without denying important differences between adoptive and biological maternal bodies or among adoptive bodies themselves, this memoir by Nancy Abrams aims to explore how the representational figure of the adoptive mothering body gives rise to the phenomenological experience of double-consciousness, thus making the adoptive maternal body a site of potential resistance to dominant discourses on mothering, including the ideologies of pronatalism, reprosexuality, repronarrativity, and monomaternalism.*

**Keywords :** Queer motherhood, Lesbian, Sexuality, Gender

The ideology of monomaternalism stems from a combination of belief about the socially normative and the biologically imperative assumption that a child can have only one 'real' mother. As gender theorists notes, claims about real men and women are intended to keep us in line with gendered binaries and to bring those who might deviate from prescribed norms of masculinity and femininity back into line with normative ideals. Assertions about who is or is not a 'real' mother often carry normative significations intended to discipline those who deviate from norms of femininity. Theoretically, queerness resists narratives of reprosexuality, the alterations to lifestyle that childrearing requires. One cannot rear children without succumbing to homonormative and domestic normative practices. Queerness involves an uncoupling of sex and reproduction and heterosexual coupledness is not mandated by biological dictates, cultural or legal norms. The aspect of queering motherhood gains from adhering to the perspectives of parents with 'queer' sexual and gender identities, especially when it brings these experiences to the centre of the analysis. Through the voices of queer-identified parents, one can hear stories and insights that might be eclipsed by the voices of cisnormative and heteronormative tradition. Such stories expand our notions of the possible, and create connections between individuals across time and space. The perspectives of queer-identified parents allow us to see how our existing sociocultural norms are constructed and point to the gaps that may arise as we construct and deconstruct identities and relations in the everyday life.

It is wrong to assume that queering motherhood is only and inevitably a matter of addition, of bringing parents who identify as 'queer' into existing yet unyielding frameworks. Motherhood is a closely monitored component of social ideology and there is ample territory for 'queering'. The parenting experiences and insights of those who do not identify as 'queer' can also queer motherhood. 'Queering' extends beyond individual identity and toward a consideration of how relationships, communities, genders, and sexualities might proceed otherwise. Queering motherhood can therefore start where any of the central gendered, sexual, relational, political, and/or symbolic components of 'expected' motherhood are challenged. These challenges can be experiential, empirical, or theoretical.



The classic canons of queer motherhood theory has largely operated outside of the realm of the parental binaries. While many scholars in this area cite works by Judith Butler on performativity, gender, and social intelligibility, Butler's own reliance on psychoanalytic traditions confirms that she has considered "subjectification" almost exclusively from the perspective of the child rather than from that of the parent/guardian. This is a focus that has been retained by many other queer theorists, particularly those who have used psychoanalytic resources; such approaches relegate mothers and other caregivers to the background of subjectification. Further, in contrast with the largely relational focus of maternal theorists like DiQuinzio and Chandler, queer theorists and others from post-structuralist lineages have often relied on 'individuated' subjects, who seem to operate free from explicit social ties and processes. A central critique of queer motherhood theory is that too many of its dictums stay safely in the realms of 'discourse', safe from the legal, social, or emotional concerns of everyday life. This focus on the textual, symbolic, and representational at the expense of the material, relational, and embodied lead many queer motherhood scholars to ignore material concerns such as domestic violence.

Queering motherhood invites questions that precede the birth, or even the conception, of a child. It examines the ways that institutional restrictions shape the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender prospective parents in fertility/ assisted reproduction clinics. They identify rigidly gendered, heterocentric, and sexually restrictive assumptions in family. When we move 'queering motherhood' beyond sexual orientation and consider transgender or gender variant lives, everyday mothering can challenge the gender binary, and more broadly, the institution of gender. Queering motherhood is often considered a theoretical exercise, but challenging heteronormative institutions and structures has material consequences. Queering motherhood can both illuminate heteronormative assumptions that structure mothering and family life and destabilize norms that maintain gender inequality in the family and other social institutions. Queering motherhood does not just operate as one engages with social institutions and in the case of gender transgressive parents, assumed version of "doing mothering" visibly adheres to the heteronormative rulebook of sex, gender, mothering, and family.

Queer motherhood scholars highlight the negative consequences of monomaterial policies and practices for women and children and to suggest ways in which adoptive, blended, lesbian, and other queer families can be sites of resistance to monomaterialism. As queer motherhood theory dictates, kinship need not be dependent on status recognition. Indeed, the desire for recognition and approval of non-normative family forms may lead to assimilation to normative expectations, thus neutralizing the radical politics adoptive, lesbian, blended, and polygamous families potentially embody much as the resistance to heteronormativity embodied in lesbian mothering. The queerness of adoptive mothering is recuperated into dominant ideologies of mothering when adoptive kinship is closeted by sealed public records and practices of genealogical mothering .

In situating polymaternal families as potentially queer communities of kinship, theorists explore the relations between the queer and the intimate from a different perspective. The claim is that polymaternal families might queer intimacy in both its psychological and its material dimensions. Psychologically, such families triangulate the mother–child relationship, thus shifting the focus away from a romanticized version of mother–child love as a dyadic relationship of mutual recognition. Materially, polymaternal families queer intimacy by destabilizing the domestic space and time in which intimacy is lived, thus shifting the focus away from a notion of home as a safe place from the challenges of public life.

In understanding why accounts of queer motherhood so rarely focus on the relationship between mothers, Eve Sedgwick's analysis of male homoeroticism is detrimental in this aspect. Sedgwick argues that male homoerotic relationships are typically configured as relationships of rivalry that are triangulated around a woman. Our culture insists on framing male–male desire as male rivalry triangulated around a woman, thus reframing queer desire as heterosexual desire, we frequently render female–female desire intelligible by triangulating it around a child, thus reframing queer desire as reproductive desire. In cases of polymaternal families, female bonding over children is frequently signified as a site of rivalry.

To queer mothering is to understand lesbian mothering as a prototype for other forms of mothering, rather than viewing it as an odd or deviant form of mothering. Although lesbian mothering highlights loving relationships between mothers, adoptive mothering, foster mothering, and step mothering highlight forms of kinship that resist the logic of the nuclear family. As Judith Halberstam suggests, queerness may be less a matter of sexual identity than it is an outcome of strange temporalities and spatial configurations. Adoptive families and blended families frequently become queer because of the ways in which they live outside of normative familial time and space. Adoptive mothers and stepmothers exemplify a form of motherhood that is not ruled by a biological clock and whose story of motherhood may not begin with mothering an infant. Moreover, they inhabit domestic spaces that lack fences to define their boundaries. Unlike the nuclear (homonormative) lesbian family, adoptive and blended families reveal the family to be permeable structures that spread across multiple households.

When we view adoptive mothering and step mothering as a lens through which to view mothering more generally, we treat such polymaternal families not as deviations from the familial norm, but instead as revealing facets of maternal practice simply hidden in normative families. Then our conceived notions of theories of maternal practice change if we no longer envision home as a stable material place. Families that are spread across multiple geographical spaces trouble the alleged boundary between private and public spaces, encouraging the readers to rethink or reimagine the distinction between home and elsewhere. Living intimacy within the complex configurations of time and space

inhabited by mothers and children in adoptive and blended families requires abandoning the notion of home as a fixed and static location wherein one always feels safe, protected, or even comfortable. Thus, to move adoptive and blended families to the center of our theorizing about motherhood specifically and kinship generally is to move toward a notion of families as entities that require practices of solidarity among the various inhabitants of diasporic homes.

Contested norms of good mothering provide an ideological terrain that often prevents practices of solidarity between mothers—whether those mothers are members of different families or belong to the same family. The adoptive mother may stereotype the birth mother as incapable, neglectful, or abusive. The first mother may characterize the stepmother as too harsh in her discipline. Instead of acting in solidarity with other mothers, society often criticizes, judge and feels criticized and judged by one another. The good mother/bad mother dichotomy endeavours to uphold the ideology of monomaterialism by giving a personal stake in claiming to be a child's 'real' mother and thereby the only mother who counts. Much as the good mother/bad mother dichotomy upholds the ideology and practices of monomaterialism, the good queer/bad queer dichotomy upholds the ideology and practices of heteronormativity. Homonormativity has fragmented the queer community into hierarchies of worthiness that seek recognition of those who mimic gender-normative social roles while marginalizing those who challenge monogamy as well as those who resist a binary gender or sex system.

Foucault speaks of power as reaching right into our bodies, permeating posture, gesture, speech, relationships, and ways of living. Following Foucault, the reader can speak of power as producing adoptive maternal bodies. As Foucault notes, power is 'a productive network which runs throughout the whole social body'. The norms for good parenting that affect prospective adoptive parents and produce the adoptive maternal body reflect widespread social ideals governing good mothers, good fathers and good families. A central argument is that caring for children has been queered by a proliferation of nonbiological polymaternal families of choice who resist normative familial configurations and normative domestic pattern. Non-normative forms of mothering are always chosen or practiced as intentional incarnations of queer subjectivities. In adoptive, lesbian, extended-blended, and polygamous families, narratives of retrosexual are displaced by narratives of chosen kinship—choices that may include homosocial and even homoerotic relationships between women. By providing alternative models of kinship featuring female homosocial resistance to gendered norms of self-sacrificial mothering, polymaternal families allow for the formation of queer subjectivities in both mothers and children.

The ambiguity of the adoptive mother as a 'real' maternal body, as dictated by Nancy Abrams in her memoir, *The Other Mother: A Lesbians Fight for Her Daughter* provides opportunities for adoptive mothers to subvert the dominant mode of mothering. As long

as the adoptive mother does not procreate, she is considered a close relative to Eve Sedgwick's 'nonprocreative adult' and thus a 'queer' adult body. In resisting genetic reproduction, the adoptive maternal body chooses when and how to become a mother. Seeking to analyze the patterns of motherhood that is more inclusive than monomaterialism and serial maternalism, the adoptive mother argues for an ontology of motherhood that embodies what Caroline Whitbeck describes as a “self–others relation”—an ontology that will encourage an adoptive mother's attempts to respond to an often complex configuration of familial relationships.

Nancy Abrams shifts our focus to the ways in which the ambiguity of the adoptive mother as a 'real' maternal body provides opportunities for adoptive mothers to subvert the dominant script of mothering. Open adoptions, like open practices of queer sex, delink reproduction from sexuality and, in so doing, resist the myth that personal fulfillment is to be found in genetic transmission to future generations. Open adoption also queers kinship by challenging the ideology of monomaterialism and insisting on the reality and presence of two different mothers in a child's life. The author examines a particular assemblage within the postmodern familial assemblage, namely, the cyborg mother as a fusion of organic and nonorganic forces that negotiates and enables intimacy across geographical distance. As a part-time custodial parent, continuity of mothering practices was maintained, in large part, through inhabiting shared virtual space with her daughter on an ongoing basis. Seeking here to initiate a dialogue between cultural theorists exploring the influence of digital technologies and feminist theorists exploring practices of motherhood, the author argues that communication technologies such as cell phones, texting, email and instant messaging extend and modify both the bodies of the adopted child and those of their parents. Thus, 'real' mothering has, in the post-industrialized world, become inextricably intertwined with technology. This form of mothering in queer space and time—like other forms of inhabiting queer space and time—should be neither romanticized nor demonized. Whether one uses such opportunities to engage in queer forms of mothering that transform the meaning and experience of maternal love or instead use these spaces to extend practices of heteropatriarchal mothering is up to them.

The distinction between adoptive and biological mothers is a historically contingent one. Abrams points to patterns of contemporary narratives of adoptive mothering and which distinguish these experiences from those of biological mothers. As these narrative threads center primarily on issues of material, physiological difference, theorists speak intelligibly about adoptive maternal bodies. She says that there are two different ways to become a biological mother: genetic and gestational. Biological reproduction provides a sense of personal identity derived from embedding oneself in a narrative of generational succession point. Women's preference for giving birth over adopting reveals not only a value placed on the genetic linkage, but one placed also on the uniquely female experiences of pregnancy and childbirth. The process of watching one's own body

undergo transformation during pregnancy, establishing emotional connections with the foetus by feeling movements through the abdomen, and giving birth are unique to biological parents.

Adoptive maternal bodies are not 'natural' bodies. They are bodies simultaneously marked as damaged (which is to say infertile) and thus undesirable . They are bodies who announce themselves as normal, even as they are marked as abnormal. They know the dominant social script for mothering and know how to pass as a 'real' mother. Adoptive mothers thus share certain affinities with `normal' mothers who know how to perform the script for patriarchal norms of motherhood or closeted lesbians or gays who know how to perform the script for heterosexuality. Biological maternal bodies may escape the closet, but do not escape this surveillance because it allows women to participate in a 'remarkably natural process'. Biological mothering may include a range of difficulties with conception, birthing, or parenting, or none of these. Biological mothering may result from conscious personal choices to mother or from circumstances of rape and incest. Whether consciously chosen or not, biological mothering, like adoptive mothering, may be experienced as satisfying and fulfilling or rife with challenges and regress the question of whether there is an adoptive maternal body distinct from a biological maternal body.

The adoptive maternal body is a potentially queer body from which one might gain a queer perspective on mothering more generally. Without denying important differences between adoptive and biological maternal bodies or among adoptive bodies themselves, this memoir by Nancy Abrams aims to explore how the representational figure of the adoptive mothering body gives rise to the phenomenological experience of double-consciousness, thus making the adoptive maternal body a site of potential resistance to dominant discourses on mothering, including the ideologies of pronatalism, reproductivity, reproductivity, and monomaternality. Adoptive maternal bodies, like biological maternal bodies, are always embodied in social, cultural, economic, and political contexts-contexts marked by racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, and ableism. In both cases, therefore, it makes sense to speak of motherhood as a status that may be conferred or withheld in processes involving the potential intervention of strangers-as well as the potential intervention of friends, neighbors, and family. Those for whom motherhood is experienced as natural are precisely those who have-like the adoptive mother-successfully embodied what Nancy Miller terms "the dominant social script" about mothering. The difference between biological mothers and non biological mothers is an epistemological one: adoptive non biological mothers know that their status as mothers depends on mastery of the social script for good mothering; the contingency of their status as mothers is largely invisible to biological mothers, who embody the norms regulating their status as mothers, unless they deviate from that script of patriarchal constructions of heteronormative motherhood.

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## Concept of Liberty in the Select Spirituals of American Civil Rights Movement

### Abstract

*The concept of liberty echoes frequently in human actions and experiences and it makes unrestrained impact on human and social order. Liberty is a state in which a freeman enjoys the freedom of being ruled by none, where everyone is treated as equal and the dignity of the individual is protected. Thus, human beings irrespective of their differences strive to attain liberty in its true form and they find different modes for its manifestation. The spirituals of the Afro-American repertoire are one of the dominant modes which portray the experiences of inequality and discrimination. The lyrics of the early spirituals were improvised according to the changing situations and they were popularised during the American Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968). It is argued in the existing literature that there are different categories of spirituals which depict the protest events with individual and group participation. The lyrics of the spirituals vividly portray their constant longing for freedom, but the conceptions of liberty that underlie within the lyrics are seldom attempted. Moreover, the area has received little attention in the literature and therefore it is deemed to be worthy of study. The lyrics under study are “We Shall Overcome”, “This Little Light of Mine” along with their earlier versions. In this context, the present study aims to analyse the lyrics and its decisive role in the representation of liberty with its key elements like harmony, repetition, improvisation and group participation. The major goal of the paper is to unveil the nuances of liberty by analysing the history and evolution of these spirituals and how they get manifested in the improvised versions. The study has adopted both socio-cultural and linguistic theories to explore the concept of liberty and the key elements in the lyrics. The analyses of the lyrics prove that the conception of liberty (group as well as individual) is overlapped and biased and often hassled. Therefore, the present research argues that the concept of liberty is relative and contextual in nature.*

**Keywords :** Spirituals, Liberty, Freedom, Civil Rights Movement, Black Music

### I. Introduction

The word 'liberty' originates from the Latin word 'libertas' which is derived from the name of the goddess 'Libertas' and the archaic Roman God Liber. The word 'liberty' is often used in slogans such as “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” or “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.” The term liberty ensures citizens the right to do as one pleases and it entails the responsible use of freedom under the rule of law without depriving anyone else of their freedom. But freedom is broader in that it represents a total lack of

restraint or the unrestrained ability to fulfil one's desires. Although some attempts have been made to distinguish between liberty and freedom (Pitkin, 1988; Dworkin, 2008; Williams, 2008) the terms are often used interchangeably. The concept of liberty is further expanded as the absence of constraints, availability of choices, social status and ultimately the effective exercise of power (Carter, 2007). Even if the term revolves around human actions and experiences, the meaning of liberty seems to be overlapping and contradictory and often understood in accordance with different thoughts and notions.

In this context, the concept of liberty can be understood with various cultural artefacts. Among them the cultural products of US especially the spirituals and its lyrics seem to be pertinent due to various reasons. The foremost reason is that US is a nation founded on the principles of liberty and equality and thus its modes of rhetoric would reflect these ideals. Secondly, the principles of US constitution have been adopted by different nations due to its cosmopolitan nature. Furthermore, they stand for personal freedom and assure liberty and equality to all men. But it has a history of enslavement and witnessed several protests and mass movements to free themselves from the fetters. Several forms of rhetoric fuelled these movements and spirituals and its lyrics play an imperative role in the attainment of liberty. The lyrics of spirituals with black roots resonates the bestiality and horrors of slavery which stir the emotions of the common man. These lyrics would have played a pivotal role in the abolishment of slavery. It seems that they manifest the various dimensions of liberty and freedom. They are likely to serve as great historical sources and subjects of historical enquiry. Hence the present study attempts to enquire the select lyrics of early spirituals and their popular adaptations during the American Civil Rights Movement. The study explores the varied dimensions of liberty in the select lyrics of spirituals.

When we trace back the black cultural repertoire, the spirituals has been one of the popular rhetoric with the varied expression of liberty. Spirituals record the struggle of people to survive and they have the power to touch the souls and stir the emotions of the people who sing and hear them (Reagon, 1992). They seem to be original and notable which is created out of the real experiences of the blacks and they perpetuate the varied dimensions of liberty (Jones, 2005). Spirituals being one of the powerful modes they were popularised during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and attained worldwide recognition (Reagon, 1992; Dett, 2013). The lyrics were used in protest movements and mass actions as a powerful rhetoric and undoubtedly they reflect the intricate facets of liberty.

Further, the traditional folk music of the Afro-Americans embodies the tonal and rhythmic expressions of millions during their enslavement. Unlike a manifesto or pamphlet, they could be memorized, recollected, repeated and disseminated. (Eyerman, 1998). There were hundred or more songs popular during the American Civil Rights Movement rooted in the rich repertoire of ballads, love songs and religious songs which express the intense feelings and expressions of individuals irrespective of their



differences. The inquisitive goal of the lyrics seems to be the attainment of liberty. But at times they vary with complacent and defeatist attitude where they bound to endure their lot without any resistance says, Seeger. Thus the lyrics foreground the different dimensions of liberty according to changing situations and there is a possible research gap to interpret the varied aspects of liberty in different contexts.

In order to unveil these varied nuances of liberty the study analyses the select lyrics “We Shall Overcome” and “This Little Light of Mine” along with their earlier versions popular during the Movement. The song “We Shall Overcome” later become the unofficial anthem of American Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968). The study specifically examines the representation of liberty and the decisive role of liberty in transforming their lives in the socio-political background. The key elements of the lyrics like harmony, repetition, improvisation and group participation are considered to determine their impact on the attainment of liberty both individual and group in its positive and negative account. A comparative analysis of the early as well as adapted versions is done to explore the implicit notions of liberty and the changing trends over a period of time. The analysis finds that the liberty has varied dimensions in accordance to changing situations. Therefore the present paper argues that the concept of liberty is relative and contextual in nature. The paper is organised into four sections. The first section gives a brief introduction to the concept of liberty and spirituals. It stretches with the relevance of the study. The second section narrates the historical background of spirituals and its evolution. The third section synthesises the theoretical discussion of the study and it broadens with the analyses of the select lyrics. The last section concludes with the major findings and its implication on freedom and liberty.

## **II. Background of the Study**

The evolution and history of the spirituals is marked with the unique experiences of slavery with larger compositions and individual composers. The songs seem to be original and notable which is created out of the real experiences of the blacks and express resistance to enslavement (Jones, 1999). In 1619, twenty Africans were brought to North America as servants. Later millions of men, women and children were brought to America as slaves and they were immigrated to the Newland by force. Many of the slaves died during the transit and the survived left their belongings in their homeland (Bennett, 2007). But they carried a rich cultural tradition which is noted for the musical repertoire of the Afro- Americans with its powerful lyrics (Brown, 1969). It encompasses myths, tales, ballads, spirituals, hymns, gospel songs, work songs and field hollers which influenced every aspect of Afro-American life in the New World. The lyrics are marked with the elements of hope and optimism from its very origin. They speak of suffering without any bitterness and they speak of hope for a better life to come, if not here, assuredly in the hereafter (Lieberman, 1989). Even if the spirituals were related to African music they had a unique form which is different from the work songs and field hollers (Jones, 2001). The songs are distinct with its unique form and pattern.

The categorisation of spirituals is found in the *American Negro Songs* as songs of call and response pattern, long phrase melody and segmented melody (Work, 2013). The lyrics were effectively rendered through the specific patterns and style. The call and response pattern is the most typical pattern where the leader sings a line from his memory and the followers sing the chorus repeatedly. An oft quoted example of this type is “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” with the chorus “Coming For To Carry Me Home.” This is the typical style of African songs and spirituals (Hayes, 1948). The second type of spirituals with lyrics of slow, longer phrases and complete sentences (Work, 2013) like “Balm in Gilead” and “Were You There?.” The third category is syncopated, rhythmic and short phrases which make the listener want to clap, tap and move (Work, 2013). “Shout All Over God's Heaven” and spirituals of this type will have a word or a phrase repeatedly sung (Work, 2013).

The lyrics popular during protests and mass movements manifest notes of resistance and they were accomplished with the elements of harmony, repetition, improvisation and group participation. Even in the absence of the leaders, the protesters carried out singing and asserted their long denied freedom in the lyrics. They chronicle the experiences of the past era and fervently sought individual representation in the lyrics. The voice of the protesters made the harmony and rhythm with their feet and hands without percussive drums (Lieberman, 1989). The lyrics became powerful tools of articulation and they attained worldwide recognition in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries driven with activism (Reagon, 1992, Dett, 2013). Consequently, the lyrics became a tool of passive resistance and an instrument of cultural affirmation (Salaam, 1995). They were improvised and assertively used in accordance with the changing situations.

### **III. Analyses of the Select Lyrics**

Spirituals record the struggle of people to survive and they have the power to touch the souls and stir the emotions of the people who sing and hear them (Reagon, 1992).

Spirituals were testimony against slavery and prayer to God to free them from the fetters of enslavement. They carry the profound power to move the souls and it let the masters to listen to the sounds that pass the chambers of their soul. If not moved by the songs, it is because there is no flesh in the obdurate heart. The concept and form of spirituals differ from the hymns and the gospel music of the afro American song tradition, even if the theme of the lyrics clings to religious faith and ideals. (Jones, 2005; Douglass, 2016).

The early compositions and the lyrics shared mores, customs and ethnic history and they were expressions of their lives. Most of them reflect religious ideals and strong faith in God. Hayden's symphonies for instance, were the expression of soul which acts as a medium to assert their faith and beliefs. They find the lyrics as a means to reaffirm their reliance on God. This paved for some fake conceptions that over the acculturation process they have lost their tradition and culture by accepting the religion of the coloniser.

Even the spirituals are only the mimicked versions of the European compositions (Walleschek, 1893; Allen, 1996). Some of the scholarly studies argue that blacks being half barbarous people and less intelligent and are incapable of producing valuable music. But later this argument was proved to be racist oriented and more biased. The assumption was ignored and subsequently the lyrics become a predominant mode of cultural interaction. The artists showed extraordinary power to move the masses and accelerate the Movement to the history itself (Denisoff, 1977). Despite the destructive environment of slavery, spirituals played a pivotal role in the constructive process which possesses the enduring qualities of culture and creativity (Jones, 2001). They were free from the fetters of dominance and the term spiritual itself suggests the fullness of spirit. It enhanced the bondage between communities and without a written language they resonate within the individual spirit. For the native blacks the songs were an amalgamation of dance, music and singing which were inseparable. They served as a tool for maintaining social memory and consciousness (Hayes, 1948). Later on they become an effective mode for affirming individual and group identities.

Individual and group identities were evolved through the lyrics. The process of narration was constructive in nature where the bondage between individuals and society is effectively rendered in the lyrics. Both the progressive and conservative views are recounted with an intellectual heritage. The progressive notion explores the Enlightenment thought with its core concepts: liberty from tradition, superstitions and beliefs which accelerate the liberal ideas of individual rights and rejection of birth entitlements. The conservative notion coincides with Edmund Burke who critiqued the ideals of French Revolution as the rejection and violation of natural social order. The modern conservatism trace back to aristocratic entitlements (Burke, 1982). The lyrics of the early and adapted versions reflect these notions of conservatism and idealism. The lyrics are ambiguous with multiple notions. It shows traces of enlightenment with its progressive tradition which stands for freedom, equality and individuality, but at times they favour the imperial domination and colonial regimes. The enlightenment thoughts are often biased which favour authority and regime. The non-western world is viewed by the enlightenment thinkers as unintelligible and they require paternal guidance to be brought into History (Mehta, 2018). The spirituals are often composed with the above mentioned traces of progressive tradition and conservatism. Thus the manifestation of liberty seems to be inclined with the conservative and progressive tradition.

At last a heavy voice began to sing... we look like men marching on and like men on war. Over and over again he sang it, making slight changes. The rest watched him intently with no sign of approval or disapproval. All at once, when the refrain struck right response in their ears, they took it up and shortly half a thousand were upraised... (Epstein, 2003).

The adapted versions have become unique from European compositions with meticulous improvisation which reaffirmed individuality and courage. They become integral in the blacks' lives with no written score and they were thoroughly improvised according to the occasions and memorised singing comforted their souls with a healing effect. The lyrics captivated the crowd and to ensemble them with better coordination. These unique features made the manifestation of liberty easy and clear. The individual's interests and desires get prioritised and the expressions of feelings and emotions freedom were at high. The form and pattern of each lyric was unique and simple. "When they come to the praise meeting dat night, they sing about it, dey work at it in, work at it in, till they get it right and dat's de way (Brown, 1969)." This shows the specific way of call and response pattern and the approach was evidently assertive.

The oral tradition was carried to later centuries and the early spirituals were thus adapted and popularised during the several protest and mass movements. The concept of liberty finds its manifestation in the early as well as in the improvised lyrics. The hope for freedom and liberty pertain to be an assertive notion. The analyses of the select lyrics prove the vitality and emotion of the lyrics sung during the movement. The individual and collective expression of liberty drove them to a state of ecstasy. They were sung during mass meetings and protest a movement with thousand voices singing as one and it generates power that is indescribable says, Wyatt Tee Walker. The adaptations of the Civil Rights Movement chronicle the same pattern.

#### **i. "We Shall Overcome"**

"We Shall Overcome" is the modern adaptation of the old Negro Spiritual "I'll Overcome Someday," which became the unofficial theme song and anthem of the Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968). The old verses *I'll be all right...I'll be like Him...I'll wear the crown... I will overcome* were adapted by Zilphia Horton, Frank Hamilton, Guy Carawan and Pete Seeger and they added verses appropriate to labour, peace and integration: *We will end Jim Crow... We shall live in peace ...We shall organise ...The whole wide world around*. The lyrics of the song were popularised by the tobacco workers union of the southern civil rights movement and later brought to the Highlander folk school- a training school for activists' interested in labour organising progressive reforms in the south. The song became popular with the March in Washington on August 1963 led by Joan Baez with a crowd of around 3000000. The song functions as a powerful stir in the movement for racial justice and equality. They affirmed that *we are not afraid* and they asserted that they have the strong faith in the ideal of truth and liberty that *they will overcome someday... and they will be set free....* The improvised version cling on the early lyrics with the biblical allusion of St. John of the Old Testament that *the truth will set them free and lord will see us through ....* The religious notions of the early lyrics are retained in the adaptation but it is attuned to the changing situation which demands unity and integration to a higher level.

A shift from individual to collective thinking is what observed in the improvised lyrics: *I'll overcome* to *We shall overcome*. The lyrics of the song, *the whole wide world around, black and white together...we shall all be free* suggest a cosmopolitan view where humans want to be *free* irrespective of their differences and thus attainment of liberty is set to be the ultimate goal of human life. The adaptive nature of the lyrics ignored the strings of blind dogmas and instead they prove to be eclectic with diverse views and notions. Seeger and Carawan added verses *black and white together* to erase racist attitudes and they call for freedom and equality. Therefore, the different aspects of liberty like peace, truth, courage, togetherness, community, racial comity, friendship and freedom get amalgamated in the lyrics. In the early lyrics, they always seek the support of a staunch leader and they showed strong faith in His ideals. They were much more dependent even if they try to become free individuals. But in the adaptation we can see a shift from individual to group where they show courage to stand independent. They reaffirm that *we are not afraid...* by external constraints and they have the innate power to overcome the hurdles put forward by the oppressor. The verse *the whole world is wide around* suggests the wide possibilities to get united and fight for justice. The early as well as the adapted lyrics follows the call and response pattern where the refrains are repeatedly sung by the participants. The preference to the devices of traditional black music like syncopation and harmonious rhythms were retained in the modern version also.

## ii. “This Little Light of Mine”

The song “This Little Light of Mine” was originally written by Harry Dixon Loes and later adapted the song by Zilphia Horton and Pete Seeger. The song became popular by the civil rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer when she sang the song, while detained by the police on her way back attempting to register the vote along with her fellow members. The song tells that there is little light in each of us that would make us enlightened. This shows the commitment to our fellow beings and thus ensures justice and freedom to all. The little light in each individual recognises the traces of goodness in others and subsequently the development of a healthy community. The song has repetitive lines and it suggests that they stand for a common cause that can effectively be rendered through sustained efforts.

On the primary level, “this little light of mine, let it shine, hallelujah” the lyrics express religious views, but on another level they are encoded with messages demanding freedom. “Out in the dark, let it shine”, “I've got the light of freedom” in the improvised lyrics suggest the quest for freedom and they have deeper layers of meanings. Thus the lyrics have become a meaningful part of organising for social change.

In the early lyrics, “I'm not going to make it shine, I'm going to let it shine” accounts the submissive attitude of the early folk in which they go for negative liberty. They want to

be free, but they are ready to be bound within the polities. They seek freedom in idealised conditions and the traces of resistance are low when compared to the adaptations. In the improvised lyrics they are out from the darkness and the chorus assertively sing that they have got the little light of freedom. In multiple verses, it envisions the eschewed visions of nationalism and they implore the protesters to share each other and to overcome the disgraces of races. Within the national discourse shift or transformation, glimpse issues-but the lyrics reassert that change is possible when there is a will to make it happen.

In the early as well as in the appropriations varied conceptions of liberty find its place. Liberty has different dimensions and the meaningfulness of the various conceptions depend on the degree of attainment of overall liberty.

Our contemporaries are ever a prey to two conflicting passions: they feel the need of guidance and they long to stay free. Unable to wipe out these two contradicting instincts they try to satisfy them together, says Alexis de Tocqueville

The actual wishes of men or societies should not be ignored in the names of selves, whatever is the true goal of man it must be identical with his freedom (Berlin, 2002). For instance the concept echoed frequently in the human actions and experiences. For instance, it is a state in which a freeman enjoys the freedom of being ruled by none where everyone is treated as equal and the dignity of the individual is protected (Gray, 1991). According to different schools, liberty has varied conceptions.

In the early lyrics negative liberty seem to be persistent where the protesters seek to be free from the chains but they lack self-realisation. The core idea of negative liberty revolves around the absence of external constraints on one's actions and the constraints are intentionally put by others or can be held others responsible for (Carter, 1999). They were faith oriented and their ideologies revolve around the belief systems which are often rigid in nature. But in the adaptations their orientation gets transformed from pure faith to objective readings of liberty and freedom get reflected in the improvised lyrics. The appropriations incline to positive liberty which rationalizes the realisation of individual self. The early lyrics "I'll Overcome Someday" was improvised to "We Shall Overcome Someday". "This Little Light of Mine" was changed into "This Little Light of Freedom". They tend to express liberty in a positive notion where they seek self-realisation through singing and they get rejuvenated through the lyrics. Thus the lyrics foreground the capabilities of individual self where fixed boundaries are tapered. The repetitive pattern and harmonious rhythm add the splendour of the lyrics and they used to sing in groups. Group participation evokes the notions of liberty in collective and they upgrade and strive to attain liberty as autonomy. The struggles and hardships of their lives get true expression in the lyrics and they were decisive to transform themselves from complacent to a state of dissent.

The key elements enriched singing and the singing patterns adopted by the protesters assert their goal. It echoes in every actions and experiences. The use of syncopation and counter rhythms marked by handclapping made the lyrics deep into the heart. The distinctive singing pattern of the blacks include shouting, exclamations and shrill falsetto tones which mark their true expression in want of liberty and their constant longing for freedom. In contrary to the early spirituals (religious ideologies), the modern versions are rooted in social and political ideologies. They stood for the attainment of individual and group liberty. The lyrics had a transformative role where minds get kindled and the vibrant lyrics rejuvenated their hearts. The primary elements of harmony, repetition, group participation and improvisation made the lyrics effective and powerful. The early as well as adapted versions had significant role in attaining absolute freedom. Even though the question arises whether they attained real freedom, they would have reached a state in which they are able to think freely. In this context, the lyrics of the spirituals both early and modern versions attuned them to resist and fight for true liberty. This cosmopolitan overview made the lyrics widely accepted in popular culture. Even the most unintelligible irrespective of their differences were able to utter the lyrics without any constraints and the one who doesn't have any knowledge in music or singing would be able express their suppressed feelings through the powerful lyrics. Thus the spirituals and their appropriations are finely tuned and the lyrics have the great potential to transform the lives of many.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The present study attempts to identify the phenomenon of liberty and freedom, with its distinct traditions. The study analyses the lyrics of two select spirituals within the contextual background. The purpose of the study is to define liberty with its different conceptions. The study finds that the definition of liberty is neutral with individualistic and collective traditions. Even if the concept is not restricted to these dimensions, the analyses of the lyrics prove that they are distinct and unique. The difference between both revolves around the subject bearer who holds freedom which could be an individual or a group. The individual freedom stretches out the possibility of conceptualisation which is value and concept oriented. The second one operational mode offers organisation and regulation principles. The study has analysed both conceptual and operational ways of the lyrics. It is observed that liberty guarantees the space for freedom where individuals enjoy freedom as the outcome of liberty. The lyrics are often transformative and they function as an agent for the attainment of individual as well as group freedom. This is a kind of self-realisation where freedom is determined by liberty. This notion coincides with positive liberty where individual has a specific role in the social and political arenas. It is synonymous with free will and free thoughts in which the individual is able to formulate his or her ideologies and to execute it without any restraint. Then the individual could be treated as *free* and liberty is attained in the true sense. However the definitions

may not be ultimate and realisation of the self is often relative in nature. It is ascertained that freedom is contextual and the accomplishment of individual and group liberty is hassled by external as well as internal constraints. Even though the lyrics had a pivotal role to bring about a radical shift, the quest towards liberty has encountered countless detrimental factors. Therefore it may be concluded that the concept of liberty is distinct and often contextual in nature.

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## Liberation from the Chains of the Past: Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* as Literature of Dissent

### Abstract

*The Revolution in France was welcomed in England as it heralded liberal values and reform, both of which were perhaps long overdue. The immediate British reaction to the “epoch-making events” of eighteenth century France was expressed in the form of pamphlets, discourse and debate. The subject of debate, undertaken by various dissenters, reformers and 'Jacobin' writers, encompassed rights of man, the nature of 'Government', patriotism, and social and political justice. The revolution served the milieu, promoting new talents in politics, business, and letters and provided opportunity for liberation from the chains of the past. Needless to say, literature of dissent, widely publicised and disseminated as it was, threatened both established culture and the socio-political order.*

*To politicians such as Edmund Burke, it threatened to upturn the life and culture of England as it existed. The fear of the destructive potential of a republic, where radical ideas were written about and freely discussed is echoed in his *Reflections* (1790). *Reflections* was seen as an attempt to preserve and guard the old regime in Britain against the threat of revolution. Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* was considered by contemporaries and historians as one of the most 'effective answers' to Burke, that rebutted *The Reflections*. This paper traces how Paine is placed in this new 'republic of letters' and how his “great debate” with Burke in *Rights of Man* serves not only as a response to Burke in regard to individual rights and liberties but also embodies Paine as a “man of letters” who came to (as Burke mentions in *The Reflections*) “consider his country as nothing but *carte blanche* upon which he may scribble whatever he pleases”.*

*This paper finds in *Rights of Man* that Paine presented certain ideas which are perceived as very modern - he explored the idea of universal freedom for all as equal and autonomous individuals and promoted a permissible form of government which “epitomized the new democratic ideal”, where people governed themselves as an “individualist society”. It also finds that Thomas Paine launched an alternative intellectual tradition that attempted to reshape and re-examine ideas and principles as they existed up to the 1790. Along with Paine's ideas and his works, he also presented himself as a 'self-made' author (and sought to promote a society based on merit rather*

than birth) who was radically independent of traditional social qualifications and brought forward by the Revolution: a representative of the republic of letters, who emerged in opposition to the rhetorical ploys through which traditional culture maintains its supremacy.

**Keywords:** Liberty; Rights and Duties; Radical Dissent; British Government; French Revolution; Thomas Paine; Edmund Burke; Social Contract.

As the Bourbon dynasty was brought down in 1879 in France, it appealed the heart of many a Briton to learn that the France was now to adopt and establish a similar type of government as theirs (Richard Allen Soloway, "The Onslaught of Respectability-A Study of English Moral Thought During the French Revolution 1789-1802", 12.) The British system of governance was, after all the best in the world as far as they were concerned. Reflecting back to that period, Charles Dickens would famously write in *The Tale of Two Cities* "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, ... we had everything before us, we had nothing before us" (Dickens, 1). To reformers and dissenters in England, the revolution was encouraging and welcoming because its liberal and advanced values heralded an impetus to reforms that seemed long overdue. Richard Price, whose sermons captured in "A Discourse on the Love of Our Country" (1789) made him into a 'key player' in the revolution debate, rejoiced that the "ardor for liberty [was] catching and spreading," while the dominion of kings and priests gave way to the dominion of "law, reason and conscience."

The immediate British reactions to the "epoch-making events" (Mee and Fallon, 3) of eighteenth-century France was expressed in the form of pamphlets, discourses (such as Price's) and debates. The subject of debates encompassed rights of man, the nature of 'Government', patriotism, and social and political justice. The ideas thrown up at that time were repeatedly and 'passionately' revisited, recast and disseminated through literature and through the media of pamphlets and treatises, and this opened up the discourse to a much wider audience. As always, literature of dissent, where widely publicised and disseminated, threaten both established culture and established socio - political order. To politicians such as Edmund Burke, this threatened to upturn the life and culture of England as they knew it. The fear of the destructive potential of a republic where radical ideas are written about and freely discussed is echoed in his *Reflections* (1790). Here Burke's attempt was to preserve and guard the old regime in Britain against the threat of revolution and nip in the bud, as it were, the dissension in England that had risen in wake of the Revolution in France. Voice after voice, however, rose to challenge his charges, and *Reflections*, ironically, became the cause for the 'intellectual flowering' of the republic of letters in England. As Kevin Gilmartin traces in *Writing against Revolution: Literary Conservatism in Britain*, -

"The radicals themselves recognized the importance of Burke's

attack on the Revolution in stimulating public debate. A wave of popular conservatism could even be said to have had the unintended consequence of transforming the political culture which it meant to preserve from innovation.” (6)

Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* was considered by contemporaries and historians as one of the most 'effective answers' to Burke, amongst the thirty-eight pamphlets which rebutted *The Reflections* (including James Mackintosh's *Vindiciae Gallicae* which was published in 1791), according to James Prior, Burke's biographer. I shall try attempt to trace how Paine is placed in this new 'republic' and how his “great debate” with Burke in *Rights of Man* serves not only as a response to Burke regarding individual rights and liberties, but also is illustrative of a “man of letters” who come to (as Burke himself mentions in *The Reflections*) “consider his country as nothing but *carte blanche* upon which he may scribble whatever he pleases”.

Post the Revolution in France, many gained awareness and developed strategies they might previously have thought impractical. In the eighteenth century a new kind of writer emerged. A writer who offered an alternative to currently accepted 'reality' and who was, in most cases radically independent of traditional social qualifications (“proper grounds” such as landed property). With *Rights of Man*, Paine was attempts to launch a new era reshaping and re-examining ideas and principles. He addresses one of the central issues of the emerging revolutionary dispute: the nature of rights and their origins.

Paine's belief was that “natural rights” (in *Rights of Man*) were rights that could not be abrogated and were ones that pre-dated all of society and its various manifestations (such as Governments). It is essential that one remember that most Whigs agreed with the premise that natural rights were divine in origin and “unalterable compared to secondary or prescriptive rights, which were historically rooted and mutable” (Claeys, 11). These rights were 'natural' in that they were ordained by God. This stipulation confined the notion of a right and this often became grounds for discrimination against certain classes in the name of divine ordinance. Social contracts were limited by civil society's requirement of seeking the happiness of others over one's own happiness. It is Paine's contention that traditionally, societal rights rather than individual happiness and rights are favoured by governments. In direct opposition to Rousseau who states in *The Social Contract* (1762) that if a member of a nation was found in a small minority of citizens who were dissenting from the national will, the citizen had to discard such views and yield to the majority of citizens. No citizen, argued Rousseau, had a right to go against what a nation wants for itself (Rousseau 17). However, though, such a doctrine may seem democratic and for greater good of society but, to Paine, it is individuals that are primary and their rights are ineradicable. The Parliament, far from being “[managers] of the affairs of a nation . . .” abuses its power which they feel may be excused so long as it was achieved in the name of the people and further strengthens itself by assuming the “appearance of

duty” (*Rights*, 15). To demonstrate and explain the rationale and principles underlying institutionalized power structures, one needed to compulsorily go beyond current contexts and conditions and return to one's deepest roots: “the state of nature”. Paine believed that it becomes clear that humans originally existed as equal and autonomous individuals. Given their originally equal and autonomous state, people would come together to form governments only to achieve what they could not on their own — namely, freedom and security. The ensuring of freedom and security is thus the basic principle underlying all social and political institutions; those that do not adhere to or apply these principles are thus inherently unjust, and individuals have no obligation to obey or abide by them. This would apply, for example, both to unelected governments such as those in England and France, which by deny individuals the freedom to choose, as well to inherited hierarchies and social privileges, which limit the freedom of choice of each new generation. He undertakes a lengthy comparison of the existing British government and class system with those intended to be created by the new French constitution and discusses the inadequacies of governments (which he continues in the second part of *Rights of Man*). The revolution in France was aimed at overthrowing the dictatorial and repressive order based upon social hierarchy and legal inequality and in England it presented an opportunity to replace the English government with a new democratic order committed to “Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite”. He seems to ask and the individual to liberate himself from the constraints (“chains”) of the past and from the constraints of other people's opinions which dictate that a government is formed to “presumptuously” (*Rights* 20) by consent and agreement of all (which is not true). To him, the ideal and perhaps the only permissible form of government would one where 'people' governed themselves as an “individualist society”. In fact, he declares the dangers of old governments in an earlier work, titled *Common Sense*, where he proclaims how:

“The romantic and barbarous distinction of men into kings and subjects, though it may suit the condition of courtiers, cannot that of citizens— and is exploded by the principle upon which governments are now founded. Every citizen is a member of the sovereignty, and as such can acknowledge nopersonal subjection, and his obedience can be only to the laws” (*Common Sense* 25).

Through the preservation of the old laws, the state preserves established hierarchy and suppresses natural rights instead of allowing individual interests to operate. He examines, in this work, the way the past is preserved, represented and consumed as 'heritage'. Dismissing the “code of chivalry” that Burke laments over and advocates in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Paine claims that Burke's sentiment is based on a romanticized 'civility', 'obedience' and subservience to the aristocracy (and government) which are characterized as the epitome of what it was to be proper and respectful. This chivalry preached the philosophy of respecting the 'more respectable' through a system of 'subjugation'. Burke's central argument thus revolved around a theory of human nature

and wants, and a notion of history and the fixity of patterns of behaviour and corresponding limits of possible change. Thus, not only is civil order sustained by this approach but so is social order, since the power of the aristocracy remains unthreatened and the ones lower in the social hierarchy gain the title of a 'good citizen', rather than 'equals'. In fact, he argued, a social contract can only bind the generation that agreed to it and it certainly could not be allowed to "govern beyond the grave" thereby "bind[ing] one generation to what was agreed by a previous generation" (*Rights of Man*, 49). Additionally, as Paine asserted, every generation must be free to act for itself, in all cases and the "vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave, is the most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies" and this kept the rights of people in custody. He argued that every individual should be perfectly free to decide the course of his own life to the extent that was possible. Of course, the laws and rights then prevalent in England did not permit this, although Burke attempted to depict it as a perfect system of social and political liberty. To challenge the status quo overtly was dangerous in those times. Paine's treatise represented a "fundamental change in the nature of politics in Europe, from which Britain had everything to fear" (Mee and Fallon 2). In his *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Honorable Edmund Burke* (1827), Burke's biographer Prior contemptuously states that Paine had suggested that Burke should "endeavour" to introduce a "more enlarged system of liberty in England" (Prior 377). The system as it existed was one of inherited privileges and entrenched social hierarchies, and it was inherently unjust. To Burke, humans in society were defined by bonds they are born into rather than chose. It made perfect sense that people born to wealth or born into the aristocracy would be allowed to rule the country because they're the people who have access to education, access to manners and knowledge, and have been 'trained' for their place in society.

Paine was 'probably the ... man ... [that] epitomized the new democratic ideal' (Claeys, 3) and sought to promote a society based on merit rather than birth. For writers such as Paine, "the republic of letters [brought] forward the best literary productions, by giving to genius a fair and universal chance ... [since] a hereditary governor is as inconsistent as a hereditary author" (*Rights of Man* 198). In a long footnote, Paine points out that "it is [in fact] chiefly the dissenters who have carried English manufactures to the height they are now at" (110). Thus, neither writing, politics, nor economic or scientific enterprise would flourish had not the 'dissenters' (who, via their academies and pulpits, and through such figures as Dr. Priestley, Dr. Price, and Paine) challenged the established socio-cultural and political domination in their construction of an alternative intellectual tradition. The revolution served as the most advantageous milieu for new talents in politics, business, and letters. 'It appears to general observation,' Paine writes, 'that revolutions create genius and talents; but those events do no more than bring them forward' (*Rights of Man* 198) since there was also, clearly, an exclusion of a majority of citizens earlier. In fact, great care was taken in the eighteenth century to prevent the majority from acquiring writing skills or even an education. However, with new

dissenters and new forms of literature, there developed a voracious appetite (as Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, politics and English society* states through her study) in the British public for information about the Revolution.

It could also be viewed that Paine took 'unjustifiable' license in attempting to translate the 'metaphysically true, [but] ... morally and politically false' rights of men into the practical politics of the state. This brings to mind a similar statement made by Plato who wanted to cast out poets from the ideal city of the Republic since they were 'corrupted' and 'corrupting'. 'Men of letters' such as Paine, were seen as political writers without any representative 'responsibility' or 'commitment' to actual everyday politics. Contrastingly, Burke, was viewed to be writing from a representative and a position of accountability - he was a member of parliament and his texts were written upon 'specific, practical problems'. Men of letters, it was argued, have nothing at stake (only a "speculative" stake). They were viewed with much suspicion especially in the light of Paine's unceasing support to rebellions, uprisings, and even revolutions. Paine saw no inherent value or authority in institutions of the past; institutions were to be judged not on the basis of whether their "principles are new or old, but whether they are right or wrong".

It is essential to remember that this also was the period when the power of the press began to challenge the power of the land (or the 'landed') and governments often tended to treat print culture as a dangerously unstable and even subversive field. As Marilyn Butler says in her Introduction to *Burke, Paine, Godwin and the Revolution Controversy*, the emergence of a dissenting group, such as these "radical intellectuals", is "dangerous", as there was an increasing political importance attached to public opinion. Since even "oligarchies cannot govern without support and acquiescence" such opinions and writings would shake the public and may even force them to challenge/shake the "liberties of England" (Butler, 7). To cast aspersions on a man's character can be considered an effective way of turning public opinion. There were plenty of "slanderous" biographies of Paine that appeared after the publication of *Rights of Man*. In fact, Gregory Claeys traces how the British government paid "£500 [and] commissioned one 'Francis Oldys', a Tory refugee from Maryland and [a] clerk at the Board of Trade and Plantations named George Chalmers" (Claeys, 68) to write one such biography. That biography reached eleven editions within two years, in the process "growing (ever more fictionally) from 25 to over 150 pages, and was abstracted, embellished and widely reprinted" (Claeys, 68). Thus, the mobilization of public opinion remained a principle vital to the government and it was becoming a factor which politicians utilised to mould public opinion. William Pitt, Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1783-1801, recognized this fact, asserting that the regulation of public opinion was of prime importance in the success of his policies and that the use of the press could effectively influence this opinion (Wheless, 12).

The British government utilized the press in an attempt to shape public attitudes

toward their policies, while the factions in opposition used the media to criticize those in power and to place their views before the people. Opinion had to be and was controlled. The newspapers, in Britain, despite claims, were not impartial and had to accept government subsidies and support and thus became vehicles of governmental opinion and discourse. The taxes on newspapers and pamphlets were also increased and many could not afford to buy them anymore – thus, attempting to be a “containing and controlling” measure (Barker, 8).

The popularity of Paine and his treatise, despite the increased taxation and increasing clamp down on copies (it was considered “a quick acting poison”), was owed to his release of cheaper versions and wide spread distribution (for both part one and two of *The Rights*). He managed to mobilize language and also the press for the wide-spread dissemination of his ideas and the spirit of revolution. Roland Barthes, argues that a textual reading conceives of the author not as the “guarantor” of meaning, and suggests that although texts are structured, they are “off-centred and without closure” and texts exist not as 'sealed units'. Therefore, reading is not an 'objective' or passive practice but, in the eighteenth century required active participation ('From Work to Text', 162-64), needing readers to make connections with that which may exist in the period's culture and politics. Paine, in distributing his ideas and his work, is offering himself as a 'self-made' author brought forward by the Revolution — as the representative man of the new republic of letters who has emerged in opposition to the rhetorical ploys through which traditional culture maintains its supremacy.

Paine's principal British support came from the lower classes, many of whom had had the two parts of *Rights of Man* read to them in “pubs or at radical meetings” (Wheeles, 13) if they could not read or procure their own copies. This was frightening to the British government who believed that Paine's radical philosophy threatened the Government's stability and signalled a transformation of the reading public to a “revolutionary public” (Grenby 17). The success of the text and of Paine as a 'man of letters' may be witnessed in the way there was a huge propaganda effort made to defend Britain's existing institutions and preserve their self interest in attempts to defeat the arguments advanced by the dissenting radicals. Repeated efforts were made to convince readers of the “danger” of putting their trust in speculative theories and to stress the importance of relying upon experience and reason. Britain's government believed that despite some imperfections and anomalies, they could be credited with preserving civil society and “most just constitution in the world.” The need to protect social unity and continuity led Burke and many anti-Jacobins to focus attention on those institutions and practices that furthered stability.

Counter revolutionary expression in Britain of the Anti-Jacobins challenged the Radical's protest against the doctrine of natural rights as it existed in society by insisting that, while God made all men equal as moral beings, he had not endowed them with equal

strength, intelligence, industry, courage and everyone had their own role to play in society. William Paley even went so far as to maintain that the poor had more reasons to be “content” with their lot than the rich. Hannah More's *The Village Politics* (1792) also, many critics believe, was written in response to Paine's work and at the behest of Church authorities who wished to discourage the protest and advocate 'quiet obedience'. Since the British Anti- Jacobins regarded the conflict with France as essentially a war of ideas, they feared that French principles might reach Britain through the influence that the French Revolution was having on British radicals.

However, the Government's efforts to persecute Paine and his work(s) increased the publicity surrounding *Rights of Man* and helped to push sales throughout Great Britain. As an 18<sup>th</sup> century critic proclaims, "if any Government wish that any book should be read by all degrees of people, let them prosecute the author, and prohibit all men from reading his writings." E.P. Thompson writes of this period in *The Making of the English Working Class* that while Burke and Paine may be seen as the representative voices of two classes where (for the first time) who were realising for the first time, that they existed in a relation of struggle with each other (4). Writing and reading, in this period, become modes of unabashed subversion, silently and anonymously undermining England's establishment from within.

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## White Walks to Freedom: Negotiating Post Apartheid South Africa in J M Coetzee's *Disgrace*

### Abstract

*South Africa is a country whose history runs into centuries of struggle which is different from the other postcolonial countries. The special condition of the country gave it the term second world. The situation in South Africa is different from other settler countries as well. The writing in South Africa has always reflected the politics and the geography, working in a space criss- crossed by conditions of race, and mixed ancestry. This is reflected in the writings in myriad ways, and is different in the writings of the blacks and the whites.*

*White writing has always sought to engage itself with the volk, and was concerned itself with the angst of belonging. There were writers who actively involved themselves in the struggles of liberation like Nadine Gordimer, Andre Brink or Breyten Breytenbach. J M Coetzee was not an active participant in the freedom movements. His writings also had a detached cerebral nature to it.*

*This paper tries to argue that in *Disgrace*, which is Coetzee's first post apartheid novel, he puts across a picture of what free South Africa would be like. The novel is also a quest into how both the blacks and the whites would try to survive in a changed South Africa where post-1994, the equations of power has tipped from the whites to the blacks. The paper contextualises the novel by aligning it with its history and reads it in a post colonial angle. It reaches the conclusion that Coetzee succeeds in putting across to us a realistic and hopeful picture of post apartheid South Africa.*

**Keywords :** Post Apartheid, Postcolonial, White

Freedom has often than not meant only one thing in a nationalist paradigm. It meant the capacity to exercise one's rights and opinions and to be free of any external forces of dominion. In a colonialist concept these lines of who was the conqueror and who were the conquered was always clear. Later in a post- colonial scenario one could also discern the harm that was done to one's own country, culture, and language. Nationalistic uprisings often hinged on reclaiming the land, the culture and language. There were clear marks in history that spoke of who the land belonged to. In settler culture, these lines of demarcation were (often) faint.

In settler countries the fight for rights was settled before the country became independent. Indigene cultures were subdued and the language wiped out. The people were killed in large numbers so that only the settler remained. This led the settler/conqueror not to have any feeling of guilt. Every sign of conquest was obliterated and wherever he looked he could find “white washed” faces of recognition and approval. This situation was less so in South Africa, the country where contending forces of colour claimed allegiance of affection to the land. The history of South Africa was made complicated by centuries of claim, that led the question of ownership of the country to be divided among the whites and the black. The earliest aboriginal people of South Africa were the Khoi-khoi and San. The Dutch who came to the land in 1652 and the French Huguenots who came later are the people who are the ancestors of the Afrikaners in current South Africa. The nationalism of these Afrikaners was fanned by later wars fought with the British, who came into the country with an imperialist eye. This led to many wars between the British and the Afrikaners that lasted for nearly a century. The Afrikaners also fought with the blacks for their rights to the land and its resources.

This history of South Africa lent the country a particular hue, one that was different from other settler nations like Australia or Canada. Both the blacks and the whites believed that South Africa belonged to them. This led the country to be categorised as the second world by Alan Lawson. The whites in South Africa truly believed that they were the true owners of the land. In the long wars that were fought between the British whites and the Afrikaner whites, the Afrikaners fought for what they believed to be their motherland. In the year 1948 the white Afrikaners came to power in South Africa. In 1961 South Africa became a Republic by breaking away from the Commonwealth.

But soon black forces were rising to power. South Africa was slowly but definitely moving towards freedom under the able leadership of Nelson Mandela, who even under imprisonment shone a light of hope in the minds of his people. In the year 1994, the country walked into democracy by electing Mandela its first black president. This definitely shifted the focus of power from the whites to the blacks. Keane in his book *Bondage of Fear: A Journey through the Last White Empire* narrates how the whites reacted to the transfer of power. He speaks of the ministers sitting there and they seem " ... irredeemable lost, the map of their world, with its neat lines of separation, rent from end to end" (2).

There were different strategies that the whites employed in order for them to ascertain their purity. Apartheid or the racial policy of segregation was an ideology as well as a rule of law. Reserve lands were marked where the blacks could be housed there so that the whites could have a space of their own. In *Culture and Imperialism* Said writes that imperialism meant thinking, settling and controlling a land space which is not possessed by the colonizer. The idea of whiteness was linked to the beginning of the idea of apartheid.

The idea of the white in the transnational scenario changes and there are many works that underline this. Sarah Nuttall in *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reactions on Post-Apartheid* speaks of how a segregated political system in the country led to a segregated theory while speaking of South African literature which led to the reading of relations in strict Manichean binarisms of race, power etc. The theoretical positions that try to address the current situation in South Africa which are termed post transitional ask for a more lateral understanding of literature than strict understanding of positions. The problem of white privilege is also highlighted in Samatha Vice's article "How do I live in this Strange Place?" All these lines of demarcation as drawn by the whites were eroded when the sun of democracy dawned in South Africa.

Many white writers in South Africa claimed their allegiance to the freedom struggle. Writers like Breytenbach openly defied the government by marrying a woman from another race. He had to go into exile from where he returned in disguise to visit his beloved country. But he was caught and imprisoned for many years. In a similar vein, writers like Nadine Gordimer and Andre Brink were vocal in their allegiance to the struggle. They supported the many movements that sprang up and wrote openly about it. J M Coetzee stood apart from these writers by not taking an active part in struggles or writing openly about it in concrete terms.

Coetzee's style was what we may be called one of the intellect, one that was distanced and objective. The style of detachment earned for him the term of being non-political. In a country like South Africa to be apolitical was also to side with the conqueror, to be on the side of violence. But Coetzee has been an observer, drawing clear opinions on the country and its history, delving deep into the reasons why the country became what it was, where the whites drew their history of nationalism from. His work called *White Writing* is ample evidence to his critical acumen. But so also are many of his novels.

The first three novels (*Dusklands*, *In the Heart of the Country*, *Waiting for the Barbarians*) are allegorical thoughts that inspect colonialism from far. The next four (*Life and Time of Michael K*, *Foe*, *Age of Iron* and *Master of Petersburg*) treat the subject of South Africa though indirectly. *Disgrace* is the text written after the first democratic elections.

Among these works *Disgrace* (1999) holds an important place as it is the first novel he wrote after South Africa became a democracy. It was written four years after the election and would have been his observations regarding the country and the future it should point to. This paper tries to analyse the future that Coetzee portends for South Africa and the roads to freedom that he thinks both the whites and blacks must take in order to attain true liberation.

When the plot unfolds, we see the narrative suddenly slipping into the crux of the story; a case of sexual assault against David Lurie by his student Melanie Issacs. The story

is also opened into the world that Coetzee wants us to see. We see David Lurie refuses to acknowledge his crime. He says

I am being asked to issue an apology about which I may not be sincere?

The criterion is not whether you are sincere. That is a matter, as I say, for your own conscience. The criterion is whether you are prepared to acknowledge your fault in a public manner and take steps to remedy it. (58)

David Lurie excuses his crime by placing it on the rights of desire. He tells his daughter Lucy about a dog that used to live in their vicinity when Lucy was a child. This dog used to whine when it smelt a bitch near. The owners of the dog would beat it till it started feeling that the desire it felt was wrong. Next time the dog smelt a bitch nearby, it would whine and act as if it was punished. David says that at the point it is better to shoot the dog at that point of humiliation.

David Lurie's unwillingness to acknowledge his guilt mimics this unwillingness to sign the confirmation of the wrong that he did to Melanie Issacs. Post apartheid scenario is a ground for white guilt, of rectifying wrongs, of compromises and reconciliations. The South African Government envisaged rainbow nation where all races would live together in harmony. As a first step the Rev Desmond Tutu was appointed as head for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Mark Sanders quotes the South African Promotion Preamble which says that the TRC meant to provide "a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society... and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence for all South Africans" (61). There was also call for the whites to sign in a statement that said that they were part of the racial inequality. Only 500 of half a million whites signed.

What David Lurie forgets is the laws of the land that only till recently laid down the rules of who should love whom and who one should tie the matrimonial knot with. As mentioned earlier in the paper Breytenbach went into exile as he married a woman of his choice. Many black people met with trial, judgement and punishment in a land where laws decided the direction one's affection would take.

As the novel progresses David learns some lessons from his daughter, Lucy. Lucy is the new South Africa. She has already unlearnt many white truths. She has also decided to live a life that is a harbinger for times to come. Her confrontation with David is the steady stand against which David slowly realises that change he must. This rationalisation of Lucy goes well with the cover of *Disgrace* which shows a hungry dog standing in the middle of a country lane. She says that there is nothing important about the humans. They are only animals too. David also learns this from his association with the animals that he is given to put to sleep.

Lucy which is the new face of South Africa, comes to terms with violence and coming to terms with it is another very important focus in the second half of the novel. Lucy tries to make sense of the violence that is done to her. She tries to rationalise it, to therefore normalise it. Lucy chooses to be silent about the sexual violence done to her,

... what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone.

'This place being what?'

'This place being South Africa'.(112)

She also refuses the guideship that David offers her. Instead she tells him that she is her own mistress and she can make her own decisions.

There are many instances in the novel where white confronts the black in a changed circumstance. Lucy asks David to help Petrus in the farm. David replies that “Give Petrus a hand. I like that. I like the historical piquancy.” (77). When he buries the dogs who have been wounded and killed by the black men David thinks that, “contemptible, yet exhilarating, probably, in a country where the dogs are bred to snarl at the mere smell of a black man” (110).

We find a more visible change in David when he visits the family of Melanie Issacs. We see that David still remembers the desire he felt for his student. But now his desire is not let to fly rampant, it is rather mediated by thoughts and actions. He meets the mother and sister of Melanie and bows before them in an act of seeking forgiveness.

In Petrus, Lucy's foreman and later partner, we see the direction the black race is taking in South Africa. It is a more assertive face, the face of a black man who has come home. His voice is more certain and the terms he lays before the white people are negotiations that he takes form his new found freedom. David is unable to reconcile with this. But Lucy is firm about accepting the new terms. She also tells David,

This is my life, I am the one who has to live here. What happened to me is my business, mine alone, not yours, and if there is one right I have it is the right not to be put on trial like this, not to have to justify myself – not to you, not to anyone else. As for Petrus, he is not some hired labourer whom I can sack because in my opinion he is mixed up with the wrong people. That's all gone, gone with the wind. (133).

Lucy's decision to keep her child is another important symbol. She accepts her motherhood with a stoicism that comes from having made peace with herself. This peace that Lucy has found also transfers to Lurie. The final picture we find is of David looking on at Lucy and it is a picture of hope. This is the picture that Coetzee leaves us with. There is white mother tending her flowers in a place where she has negotiated peace with her

black compatriot, bearing a child of mixed ancestry. She has accepted the child and its future in peace and she hopes it grows bearing both the strands of the two veins that runs close to South Africa. She has decided to run her roots here, not to go abroad, not to escape. Her child will be reared by her and the black man who has chosen to give her protection. The child is the rainbow nation, the future South Africa.

This then is Coetzee's answer to the post apartheid South Africa which seeks to find deliverance from the wounds that history cast on it.

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## Travels in the Margins: A Study on S. A. Leelavathi's Travelogue *Bharathathinte Urdhva Rekhayiloode*

### Abstract

*The experience of travel differs from person to person in accordance with their life situations. Travel involves the liberty in making choices, which are taken on the basis of the different components that constitute a person's life. The socio cultural, economic and political situation to which a person belongs constitutes the identity of the respective person and further on to the experience of travels. Along with all the other entities the person's status in the caste hierarchy is one important factor which defines the experiences of a person who has undertaken a travel. When the narratives of travel unfold it reveals the traveler/writer's perspective of the world and of one's own identity, exposing the dynamics of caste and religion amongst other parameters. The intervention of caste as a distinct entity in defining the experience of travel is examined in this paper with special reference to S. A. Leelavathi's travelogue *Bharathathinte Urdhva Rekhayiloode (Through the Zenith of India)*.*

**Keywords :** Travel, Caste, Dalit, Kerala, Travelogue

In India caste intrudes the lives of the common people just like race does in the west. In the pre- modern Kerala context one's caste and religious positions determined one's mobility. That is when society was largely controlled by the casteist and communal forces, the mobility of the people who belong to the lower strata of the society were largely kept in check by means of various strategies of control. Though the sociological and cultural developments which happened as a part of the renaissance and reformation movements helped in reviving the society, these developments could not completely succeed in annihilating the social evils in the name of caste. In the current scenario more than caste it is the gender equations that determine the contours of people's mobility. The increase in the number of honour killings in the name of caste in our country and state presents a clear case of how tight the grip of caste on the Indian society is.

It is at this point we need to discuss a travel narrative written by a person who belongs to the Dalit community. S. A. Leelavathi, a Hindi teacher from Thrissur district, Kerala embarks upon a journey which crossed several Indian states. Based on that journey she wrote a travelogue *Bharathathinte Urdhva Rekhayiloode (Through the Zenith of India)* which was published in 1983. This travelogue had won the first place in the travel writing



competition held among the people who belonged to the scheduled castes and tribes by the Harijanakshema Department.

On May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1982 along with her friend's family, she set forth on a long journey to the northern regions of India which included Delhi, Kashmir Srinagar etc. A train journey with not too many facilities was described with utmost sincerity by the narrator traveller. She says,

My greatest wish in life from my childhood onwards is to see countries. I also wished to understand many things based on detailed trajectories. Being a *Harijan* teacher I could only sit and dream without any hope. I used to find satisfaction from reading books on travel written by great people. When I read such books on travel, in my mind, I used to think “today or tomorrow “ ... Why can't I too go? Is there any point to wish with an impoverished status? No there is no point. But being a teacher I could have learnt so many things from a travel. (my trans.; Leelavathi 1-2)

From these lines her situation is quite clear that even as a teacher by profession, Leelavathi is not unsure of fulfilling her long cherished dream as she carries the baggage of her *Harijan* status. The term *Harijan* meaning 'people of God' was strategically used by Gandhiji as a term of address to protect the downtrodden by giving them a sacred aura. But in reality the mere use of the term *Harijan* didn't do any good to uplift the social status of the people who belonged to the Dalit communities.

Travel narratives seldom draw the attention of the reader to the author's caste. The author might or might not use a surname denoting the caste or something of the kind which is suggestive of their caste or religious affiliations. However the instances of an author inviting the reader's attention to her caste identity are quite rare. This is what makes Leelavathi's narrative unique and worthy of analysis as she situates her voice in a politically charged context. Leelavathi's mention of her caste position as *Harijan* at the very beginning of the text sets the tone of her narrative as a voice transcending several barriers of social oppression.

Nevertheless, in this narrative besides narrating her travel she has genuinely encapsulated the life and social status of the people of her community, that is, the Sambava community which is considered as a Dalit community. Weaving vessel out of bamboo shoots is the traditional occupation done by the people of the community. Her monologue “being a *Harijan* teacher I can only sit and dream without any hope” speaks volumes on the marginality with regard to mobility that even as a teacher she had internalized her community's downtrodden status that she will also be leading a secluded life just like the people of her community whose traditional occupation is to make vessel out of bamboo shoots. Leelavathi's travelogue *Bharathathinte Urdhva Rekhayiloode* is

published in 1983, i.e. thirty six years after India gained independence in 1947. Even after all these years a lady teacher who belongs to a Dalit community grieves over her socio commune status as a Harijan means there is some problem with India's much acclaimed independence as well as its cultural and social systems. with written constitution as the supreme law of the country, India became a in 1950. While the Constitution of the sovereign democratic republic of India regardless of one's caste and gender assures its citizens equal status and equality before law, the social and cultural systems which are based on Brahminical and patriarchal dogmas are not welcoming to tolerate with the idea of an improved social status for the lower groups assured by the supreme law of sovereign India.

Therefore, as a person who belongs to a community which hardly had privileges regarding freedom of expression and mobility it is not surprising that her thoughts contained the worries of a freedom less life. At this point we need to look into the pre modern history of Kerala to bring into the reasons which made Leelavathi to think in such a way.

In the geographical space of Kerala, the mobility of both men and women of all castes and religion were largely controlled in the pre modern era. Each caste had its own rules and regulations to follow. However these rules were mainly targeted upon the people who belong to the lower strata of the society. Even the men of Brahmin community were not allowed to cross the ocean due to the concern over caste as well as personal purity. The women who belonged to the upper caste had to strictly follow certain rules and regulations that put the journeys outside their premises at high risk. The *Mannappedi*, *Pulappedi*, *Parappedi* were such societal practices that were directed upon the Nair women, which limited their mobility at certain time of every year.

If the upper caste woman is touched or even seen by the men who belong to the lower communities like Pulaya, Paraya or Mannan communities she had to leave all the privileges of her caste and live the rest of her life as an outcaste. All these communal ordeals were created to infuse threat among the upper caste women to remain subservient and disciplined to safeguard the community's purity.

In earlier days, the mobility of lower class /Dalit /untouchable women was even worse when compared to the women of the upper class. When the mobility of the upper caste women was strictly controlled to safe guard the caste purity, the women who belonged to the lower strata need not have much to worry about the caste purity or themselves getting polluted just like the upper caste women. In her article “Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State” Uma Chakravarti notes that “the safeguarding of the caste structure is achieved through the highly restricted movement of women or even through female seclusion. Women are regarded as gateways-literally points of entrance into the caste system” (579). It should also be noted that though the women of the lower castes do not need to get concerned about the maintenance

of the purity of the caste just like the upper caste women, the threat of assault or getting raped was always immanent which forced them to lead a life within the confinements of their familiar spaces.

The roads which were considered as public were not at all public in the sense that in a largely casteist society like that of Kerala, casteist people were not at all willing to allow people who belong to the lower strata of the society to use the roads which were called as public. Here the word public becomes problematic in the sense that it applied only to very few people who definitely belong to the creamy section of the society. The public places in those days were purely meant for the ruling upper castes. People who belonged to the lower strata were denied access to public roads and they had to cross muddy tracks or depend on other unusual paths to reach destinations. It was a time when humans were treated worse than animals while animals were allowed to dwell freely.

In his book *writing the first person: Literature, History, and Autobiography in Modern Kerala* Udayakumar states that “People's movement in public spaces was normatively, and often practically, regulated through the practice of distance pollution. Separate spaces of sacredness and bodily purity were maintained through restrictions on proximity and access to other bodies- in terms of visibility, touch, hearing, and clearly specified distances”. (4)

P. Bhaskaranunni gives a clear cut picture of the socio cultural situation existed in ancient Keralam in his book *Patthompatham Noottandile Keralam*. The caste system was so strong that certain practices had to be followed by the lower castes to show their obedience to lords of the land and thereby maintain their untouchability status. The distance which each caste group has to keep from the upper caste Brahmin denoted people's status in the society. Panikkassery states that in those days certain boards named *Theendalppalakakal* were placed to denote the exact distance allowed for each caste to travel (151). The lower groups were not even allowed to leave their foot marks that they themselves have to sweep the courtyard of the upper community to prevent being polluted by their presence. They were not allowed to draw water from the wells used by the upper castes. Prof. A Sreedhara Menon in his *Survey of Kerala History* notes that other than untouchability the people of the lower strata had to observe other restrictions too with regard to their existence and visibility in public places. Menon observes:

Apart from untouchability, unseeability and unapproachability also existed in a dreadful form. A Namboothiri who happened to be seen by a Nayadi or Pulaya considered himself to have been polluted. A strict schedule of distances at which members of castes below the Nairs had to stand with respect to the higher castes was evolved. Thus the Pulaya had to keep a distance of 60 feet from a Nair. When Nair nobles came out in the public roads an attendant of theirs preceded them shouting *po, po* (get away, get away) so that they would not be polluted by a person of low caste even by a chance encounter within the prohibited distance. Failure on the part of the lower castes to make way for the

Nairs and other upper castes on the public road even led to their being murdered with the connivance of the custodians of law and order. (221)

The biography on Ayyankali by Velaydhan Panikkasseri brings out a clear picture of the social condition that existed in the pre-modern society of Kerala and the plights of the downtrodden lower castes. The right to use the roads which were actually built by the “sons of the soil” were denied to them because of their lower status in the caste hierarchy (191). It was in this scenario that Ayyankali, the great social reformer set forth his iconic struggle to use roads freely by all the people irrespective of disregarding their caste position. Ayyankali's bullock-cart travel through the road was a blow to the upper caste impudence. There had been a series of conflicts between the Dalits and the upper castes which paved way for social reformations.

In his article “Parswavalkaranam: Sancharam, Sahithyam” Dr. A. K. Vasu observes that, the Dalits in Kerala were a group of people who were not able to actively participate in travels due to the socio cultural situations that trapped them in certain localities. The lives outside their localities were completely unknown to them. Due to this ignorance they always carried a fear for the unknown. The dearth of travel narratives by Dalits is due to this reason.

When the *Oxford India Anthology of Malayalam Dalit Writing* edited by Dr. M. Dasan et. al made an outstanding compilation of the Dalit writings published in Malayalam which included poetry, short fiction, excerpts from novels, drama, life writings like autobiography and biography, critical interventions etc., they did not mention anything on travel writing. Talking about a community which had very little chance for mobility, entertainment or leisure of any kind, it is quite unfair to expect anything written specifically as a travel memory might be the reason for such a bareness in the book.

Dr. Vasu states that the Mobility of the Dalits was largely curtailed due to their interconnections with their immediate locality as explicated in their local folk and mythical stories. They were also made to believe that their lives will be under threat if they ever dared to cross the limits of their localities (153). He also states that the Dalit identities were based on the folk beliefs which kept them bound to their isolated lands rescinding any chance to go out. Their folk tales which contained dreadful instances on getting cheated or killed when went out had huge influence in their psyche. This instilled a fear for their life. Besides these kinds of fears the huge emotional attachment that prevailed within familial structures also prevented the Dalit people from taking up travels.

A person who knows the sociological, cultural and economical history of his or her caste, will have the thought of the caste position imbibed in the person's memory which make him or her hard to see things in a different manner. The travelogue *Bharathathinte Urdhva Rekhyaloode* is in anyway worth commendable for the author's identity as a Dalit. Leelavathi's caste identity as a Dalit had deep influences in her psyche that in her narrative she speaks about her caste position. In Leelavathi's own words;

I don't think there are many people among Harijans, especially in the Sambava community as lucky as I am. The people of my community- sisters and brothers- worked really hard day and night to earn a living. They weave different types of vessels out of bamboo shoots. These vessels are then stacked, balanced and taken either to households or to markets to sell. They buy rice, chilly and salt out of the money they got from selling the vessels. The mother of the household will be boiling water to cook rice. The master of the house after giving these foodies goes to the local liquor shop. When he comes back, as a result of his intoxication he will beat and kick the people in the house. This is the usual sort of life within our community. Going for a cinema itself is considered as dishonour. It is difficult to tell how many of us are there who haven't seen the Trissur city. I don't think there is not even ten percent who are educated in our community. ... Being a person who belongs to such a community- I feel extremely lucky to get such a chance. When I lied down to sleep thoughts like these came to my mind and I began to think of the hardships of the people who have worked and are working. (47-49)

This passage very well reveals the life situation of the Sambava community who had very less opportunities to lead a better life. Leelavathi expresses her genuine concern for the people who are confined to their life situations without any development. In other words the social situations prevailed in Kerala made their lives less sustainable. Their lives could be taken as examples of people who have been deprived of situations to lead a better life. They are very much conditioned that they themselves have no idea about what happens outside their worlds. The stagnancy of life situations makes it hard for developments to happen both individually and communally. She feels that the closed doors should be opened to let enough air and space to enter. When drudgery leads to boredom it is quite natural for physiologically mobile bodies to have an instinct to move out. But being people trapped in certain life situations and locales they are forced to stay back withdrawing all their instinctual desires to go out. Leelavathi never tries to hide her joy in having come out of her caste situations that she herself feels lucky on getting the opportunity to travel and see the vast and wide splendor of different states in India.

When people are not very concerned about what happens on the other side of the extravaganza and flamboyancy of the glittering world Leelavathi throughout her narrative expresses her sympathy towards the people who are exploited and forced to live in harsh situations just to make a living. Besides the thrill and enjoyment of her long cherished dream travel she happens to notice the other side of the glittering world while passing by. One such was the visit to the Fort of Agra. The majestic splendor of the Fort of Agra made her think of the 'real' makers behind it. She says, "When I thought about the construction of the building, the slave workers who were the real makers came to my

mind. Even small children will understand that without the lives and blood of the crores of workers it is impossible to build such constructions. Who doesn't get wondered over the many crores which are spent just to satisfy a single person's egotism" (my trans.; Leelavathi 41-42). Leelavathi's words are so touching that the readers too will feel sympathy towards the exploited lives of the slaves who were forcibly made to work under harsh conditions. We understand that a good percentage of such ancient constructions are the result of the misery of many unlucky souls who barely had freedom or right of any kind. One should need a certain level of sensibility to be in the shoes of others who do hard labour. Leelavathi's humanistic view gets revealed by narrating such instances.

Leelavathi's *Bharathathinte Urdhva Rekhayiloode* is probably the only travelogue which contains descriptions on monetary matters which is quite essential for a trip. She appears to be extremely sincere while describing the hardships she underwent to find enough money to fulfill her long cherished dream. Though she had to think of too many things to set forth on a journey, her desire to travel was so strong that nobody and nothing could retract her from achieving her dream. In fact she was ready to take any risk or face any situation. The support from her husband was in anyway appreciable that it was hard to find such supportive gestures from people who have authority over the travelling lady. Here it is Leelavathi's husband who has done all the packing for her, more than that he was even ready to make snacks for her to eat during her journey. She honestly says that more than the sorrow of leaving her family it was the happiness she felt at the moment of the journey that dominated her thoughts. "Having heard the train's whistling sound, everybody made preparations to board the train. But more than sorrow I felt happiness in my mind" (my trans.; Leelavathi 8). Either to the reading public or to the members of her family she is not bothered to hide her joyous feelings for setting forth on travel. Though she has worries for her family the kind of concern expected from a woman towards her family is not so visible in Leelavathi's narration—a common phenomenon seen in the travelogues written by women. By narrating on her intense desires to travel and the support she receives from her husband and family Leelavathi actually challenges the level of performativity of gender expected from a woman while writing her experience on a travel. In his study on the eighteenth and nineteenth century western women travel writers, Carl Thompson comments about the patterns of expectation and reception in the case of the women travel writers. He says that women travel writers are expected to be writing in style that they should never cross the limits of their gender and more than everything they should

need to balance the fact of their travelling with the adoption of an appropriately feminine persona on the page. ... Some sort of rapprochement in this regard was usually necessary, on the one hand, simply to get published in the first place and, on the other, to avoid hostile criticism from reviewers and commentators. To this end, accordingly, women writers were usually keen to stress the extent to

which they conformed to contemporary codes of female propriety in the course of their travels. (181)

Here what is to be noted is that while she displays the rare guts to cross the boundaries with regard to the performativity expected in women's travels and travel narratives she is not able to leave aside her own conceptions with regard to her caste positioning as a *Harijan*. Her community's downtrodden status as Dalits haunts her in her travel that whenever she happens to witness sufferings of people she consciously or unconsciously thinks of her community's life situation which is not very different from what she has confronted in those places. It should also be noted that it is not the majesty and splendor of heritage buildings, forts etc that attracts her but it is the sufferings of the unfortunate souls who sacrificed their lives to built such wonderous constructions. One such thought came to her while she was visiting the Fort of Agra. The majestic splendor of the Fort made her think of the 'real' makers behind it. "When I thought about the construction of the building, the slave workers who were the real makers behind it came to my mind. Even small children will understand that without the lives and blood of the crores it is impossible to build such a splendor" (my trans.; Leelavathi 41-42). The affiliation and empathy she flaunts for the downtrodden and exploited points towards the harsh life situations she herself is familiar with.

Throughout her narrative she quite often thinks of her lower positioning in the caste hierarchy. The oppressive status as a *harijan* never leaves her conscience that even when she gets a change to rejoice she finds it hard to completely involve with libratory and free spirit of the journey Throughout Leelavathi's narration, one can see how she had actually perceived the journey overcoming every hindrance that has tried to block her way. Nevertheless, whatever be her situations the pain she undertakes to fulfill her long cherished dream is quite appreciable that towards the end of the narrative we see an altogether different person in the narrator /traveller. That is, from the lamenting '*harijan*' teacher who was unsure of going to travels due to her own communal status has now started to see things from a different perspective.

We were able to touch many states like Tamil Nadu, Andra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajastan, Haryana, Delhi, Punjab, Jammu Kashmir in our travel. Though we didn't get chance for thorough analysis we were able to catch a glimpse of the broad and wide India. The mentality that considered world as Thrissur has now been changed due to this wide view. The diversity of nature, humans, rituals etc have also helped to change the narrow minded attitude. If this much difference is available in this considerably small area what will it be like in the world at large. In any case a travel is far more heart touching than any kind of study. (my trans.; Leelavathi 78)

As a person who belongs to a community which has been denied access to public roads or places for centuries, her travel narrative is all the more remarkable and needs special mention. Considering the time of her travel and the publication of this travel narrative the book can be considered as a landmark in the history of dalit writings.

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## Chanting Grammar : An Amalgamation of Grammar and Music in English Classrooms

### Abstract

*This paper is an attempt to explore innovative methods to teach grammar in an English classroom. Research points out that grammar is acquired unconsciously by the learner. Through a comprehensive input like audio or video, a learner can learn a grammatical point effectively. This paper attempts to discuss on how English grammar can be easily acquired through the integration of songs in the second language classroom. As brain loves music, this comprehensive input can effectively enhance learnability in the students. This paper also discusses on how certain grammatical points could be easily ingrained by using certain worksheets setting it to tune.*

**Keywords :** Chants, Grammar, Songs, Worksheet, Preposition, Concord, Tense, Conjunction

Teaching grammar in a second language classroom evidently evolves into a challenge when the students exhibit incomprehensibility of grammatical rules, lack of confidence and inability to process language to real linguistic setting. Research points out that knowledge of grammar rules is very fragile and is rapidly forgotten. Grammar rules once learnt can be forgotten soon after three months. Grammar is supposed to be acquired unconsciously and then the competence developed accordingly can be stored in the brain subconsciously. Larsen-Freeman remarks that if a comprehensible input is available, then the first and the second language can be acquired easily. Stephen Krashen, the proponent of Comprehensive input, argues that comprehensive input like audio, video or written language if integrated in the second language curriculum, can impact a surprising effect on the overall ESL instruction. Taking the cue, this paper focuses on how English grammar can be easily acquired through the integration of chants in the second language classroom. Chants is a wonderful and effective tool as it develops students' listening and speaking skills; enlarge their vocabulary; and help to construct sentences with confidence. This paper intends to explore the possibilities of how chants can be used to learn Grammar by formulating certain worksheets to learn preposition, conjunction, concord and tense. These worksheets are supposed to help the students notice and practice these grammatical points and eventually transfer them to their conversation. If the approach of learning grammar becomes student centered, activity oriented, interactive

and task-based, learning can simply be fun, enabling the students to learn grammar with ease without considering it as a 'burdened learning process'.

In the book *Singing Grammar: Teaching Grammar through Songs* Mark Hancock presents a comprehensive material entwined songs for the teachers to impart grammar lessons for the elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate students in a general English classroom. The book is intended for the teachers of general English classes who would purport to bring variety to their classroom teaching. In “Teaching Grammar Through Songs,” Leena Jadhav engages a discussion on the significance of music as an effective input in imparting grammar to enable the students to shed their inhibitions towards the target language by dishing out certain worksheets. Arif Saricoban and Esen Metin in “Songs, Verse and Games for Teaching Grammar” points out the various advantages involved in the implementation of contemporary popular songs familiar to teenagers in the grammar class so as to help the students memorize grammatical points. In “Teaching Grammar through Songs: Theoretical Claims and Practical Implications,” Theresa Summer formulates a well-structured methodological approach in order to make full use of the song's potentials.

This paper attempts to provide contextual worksheets and a link to the YouTube video, which the presenter herself has set tune to, in order to enable students to sing and understand grammatical points without the help of their teachers and thereby improving their vocabulary. The worksheet is exclusively intended for the bachelor degree students of a general English classroom. Aspects regarding preposition, conjunction, concord and tense is given focus in this paper. The song will enable the students to memorize the grammatical points and recall it during their conversation. Also as the worksheet provides a context, the students can generate a context on their own by retaining the grammatical points and set to their own tunes.

Chants are written to help enhance English language learning in a simple way with special attention to the sound system. Carolyn Graham, the brain behind Jazz Chants was a Master Teacher of ESL at New York University, a Teaching Fellow at Harvard University and has trained teachers in the art of Jazz Chanting throughout the world. According to Graham, Jazz Chants bring rhythm into the classroom. As brain loves rhythm, this activity brings joy to the class and students unknowingly learn the rules of the language. Jazz Chants are wonderfully effective tool as it develops students' listening and speaking skills, enlarge their vocabulary and aid them to construct sentences with confidence. Jazz Chants is a rhythmic expression of spoken American English. This paper assays to explore the possibilities of how chants can be used to learn Grammar by formulating certain worksheets. These worksheets are supposed to help the students notice and practice these grammatical points and eventually transfer them in their conversation shedding their inhibitions.

The following is a worksheet to enable the students to understand how prepositions

can be used to denote travel. The YouTube link below helps the students to put the sentences to rhythm.

I'm Bretch, I love traveling by land

I'm Bob, I love traveling by sea

I'm Ruth, I love traveling by bus

I'm Kate, I love traveling by plane

I'm Sue, I love traveling by car

I'm Liza, I love traveling by train

I'm Sandy, I love traveling by ship

And I'm Mary, I love traveling on foot

Please find the song in the following link <https://youtu.be/0LceLe1iXXc>

The following worksheet is designed to enhance the knowledge of the students in preposition.

The cat sat on the table

The mouse hid behind the chair

The mouse stared at the cat

The cat looked for the mouse

The maid came into the house

The mouse ran up the clock

The dog barked at the mouse

'Cause the dog looked after the house

Please find the song in the following link <https://youtu.be/xknfVnc4D0E>

The following is a worksheet that can help the students easily identify what comes immediately after elder, older, senior, junior, superior and inferior when it is used in comparative sense.

Hey big buddies we're junior to you

Hey small buddies we're senior to you

I'm your boss, I'm superior to you

But never am I inferior to you

She's my sister she is elder than me

He's my friend he is older than me

Steve and Mary are the eldest in the family

Bob and Rob are the oldest in the school

Tom, Mary, Sue are taller than me, smaller than me and bigger than me respectively

Please find the song in the following link <https://youtu.be/ohGVmSsTrKE>

The following worksheet can help the students learn subject-verb concord. The bolded words enable them to understand the subject-verb concord.

Son	Dad
Daddy daddy give me 1500 bucks	Oh my God, What for?
Don't you know? To 'celebrate my 'birthday	Who all are coming?
Most of them are coming Some of them are juniors Many of them are 'classmates A few of them are seniors	1500 bucks is a big sum
Oh dad I'm the star of my school Everybody likes me. So each and every friend Needs to be treated Don't you worry dad I'll pay you back some day	So plenty of things have to be done.

Steve and Mary are the eldest in the family

Bob and Rob are the oldest in the school

Tom, Mary, Sue are taller than me, smaller than me and bigger than me respectively

Please find the song in the following link <https://youtu.be/ohGVmSsTrKE>

The following worksheet can help the students learn subject-verb concord. The bolded words enable them to understand the subject-verb concord.

Please find the song in the following link <https://youtu.be/97xvyt3FkVY>

The following worksheet helps the students avoid faulty handling of conjunctions. The worksheet enables them to understand some of the subordinating conjunctions and coordinating conjunctions. The words denoting conjunctions are bolded.

Hardly had I entered the room, when the snake popped out of the window

No sooner had I took the stick, than it started coming into the room

Neither the snake nor myself knew what to do next

Well, I should do something, lest I should fail

To check its second coming

I decided either the snake or I am going to stay in the room

So, although I was panic stricken, I struck the snake on its head

Though seldom or never I struck a snake, I struck right on its head

Not only did the snake panic, but also it ran for its life.

Please check the song in the following link <https://youtu.be/oNmX8iXhFqU>

Most of the students are tensed when it comes to learning tenses. A lot of mistakes are committed by students who are non-native speakers of English while generating sentences. The following is a worksheet for the students to practice tense by using singular and plural form of the noun. This is exclusively made to make the students understand the tense structure.

	Simple	Progressive/Continuous	Perfect
Past	Ben played chess	Ben was playing chess	Ben had played chess yesterday
Present	Ben plays chess	Ben is playing chess	Ben has played chess today
Future	Ben will play chess	Ben will be playing chess	Ben will have played chess tomorrow

	Simple	Progressive/Continuous	Perfect
Past	I sang a song	I was singing a song	I had sung a song yesterday
Present	I sing a song	I am singing a song	I have sung a song today
Future	I shall sing a song	I shall be singing a song	I shall have sung a song tomorrow

To listen to the song, please click on to this link [https://youtu.be/114W\\_WDCV8A](https://youtu.be/114W_WDCV8A)

Practicing worksheet as above along with rhythm can be adopted as a method to suit and enrich the language-teaching environment to help the students tide over the difficulties of learning grammar to a greater extent. The benefits of employing chants in the classroom cannot be ignored due to a variety of reasons. It enables them to recall a grammatical point, that is, present perfect, past perfect continuous, conjunction, concord, preposition and so on. Further they can develop their listening and speaking skills. Chants can be considered as one of the best methods to make every student (especially in a general English class, which would be comparatively a larger class) both attentive and active participants and thereby helping them imbibe important grammatical points comparatively quickly. Moreover, it also creates an interesting, relaxing atmosphere – a perfect environment enabling the students to learn grammar, which otherwise would have been felt as a 'burdened learning process' by the students. When this teaching methodology was applied in the classroom, the students showed keen interest in learning the songs and recreating it in different contexts and setting it to their own tunes. They could recollect the songs even after a year.

The students can speak the words in the rhythm of the song without singing too to make this activity more entertaining. They could also use the method of hand clapping or finger snapping to reinforce the rhythm. The students will still find this chanting very enjoyable. This new approach would definitely bring a new air of enthusiasm in the classroom and make language teaching and learning process easier. *Abdellah's* introduction to the chapter named “Songs, Chants and Rhymes in English Language Teaching” starts off with a quote by Mr. Reda Fadel, the former English Language Counsellor at the Egyptian Ministry of Education who once said, “Oh, my! I still remember this song after all those years! I don't believe it!” (52). He was expressing his surprise at being able to join a group of teachers in singing a song he had learned when he was a student in the primary school. Songs once learned along with fun are hard to forget wherein the students unknowingly study the grammatical rules and structure.

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## **Agent Causal Libertarianism: A Transfixion of Illusory Retro Causality in the Tenseless World of 'Dark'**

“The Beginning is the end... The end is the beginning”

(Secrets, Season 1)

The Beginning and the End has always been an enigma to us. It artlessly reminds us of the age-old riddle of egg and chicken. Intricate yet intriguing, the answer may create further disarrays and will thus create a chain of questions and answers.

The history of genesis is convoluted and anfractuious; perpetually tugged by reason and faith from both ends in a never-ending game. As long as the skeptical human psyche remains unsatiated by the proposal of a dubious entity; he will keep trying to reconcile with logical explanations and scientific theories. According to Stephen Hawking who is also a renowned atheist, 'the universe is the ultimate free lunch and if it adds up to nothing, then we probably may not need someone divine and eternal to create it' (Hawking).

Eventually, man sought new promise in the evolution of quantum mechanics. This has unprecedentedly manipulated him to believe in the plausible revolution that could be made in a persistent deterministic existence. Time was perspicuously brought into focus after it was being described as the fourth dimension. This rapid transposition eventually triggered the potentiality of wormholes or cosmic strings that can concatenate two different spacetimes.

Time travel theories have always enticed us, not the least they indubitably escorted the reality of the precluded past and esoteric future, yet because of the unrestrained freedom, it offered us. It is impossible to delineate time without mentioning Albert Einstein as he was the first one who redefined the co-existence between time and space. Until then, time assumed the stature of solitary quintessence in the Newtonian impression. Einstein's Theory of Relativity has bent Newtonian time, kindling the possibilities of time travel and thus reinvigorating new space-times. His theories of time dilation and general relativity strengthened feasible travels into varying space-time continuum. Hence everything is believed to be influenced by a past and a future still abiding causal determinism. Consequently, eggs kept mothering chickens and vice versa.

This perception has however taken a riveting turn, initiating the theoretical proposition of Causal loops that answers the riddles of origin and existence. Their being



in space-time and non-conformity to a particular origin is the focal point of Retrocausality. After the evolution of quantum mechanics and relativity fever, time theorists have laid out their conclusion on the Novikov self-consistency principle regarding their untamed fantasies and computations on Time travelling. As the self-consistency principle forbade any sorts of change, it assured retrocausality eventually leading to the unending cycle of a cause-effect relationship. As Spinoza writes; "There is no mind absolute or free will, but the mind is determined for willing this or that by a cause which is determined in its turn by another cause, and this once again by another, and so on to infinity... A body in motion or at rest must be determined for motion or rest by some other body, which likewise, was determined for motion or rest by some other body, and this by a third and so on to infinity" (Spinoza,1673).

The equilibrium of this infinite causal loop is maintained due to the absence of an induced free will. No grandchild will be born if he is allowed to combat and murder his grandfather back in the past by travelling through time. If so, the intact idea of the Bootstrap paradox will roll into nothing. Thus, such causal loops will be inadvertently distracted by free action.

But the biggest loophole in time travel theories backed by retrocausality is that though time travel facilitates our knowledge about the past and future, we are still powerless to alter it by any means. Usually, we may expect a revolution through a mutated past and modified future, but the self-consistency principle hinders the metamorphosis to keep the causal loop. Now the real question is held into inspection whether everything happens because it was bound to happen or is it really by our own free will. This discussion constrains the notion of Libertarian Free Will.

Libertarian free will assumes that basic actions are carried out in one's own free will against causal determinism. This theory of philosophy challenges the logical incompatibility of free will in a deterministic universe. The pioneering thoughts on Libertarianism were initiated by John Duns Scots. The first recorded use of the term was by William Belsham in a conversation against necessitarian thinking and causal determinism. But even before such modern interventions in the field, many philosophers including Augustine and Scotus have asserted evidence of freedom from their own experiences. This subject has been a classical discourse since time immemorial as it always intersected the sovereignty of God. Several Old Testament passages validate the will of God that seemingly contradicts with libertarians; "I am God and there is no other, I am God and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please" (Isaiah 46:9-10). The perception challenges God's will yet god still appears as someone who monitors his actions and not possibly his volition, which appears to be the plausible vindication of such incompatibilist libertarians.

There are three major categories of Libertarian free will; event-causal, agent-causal,

and non-causal libertarianism. Event Causal Libertarianism routes the deterministic progress influenced by prior events whereas Agent-Causal Libertarianism is caused by an agent rather than an event. The focus of this category is the agent himself, which capacitates the agent or person with a substantial degree of autonomy over his actions and thus facilitating the free choice of events. Non-Causal Libertarianism implies the free will constituted by basically mental actions.

Agent Causal Libertarianism is not even caused by the agent's character, desires, or even past, as that may culminate in event causation. This is the most incompatibilist outlook of libertarian free will which renders the agent the command over his own situation, unlike event causation. It was Thomas Reid who initiated the conversation after his theory of common sense in 1863. Later the American philosopher Roderick Chisholm came forward with a similar outlook on volition. As Chisholm explains it, humans have "a prerogative which some would attribute only to God: each of us, when we act, is a prime mover unmoved. In doing what we do, we cause certain events to happen, and nothing – or no one – causes us to cause those events to happen." (Chisholm 1964, p. 12)

Agent causation is more instinctive and intuitive as compared to event causation. Following David Hume's argument on the succession of events, this inductive problem of Event causation is not satisfactory. According to Thomas Reid, "the conception of an efficient cause may very probably be derived from the experience we have had...of our power to produce certain effects." (Reid, p. 102)

The delineation of retrocausality and causal loops has found an explicit manifestation in the recent mystery thriller drama, *Dark* which featured a tenseless world doomed in between post-apocalyptic traumas of distorted time. *Dark* is a German Web series science fiction thriller directed by Baran bo Odar which ran for three seasons from 2017 to 2020 in three seasons on Netflix. It features the unfathomable cosmic sensations like Bootstrap Paradox, Predestination Paradox, Quantum Entanglement, Causal loops, and Hyperrealities. It explores the knotted history of three families spanning three generations, consequently divulging the time travel conspiracies for the prerogative on time. The plot is engrossing with the eventual disappearance of few teenage children in Winden (a fictional town in Germany), and the intricate upshot which reconnoiters the illusory world of infinite causal loops born out of a failed time travel experiment. The plot begins with the disappearance of twelve years old Mikkel Nielsen, who initiates the chain of time travel through a wormhole in a cave in Winden. Recurrent time travels and the inescapable deterministic causal loops tantalized the characters to a libertarian existence, which they found impossible to master.

Even though there are hardly any academic and scholarly researches available regarding the exercise of free will; few authentic newspapers, blogs, and fan pages have celebrated the success of the trending TV drama drawing possible conclusions on the interesting and ambivalent loose ends. The Hindu in its article 'Dark': Netflix's German

show that subverts every time-travel trope says; "The question is not where, but when" — a fairly straightforward question, and one that tears apart the small German town of Winden physically, emotionally and morally. Netflix's *Dark* is a deeply philosophical conundrum that explores the repercussions of fiddling with the space-time continuum." (Chowdhury, Ayaan Paul)

Though the drama concentrates on the unfaltering pace of retrocausality and necessitarian thoughts, the climax entails how young Jonas and Martha from an alternate reality broke the ceiling of unending causal loops with agent-causal free will. Such a transmutation seems outrageously out of place for a deterministic pattern, distinctively for the predestined time loop. The gargantuan irony mutilates the actuality of causal loops thus challenging the very idea of unflinching time travel theories. Pathetically, no endeavors have been made in the detangling of this conundrum. My paper construes how agent-causal libertarianism has scrupulously actuated the collapse of retro causal events in the tenseless world of *Dark*.

The scriptwriter and co-creator Jantje Frieser explained in an interview to the Thrillist titled 'How the co-creators pulled off the mind-blowing Netflix series'; "We're always very, very interested in why people do the things they do, and how they came to be the person they are, We've dedicated our past years to deciphering human behavior and trying to find out why people also do very bad things. It always comes down to some kind of programming they had before them that you cannot choose because you cannot let go of the stuff that happened before you. Your past is always pushing you into the direction you're going, while at the same time the future is pulling you." (Stefansky, Emma)

This TV drama begins with an emphasis on the illusory disposition of time through the words of the narrator; "We trust that time is linear. That it proceeds eternally, uniformly. Into infinity. But the distinction between past, present, and future is nothing but an illusion. Yesterday, today, and tomorrow are not consecutive, they are connected in a never-ending circle. Everything is connected" (Secrets, Season 1). The concatenation of past, present, and future events in the town preserves the ever-existing masquerade of repetition through causal loops.

The emphasis on retro causality is accentuated in the timeless universe of Winden by employing recurring time travels back and forth. When Mikkell travels back to the past (1986) unknowingly, he has to grow there into a man fathering his brother's friend Jonas in the present (2019). When young Jonas sets out to solve this imbroglio, what succeeds is an interminable concatenation of time travels making the family tree of Nielsons, Kahnwalds, Dopplers, and the Tiedermans embroiled with interdicted incestuous relationships. When Jonas finds Mikkell back in 1986 meeting his mother Hannah as a teen, he tries to interrupt their confabulation. But adult Jonas interferes averting him from erasing his own existence; "Don't you get it? If you take Mikkell back, you will be meddling in the course of events. Your father will never meet your mother. They won't fall

in love or get married. If you take him back now, you will be erasing your own existence" (Follow the Signal, Season 1). In an interview given to *The Guardian*, Louis Hoffman who played the character of Jonas Kahnwald says that it was a generational story about whether we want to imitate our parents or not, or whether we can deliberately move against what we actually might have done. He then accentuates that the drama is about free will. (Seale, Jack)

Jonas has basically three existence in different space-times and is in a relentless battle against his older self, Adam who unswervingly kills his lover and lets his father die. Jonas wants to get rid of this unceasing causal loop off from his shoulders to obviate Michael's suicide and rescue Martha. The more he tries to unravel the mysteries, the more he becomes entwined in the daedalean knot. This is evident from his response: "Now I have another grandma and she is the principal of my school. Her husband who is Fucking my mom is looking for his son who is my father! A few days ago, I kissed my aunt, and the crazy thing is there is nothing wrong with any of them. They're okay. I'm what's wrong! I just want everything to go back to normal." (Alpha and Omega, Season 1). Identically, Adam, or the older version of Jonas wants to destroy the world by the last cycle and create all anew. But he too gets entrapped by the fate of cause and effect; "We've declared war on time, declared war on God. We're creating a new world, without time, without God. What does that mean? It means that what people have worshiped for millennia—the God who holds everything together—that God is nothing more than time itself. Not a thinking, acting entity, a physical law with which one can negotiate as little as one can with one's fate. God is time. And time is not merciful. We are born, and our life is already trickling away like the sand in this hourglass. Death is forever inevitably before us. Our fate is nothing but a concatenation of cause and effect, in light and shadow". (Lost and Found, Season 2)

The manner in which older Helge utters 'Tick-Tock, Tick-Tock' on every moment of reminiscence over his past denotes how much he is vigilant about every tick and tock spent in his life, and how this transitory unit of time has entirely transformed the destiny of others too. Being the 'ark' of Noah he carried the cruel game of *Sic Mundus* immolating the lives of many innocent little children. When Ulrich visited old Helge in the old-age home to inspect the missing link on 'not choosing forest road' as found in the police calendar of Egon Tiederman, this dementia patient never failed to anchor his memory by articulating his long-lost thoughts as thus: "He is... It was him... I know you. I can change it. I can change the past and the future. I need help. Tick-Tock, Tick-Tock." (Follow the Signal, Season 2). Entrapped by the cruel destiny of causal determinism his tardy discretion made no difference to the cycle. His son Peter Doppler too gets constantly tormented by his incompetence to alter the ongoing crisis in Winden, that he keeps chanting to god to 'grant him the courage to change things he can and the wisdom to know the difference' (Lies, Season 1). But both, being the ones who lacked the urge and will for life played their uneventful role in the game.

Nothing is remarkable in the case of Claudia too, except in the climax. Now addressed as White Devil, Claudia meets her grandson Bartosz confessing she has never been a good mother and made a lot of mistakes back then. If she could turn back time she would do lots of things differently. But the underlying meaning is evident that after all these years hiding from her family and engaging herself with the quest to set all things right, she couldn't alter the destiny of Regina dying of cancer and that of her father who was 'mysteriously found dead' in his home. Though time travel serves as the unsurpassed opportunity to redirect the past to something most desirable, many characters get confounded by this inescapable predestination paradox. Claudia too ends up swerved until the second half of the drama.

Noah too harnesses the baffled young Helge to accompany his experiments in 1986 and back in 1953 to resolve the chaos, where he further contrives with the latter that changing everything is possible if the ark is built. If so, they can decide the world's fate far removed from all the pain and suffering, and they will thus create a time machine that can reorder everything. When little Helge remains speechless for days after the assault from Ulrich; Noah addresses his mother praising her son that 'time is always with him and carries it wherever he goes and it also carries him', resolutely alluding to the role of 'ark' he has assigned to the latter. (Ghosts, Season 2)

But knowingly or rather unknowingly, every key character kept on influencing others to actuate their intentions while simultaneously acting as pawns of others. This co-existence of intentions and role play too contributed to the tangled plot. When Claudia emphasizes every encounter was the part of a predetermined event, Noah argues that he is no longer her pawn. But she reminds him he is, "But you're still one of Adam's pawns. The paradise he's promising you is nothing but a lie. He's selling you the illusion of freedom. Ask yourself if you are really free. If you were really free, you'd have a choice. Do you have a choice?" (Ghosts, Season 2) How Claudia questions his senses further enhanced the prospect that why this recurring paradox was all that sustained.

It's rather fascinating that Adam wants to destroy the knot while Eva wants to preserve it. Eva believes in continuity as she needs to keep her son, 'unnamed' being born from two alternate realities. She states that every death is necessary and meaningful as it indicates a new beginning. "The mistake in all of our thinking is that we each believe ourselves to be an independent entity. While in reality, we're all just fractions of an infinite whole". (Adam and Eva, Season 3)

Adam's longing for a paradise and Eva's need to preserve the knot is rather disturbed by the Origin world found by Claudia. But Adam is surprised by the fact that since it's an ever-existing game, he killed Claudia but she travels timelessly and had multiple existences at different times. Similarly, he believed he killed pregnant alternate Martha to prevent the origin and thus destroyed the knot. Claudia informs him that both the worlds would have never existed as she found out that H.G. Tannhaus has invented time travel but

accidentally destroyed his own in the efforts to materialize his target, creating two corrupt mirror worlds of Adam and Eva. This discovery was however induced only as a result of Agent Causal Libertarianism.

It's quite impossible to believe that a thread of agent causation is lurking in every deterministic episode of *Dark*. But this can be validated when the characters particularly the time travelers headed to change the way everything existed. But unfortunately, as their sole cause has implied their own effect, they were bound to live in this fate. Jonas always wanted to set it right as he kept a deep aversion towards Adam, and couldn't come to terms with his selfish policies. Leaving Martha and living a life of despair is rather impossible for him. When Adult Jonas visited the clockmaker H.G. Tannhaus in 1986, he replied why he is so fascinated with time; "I want to know if I can change it. If everything has a purpose, and if so who decides about the purpose? Coincidence? God? Or is it us? Are we actually free in our actions? Or is it all created anew in an eternally recurring cycle? And we can only obey the laws of nature and are nothing but slaves of time and space?" (So You Shall Reap, Season 1)

Though Winden is a sick country and festering wound in which they are all part of it, a few of them assert their free will to prevent the plans of predetermined fate to save their loved ones. Jonas begins his expedition into the past to save Mikkell and continues his journey back and forth to retrieve the life of his father and lover back. Claudia sets out to divulge the mysteries of the nuclear plant and progresses to prevent the death of her daughter. Ulrich Nielson travels back to the past to rescue his son and brother. Noah constantly undergoes time travel playing the pawn of Adam. Helge, Elizabeth, Unnamed, Alternate Martha, and Bartosz undergo time travel to play their roles in keeping the knot yet motivated by their own free will.

When Adult Jonas shares with Tannhaus how terribly he wants to change the past and thus the present by asking him to make a Time machine to close the existing wormhole and thus preventing every series of events from occurring. "I have seen the future. And I know what will happen. I have to set things right again and you have to help me." (So You Shall Reap, Season 1)

When Ulrich travels back to 1953 he meets little Helge intending to kill him to prevent the bereavement of Mikkell and Mads. He had a conversation with little Helge: "But you will kill something. The two boys at the construction site, my brother, my son, not now but in future... if you don't exist all of this won't happen" (Everything is now, Season 1). Similarly, back in 1921, when adult Bartosz tells his son Young Noah that the beginning and the end may be a strange idea and both should be the same. Noah retorts that Bartosz has lost his faith and no longer believes in the prophecy of the new paradise. On conveying this diversion from his spiritual inclination from Adam's Paradise, Bartosz gets ready to be killed by his son. He could have resisted, but he chose to be killed as he considered death to be more meaningful than some strange belief. As pointed out earlier,

every deterministic action hid in themselves traces of Libertarian free will but was entrapped in the course of unending causal loops.

The audio of Claudia kept by young Jonas in 2053 also implies that she wants to save the town from the Apocalypse of 2019 which swept the entire Winden with few survivors, "But the God Particle. if we can stabilize it maybe it's a way back to the past. Maybe we can save them. All of them." (Beginnings and Endings, Season 2) Back in 1986, Adult Jonas asks H. G. Tannhaus whether we can change the course of events or not. The latter's prompt reply is rather engaging where he finds it's our innate nature that makes us believe that we play a role in our own lives, that our actions can change things. But any scientist may answer that Causal determinism forbids it. He even discloses that all his life he has dreamt of travelling through time and wants to explore what it all looked like. When the latter asks whether Jonas believes so he promptly retorts that 'dreams change'.

When Claudia comes up with the discovery of the Origin world, she scoffs at Adam for not knowing how to play the game. All those years Adam was scheming plans to destroy the knot which he thought was the knot between the two alternate realities, unnamed. But this has however kept the cycle on. She reveals: "Both of you have done unimaginable things on your journey because you can't let go of your deepest desires. You have been trying to escape what you will become, but that's impossible. You will end up facing yourselves again and again." (Paradise, Season 3) Claudia reminds them that they can't help meeting each other even if they are dead at some point in time because they wanted it. As long as time travel exists, they will keep coinciding with themselves in the same or parallel universes even if they are dead at some point in time. When the agents Jonas and Martha dies in two parallel dimensions, Jonas continues to live due to quantum entanglement and predominantly due to his desire to live on. Hence, pure agent causal traces indubitably portrayed how most of the characters keep intersecting in the causal loop because of their inherent free will.

Interestingly the motive that caused Tannhaus to invent a Time Machine in the origin world is in itself his own agent causation furthering a way to save his loved ones."Tannhaus, in the origin world- like you, he lost someone. And like you, he tried to bring that person back from the dead. But instead, he split and destroyed his world, thus creating our two worlds." (Paradise, Season 3). The young clockmaker had the desideratum not just to get his son and family back from death, but additionally he was effectuating the dream of 'Sic Mundus' initiated by his grandfather. It is apparent that H.G.Tannhaus is an allusion to H.G.Wells who wrote the famous novel '*Time Machine*' and the analogous pair of the book '*Journey through time*' becomes a major deterministic factor that induces volition. This same book acts as a trigger for Claudia, middle-aged Tannhaus, and Adult Jonas to set out on their journey to make everything right.

Though Claudia at a juncture advises Jonas that there is no free will in the world, they had to act blindly in their roles assigned in the infinite loop. Yet the fact that she travels

frequently back and forth and works hard to keep every role intact implies the inherent free will motive and her being the final one who resolves this imbroglio makes us think that this whole assignment might be hailed from the agent (Claudia) Causation Libertarianism which kept very well amidst the infinite threads of Retro causality.

Old Claudia informs the duo that the actual plot hole lies in the nanosecond of time when the world stops during the apocalypse. She emphasized that the cycle has to remain intact until she is prepared to change them and insists that strangely this scene is happening for the first time breaking causal determinism. Because she discovers Regina dies in both worlds but lives only in the third world. The resolution of this gargantuan catastrophe embedded in trinity rather than dualism turns out to be a real eye-opener for Adam and Eva. That's when she insists the duo to travel back to the origin world through the time bridge in a fraction of time to prevent the accident of Tannhaus' son and daughter, and when it's prevented they began disappearing as they were simply the glitch in the matrix; "You and I were the reason that all of this happens, time and time again. Because you can't let go of what you want and I can't let go of what I want. But we are the glitch. The glitch in the matrix." (Paradise, Season 3).

This gargantuan Agent Causal free will finally set straight the condition of a knotted world raised out of another similar Libertarianism. Recapitulating, the paper captures a glimpse of inherent free will that dominated the framework of the whole series in the guise of illusory Retro Causality. This paper has touched almost all the characters who laid their instinctive free will in constructing the time travel conspiracies. As William James put it right; "Fatalism, whose solving word in all crises of behavior is All striving is vain, will never reign supreme, for the impulse to take life strikingly is indestructible in the race. Moral creeds that speak to that impulse will be widely successful despite the inconsistency, vagueness, and shadowy determination of expectancy. Man needs a rule for his 'will' and will invent one if one is not given to him" (James, p.58). Undeniably, free will is a prerequisite for keeping ourselves knowledgeable and morally responsible, and being otherwise with a life of puppet in the game played by some unknown causal strains makes no sense. As Eben Alexander claims, quantum mechanics demonstrates that our world is not straightforwardly deterministic (Alexander). Free will exerted is an implication of existential demeanor not mere enactment of causal responsibility.



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## Inception of Hollywood Noir: The Maltese Falcon

### Abstract

*The Maltese Falcon is an important landmark in the world of Noir cinema, especially American Noir; as it introduced the genre to the film industry and established certain stylistic features which would later on provide a template for other film makers who wished to express themselves in the aforementioned genre. The Maltese Falcon was released in 1941 and was directed and scripted by John Huston for his debut as a director. The movie is based on the novel of the same name and is authored by Dashiell Hammett. The central character of the movie is played by Humphrey Bogart and he ushered in and popularized a new approach towards portraying the protagonist in a movie. The hero of Noir cinema came to be identified as detached and immoral who is a part and parcel of a shady world where double crossing and back stabbing is the norm.*

*Critics still argue over whether Noir cinema is a genre or a film making style but some of the stylistic features of Noir film are well defined- the conflicted anti-hero, femme fatales, claustrophobic and eerie surroundings, shady motives of the characters and many more. The Maltese Falcon is replete with these stylistic features and has gone down in history as one of the very first movies ever made as a Noir film in America. The glazed black bird "Maltese Falcon" is a symbol for the hidden true intentions of the characters in the movie. The Maltese Falcon is considered as one of the greatest films of all times in the United States of America and its legacy continues even today.*

**Keywords :** Noir, Genre, American Cinema, Anti-hero, Femme Fatales.

There have been many movements which have shaped the study of films and have led to a more informed and detailed analysis of movies. These movements also act as informants to the changing trends and the evolving sentiments represented in the movies. Film movements can be understood in the sense that a wave of certain movies follow a definite pattern and have their own unique features which sets them apart from the other movies in the market. One such movement is the German Expressionism which also deeply influenced Film Noir and Horror genre. German Expressionism as a movement began during and after the period of First World War. The term film noir was coined by a French critic Nino Frank in 1946 when he observed a particular style of cinema being made which had specific themes and was essentially dark and black in its thematic expression and were mostly American in origin. Panic and anxiety, uncertainty,

desolation, loss of innocence, misery and suspicion are the basic elements of Noir cinema which reflected the evils prevalent in the society in those days which included wars and subsequent tension and uncertainties of the time period.

Film Noir is one of Hollywood's most famous creative movements. Launched in the early 1940s, several screenplays inspired by cynical American crime fiction were conveyed to the silver screen, largely by European expatriate directors who shared a definite storytelling sensibility- extremely stylized, openly dramatic with imagery frequently drawn from a former period of German expressionist movies. Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder, Robert Siodmak and Otto Preminger and others were amongst this list of Hollywood directors. Throughout and immediately following World War II, movie audiences reacted to this different, vibrant, mature style of film - as did several authors, directors, cameramen and film actors excited to bring along a more mature world view to Hollywood. Mostly powered by the financial and creative achievement of Billy Wilder's adaptation of James M. Cain's *Double Indemnity* (1944), the studios started creating crime thrillers and murder whodunits with a predominantly murky and deadly view of reality. "In 1946 a Paris reflective of Hollywood films banned in the course of the war evidently revealed this style toward noticeably shadier, more distrustful crime melodramas" (Fay & Nieland, *Film Noir*, 67). It was observed by several French/Gallic critics who gave the name to this new type of Hollywood product "film noir," or black film. There were few, if any of the artists in Hollywood who made these movies named them "noir" at the time. But "the intense co-mingling of lost virtue, doomed romanticism, hard-edged cynicism, desperate desire, and shadowy sexuality that was unleashed in those immediate post-war years proved hugely influential, both among industry peers in the original era, and to future generation of storytellers, both literary and cinematic" (Fay & Nieland, 67).

Film noir is the French name for the "black film" genre that became immensely popular in the 1944-1955. In its background are the investigative/detective novels of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler and the femme fatale novels of James Cain. Film Noir has influenced cinema even to this day, like the crime thrillers of Don Siegel (*Dirty Harry* in 1971), gritty science fiction of Ridley Scott (*Blade Runner* in 1982), destructive femme fatales of Adrian Lyne (*Fatal Attraction* in 1987) and cynical policemen of Curtis Hanson (*L.A. Confidential* in 1997). The chronological location is the modern day world that has been tainted and has lost its ethical conviction. The prevalent pessimism and distrust of characters mirrors the reality of the atom bombs, Cold War, absolutism, propaganda, Hollywood blacklist, corrupting influence of the administration and media. The Second World War disjointed men, made them feel aimless, apprehensive, estranged, a sense of having "gone soft" and deficient in power to take control of their lives. "The liberal movement was in crisis, due to powerful forces of communism and materialism, causing a loss of faith in progress and man's innate goodness" (Kaplan, *Women in Film Noir*, 56).

The main character is a lonely person, who is withdrawn, troubled, cynical and pessimistic. He is not the conservative hero of the cinema who is self-confident and has a remarkable personality, but rather ordinary and conservative and is mostly a veteran of the war or an investigator or private eye and is defined by his talent to endure and reestablish normalcy. The main protagonist is on a mission in the noir realm and he is continuously tested in various trying situations, questioned, condemned, victimized and either emerges victorious without being corrupted and losing his integrity as a strong individual or rather be killed in the process. In the world of noir cinema the situations are not as they appear, individuals change their personalities and affiliations and the story has unexpected twists and turns. The noir world of the characters is both external as well as internal. The external world is generally the murky and malicious lanes of a big city, often Los Angeles with its coasts, apartments and palm-line roads. It could also be the nightclubs, cafes and the police stations which represent the underworld and the law and order authorities. The internal world of noir existence represents the viciousness, ordeal and the nightmares and sufferings of the main character's mind.

The antagonist in the noir cinema is the femme fatale who is a highly treacherous woman who is responsible for the moral degradation of the protagonist and entices and seduces the hero. She is generally a glamorous lady who has a great sexual charm. She customarily already keeps an additional man who might be a prosperous older husband who is like an owner toward his spouse and represents an oedipal complex by the outsider seeking to destroy the powerful father figure to possess the woman. The opposite of the femme fatale is the domesticated woman, who is a wife or lover connected with homely atmosphere and has a nurturing personality. The background narration is a subjective and confessional recitation where the narrator is recapitulating the story out of a need to own up and purify his conscience. The account is a personalized experience like a first person novel.

“The visual style of noir is the hard/undiffused look of the tabloid newspaper with cluttered/claustrophobic/dark interiors framed or restricted by the camera frame, many night scenes, off-angle and deep focus camera shots, stark chiaroscuro, low-key lighting, bleak/fatalistic overtones of despair and madness, heightened expressionistic scenes with elements distorted / nightmarish / grotesque / exaggerated” (Spicer, *Historical Dictionary of Film Noir*, 103).

The iconography of noir uses shady pavements, rain-drenched roads, blinking neon signs, fair grounds and festivals (related with insanity in German expressionism), the urban area as the villainous entity which is treacherous and intimidating, the border town area or the nightclubs, “imagery of water and alcohol that represent merging and release rather than fragmentation and blockage and the broadcasting icons are regular: the

telephone (“a metaphor of desire” to overcome limitations and alienation and connect with others), voice recorders, newspapers” (Spicer, 103).

It was after the Second World War when the Hollywood movies began to depict the dark greasy town streets, criminality and exploitation of society. In initial noir cinema, the movies and the directors such as John Huston of *The Maltese Falcon* and Billy Wilder of *Double Indemnity*, both assimilated dissimilar styles and elements to outline the filmmaking term that altered the movie industry across the globe in the early 1940's to the mid 50's. The two movies, with relation to different plots, both used similar cinematography styles to produce a new type of film genre, popularly known as film noir. Movies began to be shot in black chiefly due to the pronounced influence of German Expressionism. Female characters transformed from faultless beauties to villainous divas smoking cigarettes and sporting guns. Both *Double Indemnity's* and *The Maltese Falcon's* scripts were exceptional and took the spectators on an adrenaline filled thrill ride of trickery and lies, and the performance of the actors was nothing short of incredible.

*The Maltese Falcon* begins with Sam Spade, a private eye for the Spade and Archer Detective Agency in San Francisco, working in his office. A client by the name of Miss Wanderly, comes to Sam and requests him to follow Floyd Thursby, who supposedly has her younger sister. Later that night, Spade comes across the information that Archer, his partner in the detective agency, has been shot to death while tailing Floyd. Sam Spade soon becomes an alleged suspect when the police find out that Floyd has also been murdered. The next day Spade is presented with \$5000 by Joel Cairo, if he can find out the whereabouts of a small statue of a falcon. After a brief struggle in his office, Miss Wanderly calls up Spade and he mentions to her that he is with Cairo. Soon after, the three of them had a short meeting, where they told Sam about “The Fat Man,” and how he is an extremely dangerous man and can be deadly for all of them. The next morning, Sam comes face to face to Casper Gutman, who is an extremely heavy man and wishes to offer a big incentive to Sam for procuring the statue of The Maltese Falcon. After knowing the whole story of the falcon, Sam loses consciousness (unknowingly drugged by Gutman) and regains consciousness and comes face to face to a fatally wounded Jacobi with the falcon. Later on, Sam gives the falcon to Gutman but comes to know that it is a fake statue. Casper then demands his prize money back but receives nine thousand dollars of the entire ten thousand dollars, and informs Sam that he is not going to leave the search for the falcon and would continue on the quest. Immediately after this conversation, Sam informs the police about the people involved in the entire fiasco including Gutman and Wilmer, the men connected to the murder of Jacobi and Thursby, and Brigid, the murderer of Archer. When the police arrive on the scene, Brigid is arrested and Sam is informed by the police of Gutman's recent murder. The movie concludes with Sam giving up the remaining reward money and the statue of the falcon to the police as evidence.

Before analyzing the movie, one must be able to comprehend and recognize the significant features that make up film noir, which ultimately drew upon a reservoir of

dissimilar film systems and practices. During the time period when film noir was most popular, directors often associated their movies with a low-key black-white visual. Many of the lights portrayed in *The Maltese Falcon* were placed low and floor lamps were rarely high off the ground. Furthermore, the light inclined to come in the rooms in jagged and odd silhouettes in due course producing an ominous style and ideology. This influence could be traced back to the German Expressionism as well. Also, the key concepts in these movies were derived from the unadulterated raw school of crime fiction that developed during the early 1900's when the Depression era wreaked havoc on America. Film Noir, or "Black Film" in French, began simply as melodramas, but ultimately developed into a distinctive genre of its own. While this expression incorporated a variety of plots, the key figures of the films characteristically encompassed the detective or private-eye, police force, slum areas of the city, law-abiding and upright citizen gone crooked, femme fatale character and the victim. "*The Maltese Falcon* associated with many classic noir ideologies such as the small town just outside of the city, dark lighting, the detective, and the sex-driven femme fatale woman" (Hanson & O'Rawe, *The Femme Fatale*, 69). During this age of film-making, sex was frequently indicated through the usage of cigarettes. Throughout *The Maltese Falcon*, scenes that appeared to be action packed or dreamy were frequently trailed by either character enjoyably smoking their cigarette. Although noir films characteristically incorporated and were recognized by their visual styles, movies commonly associated as film noirs revolved around genres like the gangster films and the gothic romances. *The Maltese Falcon* comprises of topics of destiny, morality and violence which are the elementary features of a film noir.

Nothing or nobody is more terrifying than a femme fatale character in Noir films. The femme fatale's raw and exposed external beauty that conceals her wicked thoughts and character often seduces and corrupts the most strong-minded of men. The private investigator Sam Spade fell into the trap set by the attractive femme fatale character Brigid O'Shaughnessy. In *The Maltese Falcon*, Brigid O'Shaughnessy employs sexual suggestions to beguile Sam Spade. An example of seduction in *The Maltese Falcon* is when the fraud character of Brigid O'Shaughnessy gives a phony identity to use Sam Spade to seemingly find her missing sister. Eventually, Sam learned about Brigid's lies and confronts her:

Brigid O'Shaughnessy: Help me.

Sam Spade: You won't need much of anybody's help. You're good. Chiefly your eyes, I think, and that throb you get in your voice when you say things like be generous, Mr. Spade.

Brigid O'Shaughnessy: I deserve that. But the lie was in the way I said it, not at all in what I said. It's my own fault if you can't believe me now.

Sam Spade: Ah, now you are dangerous. (*The Maltese Falcon*, 1941)

In this scene, Brigid's unsuccessful attempt to control and seduce Sam Spade was due to the fact that he had become aware of the real identity and intentions of Brigid and could see through her lies and shady personality. In the end, the femme fatale Brigid in *The Maltese Falcon* could be acknowledged by her specific personality traits that made her an extremely dangerous character to the people around her especially to those who got in her way of realizing her dreams. Her sensual character clouded the awareness and understanding of many characters in the movie including private investigator Sam Spade but by the end of the movie her ego and evil intentions led to her disgrace as she was apprehended by the police for her misdeeds.

Moreover, the most supplementary components that draw the viewers' sentiments out are not always the acting but the setting and background constituents. The music employed in *The Maltese Falcon* clearly added depth to the entire movie and brought out certain key features which solidified the feel intended for the movie. For example, in one of the early scenes where Archer was seen walking down the road, the fairly gentle background music instantly changes to fast paced eerie music as he is shot and killed in the darkness. The scene then changes to Sam's house, which is presented as submerged in darkness, where he is seen sitting down in his chair by his telephone. The tune playing terrifyingly in the background corresponded well with the scene's attitude as Sam is seen picking up the phone's receiver to be communicated the news of Archer's death. Therefore, even when acting plays a crucial role in film noir, music and other background constituents play a significant role in generating the raw unadulterated passion and excitement of film noir. In conclusion, the film noir style has made *The Maltese Falcon* one of the most greatly appreciated and valued films of Hollywood cinema. The practice of employing dark lighting and heart pounding music is just a small segment of the basics that represent film noir in this movie. The screenplay of *The Maltese Falcon* was brilliant which gave the audience a great feel of a thrilling ride full of deception and lies. Additionally, the actors gave a brilliant performance which enhanced the entire effect of the movie and solidified the place of *The Maltese Falcon* in the annals of great American Classics and helped earn Film Noir its spot in history as a radical and influential genre.

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