

Interdisciplinary Research Journal for Humanities

(A Peer – Reviewed Journal)



ISSN 2249-250X

Volume – 15 No. 1

March 2025

ST. XAVIER'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS)

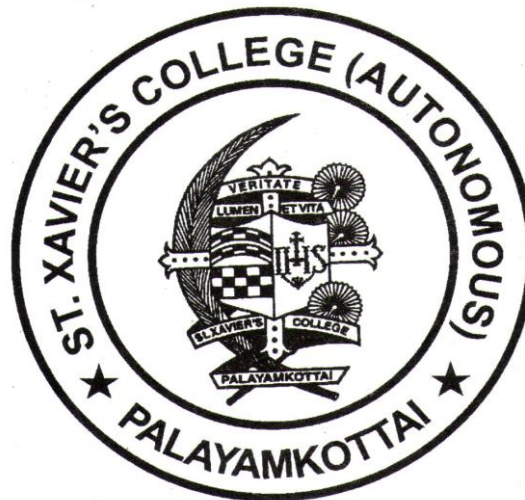
[Recognized as College with Potential for Excellence by UGC]
[Accredited by NAAC at 'A++' Grade with a CGPA of **3.66** out of
4 in IV cycle]

PALAYAMKOTTAI – 627 002.

TAMILNADU, INDIA

Website :www.stxavierstn.edu.in

Veritate Lumen et Vita
(Light and Life through Truth)



Interdisciplinary Journal of Humanities

(ISSN Number: 2249-250X)

PATRON

Rev. Dr. Godwin Rufus

Principal

St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Palayamkottai-627002.

EDITORIAL BOARD (from June 2023)

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. D. Jockim

Assistant Professor of English St. Xavier's College (Autonomous),

Palayamkottai, Tirunelveli District – 627002

E.Mail: editor_idrjh@stxavierstn.edu.in

Advisory Board

Dr. G. Baskaran

Dean & Professor, Faculty of English & Foreign Languages,

Gandhigram Rural Institute (Deemed University), Tamil Nadu 624 302

Dr. V. Christopher Ramesh

Assistant professor of English

Sri Meenakshi Government Arts College for Women, Madurai.

Dr. Lizie Williams

Assistant Professor of English

St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Palayamkottai, Tirunelveli – 627002.

Dr. P. Lavanya Devi

Assistant Professor, Department of B. Com Corporate Secretaryship

Mar Gregorious College of Arts and Science, Mogappir, Chennai-37.

Dr. Pradeep Trikha,

Professor of English,

Mohanlal Sukhadia University,

Ganesh Nagar, Udaipur, Rajasthan-313039.

Dr. Sushma V Murthy

Associate Professor, Dept of English and Cultural Studies

Christ (Deemed to be University) Bangaluru, Karnataka – 560029.

Dr. S.A. Thameemul Ansari

Professor and Head, Department of English
Mohan Babu University, Tirupathi, Andra Pradesh- 517102.
Contact: 7373627002

Rev. Sr. Juna

Department of English Sacred Heart College, Perani, Tamil Nadu
Mobile : 7358729105, Email: sr.juancsst@gmail.com

Dr. S. Sam Surya

Assistant Professor of English, Don Bosco College,
Yelagiri Hills, Tamil Nadu.

Dr. N. Vimala Devi

Department of English, J.M.J (Jesus Mary Joseph) College, Tenali,
Andhra Pradesh. Mobil No: 9849891759

Dr. Utpal Gwra Brahma

Department of Political Science,
St. Ann's College, Kokrajhar, Assam.

Dr. Aditya Goyari

Department of English, St. Ann's College,
Kokrajhar, Assam.

Dr. Gema Ataide

Department of Economics
St. Xavier's College, Goa.

Dr. Meekha Suraj Koshy

Department of English
Mar Theophilus Training College, Nalanchira,
Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. Email: meekha.suraj@mttc.ac.in

Dr. C. Anto Thomas

Department of English
St. Thomas College, Thrissur, Kerala.

Rev. Sr. Dr. Sheeba Andrews

Department of Economics, Providence Women's College,
Kozhikode, Kerala

Dr. Raju Sebastian

Department of English, St. Berchmans College,
Changanassery, Kerala

E.mail: rajupunchayil@gmail.com Ph. No: +91 9447807804

Dr. Sr. Regeenamma Joseph

Department of Economics,
Alphonsa College, Pala, Kerala.

Dr. Neeraja James

Department of Economics,
St. Albert's College, Ernakulam, Kerala.

Dr. Diana Dias

Department of English
St. Aloysius College, Mangalore, Karnataka.

Dr. Mini Mark Bonjour

Department of English St. Joseph University,
Bengaluru, Karnataka.

Mrs. Soma Banerjee

Department of English,
St. Francis de Sales College, Nagpur, Maharashtra.

Dr. Marie Fernandes

Department of English,
St. Andrew's College, Mumbai, Maharashtra.

Dr. Shirley Abraham

Associate Professor & Head, Department of Sociology,
St. Andrew's College, Mumbai, Maharashtra

Dr. Rakhal K. Purkayastha

Associate Professor & Head Department of Political Science,
St Anthony's College, Meghalaya.

Dr. Wanphai Mary K. Japang

Assistant Professor & Head, Department of Philosophy,
Don Bosco College, Tura, Meghalaya

Dr. Sandra Joseph

Department of Sociology,
Jesus and Mary College, New Delhi, India.

Dr. Rama Hirawat

Department of English,
St. Xaviers College, Jaipur, Rajasthan.

Ms. Suparna Sengupta

Department of English,
Jyoti Nivas College (Autonomous), Bangalore

Dr. C. Beulah Vijayarani

Department of Commerce Providence Women's College,
Coonoor, Tamil Nadu.
E-mail : beulah_suresh@yahoo.co.in Ph. No: 0423-2234084

Dr. K.A. Maria John Joseph

Department of Commerce Sacred Heart College,
Tirupattur, Tamil Nadu.

Dr. M. Mary Helen Stella,

Department of Commerce Holy Cross College, Nagarcoil,
Tamil Nadu Mobile: 948778547
E.mail: maryhelenstella@holycrossnsl.edu.in helenstella123@gmail.com

Dr. S. Gayathiri

Department of Commerce
Bon Secours College for Women Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu.

Dr. V. S. Suleena

Department of Commerce
St. Joseph's College for Women, Alappuzha, Kerala
Email: drsuleenavs@gmail.com Mobile: 9847090974

Dr. Daisland Thattil

Department of Commerce,
St. Thomas College, Thrissur, Kerala.

Dr. C. Geevarghese

Department of Commerce and Management Studies
Christ Nagar College, Trivandrum, Kerala.

Dr. J. Josephine Narmadha

Department of Commerce, Jyoti Nivas College,
Bengaluru, Karnataka. Email: neetatr@jyotinivas.org

Ms. Amitha Priyadarshini

Department of Commerce, St. Joseph University,
Bengaluru, Karnataka.

Dr. Abhishe

Department of School of Commerce Christ University,
Bengaluru.

Dr. Suvaiba Piran

Department of Commerce,
St. Xaviers College, Mumbai, Maharashtra.

Dr. Savita Rastog

Department of Commerce,
Jesus and Mary College, New Delhi, India.

	Name	Title	Page No.
1.	Dr. Lizie Williams	The Purport of the 'Postcolonial': Reading Colonialism with Amitav Ghosh's Themes	1
2.	Dr. Debolina Mukherjee	Negotiating the Roles of Women in Naga Society: A Study of the Status of Contemporary Naga Women and Tola in Easterine Kire's <i>Spirit Nights</i>	9
3.	S. Mouhamada & Dr. S. Visaka Devi	Unconventional(ising) Gothicism: Remodelling of the Grotesque in Neil Gaiman's <i>The Graveyard Book</i>	18
4.	Laxmi Prajapati	Exposing the Patriarchal and Hypocritical Contradictions in Girish Karnad's Play <i>Nagamandala</i>	30
5.	Dr Lanke Subha & Geeta Lakshmi Vallabhaneni	A Winter's Tale of Resilience: Echoes of Apartheid	37
6.	Dr. Geetika Gupta	From Ruins to Renaissance: Reviving the Lost Glory of Nālandā University in the 21 st Century	42
7.	Aashish Gaur	The Rise of eSports: A Sociological Exploration of Leisure in India	49
8.	Ms. Harsha A U S & Dr. Aysha Swapna K A	Mother, Body, Child: A Mythopoesis of Mothering in Select Poems by Mia Ayumi Malhotra	58
9.	Amrita Das	Short films, Real Stories: Transgender Representation in Jake Graf's Short Films	68
10.	Mahera Imam & N. Manimekalai	The Digital Abyss: Mental Health Implications of Online Harassment and Trolling	75
11.	Meenakshy B S	Odiyan: A Shapeshifter's Tale - Exploring the Adaptation of Folk Narratives in Malayalam	85
12.	Neha Perween & Dr. Iftekhhar Ahmed Ansari	Online Activism of Indian Diaspora: Role in Furthering India's Soft Power Capabilities	92
13.	Piyush Kumar	Artificial Friend, Care, and Companionship: Exploring the Posthuman Dilemma in Kazuo Ishiguro's <i>Klara and the Sun</i>	105

14.	Revathy S Mohan	Unevolved Mahatma: A Study of Select Indian Films	113
15.	T K Kavya & Dr. B. Monika Nair	Shakespeare and Machiavellianism: Exploring Machiavellian Tactics in Shakespearian Tragedies	121
16.	Irene Bijo Abraham	Ecocriticism in Contemporary Music: A Study of Taylor Swift's "Willow" and JVKE's "This Is What Falling in Love Feels Like"	128
17.	Athira. A	Tracing Mythical Narratives from Memories: Kodungallur Bharani Festival and the Nuances of the 'Time' in the Modern myth telling	136
18.	Dr Bulbul Gupta	Ageing and Memory: Exploring Vulnerability in Geetanjali Shree's <i>Tomb of Sand</i>	144
19.	Sneha Chauhan	The Conspiracy of the Triple Burden and Victimization of the Female Bodies in Baburao Baghul's <i>When I Hid My Caste</i>	151
20.	Roudrajjal Dasgupta & Debika Mukherjee	The Popular Culture and Eroticism in Indian Cinemas: The Rise of Soft Pornographies on OTT	157
21.	D. Shaline Jenifah & Dr. D. Jockim	Camera as an Oppressing Medium for Women: A Comprehensive Analysis of Margaret Atwood's <i>Surfacing</i>	173
22.	Prapya Putatunda	Shadows of Tradition: Unfolding the Enigmatic World of Ritual Hunting in Bengal	179
23.	Haseena K	Data Privacy Dilemmas in India's Digital Future: Challenges and Legal Perspectives	192
24.	Amal Krishna P S	On Gender Dystopias: The Hema Commission Report and the Handmaidens of Malayalam Cinema	202
25.	Dr. E Sahaya Chithra & Dr. S. Vijayalakshmi	Converging Artificial Intelligence with Indian Knowledge System: Issues and Solutions in the UGC Framework	215

THE PURPORT OF THE 'POSTCOLONIAL': READING COLONIALISM WITH AMITAV GHOSH'S THEMES

Dr. Lizie Williams

Associate Professor of English, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Palayamkottai.

Abstract

This research paper aims to identify a need for an evolved perception of colonialism, using Amitav Ghosh's narrations of colonialism as a springboard. Most of the postcolonial countries have remained 'developing' or 'underdeveloped', three fourths of a century after political independence. Decolonisation appears to have failed in the very process, allowing 're-orientalisation' and perpetrating 'neocolonialism'. The paper primarily uses the perspectives of Arif Dirlik to identify other ideologies and tendencies such as Modernism and Capitalism underlying colonialism that might have contributed to the failure. This research has been made possible by the support of the Jesuit Management through St. Xavier's College Research Grant.

Keywords: Postcolonial, Decolonisation, Orientalisation, Re-orientalisation, Neocolonialism, and Capitalism.

Empires always profess, and sometimes even believe in, noble ideals: the problem lies with their methods, which are invariably such as to subvert their stated aims and ends (Ghosh 224).

The sociopolitical setting as well as the cultural matrix of the Indian sub-continent underwent a sea change during the colonial period. In countries with a history of a colonial past, the cultures had been subjected to different forms and levels of undermining, erasure and suppression by the colonisers, throughout the period of colonial rule. Cultures of the peoples with a history of colonisation have been irrevocably influenced by the process of colonisation and the dynamics of its power play. The extent of the influence has left an indelible mark on the many facets of individual and collective identity of the people as well as their memories. Post political liberation, starting from the period of anti-colonial uprisings across the region, the attempts to decolonise the lands as well as the minds and to construct

individual identities and finding the roots have been ongoing. This research paper seeks to trace certain underlying ideologies and perspectives that may explain why decolonisation seems an endless process, using Amitav Ghosh's works as a springboard.

The period through the later part of the twentieth century and the twenty first century is overwhelmed with the discourses against colonialism in various forms of art and media. The impact of colonialism on the cultures of the colonised countries and how the colonised people dealt with the colonial culture and power structure add up to an important area of research and study that has led to expounding theories that constitute postcolonialism. Postcolonialism as a critical apparatus is vital to reconstruct the identity of the former colonies and come to terms with new futures. Dirlik spells out the goal of the postcolonial as "no less than the abolition of all distinctions between center and periphery, and all other "binarisms" that are allegedly a legacy of colonial(ist) way of thinking, and to reveal societies globally in their complex heterogeneity and contingency" (52).

While Indian Writing in English essentially sprouted from an anglophone education led by colonialism itself, it became one of the most powerful and potential voices to challenge colonialism and put together new identities. Amitav Ghosh, as an anthropologist and historian turned novelist, shows a dedicated and consistent engagement with the colonial rule, its system, dynamics and impact on South Asia. Ghosh's body of work is a passionate criticism of colonialism. Ghosh uses the vantage point of fiction to bring alive the colonial past of the different peoples, throwing light on colonial greed, materialist goals, cruelty, sadist behaviour, oppressive apparatus and blatant hypocrisy in the name of mission and ideals.

Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* (2000) narrates the events around the fall of Burma under British colonisation, the Second World War to India's independence from the British. The novel highlights the pre-colonial glory of Burma in terms of education, economy and gender equality. The *Ibis Trilogy*, consisting of *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011) and *Flood of Fire* (2012), traces the journey of opium from production in the plains of Bihar from the wheat turned poppy farms

of central eastern parts of India through transportation to China during the period leading to the Opium Wars. The novels narrate the history of the milieu centred on opium, foregrounding the changing lives of the people during the time. Amitav Ghosh's narration of the colonial times in the regions chosen for the stories are scathing critiques of the colonial rule and their debilitating influence on the native cultures. Ghosh does extensive research into the historical backgrounds of his stories for each of his works with his concentrated focus on the colonial apparatus and its functioning, and reimagines the milieu. His attempts at rewriting history has focused on filling up gaps in the colonial depiction of native identities. Ghosh narrates the myriad dimensions of colonial encounters and the consequent aftermaths.

Nation is one of Ghosh's themes of discussion in his novels. *The Shadow Lines* (1988) and *The Hungry Tide* (2004) centre around the concept of nation and the identity of Indian nationhood. Nationhood as in practice is in itself a western concept and the Indian nationhood is a clear colonial inheritance with no precolonial existence. The post-colonial Indian nationhood in its very constitution is constantly in fiery tension with the continuing pre-colonial socio-cultural and political identities. Ghosh foregrounds the inconsistent and unsustainable nature of the modern nation in the two works, *The Shadow Lines* and *The Hungry Tide* with the heritage of cultural diversity of the precolonial past of the Indian subcontinent.

For India, nationhood was entered into as a convenient transition from colonial oppression to liberation. What began with a very educated and spelt out constitution that understood the pluralistic nature of the precolonial cultural matrix of the new nation India, over the years has lost itself in the meandering ways of western ideals of nations and extreme forms of corruption. The nation still rallies between 'developing' and 'underdeveloped,' seventy seven years after political independence, and the identity of the nation is still defined and contested in the shadow of colonialism making decolonisation as an ongoing endless process as well as a struggle.

Meanwhile, the use of the term 'postcolonial' to describe the state of countries with a colonial past, is problematised, when the writers do not like being

identified as postcolonial; Amitav Ghosh and Nayantara Sahgal for example. The writers, who had inherited the burden of the colonial legacy along with the language, resist the identity of post colonial writers. Being described post colonial consequently, pins them to a colonial context, which in turn undermines the presence and continuity of their precolonial identity. According to Sahgal, the use of postcolonial as an adjective to describe these countries and cultures implies “that colonisation by the British is the only important thing that has happened to India, and it denies the history that precedes British colonisation and the continuing traditions stemming from those earlier periods” (18).

In line with Edward Said’s ‘Orientalism,’ Amitav Ghosh has discussed in detail the cultural and social stereotypes connected to the geopolitical ideologies of the European colonisers and how they have influenced native cultures. On the other hand, identifying and describing the cultures of the people with a colonial history, as postcolonial, reduces them to stereotypes, stripping them of a pre-colonial existence or history. Ironically this is also “Orientalisation.” Therefore, narrating cultural memories is of great significance to articulating their identities evolving across time: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. This in turn facilitates understanding the changing dynamics of hegemonic structures.

According to Innes, studies concerning interaction between the coloniser and the colonised focus on the “interaction between the culture of the colonial power, including its language, and the culture and traditions of the colonised peoples.” Innes continues to say that “the analysis of those interactions acknowledges the importance of power relations in that cultural exchange - the degree to which the coloniser imposes a language, a culture and a set of attitudes, and the degree to which the colonised peoples are able to resist, adapt to or subvert that imposition” (2). This holds true in Ghosh’s writing colonialism. His handling of colonialism continues beyond his fiction to his non-fiction, his essays. There is a gradual evolution of the way colonialism and its influence is understood. Simultaneously, the concept of decolonisation has been undergoing change.

Decolonisation aims to recuperate the people and the cultures from the damages of colonisation. Initially the urgent and essential process of decolonisation

following political liberation, had to struggle against the opinions of a rare few who reminisced in nostalgia about the colonial period, imagining it as a harbinger of modernisation, social change and development. The colonial education definitely had a hand in influencing this opinion. Decolonisation as it was originally understood aimed to produce or unveil an untainted, pristine, ideal native culture. This was an impossible task as one such never existed and Bhabha's pertinent observation of the cultures' constant state of 'becoming' rightly perceives cultures as constantly in a state of flux.

To continue discussing decolonisation, on one hand, while the issues pertaining to colonialism continue in covert forms, there is a concern if the narrating of the colonial hegemony while essential, in its mammoth proportions, appropriates the narrative space of voicing of other hegemonies. Tabish Khair calls this "the postcolonial blindspot." He writes thus: "The war on colonial hegemonies and injustices by the best anti-colonial and postcolonial minds often left other hegemonies largely unscathed." Dirlik discusses how the term, 'postcolonial' "mystifies both politically and methodologically a situation that represents not the abolition but the reconfiguration of earlier forms of domination" (54). He states: "The complicity of "postcolonial" in hegemony lies in postcolonialism's diversion of attention from contemporary problems of social, political and cultural domination, and its obfuscation of its own relationship to what is but a condition of its emergence: a Global Capitalism..." (54).

There is yet another problem with the way decolonisation is translated and marketed to the public. When postcolonialism had broken its exclusivity of an elite critical reading available only to academics, and became popular currency, anti-colonialism transformed from an essential part of political and social liberation to a popular trope with a political agenda. It is commendable that certain aspects of postcolonialism like the production of Manichean binaries, social and cultural undermining, and economic oppression were made available through mass media and general political propaganda. However, when it is used as a manipulative tool with a political agenda and mass produced in a reduced form for popular

consumption, it becomes necessary to reassess and revise the goals and dynamics of postcolonialism as a theory and an outlook, and de-strategise its use.

The post-colonial situation has taken a nose dive into another dangerous context. In the process of creating and reinforcing an integral national identity, the postcolonial nation has been consciously narrating an imagined glorious pre-colonial past of golden times with ideal livelihoods and organic living where “all lived happily ever after.” This distortion of the lives in the pre-colonial past goes hand in hand with the abject vilifying of an identified colonising power, as a subject, and overlooking the colonial apparatus of power. This in turn results in the transference of the colonial power structure into numerous post-colonial forms, like neo-colonialism. Arif Dirlik identifies postcolonialism as a “version of postmodernism” (4). He also traces the underlying principle of colonialism as capitalism and not a simplistic notion of inter-cultural encounter and conflict.

In “Confessions of a Xenophile” Ghosh says: “Today, especially in the Anglo-American world, capitalism and empire are once again being packaged together in a bundle that is scarcely distinguishable from the old ‘civilising mission’” (223). Dirlik’s identifying Colonialism with Modernism and Enlightenment along with Industrial Revolution and Eurocentrism, makes sense identifying colonialism itself as a capitalist enterprise right from the beginning. In “Priya Satia’s *Time’s Monster*” Ghosh says: “Colonial warfare was, therefore a critical factor in Britain’s industrialisation. In effect, what Satia shows in *Empire of the Guns* is that: ‘Violence committed abroad, in service of imperial expansion, was central to the making of capitalist modernity’” (371). Colonialism and Imperialism can be better understood as manifestations of Capitalism. This makes understanding and challenging neocolonialism easier.

In “Storytelling and the Spectrum of the Past,” Ghosh says: “The Ibis Trilogy happens to be set in a period in which the world—especially the Western world—was beginning to experience what is probably the single greatest shift in affect that has ever occurred: the birth of the bourgeois sensibility” (357). He further goes on to say, “Much has been written about the religious and literary dimensions of the transition to bourgeois-dom...” (357). This underlines the need to

relate Modernism, Capitalism and Colonialism to better fathom the goal of the ‘postcolonial.’

Amidst all the emotional entanglements dealing with colonial trauma to individuals, cultures and societies, colonialism has come to be seen as a strategy diligently associated exclusively with certain powerful nations from the west - outsiders/invaders. Ghosh writes thus: “The truth is that the world’s experience over these last fifteen years could more accurately be read as proof that untrammelled capitalism leads inevitably to imperial wars and the expansion of empires . . . We find ourselves in a period of extraordinary instability and fear, faced with the prospect of an endless proliferation of thinly veiled colonial wars” (224).

That the nations were themselves facades of underlying capitalist tendencies had slipped the postcolonial consciousness during the initial period of decolonisation. Identifying nation as a Eurocentric master narrative, Dirlik writes: “The repudiation of master-narratives is necessary to dispose of the hegemonic Eurocentric assumptions built into those master-narratives which have been employed in the past to frame Third World Histories” (56). This oversight of a significant piece of identification has led the capitalist formulae of colonialism infiltrating native societies, unnoticed and unidentified, creating neocolonisers in different native shapes and forms. This is besides the reincarnation of colonial structures as capitalist investment patterns of global business.

As the west in the colonial period reduced the cultures of the East to “Orientalised” stereotypes, the new avatars of capitalism are “Re-orientalising” the post-colonial societies, reducing them to object positions, located under the scrutinising eye of intolerance (Lau). Here emerges a need to understand the scope of postcolonial theory and its responsibilities and thereby facilitate a break from the vicious capitalist cycle of hegemony that keeps reorganising itself in different guises and marginalising vulnerable communities of people.

Decolonisation can never be truly possible unless Postcolonialism is understood not in isolation as a cultural liberation movement, but in tandem with other important theoretical positions connected to that milieu, and colonialism itself is seen as a manifestation of capitalist tendencies. A new understanding of an

organic social environment has to be evolved with no preconceptions regarding an idolised and idealised pre-colonial native past, also keeping in mind the inherent plurality of human cultures and societies, and the natural birth right of every human being for freedom, honour and respect, alongside a dignified life.

Works Cited

- Dirlik, Arif. *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Ghosh, Amitav. *Wild Fictions: Essays*. New Delhi: Fourth Estate, 2025.
- Innes, C. L. *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Khair, Tabish. "The postcolonial blind spot." *The Hindu*, 11 August 2016, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/Islamic-hegemonies-Brahminised-hindu-hegemonies-The-postcolonial-blind-spot/article62116830.ece>.
- Lau, Lisa. "Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals." *Modern Asian Studies* 43.2 (2009): pp. 571–590.
- Sahgal, Nayanara. "The Schizophrenic Imagination." *Wasafiri*, vol. 11, Spring 1990, pp. 17-20.

NEGOTIATING THE ROLES OF WOMEN IN NAGA SOCIETY: A STUDY OF THE STATUS OF CONTEMPORARY NAGA WOMEN AND TOLA IN EASTERINE KIRE'S *SPIRIT NIGHTS*

Dr. Debolina Mukherjee

Assistant Professor of English, St. Joseph's College (A), Jakhama, Nagaland.

Abstract

Easterine Kire's *Spirit Nights* depicts the life and status that women held in olden times through the portrayal of its female protagonist, Tola, in a patriarchal set-up. Tola becomes the force that guides the readers to traverse between ancestral Naga society and contemporary Naga society and in turn question the similarities of women's stance and station in her family and larger community even today. This paper will attempt to examine the changing status of Naga women as they navigate between traditional expectations and modernity.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Tradition, Naga Women, Status and Modernity.

Set against the backdrop of a Naga village of animists, hunters and agrarians, Easterine Kire's *Spirit Nights* depicts the life and status that women held in olden times through the portrayal of its female protagonist Tola, in a patriarchal set-up. Tola becomes the force that guides the readers to traverse between ancestral Naga society and contemporary Naga society and in turn question the similarities of women's stance and station in her family and larger community even today. Tola's predicaments, fear and insecurities that prevent her from revealing the dream that had prophesised to her about an impending doom in the village are resemblant of the inhibitions that women in Naga society are troubled with in present times. Released in 2022, just a year before Nagaland's fifteenth Legislative Assembly elections, Tola becomes the avatar of the many women whose participation in politics is remonstrated even today as Naga political landscape continue to be largely male dominated. The state elected its first women Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) in 2023, six decades after Nagaland attained statehood. The 2024 general election had no women candidates contesting to be a Member of Parliament (MP). It is ironical because statistically, women voter turn outs has always been

higher than that of their male counterparts but women candidates in state and general elections have remained imperceptible (Statistical Report on General Election). A major factor for the limited or restricted political representation of women is the Naga customary laws that keep women on the fringes on matters pertaining to decision making. In this regard, the Urban Local Body (ULB) election held in June 2024 becomes significant for Nagaland's democracy as it fulfils its constitutional obligations of making governance participatory for women, thus underscoring the rift between traditionalism and modernism that exist in contemporary Naga society. In the light of these statements, this paper will attempt to parallel Tola's status as a woman in precolonial Naga society and examine the sphere of influence of the patriarchal system in Naga society even today.

Spirit Nights uses simple narrative and relatively unambiguous plot to weave folklores of the Chang Nagas into a plausible work of fiction. Albeit, a work of fiction, Kire through her tale explores Naga tradition, culture, religion, rituals and taboos that shaped Naga village community and the roles and responsibilities demarcated for men and women within this fold. After Namumolo's parents were killed in an enemy attack from head hunters of a neighbouring village, Tola takes up the responsibility of raising her only grandchild. She teaches him the way of village life, tells him stories of lore and about the taboos and rituals around which the community life revolves, takes him to the jhums and teaches him to cultivate rice and grow vegetables. The story revolves around Namu and Tola delineating their roles and predicaments as seers and dream receivers of the village. Their plight is determined by prescribed gender roles within the Naga patriarchal structure. For Namu, it is about being too young to carry forward such immense responsibility, "It is not that I don't want to be seer. I am not ready. I am still too young" (Kire 158). Namu's denial comes from inexperience and the desire to lead a simple life in the village. He feels unprepared to take up responsibilities of a seer at so young an age. He feels challenged by the roles and responsibilities that come with being a seer. Seers communicated with the spirits, it was the village seer that received dreams pertaining to important events, a seer would be warned in his dreams about impending disasters and attacks, a seer would be consulted for important dates and

rituals related to sowing, harvesting, festivities and the like. Namu, feels unprepared to lead such a life of austerity. He does not harbor any desire to become the village seer. His choices in life are simple, “to live in peace with my neighbours, farm our fields and to be able to look after you (Tola) and Thongdi and my children” (154). Coming from a line of seers, this was, however, not a matter of choice but a matter of inherited responsibility for Namu.

This instance in the text can be read as a subversion of societal expectations set upon men by patriarchy. Often times men are forced to conform to the responsibilities and roles prescribed by the social order. In Namu’s case, he must take up this position as he is the rightful heir in the absence of Chongshen. As per the village customs, when the seer of the village passes on, the male next in line is made the seer and since Tola had no brothers and Namu was still an infant, her cousin Chongshen became the village seer. Chongshen too, had to take upon this responsibility because he was the closest male kin after Tola’s father passed away. Chongshen enjoys the power and privileges that come with this responsibility. But he is unable to converse with the spirits as he has not inherited the ability to see dreams and visions. Chongshen feels threatened when Tola tells him of her dreams. Chongshen’s jealousy of Tola then, comes from the insecurity of being judged for his incompetency in a deeply rooted patriarchal society, where gender roles become hierarchical constructs.

For the village seer’s daughter, Tola, it is denial and acceptance. Denial of the fact that she had inherited the gift of dreams from her father, “She kept reasoning in this manner and never knew the gift had passed on from her father to her” and her acquiescence of the fact that women in her village never became seers, “She could never become a seer on his death, because she was a woman” (23). Tola contends that by revealing the dreams she kept receiving from the spirits, she may challenge and potentially override the decree of the appointed village seer. Being one of the oldest members of the village, she is revered and respected by all and they turn to her for wisdom. When Tola started receiving dreams about the darkness that was to engulf the entire village, she hesitates speaking about it to anyone, “But even if she shared them, would they have taken heed of her dreams? Would they

have listened to a woman? A widow?” (50). As a woman and a widow, Tola questions her stance in a patriarchal set up. She came from a line of seers, but Chongshen was now the official seer. Should not Chongshen be receiving those dreams? Tola worried that Chongshen might assume she was challenging him to prove she was the better seer. Immersed in self-doubt, she finally takes the courage to speak of the dreams to Chongshen only to be silenced, ““They may not believe you, and worse than that, they may say you are going a little crazy in your old age. Better not tell anyone””(52,53). Tola’s dilemma reflects the dilemma of every contemporary Naga women. She continues to live in the hearts and minds of many modern Naga women. Her apprehensions, self-doubt and fear have passed down as passive acceptance of a tradition that have become antiquated and archaic in the face of modernisation. Despite the diminishing relevance of patriarchal system today, women continue to conform to traditional gender roles. Reasons may be attributed to the deep seeded socio cultural conditioning, internalised socialisations and psychological inheritance of the patriarchal order. Women, from their tender years are taught to socialise in a manner where they conform to traditional gender roles, thereby, growing up she comes to accept it as natural in the larger scheme of things.

The patriarchal structure is common to all Naga tribes but each tribe has its own established customary laws, religious practises, inheritance laws, governance, etc which in most cases are similar. In precolonial Naga society, the concept of “Naga” did not exist and each Naga village was “an independent republic” where the identity of an individual was his/her individual tribe and the village from which the individual hailed (Elizabeth 11). In this regard, the patriarchal system amongst the tribes was not homogeneous per se but definitely identical and synchronous. The position of Naga women in her family was never equal or above that of her male counterpart. Every household decisions needed the consent of her male counterpart because, “their roles are strictly defined by this tradition which says that it is only men who can be decision-makers in important matters both in private and public affairs” (Ao 46). While on the one hand, Naga women may be said to enjoy a social status that is higher than most women in the Indian subcontinent as practises such as

female infanticide, sati, remain unknown but, on the flip side, Naga women are also not entitled to property ownership or participation in the apex decision making body of the village – the village council.

The subordinate position of Naga women within the community becomes apparent when Tola, a widow had properties she owned alongside her husband but could not inherit them because she was a woman. Naga customary laws grant women very limited property ownership rights and privileges. The patrilineal structure allows for all landed properties to be inherited along the male line alone and in the absence of a male heir, the property gets legally transferred to the nearest male paternal relative. It was important for any married couple to have a male heir because it would ensure that the ancestral property continued to remain in the family and would also strengthen the family's position on the community. Tola conceived her first child after several years of marriage but the years of bareness consumed her with fear and insecurity that drove her to the point of asking her husband to take another wife that would bear him a son. There was a saying in their village, "*The name of the man passes into the stones*" implying to men without a male offspring (Kire 11). It was a practise in their village to allow rich men with no male offspring to set up sitting places at prominent sites in the village (11). The sites would be named after the man without male heir to ensure that his name was not forgotten even after his death. It can be surmised from the maxim that a woman's name and identity is subordinate to that of a man. A woman's name has no importance in history so no monuments will ever be erected in her name. Infertility was considered a curse, both to the family and to the community. She will perhaps only be remembered as the woman who failed to bear her husband a male heir: "Tongues would wag and people would try to bring back into public memory any taboo violations that had been committed by the man's ancestors as a possible reason for the fruitlessness" (11). A barren woman experienced veiled ostracism in society as she would be kept away from many activities that woman took place in. However, Tola, although at a later stage, experiences the joy of motherhood when she gives birth to a son whom they call Topong Nyakba. Tola's familial bliss, however, is short lived as her husband dies in a hunting accident when Topong

Nyakba is only fifteen years. A few years later, Topong Nyakba and his wife are killed when enemy warriors from a different village attacked them, leaving Namu to her care. Tola and her husband, together owned certain plots of lands but after her husband and her son's death, she was only a guardian of those properties until "one day, Namu would inherit all the fields and plots of land owned by her and her husband. He would also inherit her father's lands because she was his only child, and the only other male relative who might have made claims on the land had more than sufficient land of his own" (6). Tola, able to keep her father's property until Namu is of age is a case of exception given that, Tola's paternal family were well off and that they willingly relinquished the property that by village customary laws, was rightly theirs.

Women never questioned this subordinate position that they held in society because for the longest time, women never saw themselves as providers and protectors of the family, the community and/or of the village. This mandate was for the male members by virtue of the physical strength they possessed. The biological difference between the two sexes eventually became factors that established patriarchy in Naga society. Men were assumed to be better decision makers because of the physical prowess they displayed and hence only men became entitled to titles and honour. A woman, on the other hand, could only share in the honour of her husband by finding mention in songs and tales but not beyond. Men, because they were protectors of the village, were also appointed as members of the village council. Women could neither be appointed nor could they be a part of any meetings or decision making of the village council. Ao, writes that the exclusion of women from the apex decision making body of the village were for practical reasons (47). Men, by virtue of their physical prowess had to protect the village from enemy head hunters and wild animals; men usually took up the task to clearing thick undergrowths and cutting down huge trees for cultivation as it was physically tasking for women; men had to secure the village gates by building strong walls; it was men who attacked enemy villages where they felt threatened, etc. When a village council came together for a meeting, it usually consisted of matters pertaining to issues like the "selection of appropriate forest areas for the year's

cultivation, defense matters etc., where women could not play any significant roles and hence their exclusion seemed but logical even to the women” (48). But these limitations imposed upon women in ancestral Naga society, continue to dictate the general mindset of contemporary Nagas as mainstream politics continue to be male dominated. There exists this paradoxical situation in Nagaland where, on the one hand, Nagas have embraced modernity thereby seemingly accepting its influence on language, food habits, lifestyle, etc, but on the other hand, taking a very defensive stand on certain traditional practises. The convergence of tradition and modernity and the interface between the two, has led to this complex position of Naga women in contemporary society. The traditional practises and the patriarchal structure are both deeply rooted in the Naga way of life and it continues to predominate even the post-colonial, postmodern Naga mind set.

This is made apparent by the fact that it took Nagaland sixty years to elect their first women MLA. The political history of the state will now speak of the first two women legislators and it will be used to exemplify what women can achieve if only given the opportunity and the right kind of support. While this may seem like the dawning of a new era in Naga politics where women can rub shoulders with male politicians, what remains uncertain is how much political space and freedom the elected leaders will be given and if the next general elections will witness a rise in female candidates or if this glorious chapter will close in the next election. This scepticism comes from what has been witnessed in election of the MPs from Nagaland. Rano Shaiza was elected a Member of the Lok Sabha in 1977. Phangnon Konyak brought much pride and hope to women in Nagaland when she became the first Member of the Rajya Sabha in 2022. But the scepticism come from the long years between which women are elected.

Given the fact that customary laws in Nagaland form the basis of all decision making and governance, administration and social relationships; it is very difficult for a woman to pass down her baton to the next generation because even though glass ceilings get broken now and then, the patriarchal mindset continue to breed more minds than those breaking glass ceilings. Tola is also that woman. When Chongshen decided to visit the seer at Mvüphri mountain, he passed on the

responsibility of the seer to Namu because he was the great grandson of a seer although he was young and reluctant to take on the sacred task. When Namu suggested that they transfer the responsibility to his grandmother, since she comes from a line of seers, he is told that “Only a male can be seer” (Kire 82). This can be compared with another incident in the story. Chongshen, after his meeting with the seer in Mvüphri realises that he was not the right seer. He did not belong directly to a line of seer and hence his function as a seer was limited only to “the calendar and crops and festivals” and that he can never be prepared in the face of bigger forces (134). Chongshen relinquishes the position of the village seer but Tola is still not made seer. In opposition to what they said earlier that only male can be seers, this time they say that Tola cannot be seer, “Not because she is a woman, but she is old” (134). This statement came after the villagers were saved from the darkness by Tola.

Eaterine Kire’s *Spirit Nights*, therefore becomes an imperative text to examine the status of women in Naga society. *Spirit Nights* is set in Shumang Laangnyu, a pre-colonial Naga village. The traditional beliefs and practises of the people of Shumang Laangnyu interwoven with dreams and deep wisdom, magic and the supernatural, mirrors the traditional beliefs and practises of the Nagas as a whole. The feminist voice of Kire can be heard in the words of the seer of Mvüphru who tells Chongshen of how powerful female seers can be, even more powerful than male seers and yet, “For a long time, ignorant men have said, ‘Old women and their tales! and laughed at them and laughed the truth of those tales away’” (84). The biological differences between men and women have created these social inequalities and have become “encoded into our psychological compositions” (Kimmel 58). Nagaland may have elected its first women MLAs and may boast of two women MPs in different tenures, but yet at the grassroots level, how many villages have appointed a woman as its village head? How many villages allow women executives in its village council? How many villages allow women to attend the meetings of the village council, let alone participate? The recent ULB elections scripted history as women were granted the 33 percent reservations, which were opposed vehemently in the past by tribal bodies arguing that it will infringe the Naga customary law safeguarded by Article 31 (A) of the Indian Constitution. It

took Nagaland, 23 years into the 21st century to revolutionise active women participation in politics. The problems continue to be deeply seeded in patriarchy and while it is important to protect Naga customary laws, it is also important to embrace progressive changes that will positively impact the future of the state.

Works Cited

Ao, Temsula. "Benevolent Subordination' Social Status of Naga Women." *On Being a Naga Essays*. Heritage Publishing House, 2014.

Elizabeth, Vizovono and Sentinaro Tsuren. *Insider Perspectives: Critical Essays on Literature from Nagaland*. Barkweaver, 2017.

Kimmel, Michael. *The Gendered Society*. Fourth edition. Oxford University Press, 2011.

Kire, Easterine. *Spirit Nights*. Simon & Schuster, 2022.

Statistical Report on General Election 1964 – 2018 to the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

UNCONVENTIONAL (ISING) GOTHICISM: REMODELLING OF THE GROTESQUE IN NEIL GAIMAN'S *THE GRAVEYARD BOOK*

¹Mouhamada S and ²Dr. S. Visaka Devi

¹ Research Scholar, Pondicherry University, India.

² Assistant Professor, Pondicherry University, India.

Abstract

This paper argues that Gothic's protean aesthetic and metaphoric nature serves as a rendition of the collective fears, failures, desires and anxieties of the socio-cultural system. Death has been the apotheosis of humankind's foremost terrors; no culture, religion or myth is devoid of post-mortem imaginations of afterlives and reincarnations. This paper interrogates the intent behind the resurfacing visualisations of the dead and undead in the Gothic landscape as a progeny of the side-lined fiascos of our system and psyche. *The Graveyard Book* normalizes Gothicism as an innate, complementary part of human existence, not as a dark other. The novel can be read as a revision of customary Gothic binaries and represents man as an embodiment of both the good and the bad. The paper draws on the conceptualisation of 'Gothic otherness' and presents the monsters as a realistic reflection of the repressed discourse of our lived realities.

Keywords: Otherness, Grotesque, Dead, Horror and Gothicism.

Gothicism in literature is associated with darkness, defamiliarization, degeneration and dread. The 18th-century zeitgeist was dominated by a fascination towards supernatural, ghastly and haunting sentiments, which led to the emergence of the "gothic school (that) returned to the wilderness and the architecture of the distant past for night sounds and shadows on which to anchor tales of terror" (Snodgrass 13). Its emergence as a reactionary movement against neo-classical aesthetics is documented in history with the publication of noteworthy works like Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764), William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), M.G Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). These pioneering works heralded the revival of medievalism in the late

eighteenth century literature which in turn inspired a universe of horror fiction which cemented the stock, recurring elements of the Gothic theme in literature.

The employment of atavistic mechanisms in the narratives distanced the Gothic genre from the neoclassical hierarchies of taste. The Gothic aesthetic did not evolve in seclusion: it is a part of a broader, multifarious and fluid milieu of uncertainties. Following the footsteps of established Gothic writers, the genre came to be recognised as a literary evocation of heightened and sublime emotions in its readers. It traversed the territories of terror and horror and was unanimously identified as *schauerroman*- shudder novel. From wild fantasies and remote settings to spotting the ‘uncanny’ in the mundane, urbane aspects of life, the 19th-century/Victorian Gothic evolved to be more inclusive of the concerns of its time. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), Edgar Allen Poe’s *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839), Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1899) are set in an urban landscape, unlike the haunting castles of the 18th-century Gothic, and dealt with issues like dark psychology, advancement of science, foreign invasion in the *fin de siècle*.

Adorned with the facade of fantasy, Gothic Literature explores the politics and limits of the era of its production and rationalises the imaginative excess of its narratives. The writings function as a social critique by historicising the gaps in the intellectual and social climate to tackle serious issues like sexuality, social class, industrialisation, deracialization, the influx of immigration, xenophobia and so on. For instance, the debate on heteronormativity, mid 20th-century’s obsession with foreign otherness and invasion, the nexus between technological explosion and primitivity, the rise of Satanic cult worship and other anxieties have been captured by Gothic writers. Therefore, it is absurd to restrain Gothic Studies as a repertoire of terror machinations as it re-presents social and psychological concerns.

This paper hypothesises how Gothic as a medium is exploited to portray societal and psychological issues through a remodelled usage of pop-culture tropes. This paper aims to:

- To examine Gaiman’s remodelling of the Gothic mode through- reversal and redeployment of tropes in the novel.

- To critically analyse the inclusion of ‘fantastic’ figures as a reflection of our repressed selves and sociocultural system.
- To uncover the interplay between myth and the Gothic figures.
- To examine the graveyard as a heterotopia.
- To understand the evolutionary and appositional nature of Gothic Otherness.

Human Psyche and Horror

There is a common acceptance in the recent times of the caliber of human as partially gentle and inevitably evil, as his psyche provides scope for the co-existence of both as complementary extensions. Or, he is basically an ‘unformed’ personality whose ratio of the good and the evil penchants would depend on his social exposure or to which of the two he is more prone to. This in turn, differs from individual to individual, depending on the various socio-cultural factors into which a human being is implanted. Such pruning designs the human persona and this indeed stabilises the duality. It is from this mental stature of the human duo that the Gothic emerges and formulates what is referred to as ‘the horror’. Or can simply be deciphered as the dual depictions of what human anomaly is all about. This can be deciphered through Stephanie Craig’s words who observes that “by taking the position that the supernatural is real, [he opens] . . . up the possibility that the supernatural is not the result of madness, but that madness [or the rapturous raving about death] is a result of the supernatural” (Craig 59).

Texts that border on the Gothic is a reflection of a morose social system or the weird human mentality. It serves to draw the repulsive rebel in man or represent him against a demanding, compelling social, political, psychological or cultural repression. The exterior of this is the gothic, while the interior acts as the propellant that manoeuvres the gothic exterior which mirrors what is commonly understood as ghost or vampire or monster that are usually rationalised as a figment of the imagination where the “. . . visible monstrosity can be then read as a symptom a betrayal of inner evil to the outer world, bringing us back to the physical monstrosity as a sign and a warning” (Mittman 339).

Moreover, the madness of the human mind is projected as supernatural for when one sees, what has not been visible to another, the very fear of the unknown and the unseen itself causes apprehension. This then, is simply what supernatural is all about largely that provides the scope of pushing the supernatural to a subservient position. Repression of anything supernatural as something out of the realm of normality has been a furtive course to human self-empowerment or adulation that enables man to 'other' all that pose a challenge to him. Gaiman's defeats this aspect in his *The Graveyard Book* where he interchanges the 'man-other' positions and treats the 'other' as a casual extension of the normal. The text thereby postulates the new normal gothic that compels the reader to abide by what he reads.

Death, Gaiman and *The Graveyard Book*

As Fred Botting says, Gothic is a transgressive genre that deals with myriad anxieties, fears and unconscious desires that disturb the human psychic state, "signi(fying) a writing of excess" (Botting 2). It is a metaphorical play of ambivalence, contesting the boundaries and limits of human thinking, thereby, opening up an amorphous zone where facticity and supernaturalism are intertwined, a safe space to explore the darkness of our reality and the dark recesses of our psychic state. The leitmotif of death in the Gothic topos mirrors society's deep-rooted fascination with the mystery of death and its aftermath. Death is a universal phenomenon, yet, human civilisation engrained with cultural schizophrenia has engaged in a collective othering of death as a social anomaly. Gothicism dealt with the ongoing terror of death through a visual rendering of abstract fears. Herein the incessant presence of the non-human grotesque characters (dead spirits, demonic entities, undead creatures) in the Gothic paraphernalia serves as a memento mori and a gateway towards the sublime.

Thus, the idea of the Gothic itself emanates from the intangible, the human phobia for the unknown. Pondering deep into understanding of what Gothic is all about, though a lot of myths, tales, mysteries, abnormalities and paranormality could be attached to what characterises the gothic, one cannot deny that books as that of Gaiman are more of a postmodern metaphor that the post war scenario had installed in the minds of literary writers and thinkers alike. It seems to be an effort

on the part of the writer to depict a domesticated version of it, to gather details from the human debris that had gar(bag)ed the earth's surface, leaving no trace of what could be even called humanity. For, such was the post war scenario, a culmination of the insane and the abject; while the supposedly transgressive 'gothic' features contend with a reversal of what is innately abjectionable and (in)humanly insane within the human psyche.

Death and the sensation caused by dying is seen as a social construct, as well as a media hype where humans learn to deny themselves the factor of dying gracefully. In the light of this, the projection of the gothic, could be seen as an innate part of the human psyche that is taught to fear death. The inevitable interdependence among human beings, the fear and insecurity that death causes and the pain of loss caused by death are reflections of these impositions. Thus, humans learn to abhor death, conceive it as a fear factor, an experience of the unknown of which there are no reports or records that the dead return to narrate to the living. Thereby, it is established as the weirdest of all human experiences, of something connected to the other world and as not something that complements 'the span of life' which could be simply redressed 'as the span of death'. In other words, the preparedness of a human born into the world, passing over to another unknown world or a clandestine world unknown to the instincts of man is what makes Death gothic. This very consciousness conditions the human psyche which thereby is pruned to see death as repulsive and unacceptable to life. And what makes it all the more obnoxious is the inevitability of Death.

Neil Richard Gaiman, though widely known as a writer of fantasy fiction, has explored a variety of genres including comics, graphic novels, horror and sci-fi. His globally acclaimed work, *The Graveyard Book*, utilises the Gothic archetype of death and features Dead Spirits, Ghouls, Sleur, Vampires, and Werewolves. It is a coming-of-age story on the life of a feral child— raised by the dead occupants of a graveyard. The novel centres around the adventurous Bod (Nobody Owens) and his fantastic-realistic experiences. Gaiman won a slew of awards for this novel, which continues to retain its laudable position in his prolific career. Classified as children's literature, a pastiche of Kipling's *The Jungle Book* for its linear plot and

supernatural elements, the novel's Gothicity, despite its wider reach, has always been overlooked, owing to the less disturbing Gothic interventions. Bod, the central character in the novel, is endowed with the *Freedom of the Graveyard*, which ascertains his part in both the worlds: the real world and the otherworld. Through the course of the novel, Bod encounters various supernatural beings and makes meaningful connections with them.

Gothic Otherness and the Grotesque

Otherness and Grotesqueness are intertwined, complementary aspects in Gothic Literature. Otherness is closely associated with *unheimlich* and the Grotesque is associated with distortion. The concept of Otherness refers to a sense of defamiliarization at the perception of something uncanny as foreign or threatening. Othering is usually represented in the Gothic paraphernalia through the explorations of grotesque figures. In ancient tales and legends, "otherness" is directed towards what does not constitute a human. The evil Witch in *Hansel and Gretel*, the devilish monster in *Beowulf*, Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* possess abnormal powers and monstrous qualities unknown and absurd to humans. These grotesque bodies produce a sense of strangeness that helps in the distinct structuring of the self and the other. The folkloric stories represent Otherness as dangerous to humanity.

It is no surprise that Oriental Gothic writers ascertained 'otherness' to the East. In 1892, Thomas De Quincey, in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, notoriously narrated his horrifying opium nightmares of a dangerous crocodile amid Egyptian, Indian and generally Asiatic horrors. Later Gothic writers expunged the existing boundaries, within monstrosity, based on race, ethnicity and gender. Otherness, to them, was the repressed 'other'. They delved into psychological notions and emphasised on the monster lurking within the dark recesses of our minds. Edgar Allan Poe's *Tell Tale Heart*, Thomas Harris' *Red Dragon* and other explorations of paedophilic, sadistic and psychopathic individuals portray the abnormal and darker side of our subconscious. This subconscious constitutes another level of psychological otherness.

To understand the redeployment that Gaiman makes in his novel it is crucial to understand the weird and the uncanny, as Freud would say, by looking at the apparition-like projections that appear to us as ghosts. These are mere projections of the inner psyche that stand for the various levels of the human psyche. This precisely is what makes ghosts and what makes Gothic literature. For, in the case of Bod his very status as a partial being itself is a manifestation of the human world that has failed Bod. Therefore, Bod's character serves as a critique of human civilisation, which Gaiman exploits positively. Gothicism appears enhanced in the treating of Bod's character as a leap from human failures to gothic achievements a lash back against human limitations or at the narrowness of human civilisation (continue here from original Ghosts are typically used as a grotesque trope in horror fiction).

'Gothic Otherness' in *The Graveyard Book* works on two different levels. Firstly, the grotesque 'others' from pop-culture are deconstructed. Neil Gaiman creates a paradoxical situation by weaving a splendid tale of wonder and enchantment with saner non-human entities and dangerous humans. He fabricates a unique approach to understanding otherness by reversing and normalising the 'other'. Secondly, Gaiman redeploys customary grotesque tropes. Humans are presented as stock characters (Bod, Scarlett Perkins, Jack, Albanazar), whereas the Gothicised figures showcase depth in personality. Gaiman employs Gothic figures from popular culture like Vampires, Werewolves, Witches, Sleer, Ghouls and Ghosts. They mimic the varied faces and dimensions intricate to human beings.

Bod, the central character in the text, comes across both supernatural beings and humans. Through his eyes, we see the otherwise 'othered' characters from a different angle. These Gothicised bodies are given a voice so that we get to hear their part of the story; also, Gaiman contrasts the profoundness of the 'othered' characters with the menial and baseless motives of humans. This is explained through a detailed comparative analysis of the same.

Redeployment of Gothic Tropes

A. Jack (Human-Brute) vs The Owens (Friendly Ghosts)

Ghosts are typically used as a grotesque trope in horror fiction. Gaiman redeploys the figure of the dead by attaching to it a familial dimension. A contrast between the murderous human who attempts to kill Bod and the ghosts who strive at saving him helps in understanding the feature of redeployment. Jack, the killer is blinded by greed for power and a supernatural prophecy. In order to retain an ancient Egyptian conspiracy order, he sets out to kill Bod, a toddler. Adopted by the ghost couple, the Owens, the orphaned baby grows up in the graveyard amidst the dead—ghosts, Vampires, transfigured werewolves, ghouls and other supernatural beings.

Ironically, Bod learns from The Owens what he needs to know about life. The gravestones help him read and write, the other dead spirits teach him history and life skills. Gaiman normalises death and the dead while exposing the antagonism in humans. Gaiman describes the villainous Jack, “his hair was dark and his eyes were dark and he wore black leather gloves of the thinnest lambskin.” “...made the night shadowy and treacherous” (4). The grotesque illustrations of Jack, we can see that his elongated and ghostly frame is in stark contrast with the familial and friendly features of the ghosts. It is strange to associate family, community and shelter to ghosts and graveyards but Gaiman has successfully accomplished the same.

B. Albanazar Bolger (vicious trader) vs Liza Hempstock (solicitous Witch)

Another instance of contrast can be found between the merchant and the Witch. Bod’s first venture to the outside world happens when he decides to buy a headstone for Liza hempstock, a dead Witch. When faced with the stark reality of malicious human-beings, their greed for wealth and wickedness, Bod has an epiphanic moment of realisation about the workings of the real-world. He meets an antique shop owner, Albanazar, who tries to swindle and sell him off to human traffickers. Bod evades the dangerous clutches of the fraudster with the help of Liza and Silas.

The Graveyard Book reverses the trope of Gothic ‘othering’, by erasing the existent ontological corporeality of the ‘other’, as an innate reflection of the self. The ‘othered’ Gothic figures are portrayed as benevolent and more identifiable with

the kind of qualities that the humane self is meant to be than what is actually there in living humans. Traditionally antagonised figure of the Witch is portrayed in a bright light, whereas, humans, who indulge in ‘othering’ of these monstrous bodies express qualities of disdain.

C. Silas - Considerate Vampire

Gaiman’s unconventional picturisation of the Gothic malefactor, the Vampire as a mundane-looking fatherly figure is evident in the illustration. Silas, the Vampire, with his waistcoat, tie, leather jacket and courteous stature looks more like a Victorian gentleman than a bloodthirsty Vampire. This image is far too removed from the popularised depiction of the pale skinned, outgrown canines, bloodshot eyes and skeleton-like fingers of a traditional Vampiric state. Moreover, the kind of compassion and warmth as expressed by Silas is quite unheard from a Vampire.

D. Miss Lupescu- Wise Werewolf

Miss Lupescu, a transfigured Werewolf, is characterised as a wise tutor. The werewolf myth and associated notions of lycanthropy is a surviving and prominent trope in Gothic narratives. It, as a general rule, centres around vicious transfiguration of males into wolves on a full moon night. These malicious werewolves are stereotypical advocates of chauvinism. In contrary to the popular myth, *The Graveyard Book* portrays a wise and educated female werewolf, Miss Lupescu. She is patient, works to protect good people and even sacrifices her life to destroy the evil. Throughout primeval folklores and myths, werewolves, for the most part, are puissant males with a raging temperament and a gluttonous appetite. Unlike the feeding instincts of animalistic werewolves, Miss Lupescu cooks unpalatable food “dumplings swimming in lard; thick reddish-purple soup with a lump of sour cream in it; small, cold boiled potatoes; cold garlic-heavy sausages; hard- boiled eggs in a grey unappetising liquid” (56)

Graveyard as Heterotopia

Michel Foucault defines Heterotopia as a “real site that can be found within the culture and (is) simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.” (3). Cemetery is an heterotopic space, in a way, it mirrors the society yet is a disturbing

counter-city space. The proximity with the dead makes the cemetery a palimpsestic memorialisation of history, with various layers of time intersecting with the different cultures and races, from Celts to Romans. The graveyard projects itself as an illusionary home for the deceased; the gravestones, the tombs, the sculptures and engravings symbolise permanence, while simultaneously projecting the temporality of life. The spatial organisation and hierarchical divisions within the cemetery simulate an idealised order of living, but, it is also a representation of the remnants of feudal ideology in burial, as the graveyard appears to be a simulacra of the socioeconomic order of living.

The Cemetery in *The Graveyard Book* is modelled after Highgate cemetery, a space that mirrors the architecture of habitation. The graveyard in the novel simulates the real world and functions as a social set-up. The community of the dead and the home-like graveyard is an idealised space, unreal yet existing, which makes it a heterotopia. The spatial strategy of the cemetery reflects the class struggles and the social segregation prevalent in today's societies. The rich get luxurious graves, vaults and mausoleums with statues and decorated tombs whereas the less affluent are either sent to charnel houses or made to settle for cut rate ones.

The divisions within the graveyard reflect the hierarchies in our sociocultural system. In the novel, the damp and uninviting landscape of the Potters Fields is for the lowly, the criminals, the suicides, non-believers and the downtrodden, "...there was a wasteland beyond that, a mass of nettles and weeds, of brambles and autumnal rubbish" (77). Liza Hempstock, the Witch is buried in the Potters Fields. The central part of the graveyard is reserved for the elitist and socially privileged people. Hence, the graveyard in the novel can be seen as a mirror image of the societal order.

The graveyard is an ominous, creepy trope in existing horror fiction. Gaiman debunks the stereotypical representation and pictures the graveyard as a site of hope, life, safety and regeneration. In the East, the dead and the living were said to cohabitate. The space of death is less ominous and becomes a site of leisure and festivity. Cemetery was viewed as one of the noisiest, public spaces and was the centre of communal life. Shops, markets were stationed and reports of alleged

intercourse and necrophilic happenstances were prominent. Rituals, rites and festivities of the dead (*Día de Muertos*, Turning of the Bones) are held in different cultures throughout the world to honour and engage with the spirits. *Danse Macabre* as represented in the novel marks the reunion and interconnectedness between the living and the dead. All classes of people from all walks of life are represented. The *Danse Macabre* is symbolic of the temporariness of life and the timelessness of death. Therefore, Gaiman redeploys the graveyard trope and contests it as a heterotopic space.

Summation

The Graveyard Book dwells on satirising gothic characteristics as well as human reality, by which it is out to dispel a patterned reiteration of what was usually associated earlier with Gothicism. Instead, it caricatures human nature into a minuscular status, transforming the terrifying nature of Gothicism, converting it into a conducive feature that suits the schema of humanising gothic features. *The Graveyard Book* marks a new beginning to the perception of Gothicism. First, the stigmatisation of infamous Gothic antagonists is debunked. Vampires, Werewolves, Witches are no longer depicted as an arch-nemesis to be wiped out, rather such grotesque ‘others’ are normalised. Second, the morbid symbolism of the graveyard setting is reversed. The graveyard trope in horror fiction is typically a serious, haunted and snug setting. But Gaiman’s graveyard is everything but horrific, it is portrayed as a homely, safe haven in contrast to the dangerous real world. Therefore, the source of horror, central to any Gothic text, arises from the real and familiar world of the living, not from the graveyard or the grotesque ‘others.’ To sum up, post-millennial Gothic has evolved, morphed and hybridised into a vast corpus of literature, opening up myriad angles, dimensions and sub-texts worthy of academic research.

Works Cited

- Botting, Fred. “Introduction: Gothic Excess and Transgression.” *Gothic*, Routledge, London, 2014, pp. 1–14.
- Calvino, Italo. Translated by William Weaver, *Invisible Cities*, Vintage Books London (Random House), 1997.

- Craig, Stephanie F. "Ghosts of the Mind: The Supernatural and Madness in Victorian Gothic Literature." *The Aquila Digital Community*, aquila.usm.edu/honors_theses/99/. Accessed 11 Nov. 2023.
- Foucault, Michel. Translated by Jay Miskowiec, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias", *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*, web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf. Accessed 2 Sept. 2024.
- Gaiman, Neil. *The Graveyard Book*. Harper Collins Publishers, 2008.
- Giovanelli, Marcello. "Construing the Child Reader: A Cognitive Stylistic Analysis of the Opening to Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* - Children's Literature in Education." *SpringerLink*, Springer Netherlands, 4 June 2016, link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10583-016-9285-3.
- Halsall, Alison. "Visualizing the Gothic in Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* and Its Illustrated Adaptations." *De Gruyter*, De Gruyter, 18 Jan. 2021, www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783110642056-011/html.
- Hogle, Jerrold E., and Robert Miles. *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion*. Edinburgh University Press, 2020.
- Le Fans, Sheridan J. *Uncle Silas: A Tale of Bartram Waugh*. Dublin University Magazine, 1864.
- Nelson, Victoria. " Gothicka: Vampire Heroes, Human Gods, and the New Supernatural". *Harvard University Press*, 2012.
- Mittman, Asa Simon, and Peter Dendle. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*. Ashgate (Firm), 2013.
- Roberts, Mulvey Marie. *The Handbook of the Gothic*. Macmillan, 2009.
- Snodgrass, Mary Ellen. *The Encyclopedia of Gothic Literature*. Facts on File. Inc, 2005.
- Vandermeer, Jeff. "A Brief History of Monsters." *Weird Fiction Review*, 16 Mar. 2012, weirdfictionreview.com/2012/03/a-brief-history-of-monsters/.

EXPOSING THE PATRIARCHAL AND HYPOCRITICAL CONTRADICTIONS IN GIRISH KARNAD'S PLAY *NAGAMANDALA*

Laxmi Prajapati

Product Development and Administrative Assistant, PMI Arka.

Abstract

Nagamandala, by Girish Karnad, is a compelling play in which the complicated relationships among feminism, patriarchy, and the contradictory character of Indian culture are painstakingly represented. This research paper aims to explore the core of the story by analysing its layers via the prisms of social hypocrisy, feminist discourse, and gender dynamics. In order to fully explore the complex layers of *Nagamandala*, this research paper takes a multifaceted analytical method that incorporates feminism, conceptualization of mythology, and close textual analysis.

Keywords: Social Hypocrisy, Feminist Discourse, Gender Dynamics, Conceptualization, Mythology and Textual Analysis.

Introduction

Girish Karnad was a well-known author, actor, and director of films from India. Both his own compositions and adaptations of classical Indian texts are included in his vast and significant contributions to Indian literature. He wrote in various both in Kannada and English, making his work accessible to a wider range of audience. He was well-known for his provocative plays, which drew their inspiration from mythology, history, and folklore, among other places. Complex issues like identity, power, tradition, and modernism are frequently addressed in his plays. His tales have a strong Indian cultural foundation. He was a visionary playwright who elevated philosophical themes and significant cultural aspects to the forefront of Indian theatre.

Nagamandala, a play written by Girish Karnad, which was first published 1998 and has since grown to become a modern Indian theatre masterpiece. It is a play within a play that combines mythology, social satire, and folklore. It centres on the lives of Rani and her husband Appanna, a male chauvinist and is situated in a

small Indian village in the state of Karnataka. The drama delves deeply into the ideas of identity, desire, and the power of narrative. The mystical aspect of the play's main plot involves Rani discovering a cobra that has the ability to change into Naga, a human that resembles her husband. In his human form, he later develops feelings for Rani.

The Position of Women in Patriarchal Society

Girish Karnad uses a non-traditional portrayal of the character Rani to highlight how severely patriarchal, puritanical, and discriminatory toward women the culture is. Rani stands for the typical subservient Indian village girl who, by the institution of marriage, is made a victim of an unjust societal structure. Without consulting her, her parents arranged her marriage because they believe she is incapable of making her own decisions. The man asking her to marry is called Appanna, which translates to "any man." Thus, it is the narrative of any man and woman who are joined in matrimony, not simply Rani and Appanna. Men are free to think for themselves, while women cannot think for themselves without a man's approval.

A married woman in a patriarchal society is subservient to her male counterpart and is viewed as a possession and commodity. There are no social, moral, or customary taboos for Appanna. There are no restrictions for him, and no one can question what he does. "In patriarchy society, the definition of marriage different from man to woman, and limits space of a woman whereas the space of a man is always unlimited" (R.Sivasankari). Karnad cleverly brings up the point that social laws and our conformist society require a wife to be devoted to her husband, even if he is unfaithful and cruel. Appanna locks Rani inside the house all the time. The symbolic representation of the patriarchal cage that men have constructed for women is this lock and key. "Karnad shows how marriage is a patriarchal institution that has always been unfair to women" (Khan).

He forbids Rani from posing any queries. Ha says, "Look, I don't like idle chatter. Do as you are told, you understand?" (Karnad). In a marriage, a man is typically the one with the authority to command his wife, and the woman is trained to submit to his wishes. Like the majority of conventional Indian wives, Rani

experiences intense loneliness and exhaustion in marriage. She is her patriarchal husband's silent sufferer. Because of his male ego, she endures a great deal of suffering and feels worthless without her spouse.

“If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow”, says Spivak in the essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. Spivak writes that the women are the subalterns in the patriarchal society. The woman is formulated as passive self, devoid of subjectivity. Same happens with Rani but later she starts to regain her lost identity.

Mythological Conceptualisation

In *Nagamandala*, Karnad focuses on portraying Rani, the female lead, as the Ramayana's Sita. In Ramayana, Sita's tale serves as a metaphor for how women are currently treated in Indian society. The play's central theme revolves around women's chastity. Such instances, where women must undergo onerous trials to prove their virginity, abound in history. The Ramayana states that Rama frees Sita from Ravana's prison. However, Rama leaves her after accusing her of sleeping in another man's house. As a result, Sita puts herself through a self-inflicted ordeal and, distraught, jumps onto a funeral pyre and when she escapes the flames, her purity is demonstrated. A thorough analysis of women's positioning is provided by *Nagamandala*, where we see that society will always push only women into ‘Agni Pariksha’. It reveals that women have been marginalized in male-dominated society from the outset, and how society itself creates institution to benefit men.

Similarly, the concept of purity attached to Indian women has deep historical, mythological and cultural roots, often serving as a tool for social control and the reinforcement of gender norms. This notion has evolved through various movements and ideologies, particularly within religious contexts, where it has been used to dictate women's behaviour and sexuality. It often emphasizes chastity and virginity as essential virtues, reinforcing patriarchal structures, and this is what Karnad highlights in the play.

Society has always been biased and men are the one who benefit from this form of public ordeal. Similarly in the play, Rani has to prove her chastity if front of

the village where she is accused by her husband. Appana visits the elders of the village and blames her for infidelity and getting pregnant. The following day, a sizable crowd forms in front of Rani's home. The Elders advise Rani to take her oath while grasping a hot iron, a custom that is going to prove her chastity and innocence. The actions of the village elder bring up the subject of peer pressure and how outdated patriarchal traditions and customs target women. The Elders are advised by Appana to submerge Rani and her illegitimate child in boiling oil. His suggestion highlights the dehumanising customs and shows how men perpetuate violence against women under the guise of justice. Rani instead considers the counsel that Naga has given.

Rani is forced to face her opposing desires in light of the challenging choice she must make for her future. In order to preserve her honour and reputation, she makes a deal with the village elders and chooses to take the snake test. She approaches the anthill, reaches inside, and removes the cobra. The Elders give her advice to take her oath quickly. She thus affirms before the Cobra that "I have not touched any one of the male sex. Nor have I allowed any other male to touch me. If I lie, let the Cobra bite me" (Karnad). The cobra does not bite her, it slides up her shoulder and spreads its hood like an umbrella over her head. This proves her innocence and she is declared a goddess, same like Sita was. Karnad seamlessly incorporates the inspiration of mythological elements to modern traditional tales, in doing so he highlights the struggles and aspirations of women in contemporary society.

Hypocrite Indian Society

The village elders regarded women's adultery as a horrible crime and chose to ignore the men's adultery. Men were free to commit adultery, but women were subject to severe chastity laws. Even in today's world, the village elders' hypocrisies remain relevant. The village elders eagerly anticipated putting her to the test and denouncing her as a wicked woman. They wanted to exact revenge because they believed she had sinned. However, they were shocked when she made it through the perilous cobra test that no other woman had dared to take before her. She instantly

gave off the impression of being superhuman and superior to other women. They quickly concluded that she was a goddess because of their ignorance.

ELDER I. Appanna, your wife is not an ordinary woman. She is a goddess incarnate. Don't grieve that you judged her wrongly and treated her very badly. That is how goddesses reveal themselves to the world. You were the chosen instrument for revealing their divinity. (*Karnad*)

The elder's sudden transformation of a woman they were prepared to condemn into a goddess deserving of worship and respect further exposed their dual standards. Additionally, they saw Appanna's suspicion of infidelity as a way to highlight the Goddess' divinity. She was condemned earlier because they were in a better position to control her, but now it appeared that she had other abilities. Similar to Sita from Ramayana, when she was proved to be pure, she was worshiped. The mere fact that women must undergo male scrutiny to prove their innocence and that is when she will be kept on the pedestal and worshiped. This practice reduces women as an object of public judgment and their worth is defined by men. Karnad exposes this hypocrisy through Rani's plight, highlighting how women have to constantly endure male chauvinism and oppression while adhering to patriarchal norms.

It is seen in *Nagamandala* that a person's gender greatly influences how they are perceived. Most of the time, women were not subject to the same rules that were applied to men. This is because women involved in such matters are not even given the opportunity to present their side of the story; instead, they are expected to endure physically and psychologically taxing trials that will ultimately determine whether or not they are found guilty. Men, on the other hand, were turned a blind eye to the same mistakes they were making because it was assumed by the others to be expected of them.

The play critiques Indian society by highlighting unequal expectations placed on women regarding fidelity, while men are free to do as they please and face no loyalty demands. Additionally, it can be assumed that women are treated differently based on the various roles they play in society. Treatment of the same

woman, who is charged with adultery despite appearing to be a goddess, differs greatly. The same mouths that compliment her are also the ones that curse her. However, it's also important to note that societal norms and preconceived notions frequently serve as the exclusive basis for determining the value of various positions. Karnad also draws attention to the irony that exists between Rani's "snake ordeal" and the idea of public image as it eventually turns out to be a front for deceiving the public.

Within the confines of this play, Karnad draws attention to the restrictive and oppressive ideas that characterize Indian society, where a woman must constantly defend her chastity in public despite her husband's overt infidelity. The choice made by the "other" determines how they live. As a result, they start to serve the patriarchal wishes of the society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the play *Nagamandala* by Girish Karnad reveals a complex and thought-provoking depth when examined through the prisms of feminism, patriarchy, mythological conceptualization, and the hypocrisy of Indian culture. We see the enduring influence of patriarchy on women's lives in Indian culture via Rani's life. The play highlights the dualism that frequently characterizes Indian culture and moral principles and looks at hypocrisy and societal paradoxes. The drama challenges society to reconcile its declared principles with the reality that stay hidden, emphasizing the significance of identifying and resolving the discrepancies.

When one examines *Nagamandala*, it is clear that Karnad's work has the capacity to spark thought-provoking discussions and reflection. This play evokes conversations and takes action in the direction of a more just and equitable society, one in which women may rise above the constraints of tradition, become independent, and where social norms more closely reflect stated values. *Nagamandala* by Girish Karnad is a source of inspiration that pushes one to take on these important problems with fresh zeal and dedication.

Works Cited

Karnad, Girish Raghunath. *Nāga-mandala*. Oxford UP, USA, 1990.

Khan, Rashad. "Book Review: Nagamandala by Girish Karnad." *Feminism in India*, 14 Jan. 2022, feminisminindia.com/2019/04/12/nagamandala-girish-karnad-review.

Morris, Rosalind, editor. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Columbia University Press, 2009.

R.Sivasankari. "Portrayal of Women and Patriarchy in Girish Karnad's Nagamandala." *Shanlax International Journal of English*, edited by R.Viswanathan, B. Charanya, vol. 6, no. 1, Apr. 2018, p. 62, www.sacw.edu.in/pdf/Research/2018/80.pdf#page=62.

A WINTER'S TALE OF RESILIENCE: ECHOES OF APARTHEID

¹ Dr Lanke Subha and ² Geeta Lakshmi Vallabhaneni

¹ Assistant Professor of English, Andhra Loyola College, Andhra Pradesh.

² III B.A. English Literature, Andhra Loyola College, Andhra Pradesh.

Abstract

World a place of living, country a place of dwelling, village a place of belonging. A person's identity is traced out through his family, village or the country he or she belongs to. Identity gives responsibility, responsibility gives us the power, and a sense of belongingness. When this identity is drastically removed off, we feel like one is nowhere, nothing to owe or cherish in life. Pushing oneself in an alienated land, bifurcating places, suppressing the people, creates a chaotic environment. Where unity lacks, humanity also lacks, finally progress also lacks. The famous dramatists Shakespeare said, "All the world's a stage and all the men and women are players." All the people in the world have the right to live and a role to play on during his/her stay in this world. When there is a belonging for everyone why there is discrimination, suppression, oppression and depression. Nadine Gordimer in her novel *The Lying Days* showed the different colors of the world through the eyes of a girl and exhibited the concept of alienation, suppression and depression found among the generation of people in South Africa. People are being racially discriminated. The writer explains these concepts through the girl's life journey clearly projecting her experiences with different people she encounters. The researcher has made an attempt to project the voiceless through the voice of Helen, the lead character in the novel *The Lying Days*.

Keywords: Suppression, Alienation, Depression, Subaltern and Realism.

Apartheid translated as 'apartness' in Afrikaans, constituted the enforced legal system in South Africa, crafted by the white population to subjugate and control the non-white, indigenous people. In her novel *The Lying Days*, Nadine Gordimer (1923 – 2014) genuinely depicts the eras of Apartheid and Post-apartheid in South African history. The novel was first published in 1953, when Apartheid policies were being implemented and enforced by the South African government.

Nadine Gordimer, who lived through and witnessed the impact of Apartheid, used her works to address and critique the racial segregation and injustices which were prevalent during that time. *The Lying Days* specifically explores the themes of race, identity, and societal change in the context of Apartheid-era South Africa. Her writing mirrors a deep impact of the prevailing societal conditions and the dominant-subordinate relationship between whites and blacks, i.e. of the master and slave.

The Lying Days (1953) draws inspiration from Nadine Gordimer's hometown of Springs. The novel chronicles the initial twenty-four years of the protagonist Helen Shaw's life. The narrative unfolds in a world untouched by the color bar, mirroring Gordimer's own upbringing. The genesis of Gordimer's writing career coincides with the racial turbulence under the apartheid regime, infused with a hopeful anticipation that the suppressed people of South Africa will eventually triumph.

Gordimer portrays her female characters with greater courage than to the male protagonists, and all of her women characters exhibit robust social and political revolutionary perspectives. In this semi-autobiographical account, Helen Shaw, emerging from a small African mining town akin to Gordimer's childhood surroundings, takes center stage in this woman's bildungsroman. The narrative delicately traces Helen's growth, navigating her transition from her innocence from a colonial town in South Africa. Comprising three distinct sections, each intricately molding pivotal moments in Helen's maturation, the novel embarks on a captivating journey. "The Mine" establishes the foundation with the industrial landscape of Helen's youth, subtly hinting at the emergence of nascent political awareness. Subsequently, 'The Sea' unfolds the potential for apolitical white escapism, materializing through Helen's passage through her adolescence and her attempts to fashion a way of life different from that offered by her parents. Concluding with 'The City,' the final and most expansive segment signifies the onset of Helen's political consciousness.

Helen's evolving understanding of apartheid, particularly her perception of the indigenous black population, intricately threads through the narrative. This

introduces a nuanced layer of complexity shaped by the diverse settings and experiences depicted in the novel. This all starts when Helen becomes conscious of the black township adjacent to her white settlement. Recognizing the racial inequality perpetuated by society, she makes the decision to leave her home and relocate to Johannesburg. In this new environment, she witnesses the turmoil and unrest following the Nationalist Party's electoral triumph, exposing her to a world marked by violence, a stark contrast to the sheltered and comfortable upbringing in her parents' home.

From her early years in the mining town, her sexual maturation in Natal, the dynamics with Joel Aaron, university experiences, friendship with Mary Seswayo, romantic involvement with Paul Clark, the events of 1948, to her ultimate decision to depart South Africa, Helen undergoes a continual transformation in awareness, transitioning from innocence to maturity. *The Lying Days*, thus unfolds as a narrative of gradual and sometimes challenging enlightenment, tracing Helen's pursuit of freedom from the influential forces of the mining environment and her endeavor to achieve personal autonomy, as emphasized by Dimitriu. A pivotal moment in Helen's life unfolds when she chooses to enroll in the University, defying her parents' wishes. Her time at the institution expands her perspective and deepens her understanding of political and social dynamics happening around her.

In Helen's youth, her mother refrains from leaving her alone at home, expressing concerns about the presence of native boys. Helen is initially influenced by her mother's perception that black people pose a threat. However, as Helen ventures out and gains independence, she discovers that such fears are unfounded, realizing that there is an enigmatic quality associated with black individuals of which whites are unaware. In the company of her friend Mary, Helen not only recognizes and dispels the fear of this mysteriousness but also appreciates the companionship. Helen's understanding deepens as she becomes aware of the economic challenges faced by the black community during her visit to Mary's impoverished neighborhood. When Helen, accompanied by another friend, escorts Mary home, she seizes the opportunity to observe the native township more closely. Mary serves as a representative of the marginalized black population in apartheid-

era South Africa, depicting the harsh realities of their lives. Through Mary, Gordimer endeavors to provide an authentic portrayal of a South Africa deeply affected by apartheid policies. Mary is characterized as an extremely reserved girl, her shyness hindering easy interaction: "an obstinacy of shyness made it very difficult to talk to her" (126). Helen comes to understand that the color bar enforces Mary's shyness, limiting her ability to engage with people and mingle with her classmates at the university. Mary is restricted from using facilities like lavatories and sitting in areas designated for whites, highlighting the segregation and discrimination inherent in the apartheid system.

The novel traces Helen's journey through various encounters with race and interracial relationships, spanning from her childhood to her engagement in political activism. While residing in the mining town before her departure, Helen is oblivious to Joel Aaron until they meet on a train, exposing her to a different perspective of the world. Joel introduces Helen to new interests, friendships, and most importantly, novel ideas. Serving as a guiding influence, he assists her in exploring the complexities of life. Throughout this experience, Helen observes her family's prejudiced attitude towards Joel, who faces disdain from Christians. In the novel, Joel's community is labeled in postcolonial terms as a 'diasporic community' due to his status as an outsider as an emigrant. This revelation deepens her understanding of the pervasive nature of racism and highlights how even individuals like Jews, renowned for their intelligence and impartial perspectives, are not exempt from bigotry.

The central focus of the novel revolves around Helen's connection with Paul. This relationship offers her a connection to the realities that eluded her both in Atherton and at the university, according to Green. Paul Clark, hailing from Rhodesia and employed in the Native Affairs Department, becomes someone Helen admires. Her affection for Paul stems from his strong dedication to combat the injustices of apartheid, as she expresses, *"I loved Paul, and part of my love for him was rooted in my belief and pride in the work he had chosen"*. Gordimer portrays Paul as a revolutionary and visionary figure deeply committed to achieving an apartheid-free South Africa. His work at the Native Affairs Department is not just a

livelihood but a responsibility to serve his community, exemplified by his passionate involvement in movements and personal initiatives, such as visiting Sophia town to reconcile troubled couples, that go beyond his job requirements.

The novel authentically portrays the atrocities inflicted upon the black population. In *The Lying Days*, a reflection of the tumultuous 1940s and 1950s in South Africa, Nadine Gordimer skillfully portrays the harsh treatment of blacks by whites, influenced by the rise of industrialization and the Nationalist Party's ascent to power. Gordimer's writings depict an individual's struggle with identity in the context of apartheid in South Africa. Her novels illustrate that apartheid is profoundly destructive and inherently harmful. Gordimer prioritizes the Black Consciousness Movement over liberalism in her works, advocating for the psychological liberation of blacks from the shackles of slavery. Gordimer addresses the communist's perspective on the colonial underpinnings of apartheid, highlighting how blacks endured subjugation to European superiority with little concern for their social and economic welfare. Apartheid laws systematically stripped away the rights of the black population in their own homeland, categorizing people into distinct racial groups – white, black, colored, and Indian.

Gordimer's literature offers solutions to the challenges posed by apartheid, addressing themes such as the Black Consciousness Movement, multiculturalism, multiracialism and so on. The most important feature of Gordimer's works is humanism. Through her literary works, Gordimer aimed to illuminate the diverse needs and issues within society. Her characters, advocates for natives like Helen Shaw, Toby, Lionel Burger, Sonny, among others, experience parallel hardships to those faced by the black population. When British imperialism formally concluded in South Africa, its lingering impact persisted through the era of apartheid until the advent of the first democratically elected government in 1994, symbolizing the official end of apartheid.

Work Cited

Gordimer, Nadine. *The Lying Days*. Bloomsbury Publishers, 2002.

FROM RUINS TO RENAISSANCE: REVIVING THE LOST GLORY OF NĀLANDĀ UNIVERSITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Dr. Geetika Gupta

Assistant Professor, Symbiosis Law School, Noida,
Symbiosis International (Deemed University).

Abstract

The paper seeks to look into the glorious past of Nālandā University, one of the premier institutions of higher learning in ancient times. From being India's greatest center of learning, especially for Buddhist studies. The paper attempts to unravel the trajectory of development. The inauguration of the new campus by our Prime Minister has rekindled new hopes for the future, and revival of the historic center of scholarship.

Keywords: Lost Heritage, Higher Learning, Revival, and Educational Hub.

'Knowledge is the key that opens all the doors.' This well-known quote embarks the journey from ruins to the revival of the Nālandā University. Situated in the state of Bihar, Nālandā was an ancient center of higher learning that thrived from the fifth century to the twelfth century CE. Located near the place where Buddha attained enlightenment, it served as a significant center for educational and intellectual interactions. Nālandā, a quaint town in ancient Magadha, was nestled between the two major capitals of the empire- Rājgriha and Pātliputra (Singh, 2022, p. 120; Kumar, 2011, p. 66). Nālandā University was located in the state of Bihar. The main focus of the program was on Buddhist studies. It attracted students from various parts of Asia and sent missionaries and scholars to the prominent Buddhist centers in the region. Before the advent of Christianity, this region was closely linked to Buddhism and Jainism.

Nālandā University was one of the top universities in ancient India, alongside Taxilā and Vikramaśīla. In ancient times, numerous educational institutions were founded by adopting the Vedic process, three of them being considered among the oldest universities in India. Nālandā University is regarded as one of the pioneers in providing residential education, which is one of the first universities to offer such opportunities globally. India took immense pride when the

ruins of Nālandā were recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2016. About 50 miles southeast of Patna, Nālandā emerged as a renowned Buddhist center of learning. It was a place where several discussions on Buddhist doctrines took place, where Mahavira met Gośāla (Apte 23). Additionally, there was a surge of scholars from other countries, such as Fa-Hien, Yuan-Chang, and I-Tsing, who took advantage of this library. Their primary objective was to obtain authentic copies of the sacred texts and other writings on Buddhism. Our primary source of information about Nālandā University is the biography of Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang. He stayed in India for fifteen years. He has provided a detailed account of the university where he dedicated many years to his education as a student and later as a teacher.

D.G. Apte in his path-breaking work on *Universities in Ancient India* upholds that it was the Mauryan king Ashoka who built a temple and a vihāra at this place (Ibid 23-4). The university was founded later by Kumāragupta (śakrāditya) and extended by his son, Buddhaguptarāja, and his successor, Tathāgataguptarāja, followed by the destruction of the place by Mihirakula in the course of his pursuit of Narasinhagupta, in 500 CE (Ibid 24). This information is corroborated by the accounts of Tibet traveler Taranatha who mentioned that Ashoka (c. 3rd century BCE) laid the foundation of Nālandāvihāra for the first time (Singh, 2022, p. 121).

Even after facing destruction, Nālandā continued to thrive with even greater brightness and prosperity. Although the place had been a significant religious and educational center, it transformed into a university in the earlier half of the fifth century when a continuous stream of students started visiting for their studies. From the very start, Nālandā University gained a lot of respect and recognition from other countries, reaching its peak during the 9th to the 12th centuries. According to legends, the word Nālandā is believed to have originated from the combination of the Sanskrit words 'Nalam' and 'da'. Nalam, which translates to "lotus" in Sanskrit, symbolizes light, knowledge, and wisdom (Apte 120). As a result, the meaning of Nālandā is "where there is no limit to imparting knowledge". The center consisted of eight distinct compounds, ten temples, meditation halls, classrooms, lakes, and parks. The library had a vast collection of books and documents, which were

carefully copied by monks to ensure that scholars could have their libraries. The university also had dormitories for students, which was a first for an educational institution, accommodating 10,000 students during its peak and providing housing for 2,000 professors (Tamrakar & Jadon 130). Nālandā University drew in students and academics from Korea, Japan, China, Tibet, Indonesia, Persia, and Turkey (Ibid 66).

Nālandā University was constructed with meticulous planning and a vast area, serving as a remarkable example of architectural excellence from north to south. Alongside the university, there was a row of monasteries. Some of the vihāras were incredibly large and majestic, with skyscraper-like peaks that were visually captivating. Hiuen Tsang, who arrived in India around the year 6th century, referred to it as the "center of Buddhists." It was a vibrant intellectual center, drawing scholars from across Asia for more than eight centuries. After the Mahāvihāra was built within the premises, the name gradually changed to 'Nālandā Mahāvihāra'. It was considered Asia's and the world's most prestigious university since the 7th century. Even today, archaeological excavations conducted at this location provide evidence of the artistic richness of Nālandā.

Harshvardhan, a well-known ruler, played a significant role in the growth and development of Nālandā University through his generous contributions. According to Hiuen Tsang, 'śladitya' (i.e. Harshashavardhan) used to give a permanent donation of the income of 100 villages to Nālandāvihāra (Singh 121). Every day, two hundred residents of these villages contributed rice, ghee, and butter to the monks residing in Nālandā. Harsha held great admiration for the monks of Nālandā and referred to himself as their servant. According to a copper-plate inscription of the Pala dynasty ruler Devpāladeva, he made a generous donation of five grams to Nālandā at the request of Bālagupta Deva, the ruler of Suvarndveep (Sumatra) (Ibid 310-27). He also selected a monk named 'Vīrādeva' to oversee the Nālandā University. In the ancient inscriptions, the location has been referred to as 'Mahāvihāra', which translates to 'Nālandā Mahāvihāraya ārya bhikshusya.'

Admission to the University

Admission to the university is granted to students who meet the required academic criteria and submit the necessary application materials. According to historical records, gaining admission to Nālandā University required a rigorous selection process, guaranteeing that only the most capable students were accepted. Nālandā, similar to other universities of its kind, focused solely on providing higher education. As a result, admission was limited to individuals who possessed the necessary qualifications to pursue postgraduate studies. The people of neighbouring nations would come together to the institution to seek answers to their questions and enhance their skills through engaging in debates. A significant number of scholars from China, Mongolia, Korea, Tibet, and Tochara flocked to the conference (Apte 27). Although some of the scholars came to the university to obtain manuscripts on Buddhism, many came to gain approval for their doctrines from the authorities in the university.

The leader of the university was typically a bhikkhu who demonstrated qualities of character, knowledge, and experience and was chosen by the different *saṃghas* that made up the federation (Tamrakar & Jadon, 2022, p. 131; Apte, pp. 32-4). This monk managed and guided the university's operations, both academic and non-academic, through councils that were specifically created for this purpose.

I- Tsing observed that there was a great assembly of priests who assigned rooms every year. He also records officers called Vihārapalas, as the keepers or the custodians of the gate, and he who announces the affairs of the institution and lay servants (Kumar 77-8). Besides the gatekeepers, there were other three important officers at Nālandā: the treasure of the good law, corresponding to the chancellor of a modern university; the Karmadāna, the sub-director of the monastery to exercise a general superintendence over all monastic works; and the Sthavira, the presiding priest.

Library

Nālandā's library was the biggest in the world. Nālandā boasted a massive nine-story library called *dharmaganjor dharma yojana* (mart of religion) (Singh, 123; Kumar 76-7), which housed a remarkable collection of manuscripts, catering to

the study of thousands of students and masters. This library was managed in three magnificent structures called Ratnasāgar (ocean of jewels), Ratnodadhi (sea of jewels), and Ratnaranjaka (jewels adorned) (Apte 36-37; Kumar 76-77). Hiuen Tsang copied 24 Mahayānā texts and 5200 texts from here and brought them with him to China (Singh 123). The library of the Nālandā monastery was the most advanced, well-structured, and extensively utilized library in the region. It was considered an ancient center of higher education and was often compared to a modern-day university.

I-Tsing, the Chinese scholar, stayed at Nālandā for ten years to pursue his studies. During this time, he copied and collected 400 Sanskrit texts, totalling 500000 verses (*shlokas*). This record clearly shows that the Nālandā monastery had a vast library containing both Buddhist and non-Buddhist books, which were either given away or sold. No reliable data as to the strength of the collection is available, but it can be presumed without much polemic or controversy, that the library stocked every written material on Buddhist scriptures, and their commentaries, and they might be in hundreds of thousands, including copies.

A devastating fire destroyed the library, which housed over 9 million manuscripts, and in the early 12th century, the Muslim invader Bakhtiyār Khalji attacked and looted the university (Nath 67; Apte 43; Mishra & Saxena 4). Between 1197 and 1206, Nālandā faced challenges due to the conquest of Bihar. The university was looted, and monks were killed, causing political unrest and a decline in support from patrons.

It was not until the 1860s that the renowned archeologist Alexander Cunningham recognized the site as the Nālandā University. In 1915-1916, the Archeological Survey of India commenced the systematic excavations at the site (Sharma 11). New Nālandā was officially established as a nation by an act of the Indian Parliament in November 2010 (Ibid 12). It is, by charter, an international and secular institution of national importance and global significance that came into existence. The unique character of Nālandā is that its revival was welcomed not just by Indians who had grown up on the memory of the old Nālandā (destroyed

somewhere about 1193 CE), but by the aforementioned member states of East Asia at the EAS summit when the idea was first mooted in 2007 (Ibid.).

The university was revived by former president A.P.J. Abdul Kalam in 2006, followed by the passage of the Nālandā University Bill in 2010, which led to its establishment as a temporary site near Rājgir in 2014 (Mishra & Saxena 4). The university officially began its activities on September 1, 2014, starting from a temporary location with only 14 students. The temporary venue, the international convention center situated in Rājgir, 10 km away from the ancient city of Nālandā, was officially opened in September 2014 by the then-external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj. In 2016, former president Pranab Mukherjee laid the foundation stone for the permanent campus of the university in Pilkhih village, located in Rājgir. The construction of the new campus began in 2017. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen remarked that “the tradition of Nālandā was not only that of quality education— itself a matter of great importance in India today—but also one of global cooperation and a systematic attempt to learn across the barriers of regions and countries. What the Singaporeans call ‘the Nālandā trail’ was a flow of ideas and contacts that brought people from different countries and different cultural backgrounds together. It was easy to see how profoundly that commitment was inspired by Gautam Buddha’s focus on enlightenment without borders” (Sharma 12-3).

On June 19, 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the new campus of 1600-year-old Nālandā University in Rājgir, Bihar. This university is being viewed as a partnership between India and the countries participating in the East Asia Summit (EAS). The campus is a massive carbon footprint-free ‘net zero’ green campus (Mishra & Saxena 4). The city is self-sufficient with solar power plants, water treatment facilities for drinking water and wastewater, a water recycling plant, water bodies, and other eco-friendly amenities.

The renowned architect B. V. Doshi created an environmentally conscious architectural design that incorporated the principles of ancient Nālandā while incorporating modern amenities that meet global standards (Ibid.). In the future, Nālandā University will become a renowned global knowledge hub, promoting

discussions and partnerships among diverse cultures and nations. Given its historical importance, the university is anticipated to prioritize Asian studies, encompassing subjects such as history, culture, philosophy, and language. Numerous initiatives and studies focused on preserving and researching cultural heritage will be of significant importance, reflecting upon the legacy of the ancient Nālandā University.

The integration of digital technology with online courses and virtual classrooms will usher in a new era of education, improving learning outcomes. Similar to ancient universities, the new institution will enhance its partnerships with renowned institutions globally. The new campus being located closer to the old site will help to rediscover the past and draw inspiration from it for the future as well.

Web Resources

<https://www.narendramodi.in/prime-minister-narendra-modi-inaugurates-Nālandā-university-campus-in-rajgir-bihar-583537>

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/pm-modi-to-inaugurate-Nālandā-universitys-new-campus-calls-it-very-special-day-for-education-sector/articleshow/111100744.cms>

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/built-at-a-cost-of-rs-1749-crore-pm-modi-inaugurates-new-Nālandā-university-campus-in-bihar/articleshow/111100761.cms>

THE RISE OF E-SPORTS: A SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF LEISURE IN INDIA

Aashish Gaur

Assistant Professor of Sociology,
Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Patiala, Punjab.

Abstract

This sociological study analyses India's burgeoning Esports culture through Fischer's subcultural theory, examining its evolution from niche hobby to transformative leisure phenomenon. Competitive gaming emerges as a distinct subculture with specialized institutions and shared lexicons like "GG," fostering digital communities while amplifying mental health pressures and gender disparities. The analysis reveals Esports as both a democratizing force bridging socioeconomic divides through platforms like Discord and a contested space navigating mainstream integration via sports franchise collaborations, reflecting broader shifts in digital-age identity formation and competitive culture.

Keywords: Esports, Subcultural Theory, Digital Age, Mental Health and Gender Diaspora.

Introduction

Esports or electronic sports, as a concept, has quickly transformed from a niche subculture into a prominent global phenomenon. The sociological examination of Esports is thus vital for understanding how this highly dynamic field mirrors certain larger sociological transformations. This study explores Esports through the lens of Fischer's perspective and the subculture theory, emphasising the unique characteristics that define its cultural and community dynamics. It draws on the interconnection between these two perspectives to analyse how Esports influence youth culture, identity formation and social norms. By applying this theoretical framework, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Esports is redefining leisure activities and impacting the social fabric of Indian society.

A stark contrast to most subcultures, Esports has transcended regional and international boundaries with people, from varying backgrounds like race, religion

and class, being brought together due to their shared interests through online platforms like Twitch, YouTube and Discord. Similar to many subcultures, Esports has its own terminologies and lexicon which can only be understood through inferential analysis. People who are not interested in Esports are perplexed by this lexical use of words. In this context, the concept of 'Geng culture' is also analysed to highlight the distinct aspects that contribute to the Esports subculture.

Besides that, this study will also investigate the level at which Esports offers equal chances for men and women and its effect on their participation. An understanding of these dynamics will uncover the role Esports plays not only as an activity for pleasure but also as a social channel and tool for identity construction among India's youth. In conclusion, Esports, as a subculture, represents a vibrant and thriving community shaped by shared interests, technological advancements, and global connectivity. While it increasingly merges with mainstream culture, its distinct identity is well-rooted in the specific experiences and values of its members.

Esports as a Subculture

Going by definition, a subculture is a cultural group within a larger culture wherein people within a society share a specific identity and values that are different from the larger society. In that sense, Esports can be understood as a subculture of gaming and like every subculture, Esports has an origin story with its own set of institutions, belief systems, aesthetics and language or jargon.

Originating in the early 1970s with the first video games reaching arcades and shopping malls, and the first competitive video game tournaments being held at Stanford University, featuring games like Spacewar! and Pong, a new era of sports began in dimly lit arenas with headphones in and fingers glued to the keyboard. Once considered a niche area, Esports has now entered the global stage, capturing the attention of millions of people, influencing their community as well as identity and challenging the very definition of competitive gaming. Focussing on the interplay of raw talent, cutting-edge technology and intense gaming rivalries, Esports has transcended boundaries and become a worldwide phenomenon, gaining maximum traction in the late 1990s and early 2000s with the rise of internet

connectivity as well as the emergence of gaming communities (The Evolution of Esports: From Niche Subculture to Global Phenomenon, 2023).

To look at Esports through the lens of a subculture, one should subject it through the defining components of what a subculture essentially is (Pitroso 2024). Firstly, a subculture is based on a belief system or an ideology. Pertaining to Esports, these shared beliefs, although not political or religious, are of the view that Esports is equally competitive and as worthwhile as any form of traditional sports. Unlike political and religious beliefs, it is not based solely on mythical and oral evidence, arguments and propositions but rather uses empirical evidence to cater to these belief systems, which reinforce the fact that Esports' reach and audience is ever-growing and it is attracting many potential investors with the growing passage of time. Another feature of this subculture, mostly in reflection of traditional sports such as soccer, rugby, basketball, football etc. is that the industry intends to develop by forming connections. These connections can be seen in the form of team spirit, coordination, teamwork and partnership under the ambit of a common gaming community.

Secondly, a subculture as an industry inherently depends upon the formation of organisations or institutions, which is precisely the case with the Esports industry. Various organisations have popularly emerged within the Esports industry including game developers and publishers, tournament organisers, Esports teams ranging from an informal group of players to professional organisations with structured management, regulatory bodies and associations, talent and advertising agencies and finally, players who are at the heart of the Esports ecosystem. These organisations are not only interdependent but are also currently entering the stage of volatile maturity wherein they go through creation, investment, assimilation and downfall as a direct result of and extremely mature and hyper-competitive capitalist society. The main goal of such organisations or institutions is to provide a structure to the emerging industry, to provide a regulatory framework as well as economic interdependence and to foster community engagement among fans, players and stakeholders (Seaton 2023).

Moving on to a key feature of the Esports subculture, which is the use of a unique language, something that we can label as a slang, with the use of abbreviations or terms coming from the video games world, especially from multiplayer games. Esports lexicon has various characteristics, including the use of specialized terms describing mechanics, strategies and player actions; acronyms and abbreviations in Esports communication like ‘GG’ (Good Game) and ‘KDA’ (Kill Death Assist) as well as the use of slang and informal language, including terms like “salty” (upset or frustrated) and “dope” (excellent) creating a casual atmosphere within the community. This specialized vocabulary relating to gaming in Esports serves multiple purposes including enhancing communication regarding complex strategies quickly and effectively during matches amongst players, fostering community identity and a sense of belonging amongst the gamers as well as enhancing engagement in competitive matches.

Moreover, gamer’s language and the usage of abbreviations inside the games are not just limited to the Esports ecosystem but has long been integrated into the mainstream culture and everyday life of individuals as well. For instance, the use of “GG” is not just a gamer language to showcase good sportsmanship but is a widely used term to sarcastically mock someone who makes a mistake. Language is typically how culture spreads and the relationship between culture and language is supervening, meaning that it will only continue to grow steadily.

As already discussed, language is the carrier of culture and it reflects the social, political, economic and cultural conditions of an ecosystem to a certain extent. Another extremely niche area of Esports language is ‘geng’ culture (Song 2022), which is regarded as a community-driven phenomenon where fans and players unite around shared interests, particularly in competitive gaming. The idea of ‘geng culture’ in Esports originated from the rise of competitive gaming, particularly within the League of Legends (LOL) in China. ‘Geng’ serve as social groups that foster engagement and camaraderie among users, often reflecting the highs and lows of Esports culture. This culture has evolved from light-hearted interactions to more complex dynamics, including both positive engagement and negative behaviours, reflecting the broader trends in Esports fandom and media. For

instance, organisations like Gen.G exemplify this culture by bringing diverse markets, enhancing global fandom through localised strategies (Scholz et al., 2022).

Geng culture significantly influences Esports players' behaviour by creating a high-pressure environment driven by fan expectations and social media scrutiny. Amidst the backlash faced by players for poor performances, which lead to the rapid spread of negative narratives online, this culture fosters a sense of common identity amongst the players where they are seen as representatives of their respective communities, impacting their performance and interactions. Although it is not very prevalent in India till yet, in the future geng culture will play a major role in shaping public perceptions and behaviours in the Esports ecosystem.

Esports has come a long way from its niche subcultural roots to becoming a firmly established global phenomenon. Esports shows no signs of slowing down with its dedicated fan base, growing revenue streams and constant stream of innovation. As technology continues to evolve, the future of Esports has even more potential for growth and social acceptance.

Integration into Mainstream Culture

Esports is an area that has conventionally remained outside mainstream boundaries but is gradually finding itself more and more integrated into traditional sporting frameworks, delineating a new understanding of competition and athleticism. This transition emphasizes the recognition of Esports as an authentic area of competition, and its values of strategy, teamwork, and discipline align closely with those exhibited in conventional sports. In one such endeavour, the International Olympic Committee has actively explored the inclusion of virtual sports in its events, illustrating just how pervasive Esports are becoming (Jenny et al. 2017). Also, partnerships between Esports and traditional sports organizations are steadily shaping a converging trend that goes beyond the athletic culture; for example, Paris Saint-Germain and FC Barcelona football clubs introduced Esports teams (Megh Leena 2023).

One of the drivers behind the actual merger is how Esports can capture the youth audience whose attention has constantly dwindled away from conventional sports. Others add that the Gen Z and millennials are more attracted to digital

platforms, and therefore, Esports remain a front where conventional sports organizations can continue to captivate and stay relevant (Jenny et al., 2017). The crossover between Esports and traditional sports extends to the athletes themselves, lending further credence to the ongoing integration; David Beckham, co-founder of the Esports organization Guild Esports, as well as Formula 1 driver Lando Norris, an active participant in online racing competitions, exemplify the uptake and acceptance of Esports by professional athletes into their portfolios (DiFrancisco-Donoghue et al., 2019). Such crossover gives Esports legitimacy in mainstream sports culture, as these athletes bring credibility and visibility to the industry. Moreover, Esports tournaments often adopt organizational structures that parallel traditional sports, including team franchises, anti-doping regulations, or player contracts, thereby aligning itself with the professional ethos and acceptance (Griffiths 2017).

There are hurdles along the way toward full integration, with traditionalists often questioning the physicality and athleticism of Esports to the point that it is virtually devoid of any physical exertion associated with traditional sports. Supporters contend that the sport does require a different but still rigorous set of skills, such as hand-eye coordination, split-second decision-making, and mental endurance (Reardon et al., 2019).

The cultural ramifications of e-sport grafting transcend pure competition; they suggest a general shift in society toward digitization and innovation that will confront traditional definitions of leisure and sport. Fisher's subcultural framework functions as a lens to apprehend e-sport as a transformative space of resistance against established hierarchies, the forging of new forms of community and identity (Fisher, 1995). E-sport bridges the physical and virtual worlds, expanding participatory culture and enabling individuals to participate, collaborate, and create like never before.

However, the increasing incorporation of Esports into the frameworks of mainstream sports would, on the whole, denote such important cultural and economic change. It hints that sports do evolve constantly to be an arena through which society is reflected in its changes in technology, media, and community

formation. Embracing that integration stands to benefit, in one way or another, both Esports and more mainstream sports and to usher in a new era of diversity and dynamism in competitive behaviour.

An examination of Esports as a subculture in India reveals a complex tapestry of social, cultural, and economic dimensions that both challenge and reinforce existing norms in society. This study has sought to exemplify, within the framework of Fischer's subcultural theory and relevant sociological frameworks, how Esports evolved from a niche hobby to become one of the most important cultural phenomena in modern India, with consequences for youthful identity, sociality, and career aspirations.

This research draws out several major findings. Esports has evolved its very own subculture that finds expressions in distinct institutions, belief systems, aesthetic values, and lexicon - with a peculiar 'geng culture' shaping the ways and forms of interaction among members in community settings. This subculture has an extraordinary ability to transcend traditional limitations related to race, religion, and socioeconomic class, which makes it possible to form global communities through virtual platforms. However, this transcendence is accompanied by complexities, as shown by the continued existence of gender inequalities and issues of accessibility.

This, therefore, presents both positive and negative impacts on psychological Esports participation. The subculture allows valuable opportunities for identity formation, community building, and the development of skills, but it also presents challenges of mental health in the form of anxiety, depression, and burnout—challenges more acutely felt in India, where gaming is still a much-stigmatized and scorned activity from the point of view of traditional social structures.

The integration of e-Sports into mainstream culture shows a large shift in how society views competitive gaming. While traditional sports frameworks become more accepting of Esports, it still faces different hurdles in terms of wider social acceptance, regulatory frameworks, and financial sustainability. This study has especially brought to the fore how Indian Esports reflects broader societal

inequalities through the gender dynamics involved, with female participants facing multiple barriers to enter and rise in the field.

The future of Esports in India now stands at a critical juncture. The sector has abundant growth and cultural influence opportunities but simultaneously faces the problem of increased regulation, more inclusive practices, and sustainable business frameworks. On the other hand, the Esports subculture can only gain that much potential when it can counter these challenges while still maintaining the sincere community-prioritizing nature of the subculture. As Esports continues its growth, the role it is playing in shaping youth culture in India is one that will no doubt be an important area of sociological investigation.

Work Cited

- minshewnetworks. "The Evolution of Esports: From Niche Subculture to Global Phenomenon - Skewed 'N Reviewed." Skewed 'n Reviewed, 31 Aug. 2023, www.sknr.net/2023/08/30/the-evolution-of-Esports-from-niche-subculture-to-global-phenomenon.
- Pitroso, Giulio. "Beyond Subcultures: A Literature Review of Gaming Communities and Sociological Analysis." *New Media & Society*, May 2024, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/14614448241252392>
- Seaton, Ian Michael. "Sociology of Esports, Chapter 2 — a Subculture of Assimilation." Medium, 19 Mar. 2023, ianseaton.medium.com/sociology-of-Esports-chapter-2-a-subculture-of-assimilation.
- Song, Suwan. "E-sports and Its Unique Geng (PunchLine) Culture." *Advances in Economics, Business and Management Research/Advances in Economics, Business and Management Research*, Jan. 2022, <https://www.atlantis-press.com/proceedings/cike-22/125972907>.
- Scholz, T. M., Nothelfer, N., Esports Research Network, & Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, European Parliament. (2022). Esports. In *Background Analysis* [Background Analysis]. European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies,

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2022/699635/
IPOL_STU\(2022\)699635_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2022/699635/IPOL_STU(2022)699635_EN.pdf)

Megh Leena. (2023). The thriving intersection of traditional sports and e-sports integration. *Medium*.<https://medium.com/@sofiamegh14/the-thriving-intersection-of-traditional-sports-and-Esports-integration-0150f833335a>

Jenny, S. E., Manning, R. D., Keiper, M. C., & Olrich, T. W. (2017). Virtual(ly) athletes: Where Esports fit within the definition of “sport.” *Quest*, 69(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2016.1144517>

DiFrancisco-Donoghue, J., Balentine, J. R., Schmidt, G., & Zwibel, H. (2019). Managing the health of the eSport athlete: An integrated health management model. *BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine*, 5(1), e000467. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjsem-2018-000467>

Reardon, C. L., Hainline, B., Aron, C. M., Baron, D., Baum, A. L., Bindra, A., Budgett, R., Campriani, N., Castaldelli-Maia, J. M., Currie, A., Derevensky, J. L., Glick, I. D., Gorczynski, P., Gouttebauge, V., Grandner, M. A., Han, D. H., McDuff, D., Mountjoy, M., Polat, A., Purcell, R., ... Engebretsen, L. (2019). Mental health in elite athletes: International Olympic Committee consensus statement (2019). *British journal of sports medicine*, 53(11), 667–699. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2019-100715>

Fischer, C. S. (1995). The Subcultural Theory of Urbanism: A Twentieth- Year Assessment. *American Journal of Sociology*, 101(3), 543–577. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2781994>

MOTHER, BODY, CHILD: A MYTHOPOESIS OF MOTHERING IN SELECT POEMS BY MIA AYUMI MALHOTRA

¹ Harsha A U S and ² Dr. Aysha Swapna K A

¹ Research Scholar of English, Farook College (Autonomous), University of Calicut, Kerala.

² Professor of English, and Principal, Farook College (Autonomous), University of Calicut, Kerala.

Abstract

Representations of motherhood in much of western literary history have been dominated by images of the sacrificial, nurturing mother-figures idealized by myths like that of the Virgin Mary and Mother Earth. Bodily experiences, which form a central part of real-life mothering, hardly ever found traditional literary expression. It is only in the late 20th century, once feminist movements became influential, women writers began unapologetically writing about the intimate physical aspects of their lives including menstruation, sexualities, pregnancy and motherhood. In this light, this paper analyses select poems of the contemporary Japanese-American poet Mia Ayumi Malhotra, whose ‘mother poems’ trace a very real, intimate picture of mothering from various stages of pregnancy to childbirth and beyond. The study reads how Malhotra uses the body as a central metaphor to negotiate the corporeal and emotional dimensions of motherhood, and shapes a compelling new quest narrative of the rite of passage that pregnancy and childbirth represent for women.

Keywords: Feminism, Body, Mind, Pregnancy and Rites of Passage.

For much of literary history, the images of motherhood in literature have oscillated between the archetypal figures of the benevolent, sacrificial, good mother, and the bad, selfish step-mother. The good mother is idealized in various cultures by sacred and nurturing figures like the Virgin Mary, Mother Earth or even the Fairy Godmother. She is conceived as a woman for whom ‘nurturing’ is instinctual and natural, elemental to her being. Especially in poetry, ‘the mother’ has remained a passive and sentimentalised figure, with very little connection to the real and lived

experiences of women who have been mothers. Many prominent poems on motherhood have been from the offspring's point of view, with the sacred figure of the mother often being disembodied and exalted to the status of "The angels, whispering to one another, /Can find, among their burning terms of love, /None so devotional as that of 'Mother'" (Poe). Such representations are manifestations of "the perfect mother myths", that "include: the measure of a good mother is a perfect child; mothers are endless founts of nurturance; mothers naturally know how to raise children; and mothers don't get angry" (O'Reilly 884-5). The resulting picture is that of an unfailing, pure and divine mother reminiscent of the ideal Christian symbol of the Virgin Mary.

Amidst this consecration of literary motherhood, one aspect that has largely remained side-lined is that of the female body and bodily changes, despite the fact that they are at the very core of the lived experiences of mothering. In 1995, famous feminist theorists Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar along with Diana O'Hehir co-edited and published an anthology of Anglo-American poetry on mothers and motherhood, titled *Mother Songs: Poems For, By and About Mothers*. The anthology celebrates maternity by bringing together a wide range of verse on different phases like pregnancy, labour, nursing, childrearing and mourning, by poets as diverse as William Blake, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Sylvia Plath, Gwendolyn Brooks and Margaret Atwood along with traditional ballads and elegies. In its preface, the editors write: "Although maternity has been celebrated and consecrated for centuries, and although as primary caretakers mothers have always helped shape civilization, poets have just in the last few decades begun to speak as mothers and about mothers with unprecedented complexity, intensity and subtlety" (17).

Into this lineage, this paper situates the contemporary American poet Mia Ayumi Malhotra, whose 'mother poems' trace a very real, intimate picture of mothering from various stages of pregnancy to childbirth and beyond. Mia Ayumi Malhotra is an award-winning poet whose debut collection titled *Isako Isako* explores themes like migration, intergenerational women's bonding, and the historical and cultural trauma associated with experiences of her ancestors in the

Japanese internment camps of the 1940s. She has widely published her poems in various online and print literary journals as well as in anthologies. A rare evocation of the bodily experiences of the process of mothering is found in some of her poems, where strikingly raw images of the pregnant female body, the umbilical cord, ultrasound scans, and the unborn foetus compete with the tender emotions, joys and sorrows of mothering. In the present paper, the researcher focus on these ‘mother poems’, and attempt to read how Malhotra uses the body as a central metaphor to negotiate the corporeal and emotional dimensions of motherhood, and shapes a compelling new quest narrative of the rite of passage that pregnancy and childbirth represent for women. The poems used for study in this paper are fragments from the two series *Mothersalt* and *Notes from the Birth Year*, published and available in various online literary journals including the *Poetry Northwest Online*, *The Yale Review Online*, *The Los Angeles Review Online Poetry*, and the *Columbia Journal* among others.

The Western civilization has traditionally favoured the mind in the fundamental dichotomy of ‘mind and body’, a dualism which is in itself deeply gendered. The rational mind is traditionally regarded a masculine attribute, while the material body is regarded as feminine, the weakness that often limits the higher, spiritual pursuits of the masculine mind. These attributes are reiterated again and again through patriarchal myths and archetypes (like the biblical story of Adam and Eve) that view women as temptresses who lead men astray from their spiritual and intellectual pursuits. The pioneer psychoanalyst Joseph Campbell, in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, identifies a stage in the heroic quest myth as the meeting of the hero with a “Woman as Temptress”, a representation of the worldly desires, pleasures and temptations that may lead the hero astray and delay his pursuit of the treasure (111). Such associations of the woman and her body as temptations and impediments to higher spiritual pursuits of the human mind, is a trope that has been used and repeated in literature time and again. Robyn Ryle observes in her book *Questioning Gender: A Sociological Exploration*, how Dorothy Dinnerstein attributes the origin of this gendered dynamic to “women’s primary responsibility for taking care of human bodies as infants.” Women, owing to the greater role of

their bodies in the procreation and nurturing of offspring, are in most cultures “more closely associated with their bodies than are men.” As such, “the negativity associated with the body is also associated with women and femininity” (Ryle 266-267). As a result of these negative connotations associated with the female body, it was not until the 1970s, with the influence of the Second-Wave and French Feminist movements, that the woman’s body began to be regarded as an acceptable subject and metaphor of literary expression. According to the French feminist theorists like Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, women’s self-expressions should begin with what has been repressed for ages by patriarchy- their bodies and their sexuality (Jones 252). In *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Cixous famously declared that women have “been turned away from our bodies, shamefully taught to ignore them, to strike them with that stupid sexual modesty;” and exhorted women to win back and “write through their bodies” (885-886). It is perhaps in this light that women writers of the late twentieth century and after, indulged in unapologetic literary expressions reclaiming their bodies, and began to talk about the intimate physical aspects of their lives including puberty, menstruation, sexualities, pregnancy and motherhood.

From Simone de Beauvoir’s famous demystification of pregnancy and motherhood in her seminal treatise *The Second Sex*, to its dismissal by many second-wave feminists as oppressive for women, motherhood has long been a contentious topic as far as feminism is concerned. Beauvoir, in her seminal text, debunks the patriarchal myths which propagate that a woman can attain fulfilment in life only with motherhood, and even controversially remarks that pregnancy is “tiring work that offers woman no benefit as an individual but that demands serious sacrifices” (64). She was among the first to open a discussion on the necessity of legalization of birth control and abortion, and acknowledges that motherhood can be rewarding, only if it is freely chosen by the women at her own will. Later feminist activists took up many of these concerns including women’s control over their own body and fertility, better social and workplace support for mothers by providing maternity leaves, childcare facilities and flexible work schedules. Adrienne Rich, in her 1976 book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, distinguishes “between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the

other: the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the institution, which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control” (13). Rich identifies the female body as the site on which patriarchy has built its control, through mythology and theology that deem it as “impure, corrupt, the site of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to masculinity, a source of moral and physical contamination, the devil’s gateway”. While at the same time, as a mother, her body paradoxically becomes “sacred”, and motherhood becomes “her single destiny and justification in life” (34).

Drawing from Rich’s work, Andrea O’Reilly distinguishes the two terms ‘motherhood’ and ‘mothering’; the former being the “male-defined” and “controlled” patriarchal institution, while the latter refers to the “female-defined”, lived experiences of women as mothers (O’Reilly et al 2). Nancy Doyle, in her study on the shifting dynamics of motherhood in American culture through the mid-18th to mid-19th centuries, examines how traditional literature portrayed motherhood as refined and pious, focussing only on the moral and emotional aspects of mothering, rather than the raw physical labour involved in it. Mothers in traditional literature and poetry thus became disembodied and sentimental. Citing examples of poets like Alicia Ostriker and Sharon Olds, Doyle further goes on to mention that in the aftermath of the feminist movements of the 1970s, “women have begun to explore the physicality of experiences such as pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation, both in private and in public texts and images” (209).

The poet under study in this paper, Mia Ayumi Malhotra, in her two series titled *Mothersalt: A Lyric* and *Notes from the Birth Year*, explores “the way motherlabor reconstitutes the elements of one’s being—ontologically, physically, metaphysically” (Malhotra, An Interview). In ‘Notes from the Birth Year: On Gestation and Becoming’, the speaker, an unsure, expectant mother, contemplates the new life growing within her, both its promise and the “fear, held in equal measure”. She likens the foetus at eighteen weeks of gestation to an “unripe fruit, joined to branch by a tiny umbilicus” – a reference to its vulnerability and complete dependence to the mother’s body through the umbilical cord. “To hold her in my hands—or my palm, rather, ...—would be to destroy her” (Malhotra ‘Two Poems’).

It is especially significant to note the poet's choice of the rather unfeeling, medical term "fetus" first, and the more sentimental word "baby" used only towards the end of the poem, after the birth. The woman does not dive headfirst into motherhood with conception; she acquaints herself with the foetus first, and as the foetus 'becomes' a baby, she too, 'becomes' a mother. Pregnancy here is treated as a rite of passage during which the woman gets accustomed to the life growing within her; a liminal stage when she is suspended between the two phases of "woman-not-mother" and "woman-mother" (Côté-Arsenault et al 72).

The speaker is more deeply aware of how she and the baby are connected, as the pregnancy progresses and approaches the end. At 37 weeks 1 day, the speaker confronts the many 'if's – doubts about her own body and its ability to survive the ordeal of the impending birth – "If the body goes rogue, turns against itself... If I am broken and not remade... ." At 38 weeks, 6 days, now closer than ever to labour, she is "the body fantastic", more brilliant than the full moon. Even while dripping in night sweats, she dares the moon to come near and outshine her glowing, orb-like pregnant body. Hers is a body worthy of a mythical mother-goddess; hair risen "from the roots", "Muscles lit with new fire", as she throws her "big-bellied challenge to the sky" (*Mothersalt*, in Los Angeles Review).

During the labour, the woman switches between fear and fearlessness, going from "[I'm scared]" to "[I can do this. I can finish this]". Nature, the "brutal beast" has now "dismembered" her like never before. She confronts the pain that radiates through "every inch" of her body and has broken "everything female" in her, dissolving her into mere fluids – "Blood. Milk. Urine" (*Mothersalt*, in Columbia journal). The soon-after-birth fragments in this series are dubbed '*X days*' – indicating that time has lost its meaning for a new mother who has "come unmoored from the hours". The initial days for the new mother are clocked only by the baby's cries, satisfying its basic, animalistic needs. It takes a while to realize that what her body has achieved is a miracle –

This miracle cradled in my arms, breathing quietly through the hours. The crown of her head, rung with light. Labia, lips, the voice I sang all the way through. *Bring it low. Hold that energy and PUSH.* The uterus' wild red interior, ballooned to

contain a galaxy; the moment she broke through; the slippery, muscular force of one life spilling into the next. (*Mothersalt*, in *Your Impossible Voice*)

In ‘Notes from the Birth Year: On Weaning’, the poet lays bare the mother’s anxieties as her child grows more independent and separate from her. The “plane” that she boards, is not simply a physical aeroplane taking her to another continent, but is also the temporal plane that separates her from her growing baby, who is no longer completely dependent on the mother for survival – no longer the “merged self we make: mother, mouth, milk”. Weaning the baby feels like leaving behind the mother’s body, a “body of milk”, elongated nipples and clogged ducts. In seclusion, the woman drinks herself in from her “weeping” breasts, bringing in “a new sensation”, an altered sense of self. In ‘On Worlds That Leave Us’, the mother reminisces how, soon after birthing, she “felt very cold and strangely alone in my own body”. The body which hosted two lives and two hearts within itself, had suddenly lost its companion of nine months, and was feeling the loss, now that the baby had been separated from the mother’s body. This loss manifested in the literal feeling of coldness; a sudden chill that is often felt by many women immediately after birthing. The daily and nightly rituals of breastfeeding, “the circle of milk and child and mother”, were what built the bond between the mother and child, and sequestered them in a world of their own. With weaning, the mother again feels the loss of that exclusive world, realising that she would now be present only on the “edges” of her child’s world. These two fragments, thus grapple with the sense of loss that is associated with both birthing and weaning.

Finally, in ‘Notes from the Birth Year: On Mind and Memory’, the mother has now become a storyteller, telling the story of her birth for the daughter who has now become old enough to forget the earliest events of her life: “You were blue, I say. The umbilical cord was wrapped around your neck three times. They took you away, and then they brought you back”. With this, the mother-storyteller declares that she was creating a mythology – “an origin story” – for her child, where she herself is only a ‘somewhat incidental’ character. The mother, who remembers what her child has forgotten about herself, is fated to tell her daughters’ birth stories for the rest of her life. Her memories that are altered every time they are recalled and

retold, make up new stories and new myths. The mother's body and body parts – the uterus, the umbilical cord, the belly and the breasts – become the primary sites from which each of these stories emerge: "Each drawn-out day and fractured, contraction-gutted night. Each twitch, each pain—my belly, a luminous bulge that torqued this way, then that" (Malhotra). Thus, the mother, like the mythical goddess Mnemosyne, becomes the keeper of her child's memories; the earliest moments of life the child herself has forgotten about. For the child, the stories that her mother tells about her birth, or origin, would seem like mythical stories of a distant past she has no memory of.

In these two series of 'mother-poems', Malhotra shifts the balance of the traditional dichotomy of the mind versus body, with the body and bodily experiences taking primacy over the mind. While the mind also exerts its sway through memory which forms an important facet of mothering, each of these memories originate or is associated with some body part or bodily experience of the mother, be it her uterus, belly or the breasts. The elemental bodily functions associated with mothering, like the physical processes of gestation, birthing and breastfeeding, become rituals through which the woman develops her emotional connect with the infant, and therefore, it becomes impossible to separate the mother-mind from the mother-body.

The poet debunks the essentialist discourses which stereotypically depict all women as 'natural' mothers, by portraying mothering as a lifelong quest, in which the woman undergoes different phases of physical and mental transformations. She conveys how pregnancy is a liminal stage and how the woman's pregnant body is a liminal body in the process of change. The initiation of the woman into mothering through pregnancy, and the physical changes in her body associated with it, are important parts of the rites of passage that prepare her for the emotional quest of building and strengthening of the bond between herself and the child. The poet, in these autobiographical poems, thus traces a new quest narrative of the embodied experiences of different stages of mothering, from pregnancy through birthing, nursing, weaning and childrearing.

Works Cited

- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Princeton UP, 2004.
- Côté-Arsenault, Denise et al. "Pregnancy as a Rite of Passage: Liminality, Rituals & Communitas." *Journal of Prenatal & Perinatal Psychology & Health*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2009, pp. 69-87.
- Cixous, Hélène, et al. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Signs*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1976, pp. 875–893.
JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3173239.
- Doyle, Nora. "Conclusion: In Search of the Maternal Body Past and Present." *Maternal Bodies: Redefining Motherhood in Early America*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2018, pp. 203–210. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469637211_doyle.11.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. et al, editors. *MotherSongs: Poems For, By and About Mothers*. Norton, 1995.
- Jones, Ann Rosalind. "Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of 'L'Ecriture Feminine.'" *Feminist Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1981, pp. 247–263. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3177523.
- Malhotra, Mia Ayumi, interviewee. "An Interview with Mia Ayumi Malhotra." *Wildness*, readwildness.com/17/malhotra-feature
- , "EXCERPT FROM 'MOTHERSALT: A LYRIC.'" *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, no. 57, 2019, pp. 202–06. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45175435>
- , "From 'MOTHERSALT: A Lyric' "[37 Weeks 1 Day]" and "[38 Weeks 6 Days]". *The Los Angeles Review Online Poetry*, Feb. 2018, losangelesreview.org/MOTHERSALT-lyric-mia-ayumi-malhotra/.
- , "From MOTHERSALT: A Lyric." *YOURIMPOSSIBLEVOICE*, 2018, yourimpossiblevoice.com/from-Mothersalt-a-lyric/.
- , "Notes from the Birth Year: On Mind and Memory." *The Yale Review*, July 2018, <https://yalereview.org/article/notes-birth-year-mind-and-memory>.
- , "Notes from the Birth Year: On Weaning." *The Yale Review*, Aug. 2018,

- <https://yalereview.org/article/notes-birth-year-weaning>.
- , "Notes from the Birth Year: On Worlds That Leave Us." *The Yale Review*, Aug. 2018, <https://yalereview.org/article/notes-birth-year-worlds-leave-us>
- , "Two Poems." *POETRY NORTHWEST*, 22 Oct. 2018, poetrynw.org/mia-ayumi-malhotra-two-poems/.
- O'Reilly, Andrea, general editor. *Encyclopedia of Motherhood*. Sage, 2010.
- et al. "Introduction". *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born*. State University of New York Press, 2004, pp 1-23.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. "To My Mother." *Poetry Foundation*, Poetry Foundation, poetryfoundation.org/poems/55569/to-my-mother-56d2374c0d434.
- Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Institution and Experience*. Norton, 1995.

SHORT FILMS, REAL STORIES: TRANSGENDER REPRESENTATION IN JAKE GRAF'S SHORT FILMS

Amrita Das

Amrita School of Arts, Humanities and Commerce, Kochi.

Abstract

Gender studies have benefited much from feminist concepts, but due to their essentialist nature, they require further theoretical discussion and development. In contrast to queer theory in the 1900s, theories on the transgender experience focused more on the limitations of embodiment. The study uses a qualitative method with an emphasis on trans-identity theory to examine the lives of transgender characters as a postmodern metaphor. Jake Graf's short films, which succinctly and successfully convey complex ideas like gender and identity, are the subject of a critical analysis in this study.

Keywords: Transgender, Gender Studies, Queer Theory, Postmodern and Identity.

Introduction

There is minimal effort made into developing appropriate and realistic representations of transgender people in the media, which range from making them invisible to terrified others to comic relief. On the other hand, in recent years, transgenders have started to be accepted as legitimate identities. Films such as *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) and *The Danish Girl* (2015) presented the real-life experiences of transgenders through the stories of Brandon Teena and Lili Elbe, respectively. Films have traditionally depicted trans bodies in the most repulsive and weird situations. There aren't many objections to this yet from the general public that views those photographs. Trans people are presented and discussed in movies as if they are odd ideas or anomalies. It is now clear that producers, commentators, and marketers pay very little attention to how a trans audience could view and react to these initiatives to put their lives in front of the camera as the cisgender majority still controls the conversation. Trans-identity theory stresses the constraints of embodiment, in contrast to queer theory, which emphasizes the diversity of sexual orientation and gender identification.

Analysis

The lived experience, which is shaped by embodied experience, self-construction, and social structure, is the central idea of trans-identity theory. According to the idea of embodiment, the mind and body are closely related and that our physical bodies have a significant influence on our feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Since most people are not aware of this experience, it is partially subconscious. However, it incorporates the idea that the body can only be either male or female, it is essentialist in nature. The concept of social construction holds that the meanings, norms, and standards we ascribe to objects, occasions, and actions are not innate or natural; rather, they are created via social processes and interactions. A person's self-development is impacted by both their personal and social situations.

Transgender director Jake Graf's short films were released during the twenty-first century, and dealt with noteworthy themes such as gender, sexuality, family and cultural politics. The short films focus on the orthodox agenda of the persisting dominance of cisheteronormative society. The protagonists of these short films, who experience various forms of discrimination and persecution in American society, powerfully illustrate the transgender characters with depth.

Using a textual analysis and a close reading of *Brace* (2013), *Dusk* (2017), *The Star of Bethnal Green* (2019), and *Headspace* (2022), the paper examines Jake Graf's short films on transgender life. They highlight the issue of gender discrimination in American society through the lives of select transgender characters. Each short film discusses their individual experiences in different classes, gender and sexual orientation. Many US based short films represent transgender people as victims, whereas these short films comment on 'the life they lived, as they wanted'. These characters advocate for a more egalitarian perspective by challenging gender and sexual orientation based social structures, both in the play and their portrayal in the film. Jake Graf being a trans man himself has committed to egalitarianism by this alternative cinematic narrative that works against typical trans film representations.

Graf seems to be breaking new ground, revolutionizing, and dismantling the established structures that have previously limited the depiction and subjectivity of transgenders. His portrayal of the protagonists, which challenges the unfair society, is crucial to the storyline of the short films and takes the focus away from the "culture of ambivalence" that has been the cornerstone of transgender representations in American cinema. People view trans characters as individuals who defy stereotypes and disrupt customary standards. Works by transgender filmmakers particularly demonstrate this complex representation of transgender subjectivity. These characters are neither oppressed or mistreated as a result of their transgender identity; rather, they are shown as independent, rational individuals with an equal voice in the political sphere.

Altering the Stereotypical Representation

Within the framework of trans-identity theory and how they are created through self-construction, social relationships, and bodily experience, the study employs a qualitative approach. Additionally, it aims to reveal these characters as postmodern metaphors.

A few scenes are chosen for further study from these short films. Initially, Jake Graf's *Headspace* aims to promote acceptance and tolerance by highlighting the challenges faced by transgenders on a daily basis. The camera focuses on transgender man Laith Ashley's strong shoulders and muscular body as he enjoys his company in the changing room. The presence of another man in the same room causes a disturbance, which makes him lose the joy he felt while he was by himself. Ashley whispers, "If I drop my towel now, he's definitely going to know I'm trans," (*Headspace* 2:08-2:10) which freezes the shot empathizing with Ashley's transgender body. In terms of embodiment versus self-construction, this moment is fascinating. In private, he showed no signs of dissatisfaction with his physique, and the camera angles further emphasized Ashley's masculinity. The audience is prompted to consider his masculinity by the relevance of the body. The person becomes anxious about not adhering to the male sex norms as a result of this query. This nervousness is exhibited when another man enters the changing room and is

scared to change his clothing, rather than when Ashley is alone. This variation in embodiment caused by social construction occurs in both the public and private domains.

Furthermore, the topic of transgenders using public restrooms has always been controversial. Films from the 1960s portray such scenes as humorous. The establishment of male and female restrooms is a societal construct that must be considered first, followed by self-construction to an embodiment. As a trans man, Kieran Moloney's character in *Headspace* is confused about which restroom to use. However, he would prefer to use the male restroom because of his male self-construction, which creates a sense of disturbance. These people's lack of embarrassment or nervousness over using the incorrect restroom tells much about how gender is socially constructed. These characters occupy a social location that exposes them to multiple forms of oppression such as gender inequality and sexual orientation. In these short films, they are portrayed as a strong-willed and resilient individual who finds it difficult to reconcile discrimination based on both gender and sexual orientation. They emphasize the necessity of solidarity between many social categories and intersectional analysis in order to confront systemic oppression and build a more just society. These individuals serve as a reminder of the fortitude and tenacity of oppressed communities.

Secondly, as shown in *Dusk* and *The Star of Bethnal Green*, the use of a 'mirror' as a 'mask' in transgender depiction is a popular visual media approach. Chris Winters's battles with body dysphoria are depicted in *Dusk* as he learns to accept his transgender identity and embrace who he really is. The 'mirror scene' in *Dusk* can be a mask reflecting the person's face or it can be placed so that the face is covered or partially obscured. Both in the self and in society, masking is strongly associated with gender constructs. It shows how a person molds themselves to fit a predetermined image, which may be derived from their own societal expectations. A trans-identity perspective on masking holds that, despite your discomfort with your embodiment, it is socially expected that you act and shape like your biological sex. Colin David Jackson portrayed an elderly trans woman in *The Star of Bethnal Green* who was unable to live her true life because of the way gender is constructed

in our culture. The mirror scene illustrates the character's struggle with embodiment and self-creation in relation to the social construction of their relationships with friends, family, and coworkers.

Thirdly, *Brace* emphasizes how Adam and Rocky are portrayed and welcomed in their own group while illustrating their struggles with gender identification and sexuality. Adam and Rocky are similar in terms of embodiment and self-creation, yet they both hurt each other by using ideas from social construction. They chose to denigrate each other by using language that represents their understanding of society, even if they both acknowledge their transsexual identities. After admitting that Rocky is transgender, Adam leaves him at the hospital. Rocky's discovery that Adam is also trans illustrates the odd notion that even people in 'the minority' are harming rather than helping one another. *Brace* illustrates how members of the 'minority community' make fun of each other's identities by using words, opinions, and ideas that belong to the 'majority community.'

These short films center around the subject of love, but they diverge from the conventional love stories. They typically do not disclose the reality that transgenders frequently endure honor killings and other terrible responses from society. Through the use of self-construction for the layer of subjectivity and social-construction as the layer of assumed truth, the transgender characters in these films function as a postmodern metaphor. Transgender is the term most frequently used to describe a spectrum of gender minority individuals. While media representations continue to increase, they are also frequently underrepresented and are "characterized predominantly by negative or one-dimensional portrayals" and "instability, vulnerability, and victimization rather than resilience or self-efficacy (Craig et al. 257)." But in terms of content quality and diversity of stories featuring marginalized people, the American film industry has become a serious competitor to other mainstream movies in recent years.

The characters are shown as ardent supporters of equality and social justice in the short films. Graf uses their voice to raise awareness about the issues faced by the marginalized communities. The experiences of marginalized transgender people

in social and political movements need to be more widely acknowledged and represented, as these short films demonstrate. In order to combat systemic oppression and build a more just society, it emphasizes the significance of solidarity and allyship among all social categories. They frequently explore the complex and varied subjects of gender identity, experiences of transgender people, and queer stories. The short films present a constructive critique of the political and social systems that uphold injustice and inequality in American society through these themes.

Graf's touching narratives and strikingly beautiful cinematography have made him a well-known figure in the film industry, bringing attention to the struggles and victories faced by people trying to understand their gender. In an effort to promote acceptance and tolerance, his work frequently delves into the emotional landscapes of transgenders, providing a profoundly sympathetic portrait. Graf's short films add to a larger discussion on inclusivity and the range of human experiences by tackling issues like self-discovery, societal perceptions, and personal perseverance. His dedication to truthful storytelling and depiction has touched an affinity not only with the queer community but also with audiences around the globe, stimulating a heightened sense of consciousness and compassion.

Television can subvert cisnormativity and have a good impact on minorities' social acceptance (Capuzza and Spencer 216). Kerry's analysis of the Star Trek franchise found that the science fiction genre disrupted gender norms by creating space for gender queer characters such as shape-lifting aliens, multi-gender aliens, and a pregnant male StarFleet officer, among others. These short film's issues are presented in a sensitive and subtle manner. Director Jake Graf, exhibits a thorough comprehension of the intricacies of prejudice based on gender and its impact on both individuals and communities. Without using coercive or exploitative strategies, he is able to portray the character's anguish and suffering in the movie. He was able to densely portray the key elements in the life of a transgender person. These short films show how various social categories are interconnected and stress the importance of empowerment and group action in opposing systemic oppression and building a more just and equitable society.

Conclusion

The concept of trans-identity holds that transgenders are influenced by their embodiment, social structure, and self-construction. A postmodern reading of these short films through trans-identity theory reveals the unseen stories and neglected voices of the darker side of the transgender community. Transgenderism is negatively impacted by the social construct, which includes marginalization and prejudice. Even though transgender theory acknowledges that social reality plays a part in the opportunities and limitations of gender fluidity in the embodied condition of the transgender person, the function of society in relation to personal growth is still not widely acknowledged.

Works Cited

- Graf, Jake. "The Star of Bethnal Green". *Youtube*. uploaded by Bear's Den, 10 Dec 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUDJqKgJEDU>
- Graf, Jake. "Dusk". *Youtube*. uploaded by Jake Graf, 11 March 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmaZatLVOQ0>
- Graf, Jake. "Brace". *Youtube*. uploaded by Jake Graf, 17 April 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWuwms95bd0>
- Graf, Jake. "Headspace". *Youtube*. uploaded by Jake Graf, 16 April 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEpBu1HYSVw>
- McInroy, Lauren B., and Shelley L. Craig. "Transgender representation in offline and online media: LGBTQ Youth Perspectives." *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, vol. 25, no. 6, Apr. 2015, pp. 606–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2014.995392>.
- Spencer, Leland G., and Jamie C. Capuzza. "Centering Gender Identity and Transgender Lives in Instructional Communication Research." *Communication Education*, vol. 65, no. 1, Jan. 2016, pp. 113–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2015.1096949>.

THE DIGITAL ABYSS: MENTAL HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF ONLINE HARASSMENT AND TROLLING

¹ Mahera Imam and ² N. Manimekalai

¹ Research Scholar, Department of Women's Studies, Khajamalai Campus, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli.

² Director, Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi.

Abstract

The rise of digital platforms has transformed social interaction, enabled unprecedented connectivity while also facilitated harmful behaviours like online harassment and trolling. Scholars such as Manuel Castells describe these platforms as "network societies" reshaping connections, while Sherry Turkle highlights the paradox of digital intimacy, where constant interaction often leads to disconnection and hostility. John Suler's "online disinhibition effect" explains how anonymity fosters aggressive behaviours like trolling and cyberbullying. Research by Amanda Lenhart and Danielle Citron reveals the severe psychological impact of cyber harassment, including anxiety, depression, and lasting trauma. Marginalized groups face heightened vulnerability to such abuse, further exacerbating digital inequalities. This study examines the interplay between mental health and online hostility, advocating for robust policies, psychological interventions, and digital accountability. By promoting inclusive and safer digital spaces, it emphasizes the urgent need to balance mental well-being with freedom of expression in the digital age.

Keywords: Digital Platforms, Online Harassment, Mental Health, Digital Safety Policies, Online Accountability and Cybersecurity Interventions.

Introduction

The proliferation of digital platforms has transformed communication, reshaping social interactions and information dissemination on a global scale. It has been fundamentally changed the way people connect and interact, bringing individuals together across distances in ways that were once unimaginable. Social media, online forums, and messaging apps have given rise to expansive digital

networks that allow people to communicate instantly, share ideas, and build communities beyond geographical limitations. These platforms have enabled what sociologist Manuel Castells describes as "network societies," where human connections are constantly redefined through technology.

Digital spaces offer unprecedented access to information, support networks, and community involvement, empowering individuals with opportunities to voice opinions and engage with diverse perspectives. However, this shift towards constant digital connectivity has not come without significant drawbacks. While digital platforms enable constructive interactions, they also provide a fertile ground for negative and harmful behaviours, such as online harassment and trolling, that can severely impact mental health. Unlike traditional face-to-face interactions, online exchanges often lack social cues and accountability, leading to what psychologists describe as a "disinhibition effect," where individuals feel less restrained and more prone to aggressive or hurtful behaviours. The anonymity and distance that online platforms afford make it easier for people to engage in hostile actions, emboldening individuals who might not otherwise act in such ways.

Psychologists and social theorists, including Sherry Turkle, have observed that digital intimacy the sense of closeness created by constant online communication can paradoxically lead to feelings of loneliness, disconnection, and increased vulnerability. In online environments, the interactions are frequently marked by a lack of empathy and understanding, often spiralling into hostility and unregulated aggression. Many individuals find themselves exposed to negativity, criticism, and harassment, which can create an environment where feelings of isolation are magnified rather than mitigated. For many users, especially those from marginalized and vulnerable groups, the risks are even greater.

Studies indicate that marginalized individuals are disproportionately affected by online harassment, which compounds the challenges they already face in the physical world. The mental health impacts on these individuals can be profound, resulting in increased anxiety, depression, and a diminished sense of safety both online and offline. The need to understand and address the mental health implications of online harassment and trolling is increasingly urgent, particularly as

digital spaces continue to expand. Recognizing these challenges requires us to examine the structural issues within digital platforms that enable hostile behaviour, while also considering how the experience of online harassment varies across different groups. Through this understanding, we can begin to address the complexities of mental health in the digital age and work towards creating online environments that foster connection, inclusion, and well-being.

Methodology

This conceptual analytical review draws from academic literature, policy reports, and legal frameworks on online harassment, mental health, and digital safety. It examines key theories like John Suler's online disinhibition effect and Sherry Turkle's digital intimacy paradox to understand online hostility. The study also reviews cyberbullying, digital exclusion, and marginalized communities' vulnerabilities, identifying gaps in prevention and mental health support. By synthesizing these perspectives, the paper advocates for stronger legal protections, mental health interventions, and inclusive digital policies.

Online Disinhibition and Anonymity: Enablers of Digital Hostility

A central concept in understanding online harassment is the "online disinhibition effect," a term coined by psychologist John Suler. This phenomenon captures how the unique nature of online environments, particularly their anonymity and perceived lack of consequences, significantly reduces people's self-restraint. In these virtual spaces, individuals often feel less bound by social norms, leading them to engage in behaviours they would likely avoid in face-to-face settings. This loss of inhibition encourages a range of behaviours from blunt expression of opinions to, more problematically, hostile acts such as trolling, cyberbullying, and doxing.

How Anonymity Amplifies Disinhibition

Anonymity on digital platforms weakens social restraints, allowing individuals to act without accountability. In face-to-face interactions, social cues like tone and body language regulate behaviour, but online spaces strip these away, fostering a depersonalized environment. This emboldens users to express themselves without considering the emotional or psychological impact on others. While anonymity can empower free speech, it also enables harmful behaviours like

cyberbullying and trolling, as individuals feel shielded from real-world consequences. This lack of accountability amplifies disinhibition, normalizing hostility in digital spaces.

Rise of Hostile Behaviours in a Permissive Environment

The online disinhibition effect weakens social restraints, fostering a culture where trolling, cyberbullying, and doxing thrive. Anonymity and minimal accountability embolden perpetrators to harass, intimidate, and expose personal information without facing real-world consequences. These behaviours not only violate personal boundaries but also create an environment where digital aggression becomes normalized, leaving victims vulnerable to ongoing abuse and psychological harm.

Spillover Effects of Online Hostility

Online hostility doesn't remain confined to digital platforms it deeply affects victims' mental health, personal relationships, and career prospects. Continuous exposure to harassment fuels anxiety, depression, and self-doubt, often forcing individuals to withdraw from online spaces to protect themselves. This withdrawal, however, can result in social isolation, limited opportunities, and long-term emotional distress. The fear of further attacks alters behaviour, erodes confidence, and diminishes a sense of safety, making recovery from such experiences challenging.

The Psychological Toll of Cyber Harassment

The psychological impact of cyber harassment is profound and far-reaching, affecting individuals in ways that go well beyond the screen. Research by scholars such as Amanda Lenhart and Danielle Citron has brought critical attention to the emotional and mental health challenges faced by victims of cyberbullying, hate speech, and other forms of digital abuse. These experiences are not simply fleeting encounters; rather, they are persistent and invasive, leaving long-lasting emotional scars. The psychological toll of cyber harassment can affect various aspects of a person's life, from mental well-being to interpersonal relationships and even physical health.

Persistent Anxiety and Depression

Cyber harassment creates a relentless cycle of stress and emotional distress. Victims experience chronic anxiety, constantly fearing further attacks, which can lead to insomnia, panic, and difficulty concentrating. The omnipresence of online abuse through notifications, messages, and digital traces keeps the trauma alive, preventing victims from fully escaping the harm. Over time, depression can set in, causing feelings of hopelessness, self-doubt, and social withdrawal. Victims may struggle with motivation, leading to disruptions in work, studies, and personal relationships. If left unaddressed, prolonged depression can result in severe mental health deterioration, requiring professional intervention.

Impact on Self-Esteem and Identity

Cyber harassment is particularly damaging when it targets personal characteristics like appearance, gender, ethnicity, or beliefs. Public shaming and humiliation, amplified through shares and comments, intensify self-doubt and shame. Victims may feel pressured to change their behaviour or opinions to avoid further abuse, leading to identity struggles. For young people and marginalized communities, this erosion of self-worth can be devastating, stunting confidence and self-expression. The fear of online backlash often silences victims, restricting their participation in digital discussions, activism, and networking opportunities, ultimately reinforcing societal inequalities.

Ripple Effect on Relationships and Physical Health

The emotional distress caused by cyber harassment often manifests physically. Chronic stress can lead to fatigue, headaches, digestive problems, and weakened immunity. Victims may also experience sleep disturbances, weight fluctuations, and heightened sensitivity to stress. These health issues can further impact daily functioning and quality of life.

Long-Term Trauma and Its Consequences

The psychological scars of cyber harassment often endure long after the abuse has stopped. Victims may develop trust issues, social anxiety, and a reluctance to engage in online or offline interactions. Danielle Citron's research highlights how digital abuse fosters long-term trauma, as victims feel powerless when platforms or

authorities fail to intervene. Many avoid professional or academic opportunities that require a digital presence, fearing renewed harassment. This withdrawal limits personal growth and reinforces exclusion from important spaces.

Amplification of Societal Biases in Digital Spaces

Digital platforms often amplify societal biases through algorithms that prioritize engagement, inadvertently promoting harmful content like hate speech. Anonymity and weak moderation further enable discriminatory behaviour to thrive unchecked. Marginalized groups face inadequate protections, with reporting mechanisms often failing to address their specific needs. This neglect mirrors broader societal issues, leaving many feelings unprotected and disempowered in digital spaces.

Cycle of Exclusion and Mental Health Decline

The cumulative effects of harassment perpetuate a cycle of exclusion, discouraging participation in online and offline spaces. Social isolation and reduced access to community support deepen mental health challenges, while the erasure of marginalized voices limits digital inclusivity. This exclusion undermines the diversity and richness of online platforms, reinforcing societal biases.

Reactive Legal Frameworks and Gaps in Protection

Current legal frameworks primarily focus on punitive measures, addressing online harassment only after harm has occurred rather than preventing it. While laws exist against cyberbullying, hate speech, and online threats, they struggle to keep pace with evolving digital abuses like doxing, deepfakes, and cyberstalking, leaving victims without timely protection. Additionally, complex and ineffective reporting mechanisms discourage victims from seeking justice. Marginalized communities face even greater risks, as current policies often fail to address identity-based abuse, leading to underreporting and inadequate responses. To create safer digital spaces, a preventive approach is essential. Strengthening identity verification, enhancing AI-driven content moderation, and promoting digital literacy can help curb online abuse before it escalates. Integrating mental health support within platforms, such as in-app counselling resources and support networks, can assist victims in coping with harassment. Without proactive strategies, digital

environments will remain reactive, failing to protect users from the increasing risks of online harm.

Moving Beyond Punitive Measures: A Call for Comprehensive Policy

To address the limitations of reactive legal frameworks, there is a pressing need for policies that go beyond punitive measures and adopt a more holistic, proactive approach. Comprehensive policies should include multiple layers of protection, focusing not only on deterring and punishing harassment but also on fostering an online culture that values respect, inclusivity, and mental well-being. This approach could include the following strategies:

Enhanced Reporting Mechanisms

Platforms could implement user-friendly reporting systems that allow victims to report abuse more easily and receive timely responses. These systems could be tailored to different forms of harassment, making it easier for marginalized users to report identity-based abuse accurately and effectively.

Proactive Content Moderation

Investing in AI-driven content moderation tools that can detect abusive behaviour before it escalates is crucial. By identifying patterns of harassment early on, platforms can prevent harmful interactions from occurring and potentially intervene in real-time.

Support for Mental Well-Being

Providing access to mental health resources directly through the platform, such as links to counselling services or peer support groups, can help individuals cope with the effects of harassment. In-platform tools that promote mental well-being, such as digital wellness tips, reminders for breaks, or resilience-building content, could also reduce the psychological toll of online abuse.

Educational Initiatives

Education is key to fostering a safer online culture. Platforms and governments could run campaigns that raise awareness about the impact of online harassment, encourage respectful communication, and educate users about reporting tools and mental health resources. These campaigns could also highlight the unique challenges faced by marginalized communities to promote greater empathy.

Towards Inclusive Digital Safety Policies

In today's interconnected world, digital safety policies must evolve to address online harassment's intersection with mental health, fostering secure, inclusive digital spaces. Beyond content moderation, these policies should integrate mental health support, accountability measures, and tailored protections for marginalized groups, ensuring safe engagement for all users.

Prioritizing Mental Well-Being

Inclusive policies must prioritize mental well-being by addressing the emotional toll of online harassment. Platforms can integrate resources like mental health support links, mindfulness tools, and guidance for coping with abuse. Features such as content filters and reminders to take breaks promote healthier online interactions, benefiting users and cultivating a culture valuing mental health.

Ensuring Accountability

Accountability in online spaces deters harmful behaviour. Platforms should enforce clear community guidelines with consistent consequences for violations, such as content removal or account suspension. Enhanced reporting tools and optional identity verification mechanisms can streamline responses while maintaining user privacy, discouraging abuse.

Accessible Mental Health Resources

Platforms can link users to helplines, counselling, and self-help resources, providing vital support for harassment victims. Customizable features like keyword blocking and notification management empower users to protect their mental health proactively, fostering a safer environment.

Addressing Marginalized Groups' Needs

Marginalized groups, such as women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and racial minorities, face disproportionate online abuse. Policies must include tailored safeguards like precise reporting tools and refined algorithms to detect discriminatory content. Collaboration with advocacy organizations ensures these communities' concerns inform decision-making processes.

Support Networks for Victims

Support networks, including peer groups and crisis resources, offer solidarity

and guidance for harassment victims. Platforms can collaborate with mental health and legal organizations to provide comprehensive support, helping users reclaim control over their digital experiences.

Balancing Safety and Free Expression

Effective digital safety policies balance protection against abuse with preserving freedom of expression. By clearly defining harmful behaviour, such as hate speech or threats, and distinguishing it from respectful debate, platforms can maintain vibrant spaces that encourage diverse perspectives while preventing harassment.

Conclusion

As digital platforms play an increasingly central role in human interaction, it is crucial to understand the profound mental health impacts of online harassment and trolling. These harmful behaviours have significant psychological effects, often causing long-lasting distress and isolation for those targeted. Recognizing the complexities of online harassment, we see that it is not a simple issue but one deeply rooted in social dynamics, anonymity, and the unique structure of digital spaces. Therefore, addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that considers legal, psychological, and social factors. A meaningful response to online harassment must encompass legal protections to hold perpetrators accountable, while also incorporating psychological support systems for victims and educational efforts to promote respectful behaviour. Legal measures should go beyond punitive actions to include preventive frameworks that deter harassment before it begins.

A holistic approach must address the needs of marginalized groups, who face higher levels of online hostility due to their identity. By acknowledging unique vulnerabilities, digital spaces can become more inclusive, empowering individuals from all backgrounds to engage freely and safely. This paper advocates for a balanced approach that protects mental health while upholding freedom of expression. Creating digital environments that are safe and inclusive does not mean restricting open dialogue but rather establishing boundaries that prevent harmful behaviours and promote mutual respect. A digital world that respects both safety and freedom allow everyone to connect, share, and grow

without fear of harassment or exclusion. In moving towards this vision, society can shape digital spaces that not only connect us but also support well-being, fostering communities that value inclusivity, respect, and mental health. Such an environment enables all individuals to participate fully and confidently in the digital world, knowing they are protected and supported. This balanced, inclusive approach is essential for building a digital future that is both free and safe for everyone.

Note: This research is sponsored by Social Science Research (ICSSR).

Works Cited

- Citron, D. K., "Law's Expressive Value in Combating Cyber Gender Harassment" (2009) 108(3) *Michigan Law Review* 373-415.
- Castells, M., *The Rise of the Network Society* (2nd ed., Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).
- Citron, D. K., *Hate Crimes in Cyberspace* (Harvard University Press, 2014).
- Citron, D. K., & Franks, M. A., "The Internet as a Speech Machine and Other Myths Confounding Section 230 Reform" (2019) 87(2) *Fordham Law Review* 229-249.
- Fox, J., Cruz, C., & Lee, J. Y., "Perpetuating Online Sexism Offline: Anonymity, Interactivity, and the Effects of Sexist Hashtags on Social Media" (2015) 52 *Computers in Human Behavior* 436-442.
- Lenhart, A., Ybarra, M., Zickuhr, K., & Price-Feeney, M., "Online Harassment, Digital Abuse, and Cyberstalking in America" (2016) Data & Society Research Institute.
- Lenhart, A., "Teens, Social Media, and Technology Overview 2015" (2015) *Pew Research Centre*
- Roberts, S. T., *Behind the Screen: Content Moderation in the Shadows of Social Media* (Yale University Press, 2019).
- Suler, J., "The Online Disinhibition Effect" (2004) 7(3) *Cyber Psychology & Behaviour* 321-326.
- Turkle, S., *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (Basic Books, 2017).
- UNESCO, "Addressing Online Violence Against Women & Girls: UNESCO's New Guidelines for Policymakers" (2020)

ODIYAN: A SHAPE SHIFTER'S TALE - EXPLORING THE ADAPTATION OF FOLK NARRATIVES IN MALAYALAM

Meenakshy B S

Post Graduate Student,
St. Teresa's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam.

Abstract

Odiyans are individuals who practice Odividya, a particularly malevolent form of black magic. While the legends surrounding Odiyans vary by region, they are depicted as a sorcerer or animagus endowed with numerous supernatural abilities. Malayalam drama film *Odiyan* depicts the same which is most popular in Paruthipulli, in Palakkad. This research focuses more on how the technique of retelling a folklore prominent in the outskirts of a rural area was effectively employed on big screen to capture the audience's attention.

Keywords: Odiyan, Supernatural Abilities, Folklore, Audience and Legends.

The legend of Odiyan is a captivating page of Kerala's folklore, rooted deeply in the cultural and historical fabric of the region. Even though many adaptations in different form have been developed, *Odiyan*, a 2018 Indian Malayalam language fantasy film, is directed by V A Shrikumar Menon in his feature film debut and is written by Harikrishanan, has another charm of its own. The film features a modern adaptation and interpretation of the tales revolving around Odiyans. The film acquires its foundation from the legend of Odiyan clan in Malabar region of Kerala, who in Kerala folklore history are those who are believed to possess the ability to shapeshift and can assume animal forms. The film casts Mohanlal, Manju Warriar and Prakash Raj in its main roles. The movie revolves around the folklore of Odiyans also called shapeshifters. The Odiyans are like any other forms of night like ghosts or vampires that instil the emotion of fear and shock to normal people. The film can thus be analysed through the lens of cultural studies as it provides rich insights on to how culture, power and social hierarchies are represented in historical contexts. This exploration delves into the adaptation of folk narratives in Malayalam cinema, focusing on how Odiyan reflects and transforms these ancient myths for contemporary audiences.

A cultural studies analysis prompts the readers to focus more on the aspect of folklore in shaping cultural identity and community values. One could also analyse how a myth which is hundreds of years old is reinterpreted in visual aids and media. Cultural studies also provides light on how marginalized or liminal figures are presented in media or films and how their portrayal proves as a resistance against the dominant ideological structures existing in society. Here, Odiyan presents a figure who works on the margins of society as he is from a lower caste usually working for upper caste people. Hence his powers can be seen both as a curse and empowerment source. A cultural studies exploration can delve deep into the fronts of marginalization, resistance and identity formation in all senses. Above mentioned studies also play a great importance when it comes to realising regional identities. It measures how these regional identities are constructed and represented in the work, especially in visual methods when it comes to films. As Odiyan is a myth born out of the regional culture, history and landscape of Kerala, analyzing the film paves way for the exploration of how Odiyan portrays Kerala's unique cultural landscape and reflects the specific cultural identity of the state.

Around 1950s and 60s, a time when the caste- based distinctions were prevalent in South India, the community was often divided on caste lines that segregated them into high class and low class. The high castes being the Brahmin, Kshtriya, Nair and Ezhava and the low castes comprised Paraya, Pulaya, Paana etc. Rifts and familial conflicts were common on those days being an agrarian society which could often result in murder. However, the high caste people never cast their hands on these dirty acts but involve Odiyans, from the low caste families. In that term, they can be called contract killers. Odiyans are people who do Odividyas, a form of black magic. The stories and mythical legends about Odiyans vary from place to place and from clan to clan. They are sorcerers who possess some supernatural abilities and inhuman stamina, sometimes they could walk at high speed, run fastly, climb trees and jump at sky height. Even though Kerala folktale history is flooded up by myths and legendary stories, the story of Odiyan stands out just because of the fear it instills upon people's hearts even today.

The myth of Odiyan is most commonly heard in Pallakkad's Paruthippulli, which itself is strange in its settings due to forest and howling winds. In the regions of tribal culture, pregnant women are restricted to go out during night just because of the fact that they are the targets of Odiyans. The inhuman power that Odiyans receive is from the oil that they apply on to the earlobes which is derived from the amniotic fluid of an unborn foetus. They attracted the women by chanting some mantras after darkness prevails and brought them to a pre-fixed spot where they took the foetus out from the womb and they collected the amniotic fluid from the foetus. After that, the woman went back to her home and the next day, she would be found dead by bleeding. Odiyans added some medicinal plants in the amniotic fluid by chanting some mantras. This oil is applied on the back of ear lobes to perform the Odividya. The animal form that Odiyan acquires will have some forms of deformity, as a bull may have three legs or an extra eye for a dog. This instigates the victim to take a closer look on Odiyan once he is near, boosted by the advantage of surprise, Odiyan kills the victim.

The history of Odiyan is not popular all-around Kerala other than Malabar region as it revolve around lower caste communities. The basic history of Odiyan and the myths that is passed on from generation to generation is absent in the movie. Rather than focussing on the commercial value, if the movie focussed on propagating the real myth of Odiyan it would have created a visual wonder to the audience. One of the reviews about this movie in the Hindustan Times remarks that the director did not highlight the good and moral side of the character Manikyan in the entire film (Sundar 2018). However, when compare the real Odiyan with Manikyan, the director presented a kind hearted Odiyan. Here Odividhya, the ability to shapeshift into an animal presented merely as a fancy dress (Viswanath 2018).

Cultural studies in literature is an interdisciplinary approach that analyzes literary works on the basis of wider cultural, social and political structures. It goes beyond the traditional literary critical analysis which focus just on themes, symbols, character development etc. Cultural studies paves way to explore how literature joins its hands with society, power structures, identity and ideology. Cultural studies gains aspects from sociology, anthropology, history, political science and media

studies. Here literature is viewed as not just an aesthetic object but a cultural artifact that is shaped by the social structures like class, race, gender and ideology. T.S.Eliot in *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* manages much better when he defines 'culture' not in terms of an individual or a class but, more plausibly, as 'the development...of a whole society.' Culture in all its flexibility allows us to think not just of the stuff that is carried but also all that goes on in the carrying

In the prologue of the film, one could see a narration of what sorcerers are and what they meant with the history of Kerala. It narrates that Odiyan are the king of night who disguise as animals to trick their enemies. In those nights when electricity and silence existed on the scary, lonely ridges amidst the fields they waited covered under dark cloaks for their enemies. Then jump out and land on four legs in front of them. The prey under the spell of a sudden attack of bull or buffalo would fall scared. There were many folklores like, obtaining oil from the killed human foetus and applying on their ear lobes gave them powers to assume forms or shapes that they desired to be. There was a time when the entire village used to be scared of these sorcerers. These ages have now gone by. With the arrival of electricity and disappearance of quietness the sorcerers announced self-retirement and left the stage. Many of their future generations looks at the antics of their forefathers with shame. Many among them left these lands.

In the film one could see Mohanlal depicted as Odiyan Manikyan, the last surviving member of the Odiyan clan. After a 15-year exile, he comes back to his village, where he was forced to confront his past and the legends that surround him. The narrative unveils through flashbacks that reveal his training in Odividya and his complex relationships with other villagers, particularly with Prabha (Manju Warrier) and Ravunni Nair (Prakash Raj), who harbour deep-seated grudges against him. While looking on to through the lens of cultural studies, one could see how the Kerala landscape and societal construction in those days. The society was highly divided according to caste lines where the higher caste was the most dominant group and the lower caste existed just to do menial jobs for the privileged section of society. Lower caste people were not allowed to enter into the high caste homes and was meant to stay outside the bungalow. They were not allowed to touch them as it

impure to them. It serves as a reminder of the region's historical practices and beliefs, which are often overlooked in contemporary discussions.

The elite characters in the film often wield significant influence over the lower classes, controlling resources and social status. This power dynamic is essential to the conflict, as it drives the protagonist's motivations and actions. The film engages with traditional caste structures, illustrating how they shape relationships and social expectations. Characters are often confined by their caste identities, affecting their choices and interactions. When the female protagonist fell in love with the male protagonist, Odiyan was discouraging the affair just because of caste lines. The economic disparity is prevalent, with many characters facing poverty and limited opportunities. It was common in those days to burn the low caste huts for a mistake they did, this is seen in the film too, when the landlord Ravunni proclaims his helpers to burn the hut of Odiyan. The journey of protagonist can be seen as the symbol of rebellion towards the social order and hierarchy of caste lines existing in the society. It is said in the film that Odividyas are done not to kill anyone but to make them feel feared and scared just because of their wrong doings, but at the end one could also see another band of sorcerers coming to the scene to kill Odiyan Manikyan.

A character in the film narrates how his grandmother used to say not to go out during night to urinate as one don't know where the sorcerers are hiding in the dark. Not just about Kerala, the religious customs of Kashi is portrayed in the film in a few minutes. The film also unfolds the agrarian economy and landscape along with the feudal setup prevalent in those days. The traditional practises, rituals of dominant Brahmin and Nair Hindu lords is shown clearly. Odiyan can be seen as practising certain rituals on front of their deity Muthappan before doing Odividya and receiving the title of Odiyan from Mootha Manikyan alias Senior Manikyan. The checking of horoscope for marriages were prevalent just like now for marriages, in a word it was something rigid than today's casual approach. One could also find how the medical practices were in those days. The delivery of pregnant ladies were not done in hospitals but at homes by a woman called Vayattatti and for other ailments there was a person called Vaidyar.

"Odiyan" contributes to the appreciation of the region's natural beauty and cultural settings. As Odiyan was most common on Palakkad district of Kerala, we could witness the scenic beauty of the lush green landscape of the so called village Thenkurisshi in Palakkad district. One could witness how close people of those days lived together with nature. Coconut trees, rivers, paddy fields and ponds create an ecosystem of serenity. Such a setting becomes crucial in shaping the cinema's atmosphere and story narration. The greenery of countryside with its dense forests and rolling hills, serves as a backdrop that enhances the mystical elements of the narrative. The natural beauty juxtaposes the film's darker themes, creating a vivid contrast that reflects the internal struggles of the characters. The film also uses specific locations, such as traditional villages and ancient temples, to evoke a sense of cultural heritage and history. These settings are not just visually striking but also imbue the story with local myths and traditions, enriching the narrative and making the landscape of character in its own right.

Rituals depicted in the film, such as festivals, temple ceremonies, and traditional practices, serve as a means of integrating the community with their spiritual beliefs. These rituals highlight the importance of cultural heritage and continuity. The protagonist's journey involves personal transformation tied to ritualistic elements. This evolution underscores the power of rituals in facilitating change and healing within individuals and communities. One could also see in the film the political alignment that Kerala had at those times. The communist movement gaining popularity among the middle-class people as a matter of resistance is also witnessed. People were highly intoxicated with communist ideologies that gave them a sense of strength and power.

The power of Odiyan is at its extreme in no moon days. Amidst the absence of electricity, darkness prevails and at that moment the Odiyan gains his strength and shape shift into animals and birds. Due to the deaths that had happened due to Odividya, one could see the character Prabha announcing her need for street lights in the village so that no more deaths happen in the light of black magic. At the same time one could also see Odiyan breaking the bulbs on no moon day to perform his

work. Hence, it's clear that the arrival of electricity was also a reason for the Odiyan to disappear from the soil.

The study of Odiyan in the boundaries of cultural studies offers a vast and wider exploration of identity, power dynamics, and folklore in Kerala, particularly among marginalized communities like the Panan and Paraya. As a mythical figure, Odiyan paints the complexities of cultural narratives that shape societal beliefs and practices, revealing how folklore serves as both a means of cultural preservation and a critique of dominant power structures. Furthermore, the Odiyan phenomenon illustrates the interplay between tradition and modernity, as it navigates through changing social landscapes while retaining its mythic significance. This duality underscores the role of folklore in articulating community identity and resistance against hegemonic forces. In this context, Odiyan is not merely a relic of the past but an active participant in ongoing cultural dialogues that challenge existing norms and empower marginalized voices. Ultimately, the study of Odiyan enriches one's understanding of how folklore operates within broader socio-political frameworks, offering insights into the ways communities negotiate their identities in a rapidly evolving world. Therefore, the cultural studies not only illuminate the intricacies of local traditions but also engage with global discourses on power, representation, and social justice

Works Cited

- Sundar, P. 2018, December 14. Odiyan movie review: Mohanlal's Manikyan is fast and sharp, but the film is not. Hindustan Times.
<https://hindustantimes.com/regional-movies-review>
- Viswanath, C. 2018, December 15. Odiyan Movie Review: Who Killed the Magnificent Concept?
- News 18.com. <https://www.news18.com/news/movies/odiyan-movie-reviews-who-killed-the-magnificent-concept1974309.html>.

ONLINE ACTIVISM OF INDIAN DIASPORA: ROLE IN FURTHERING INDIA'S SOFT POWER CAPABILITIES

¹ Neha Perween and ² Dr. Iftekhhar Ahmed Ansari

¹ Research Scholar of Political Science, Aligarh Muslim University.

² Associate Professor of Political Science, Aligarh Muslim University.

Abstract

Diplomacy has played a significant role in establishing the three pillars of soft power, i.e., Political values, Culture, and Foreign Policy. The support provided by the Indian Diaspora in establishing these pillars over the past few years has helped India boost its image at home and in host countries. The process of digitalization has further enhanced India's diplomatic capabilities. The Indian government has realized the strategic importance of diaspora diplomacy and digital connectivity in the 21st century. Considering these vital roles played by the Indian diaspora and digital processes, this paper seeks to find the online activism of the Indian diaspora and its role in reconstructing the expression of nation-branding. The paper constructs a framework of three variables related to pillars of soft power to understand the matrix of diasporic communities in achieving India's unforeseeable success in soft power diplomacy. It also tries to assess the diaspora's impact on India's Soft Power and the motivation that drives the online activism of the Indian diaspora. It highlights the drawbacks that come with the diaspora's potential to harness soft power.

Keywords: Soft Power, Diaspora, Online Activism, Foreign Policy, and Social Media.

Joseph Nye defines the ability of persuasion and attraction as soft power. "This attractiveness rests on intangible resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions, which could help legitimise a given state's power and policy in the eyes of others" (Papaioannou 504). Nye contends that a nation's soft power is contingent upon its Culture, political values, and foreign policy. Diplomacy has played a significant role in establishing the three pillars of soft power. For India to be a strong player in public diplomacy, the Indian diaspora has great strategic importance, serving as the most prominent instrument of soft power. "Over the past

several years, as India has boosted its public diplomacy efforts to foreign publics, it has also reached out more to its diaspora” (Murti & Zaharna 6). The variety and diversity of the Indian diaspora play a critical role in the success of India’s soft power diplomacy. It is a major source of trade and investment, a resource of knowledge, and the largest contributor and earner of the inflow of remittances. Other than that, the support provided by the Indian diaspora in establishing the three pillars of soft power over the past few years has helped India boost its image a lot, both at home and in host countries. The Indian diaspora has extended to every continent in the globe. Goyal & Vajid (2017:115) has rightly pointed out that the Indian diaspora has extended to every continent in the globe. Numerous Indians have achieved prominent roles in the administration and ministries of their host nations, including those of governors, mayors, chief ministers, prime ministers, and presidents.

The process of digitalization has further enhanced India’s diplomatic capabilities. There is much hype about the digital enhancement of diplomacy, what is now defined as “Digital Diplomacy.” It has given birth to dialogues and offers opportunities for engagement with diasporas and foreign publics. Following the revolution, the Indian government realized the importance of diaspora diplomacy and digital connectivity in the 21st century. From handling social media platforms to creating the official @MEAIndia, the government has expanded its digital footprint towards diplomacy or, more appropriately, public diplomacy. The Ministry of External Affairs official website mentioned that “@MEAIndia has enthusiastically embraced the social media sphere and persistently perseveres to enlarge its footprint in the new realm of diplomacy” (MEA’s Digital Diplomacy Footprint, n.d.). This digital advancement has also led to the invention of social activism. Today, this Online activism has brought many social and political changes through interconnected groups and networks. Allowing large groups of people to easily link one another, exchange content, and coordinate acts, in turn, aiding the ability to create an effective political movement. The materials used in one country are not necessarily those used in another. This is an example of how the interaction of

economic, social, and political factors in infrastructure leads to different digital activism outcomes (Shah et al., 296).

Considering the vital roles played by the Indian diaspora in intensifying the diplomatic and digital process, this paper seeks to find the Online activism of the Indian diaspora and its role in reconstructing the expression of nation branding and effectively utilizing the soft power capabilities of India. The connection of the Indian diaspora concerning Online activism is specified with a terminology called “Digital Diaspora.” As a result, “digital diaspora re-creates identities, share opportunities, spread their culture, influence homeland and host land policy, or create debate about common interest, issues by means of electronic devices.” (Soni & Sahoo 68). The paper explores the digital networks of the Indian diaspora by keeping three variables, which are the pillars of soft power – Political Values, Culture, and foreign policy. These factors inevitably determine the strategies for advocacy in building alliances, mobilizing resources, and specifying a distinct position in international relations.

Online activism becomes integral to the diasporic identity within everyday cultural and political life. India exerts a profound influence over the NRI (Non-Resident Indian) community, compelling them to maintain loyalty and adherence to cultural traditions despite their geographical displacement and detachment from direct national bonds. Though physically distant, they are not free from the gaze of surveillance or the weight of remote duties. Ponzanesi (2020) claims that “the media actually reinforce the long arm of diaspora through practices and connectivity with the homeland that were not possible before.” (Hegde 2016). This paper constructs a framework of the following three variables to understand the underlying matrix of diasporic communities in achieving India’s unforeseeable success in public diplomacy and soft power. “As a leading source of professionals for developed nations, India has prompted a shift in perspective. A negative ‘Brain Drain’ view is now seen as an opportunity with the Indian Diaspora offering potential benefits, turning migration into ‘Brain Gain’” (Khadria, n.d.). In addition, the paper investigates the motivations underlying the online activism of the Indian diaspora, exploring the driving forces behind this activism and its potential connections to

India's soft power, as well as its influence, if any, on the country's foreign policy strategies.

Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework attempts to analyse Nye's conception of Soft Power and its three pillars and also discusses other scholars who have built upon and substantiate Nye's concept of soft power. An alternative tradition of power based on military and economic might often referred to as 'hard power' was replaced in the late 20th century when Joseph Nye introduced the concept of 'soft power'. Soft power according to Nye is the ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or force. It is grounded in the capacity of a country to shape the preferences of others through its appeal in three intangible assets: Political values, Culture, and Foreign Policy that is viewed as legitimate or morally authoritative (Nye, 2008).

As a core pillar of soft power, political values reflect a nation's system of governance, institutions and ideologies. Democratic societies exercise their soft power capacity mainly by promoting human rights values, the rule of law and political freedom. A country's stance as a global superpower is influenced when its political values are seen as legitimate and attractive by others. A nation's attractiveness, as argued by Nye in the domain of political values, is its ability to live up to its ideals. "Robert Cox argued that nineteenth-century Pax Britannica and the twentieth-century Pax Americana were effective because they created liberal international economic orders, in which certain types of economic relations were privileged over others and liberal international rules and institutions were broadly accepted." (Nye 1990). Similarly, Melissen discusses the importance of credibility in political values and the connection between soft power and public diplomacy. He emphasizes that the credibility of political values is crucial in maintaining a country's soft power and for winning international trust.

Online Activism of Indian Diaspora and Soft Power

"Digital Activism refers to the goal of social or political change that uses digital technology" (Joyce 2). Digital media is an effective communication tool for activism because it can be used for connection, interaction, and mobilization

(Suwana 2020). The media occasionally takes an active role in covering socially relevant stories, known as media activism. This can generate public support for issues that may not otherwise receive sufficient attention from other social institutions. The emergence of new social media and the internet has provided citizens with platforms to voice concerns on pertinent matters. The new media offers a platform where geographically and temporally dispersed individuals can discuss socially relevant topics, fostering a consensus through rational and critical deliberations. This reflects the concept of the public sphere as articulated by Jürgen Habermas (Habermas et al., 1974).

Social media platforms can serve as forums for collective action and dissent. Such platforms can shape public discourse and opinion formation. Prominent individuals can use these platforms to express their thoughts, opinions, and reactions, which their followers may amplify. Online activism can function as a form of social oversight, enabling people to live-stream instances of corruption and mistreatment. This allows for the amplification of marginalized voices. The success of Online activism stems from technology's capacity to cultivate connections among young individuals. This enables them to establish online communities and discover like-minded peers who share their enthusiasm for change. Social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, function as virtual meeting spaces where passionate young minds convene. Two key factors influence the degree to which individuals can engage in digital activism: motivation and resources. Motivation encompasses the individual's access to the internet, ability to utilize it effectively, confidence and familiarity with online communication, and open-mindedness toward the democratic process (Norris 22).

Indian Diaspora's motivation behind Online activism can be attributed to their strong desire to maintain ties with their homeland and contribute to its development. Indian diaspora uses the internet to build identity and establish community. We live in a world where most people are online, and with the help of digital activism, people "can mobilize a large number of people within minutes, far quicker than offline activism. It also fosters an interactive approach, where diverse groups of people can participate through online blogs, petitions, and articles while

connecting with other (Jain 2020). Many Indians residing abroad have succeeded and endeavored to contribute to developing their local communities. These overseas Indians are proponents of the Vedic Indian philosophical concept of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.' They have embraced this philosophy and actively work to foster greater interconnectedness. The Indian diaspora community has started using media platforms. These digital and print platforms reflect immigrants' unique experiences, interests, and concerns. They stay connected to their cultural roots through culture, lifestyle, immigration, and community news.

The younger generation in the Indian diasporic community become more active and vocal about representation, social justice, and diversity. Social activism and representation within the media have seen an upsurge after 2014. To address the concerns regarding these issues, social media campaigns, discussions, and content creation have been utilized by the Indian diaspora a lot (Kumar et al., 2023). Indian Diasporic communities thus engage in media activism in three key ways: Firstly, they express their experiences and opinions. Second, to provide support and organize activities; third, to involve others outside their online community to negotiate new shared realities collectively.

A prominent tool for soft power introduced by internet technology is social media. Soft Power is often referred to as the second power source and media as the fourth pillar; in this way, social media represents a new and potent means of mass communication. The information, content, and opinions spread through social media are cheap and faster, influencing and shaping public opinion and information dissemination (Mavrodieva et al., 2019). Ong (2006) called it the 'Cyberpublic of Communal belonging'. Digital technologies grant elite expatriates new power beyond traditional long-distance nationalism. Through websites, chat rooms, and member lists, they shape the experiences of coethnics, reviving cultural memories and fostering communal belonging while inciting shared emotions like rage and suffering in a cyberpublic.

The Indian Diaspora's online activism contributes significantly to its soft power and impacts foreign policy in many ways. The presence of diaspora members on social media through blogs and other digital outlets contributes greatly to

enhancing advocacy and political commentary to promote Indian culture, values, and strategic interests all over the globe. Activism reinforces India's growing position as a global influencer and as a democratic and pluralistic society. Diaspora's activism helps align India's foreign policy goals, such as improving relations with the host countries, countering unfavourable narratives, and supporting economic and cultural diplomacy. Diaspora presence over social media is a powerful tool for soft power, aiding both grassroots and high-level diplomacy, strengthening India's global standing, and shaping its bilateral and multilateral ties with other nations.

The Three Pillars of Soft Power in Activism of Indian Diaspora

1. Political Values

It requires a long time to form political values in which education, class, castes, religious and personal experiences, values, and history play a significant role in forming outcomes and opinions. Debates, discussions, newspapers, films, and national and international events influence them. The cost-effectiveness of new media enabled these processes to seize upon the opportunity and connect globally to re-envision the social, cultural, and religious parts and future of online diasporic communities. Indian diaspora division on caste, religion, and language is deeply rooted, and so are their political identities and arrangement of needs with different political powers. This also becomes possible due to new media technologies, which help them be active with different diasporic communities on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and participate in Indian politics. Campaigns, canvassing, collecting funds, and mobilizing public opinion become easy with these platforms to favour the political parties of their choice.

2. Culture

The period of post-humanism encouraged Indian diasporic communities to articulate and construct social identities and relations. Online representation has not only enabled the formation of identities but has also provided inclusivity and political activism. Indian media simplifies the complexities and diversity of Indian society, fostering a positive national identity. The diverse media and communication technologies used by the diaspora play a crucial role in shaping diasporic identities

while maintaining networks and connections, supporting the global Indian community and its cohesion. Various online spaces and social networking sites create social groupings and long-distance nationalism. Internet sites like www.indernet.net, 'Indian in London Community,' and 'www.soc.culture' on Orkut promote cultural elements crucial for India's political image. Usually, the main tasks that national governments should accomplish in virtual communities are to affirm cultural distinctiveness and provide myriad initiatives focused on conserving cultural heritage. Therefore, the cultural stories shared on such websites usually refer to themes that describe cultural uniqueness, integrity, cohesion, and a set of very deep, old traditions.

"Generally speaking, these sites tend to be very comprehensive and educative and usually provide retrievable archives containing extensive information on all the aspects of their culture." (Diamantaki 6). Gautam (2013) emphasized on a German language cyber platform active since 2000, the website 'www.theinder.net' also referred to as the 'Indian Online Community' presented India through its political, geographical and cultural aspects. The site mainly addresses issues related to India for younger generations in the digital space. The political lenses reflect the current status of India in South Asia and cultural aspect encompasses religion, culture, philosophies, language and traditions emphasizing the continuity of Indian culture from historical to modern times. The website theinder.net is active in 2024 and is represented on its frontpage as "the India portal for Germany for almost 25 years," thus re-establishing itself as the major NRI portal of Germany. The social media network is low-key with 3,065 followers on Facebook, 160 on Instagram, 13 on X (formerly Twitter), and 136 YouTube subscribers. Although these numbers are quite low, the portal seems to serve mainly the Indian diaspora living in Germany (Theinder.Net, 2024).

Similarly, the IIL Community, based in London, was an online community in Orkut. The creators of this community defined themselves under the 'culture and community' category on Orkut (Goswami, 2010). The internet is reshaping religious perceptions by providing a platform for individuals to re-engage with authentic religious experiences. For the Indian diaspora, online religious practices create a

"third space," facilitating the reconnection with their cultural and spiritual roots. The public and private space of the Indian diaspora is conscious of their cultural heritage. When focusing on the medium specificity and variations in the use of social media to promote culture, it has shifted from websites representing culture to social networking sites like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc. Advances in technology ensure that the Indian diaspora now upholds their identity in culture, even as distance no longer poses as a serious barrier. There are many Indian cultural groups abroad which represent this sense of connection; some are Amazing Indian Diaspora, Pratibimb and Tamil Cultural Association. Others include websites like www.Indianartsandculture.org, www.Indiaculture.net, www.Indiaculture.nic.in, www.saigan.com/heritage, www.culturepedia.com, and www.bestIndiansites.com/culture, which can be said to represent Indian culture internationally (S., 2013).

Instagram nowadays has become a platform that shares content about different diasporic lives and their stories. Reels, hashtags, and pictures assimilate the diasporic communities with their homeland. "The descendants of indentureship are very active as content creators and as audiences. Accounts like @Jhajeesters @thebgdiaries regularly hold events and post about social issues regarding the indenture diaspora" (GANGULY, 2021). The networked diaspora operates at the household, ethnic, and global levels. Household-level social networks revolve around places of worship, ethnic shopping, and family gatherings, while community networks form around shared interests. New communication technologies have simplified networking at both levels and have enabled the rise of Pan-Indian Associations representing India's public image globally" (Raj, 2013).

3. Foreign Policy

In terms of diasporic communities promoting foreign policy objectives through online spaces, there is not much literature available, but in terms of the Indian government reaching out to its diaspora aspiring through projects like Digital India, there are plenty of scopes. Likewise, ICCR and ICWA have a significant role in establishing good cultural and foreign relations. Recently, the launch of websites of the 17th Pravasi Bhartiya Divas Convention is a prominent step towards the

commitment of India to promoting the Digital India Program. S. Jaishankar said – Indian diaspora engagement is the Indian government’s top priority. He stressed the basic principles of the Indian government’s engagement policy, which are the 4C’s- care, connect, celebrate, and contribute. At the convention, people would be able to know the diaspora’s contribution to India’s freedom struggle through the digital exhibition (thelivemint.com, 2022).

In a similar manner, the opening of the ‘Madad Portal’ and ‘Know India Program’ also indicate the government’s top priorities towards its home-away community. Government has started Madad Portal for online lodging of grievances of emigrants. Programs like ‘Bharat ko Janiye’ to help the Indians living abroad learn about India and also an opportunity to visit India (Manivasakan 2020). During the COVID pandemic, social media has been an absolute game changer, and India’s diaspora diplomacy, which has proved to be an instrument in accelerating the country’s national security, provides an impetus to leverage influence and mediation. The help of the Indian diaspora in the USA led to the mobilization of resources and local aid.

Social media news feeds during the COVID-19 pandemic played a crucial role in facilitating supply chains and addressing the needs of the Indian population. The Indian diaspora actively participated in these efforts, providing support through donations, fundraising, and resource mobilization to bridge gaps in essential supplies and financial aid. It particularly brought into light the recognition of the transnational communities as critical players in crisis management and the weaknesses of the Indian government’s capacity to cope effectively with the growing crisis presented by the pandemic. “In fact, during the second wave of COVID-19, social media activity became one of the main sources of intelligence regarding sustaining supply deficits such as hospital beds, ventilators, oxygen cylinders and medicine, despite sporadic media shutdowns, sustaining medical infrastructure” (Jindal et al., 93).

In 2007, as a part of public diplomacy targeting the Indian diaspora, India set up the website ‘The Overseas Indian Facilitation Centre.’ This site embraces the Indian government’s digital communication efforts. The OIFC website demonstrates

initiatives promoting brain circulation, with twelve Indian states collaborating to offer services that help diaspora members establish projects in sectors like infrastructure, agriculture, and energy. Furthermore, The OIFC is connected to Global Ink, a network that allows the expertise of the Indian diaspora and professionals worldwide in such realms as environment, health, and science without their having to physically return to India (Murti & Zaharna 2014). India's foreign policy reflected a trend of smart power policy, which is a balancing view of combining hard and soft power. The diaspora's activism is primarily focused on soft power, which includes promoting culture, political ideologies, enhancement of science and technologies, etc., in the online world. All these domains together constitute the ultimate advancement of India's foreign policy.

Conclusion

Online activism is barely a couple of years young in India and the seamless internet connectivity has opened new avenues beyond physical boundaries. The activism of the Indian diaspora on digital platforms has also provided a road map to the state's diplomatic proficiency and a drive to advance its national interest. "India's Ministry of External Affairs has determined to promote a 'soft power matrix' to measure the effectiveness of the country's soft power outreach" (Amareesh 2021). This paper's three components of soft power dealt with – Culture, Political values, and Foreign Policy- have attracted many more channels to implement soft power.

Works Cited

- Daniel, Y. R., & Mathew, A. J. (n.d.). Emerging Digital Media and Youth: Activism in Kashmir and the North East [Research]. CCYSC, 2024.
- Ganguly, A. (2021, June 23). Instagram: A new identity for the descendants of indentureship [Migration and Im (Mobility) magazine]. Routed Magazine.
- Gautam, Dr. M. K. (2013). Indian Diaspora: Ethnicity and Diasporic Identity (Thematic Report CARIM-India RR2013/29; CARIM-India Developing a Knowledge Base for Policymaking on India-EU Migration, p. 40).

- Goswami, S. (2010). Indian Diaspora's Use of Social Networking Sites for Identity Construction and Community Building the case of Indians in London (IIL) Community on Orkut [Roskilde University].
- Goyal, K., & Vajid, A. (2017). The Role of Diaspora in Strengthening Relations between Host and Home Country. (A Case Study of Indian Diaspora in UAE). *Pacific Business Review International*, 10(1), 114–120.
- Habermas, J., Lennox, S., & Lennox, F. (1974). The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964). *New German Critique*, 3, 49–55.
- Jain, S. (2020). The Rising Fourth Wave: Feminist Activism on Digital Platforms in India. *Observer Research Foundation*, 384, 1–15.
- Jindal, R. M., Baines, L. S., & Mehjabeen, D. (2023). Reimagining diaspora diplomacy during the COVID-19 crisis in India. *International Health*, 15(1), 93–100. <https://doi.org/10.1093/inthealth/ihac019>
- Joyce, M. (Ed.). (2010). Introduction: How to Think About Digital Activism. In *Digital Activism Decoded: The New Mechanics of Change* (pp. 1–14). international debate education association.
- Khadria, B. (n.d.). Indian Diaspora in International Relations: 'Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy', or A 'Great Off-White Hope' of the New Century? Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi. Retrieved 17 September 2024.
- Kumar, R., Fernandes, M., & Goswami, V. (2023). Exploring Diaspora Identities and Media Consumption among Indian Immigrants in the United States. *Stallion Journal for Multidisciplinary Associated Research Studies*, 2, 1–7.
- Livemint, T. (2022, October 13). Engagement with Indian diaspora is govt's top priority: Jaishankar | Today News. Mint.
- Mavrodieva, A. V., Rachman, O. K., Harahap, V. B., & Shaw, R. (2019). Role of Social Media as a Soft Power Tool in Raising Public Awareness and Engagement in Addressing Climate Change. *Climate*, 7(10), Article 10.
- MEA's Digital Diplomacy Footprint. (n.d.). https://fsi.mea.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/29120_MEAs_Digital_Diplomacy_Footprint.pdf

- Melissen, J. (2005, May). *Wielding Soft Power: The New Public Diplomacy*. Clingendael Diplomacy Papers No. 2.
- Murti, B., & Zaharna, R. S. (2014). India's Digital Diaspora Diplomacy: Operationalizing Collaborative Public Diplomacy Strategies for Social Media. *Exchange: The Journal of Public Diplomacy*, 5(1), 24.
- Nanda, P. K. (2020, February 23). Political influence of Indian diaspora in focus. Mint. <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/political-influence-of-indian-diaspora-in-focus-11582478737611.html>
- Norris, P. (2001). Digital Divide. In *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide* (Vol. 2, p. 22). Cambridge University Press.
- Nye, J. S. (1990). Power Transitions. In *Bound To Lead: The Changing Nature Of American Power*. Basic Books.
- Nye, J. S. (2008). Public Diplomacy and Soft Power. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616, 94–109.
- Pande, A. (2013). Conceptualising Indian Diaspora: Diversities within a Common Identity. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48(49), 59–65.
- Papaioannou, K. (2018). A Theoretical Approach to the Terms of Cultural Policy and Cultural Diplomacy as Pillars of 'Soft Power'. *IJASOS- International E-Journal of Advances in Social Sciences*, 4(11), Article 11, 503-506.
- Ponzanesi, S. (2020). Digital Diasporas: Postcoloniality, Media and Affect. *Interventions*, 22(8), 977–993.
- Shah, V., Sivitanides, M., & Mehta, M. (2013). The era of digital activism. *International Journal of Information Technology, Communications and Convergence*, 2(4), 295. <https://doi.org/10.1504/ijitcc.2013.059409>
- Soni, V. K., & Sahoo, S. (2021). Digital Activism for Homeland: Social Media, Politics and the Indian Diaspora. *IIS.UNI.Journal of Arts*, 10(1), 67–78.
- Suwana, F. (2020). What motivates digital activism? The case of the Save KPK movement in Indonesia. *Information, Communication & Society*, 23(9), 1295–1310.

ARTIFICIAL FRIEND, CARE, AND COMPANIONSHIP: EXPLORING THE POSTHUMAN DILEMMA IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *KLARA AND THE SUN*

Piyush Kumar

Research Scholar, Department of English and Foreign Languages,
Central University of South Bihar, Gaya.

Abstract

The urge to understand the Posthuman and the new journeys of humans as a species comes with the development of artificial intelligence. Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021) is a novel about the protagonist, Klara, an artificial friend created to care for and provide companionship to lonely teenagers. The story is centred on whether a humanoid could acquire a self-identity and flourish among humans. This paper interrogates the proposition of posthuman caregiving and companionship and its effect on human civilisation. It examines the subject of artificial beings as friends, caregivers, and companions. It also focuses on the human-robot relationship in a posthuman society and whether such fictional scenarios are only limited to fiction and imagination or will become real issues in the future.

Keywords: Humanoid, Artificial Friend, Posthuman Care, Companionship, Genetic Editing, Genetic Enhancement, and Science Fiction.

Is there a possibility for humans to enter a world of cordial and loving relationships with humanoids? It is a complex investigation to come to any conclusion with complex, challenging, and controversial answers. Can humans feel emotions for the artificial being and be empathetic towards them, and can they reciprocate for us? The more one delves into answering such fascinating and curious questions, the more complicated it gets. What would be the moral standpoint of a humanoid? Would they attain intellect and human-like behaviours, or would one become more mechanical? In the novel *Klara and the Sun*, Ishiguro raises the question of the relationship between humans and humanoids and the disposition of the emotional bond between the two beings or the species.

Ishiguro sets his story in an unknown future. It is a first-person narrative told from the viewpoint of Klara, a humanoid robot called an AF, which means Artificial Friend. One recognises the world from her limited perspective and observation; therefore, it does not reflect the whole scenario and condition of the fictionalised world. In this fictional world, AF, like Klara, is created to provide companionship to sick and lonely teenagers. Klara becomes the AF to a girl named Josie. Klara's only duty is to prevent loneliness and give care to Josie. What led to the loneliness of the children is unknown. Still, another biotechnological transgression of radical enhancement, referred to as 'genetic editing' in the text, occurs in the background in which children are genetically enhanced to be more intelligent and competent. Those who are enhanced are called 'lifted', the term used in the novel. It is not mentioned in the story, but one can only guess that Josie's sickness emerged from the process of lifting, which is potentially risky.

Earlier, Josie's sister Sal also died, probably because the genetic enhancement did not work. Klara has the potential to create a relationship with humans. Ray Kurzweil writes that the way artificial intelligence is emerging will soon become a lifeform (20). Some could agree with the speculation, and others might not; however, it cannot be ignored. Ishiguro seems to belong to the former category. He created Klara's character, which was designed to observe and understand human loneliness. Klara is shown in the beginning through her observations and her comprehension of the environment. She notices, deciphers, and interprets the subtle variations of her surroundings. Her character gives the posthuman perspective because though her status is of an artificial friend, she provides the readers with an uncanny way of existing in the human world and reflects the more than human way of relationship.

Klara is curious and empathetic toward the world of humans. She always tries to understand what is going on inside the minds of others and comprehends their pain and suffering. She thinks it is her sole duty to make other people happy. The novel is about the companion and caregiving humanoid leading to the emergence of social robots. The novel delves deeper into the thought process of Josie's mother, who is so hopeless about her daughter's survival that she wants

Klara to continue as Josie and, therefore, wants her to learn, understand, and imitate Josie's mannerisms. So, Klara could be embodied in a synthetically made replica or clone of Josie. However, Klara's perception of the world is sometimes fascinating and odd. It turned out that Klara started praying for Josie's good health and recovery and somehow began to have faith and a spiritual sense. She worships the sun because she runs on solar; according to her, the sun nourishes her existence. In Ishiguro's novel, the dividing line between humans and humanoids is blurred, aligning with the idea of Amelia Defalco's "curious kin" (3).

The idea draws toward producing social and cultural alliances created through fictional narratives. In such narratives, a dynamic model of the relationship between humans and nonhuman or artificial beings exists. According to Defalco, the relationship between humans and artificial beings regarding care and companionship is increasing. Therefore, she views the "notion of humanity itself as profoundly unstable, a cultural paradigm rather than a natural truth" (6). This perspective reflects the expansive assumptions of the coexistence and entanglement of humans and robots as interdependent beings. In *Klara and the Sun*, Ishiguro seems to respond to some posthuman dilemmas of defining humans, whether AI will replace humans, can humanoids entirely acquire essential human traits, and whether AI can be conscious and become spiritual.

The novel demonstrates how the intimacy of human/ machine care relationships can contribute to posthumanist insights into the illusion of human exceptionalism. It offers the fundamental anxieties caregiving robots incite and imagines the provocative posthumanist critique of human exceptionalism and trespasses the boundaries between humans and machines. It tells a story in which human interaction is no longer a primary feature of children, and therefore, the development of artificial friends and new care relations emerges. There is explosive growth in the application of contemporary robotics to caregiving, including nursing care robots, therapeutic robots, companion robots, and assistive social robots, and it raises questions about the future of care. Kate Darling writes about a real example of a companion and caring robot, "Paro" (137).

Throughout the story, Klara projects several signs of caring, empathy and understanding that are essentially attributed to humans. Klara differs from our real-world and highly speculated artificial general intelligence. She is not all-knowing and is not connected to databases where all knowledge of human civilisation has been stored. What she possesses instead is the exquisite power of empathy and friendly nature. Her service to humanity is the driving force. Klara's character forces us to rethink selfhood, value, and gesture toward the post-anthropocentric notion of empathy. This corresponded to Donna Haraway's idea of "bounded individualism" that cast intersubjectivity, relationality, and more dynamic models of selfhood (18). Such accounts reject the hierarchical model of cross-species interaction and ethical values. Instead, they focus on embodying shared experiences and an expanded notion of care.

While emphasising the posthuman character Klara, her relationship with the human character Josie, and how Josie treats her, Ishiguro embraces the path of empathy beyond humans- an "entangled empathy" proposed by Lori Gruen. Gruen's concept of 'entangled empathy' is built on the cross-species potential of care ethics to describe an experiential process involving a blend of emotion and cognition in which one recognises one is in relationships with others and are called upon to be responsive and responsible in these relationships (43). The novel not only influences the apprehension of humanoids but plays a crucial role in shaping the development of social robots. Klara's learning abilities make her more human; how she acquires knowledge and understanding of human society and culture is commendable. When someone asks her about her ability to feel, Klara replies, "I believe I have many feelings. The more I observe, the more feelings become available to me" (98). This statement from Klara seems to deconstruct the dominant status of humanism in the shade of posthuman transformation.

As Katherine Hayle points out, "In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals" (84). The novel emphasises the significance of the representation of Klara as a companion and caregiving humanoid. It describes a scenario that is called

“robotic moment” in the words of Sherry Turkle. As Turkle explains, “I find people to seriously consider robots not only as pets but as potential friends, confidants, and even romantic partners. We don’t seem to care what these artificial intelligences ‘know’ or ‘understand’ of the human moments we might ‘share’ with them. At the robotic moment, the connection's performance seems connected enough” (9).

Human care and friendship are considered genuine care and companionship, but what happens when care from humans is shifted to posthuman care? According to critical post-humanist thinking, it has moved beyond human exceptionalism and focus on the potential of posthuman care and companionship. Amelia Defalco, in her essay “Toward a Theory of Posthuman Care: Real Humans and Caring Robots”, writes, “By claiming that good care is human care, one is tacitly assuming the transparency of the category human. Who counts as human, who deserves to give and receive care, and how, are not ethical questions, but political, economic, and ontological questions” (5). The representation of Klara in the novel, which imagines humanoid care, helps us think about the ethics, aesthetics, and politics of posthuman care.

The novel provokes compelling questions about care and companionship in the posthuman world, representing and invoking fears of a humanoid being and the collapse of human exceptionalism. According to Hampton, a time will come in the future when robots can be created in a way that they could mimic human behaviours, and it will lead society to change and evolve to the next level or structure to regulate our existence, and the robots would not be called lifeless anymore (36). Human and humanoid relationships in *Klara and the Sun* help the readers understand posthuman companionship and care. Klara is an extraordinary example of the combination of social and domestic robots. The way she is devoted to fulfilling her duty is to be with Josie, take care of her, and prevent her loneliness. At a certain level, there is a hierarchy, and she is just a slave to her human master, even though Josie sees her as a friend and equal to her status.

Klara is perhaps the most compassionate character in the novel. Amelia Defalco writes, “Posthuman relationships evoke a future in which humans could be dependent not on one another, but on robots or other nonhuman entities” (4). The

speculative representation of Klara makes us rethink the ontological assumptions of posthuman affective relations. Ishiguro demonstrates how the intimacy of human-machine care and friendship gives post-humanist insights and offers a critique of human exceptionalism and the fear of losing human essence that trespasses the frontiers of humans and machines. In the novel, Klara is a machine, but something is there, like human sentiment and emotions. Klara felt content when Josie's mother complimented her and said, "Josie is so much calmer, so much more cheerful since you got here. You are doing very well, Klara. I want you to know that". Here, the post-human world seems divided in its concern for human essence. On one hand, there are people like Josie's mother who is satisfied and happy with Klara's performance. On the other hand, there is a section of people apprehensive about the humanoid performing so well as to replace the human. In one instance, the scientist Mr Capaldi says to Klara:

The fact is there is growing and widespread concern about AFs right now. People are saying how you've become too clever. They are afraid because they can't follow what's happening inside anymore. They can see what you do. They accept that your decisions and recommendations are sound, dependable, and almost always correct. But they don't like not knowing how you arrive at them. That's where it comes from, this backlash, this prejudice. (297)

So, the novel's central question is: what happens when one treats machines like people and people like machines, and what happens when one can't tell the difference?

Concerns about relationships and identities that appear to transgress species boundaries raise the spectre of the posthuman, destabilising intimacies that cast doubt on the condition of humans. As Donna Haraway indicates in *The Companion Species Manifesto*, "Cyborgs and companion species each bring together the human and nonhuman" (4). At the same time, robotic care comes with underlying anxieties about the blurring and crumbling boundaries between humans and machines. Therapeutic or social robots are unsettling to many ethicists, philosophers, and healthcare workers for their capability to replace human caregivers. As Linda and

Robert Sparrow point out, “It is naïve to think that the development of robots to take over tasks currently performed by humans in caring roles would not lead to a reduction of human contact for those people being cared for” (152). Indeed, robots might alleviate the burden and strain of caregiving but raise an equal chance of danger that such technologies will reduce or eliminate human contact in vulnerable communities, particularly older people and children.

In the novel, one sees that the contact and interaction between humans have so much reduced that artificial friends are used for companionship. On the other hand, while referring to Aronson, Defalco writes, “kind and competent human caregiver might be preferable to a robot, but caregiving robots are better than the unreliable or abusive person or no one at all” (10). Real companion robots like Paro and fictional companion robots like Klara “appeal to the desire for affective reciprocity, fabricating a relationship in which users can simultaneously receive and give care” (10). Klara usurps as Defalco believes “what many assume are exclusively human prerogatives of caregiving- affection, intimacy, even love, and prayers destabilising the humanistic models of care that privilege human-to-human relations as uniquely authentic and meaningful” (10). Rosi Braidotti draws attention to the “transversal” interconnections that produce the posthuman subject as “an expanded relational self” (60). Defalco also goes back to Katherine Hayles, Donna Haraway, and Rosi Braidotti contend that “the non-human is always already incorporated in the human and that we are as a result already posthuman complicating the ontological panic that human-machine relationships often provoke” (14). In the case of Klara, she is more concerned about the health, safety, and survival of her human companion, Josie, and even becomes spiritual, a revelation that disturbs the readers and makes one curious. Despite her artificiality, Klara is nonetheless embodied and socially embedded. Her material presence is integral to her caregiving role.

Everyone knows about the long tradition of science fiction literature since the times of *Frankenstein* with posthuman themes. Still, this new way of looking at the future has recently become prominent. Most 20th century science fiction writers showed us a dark and horrific future where robots will overpower the human

species and probably make them extinct. This posthuman future, in which the humanoid starts to self-discover, contemplate their actions, and introspect to be more beneficial to humankind through love, care, and companionship, should be looked upon by everyone.

Works Cited

- Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. 1st ed., Polity, 2013.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *More Posthuman Glossary*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2023.
- Brooks, Rodney A. *Flesh and Machines: How Robots Will Change Us*. 2002, ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA63374042.
- Čapek, Karel. *R.U.R - Rossum's Universal Robots*. 2015, preprints.readingroo.ms/RUR/rur.pdf.
- Darling, Kate. *The New Breed: How To Think About Robots*. Allen Lane, an Imprint of Penguin Books, 2021.
- DeFalco, Amelia. "Beyond prosthetic memory." *Age, Culture, Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 3, 2018, pp. 01–31.
- DeFalco, Amelia. "Towards a theory of posthuman care: Real humans and caring robots." *Body & Society*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2020, pp. 31–60, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034x20917450>.
- Defalco, Amelia. *Curious Kin in Fictions of Posthuman Care*. Oxford University Press, 2023
- Gruen, Lori. *Entangled Empathy: An Alternative Ethic for Our Relationships with Animals*. Lantern Books, a Division of Booklight Inc., 2015.
- Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Prickly Paradigm Press, 2020.
- Hayles, Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. 1st ed., University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Ishiguro, Kazuo. *Klara and the Sun*. Faber and Faber, 2021.
- Kurzweil, Ray. "The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence." *Viking Press eBooks*, 1998, ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA50359545.
- Mori, Masahiro. *The Buddha in the Robot*. Original ed., Kosei Publishing Company, 1989.

UNEVOLVED MAHATMA: A STUDY OF SELECT INDIAN FILMS

Revathy S Mohan

Research Scholar of English, TKM College of Arts and Science, Kollam.

Abstract

Gandhi's life has been re-interpreted and retold from different perspectives from the bygone days. His demise does not even end his relevance and he is kept alive through speeches, debates, studies etc. either with admiration or with hatred. Thus, it is relevant to analyse the portrayal of the life of Gandhi to re-draw his image as conceived in Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi*, Feroz Abbas Khan's *Gandhi My Father* and Jayan K Cheriyan's *Papilio Budha*.

Keywords: Movies, Mahatma, pro- Gandhi, anti- Gandhi and un- Mahatma.

Mahatma Gandhi is undoubtedly addressed as the crusader for civil rights and liberties. His successors continue to analyse him with love, adulation, hatred and even contempt all these ages, in accordance to their personal, cultural and historical background. Thus, the life of Gandhi obtains a new take on each attempt of interpretation. His celebrated life picture is inundated with faces such as mahatma, crook, paedophile, racist, deity layman and so on. Thus, even posthumously he can be considered the most happening personality.

Gandhi and cinema, both are inextricably entwined. As movies are the representing arts of this era, it is relevant to analyse Gandhi's portrayal in well – acclaimed movies with contrasting ideologies which includes Attenborough's *Gandhi* (1982), Feroz Abbaz Khan's *Gandhi, My Father* (2007) and Jayan Cherian's *Papilio Budha* (2013). These movies present three entirely different shades of Gandhi. These can be utilised as tools to inscribe the evolving picture of Gandhi. It is a necessity to provide a proper image to the father of our nation by analysing the impeccable idol, the ordinary human and the malevolent devil in Gandhi.

The accomplished film maker, Richard Attenborough, has succeeded in creating a spell by the release of his epic film *Gandhi*. It will never be an exaggeration, if one proclaims this biopic of Gandhi as the flawless and best version in the genre of Gandhi films or more precisely, pro-Gandhian films till date. The

epic period from 1893 to 1948, when Gandhian icon was treated as the moral, spiritual and political symbol of India, is shown conspicuously in *Gandhi* by Attenborough. The South African struggles of Gandhi, Champaran Satyagraha, Jalianwala Bagh Massacre, Partition of India and Sanguinary Rebellion are eternalised in this biographical movie of Gandhi.

A wicked pervert who performed the shameful act of lying nude with his grandnieces, a hypocrite who is a racist and a paedophile, a homosexual, an anti-Dalit, a patriarch, the designations bestowed to Gandhi are endless and these are the “un-Mahatma” features associated with *Bapu’s* name. The interesting fact regarding *Gandhi* is that this movie opposes all these accusations on Gandhi through subtle dialogues and movements. In this movie, Gandhi is a person or may be much more than a person, on whom the title of *Mahatma* seems to exist unproblematically and proudly because it has a justification for all acts of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Thus, Attenborough’s *Gandhi* is the reflection of the popular image of Gandhi who is the epitome of all virtues.

The film introduces Gandhi as a sage, whose demise is unendurable for the whole world, so that the entire humanity had convened to pay him tribute with tears in their eyes and prayers on their tongues. For the film maker, Gandhi is the man who conquered the soul of mankind with his altruism and sincerity. Allegations on Gandhi for his racist, anti-Dalit and anti-Muslim attitudes are destroyed in this movie: “There must be Hindu- Muslim unity always. I am a Muslim and Hindu and Christian and Jew and so as all of you” (*Gandhi*).

Attenborough’s *Gandhi* is adept in all religious ideologies, be it Christianity, Islam or Jewish. “I want to embarrass all those who wish to treat us like slaves. I want to change their mind, not to kill them for weaknesses we all possess” (*Gandhi*). Gandhi’s view of love as the subtlest force in this world is eulogised in this movie. One can also witness a Gandhi who treats everyone as equals sans disparities of vocations, class or race, when he offers tea to the driver of Walker, a journalist.

Gandhi is pictured as someone who lives a life of a common man. He becomes one among them to support them and understand their real dilemmas.

Whereas, his compatriots like Sardar Patel, Pandit Nehru, Mohammad Ali Jinnah are figured as residing sumptuously in their palatial houses never disowning their comfort zones. Through this, the director enhances the greatness of Gandhi which makes him efficient for the title *Mahatma*. Attenborough valorises Gandhi as a man freed from the evil called ego as he offers prime ministerial slot to Jinnah for the solidarity of his nation. “I am asking Panditji to stand down. I want you to be the first prime minister” (*Gandhi*).

The film deliberately or not, starkly replies those counter images that destruct the pious portrait of Gandhi. This movie has glorified the facts of Gandhi in a candid manner. Thus, Attenborough’s attempt is to establish and emphasise the Mahatma part of Gandhi in such a way to prove that there is only one Mahatma Gandhi in this world who is irreplaceable by any other personality.

Feroz Abbas Khan’s *Gandhi, My Father* is an attempt to tell the story of Gandhi and his son. The crux of the movie *Gandhi, My Father* is comprised in its tagline with limited but meaningful words, “One family’s tragedy was the price of a nation’s freedom”. The story mainly revolves around the lives of Harilal and his *Bapu*, who has later become the father of a nation. As Harilal Gandhi’s life is similar to a labyrinthine ladder, the film too is narrated with over dose of incidents shifting between nations and cities.

In the introduction scene, Gandhi’s son is depicted as an indigent, languished vagabond who has been taken to hospital by the authorities. The sentimental factor climbs to the peak when he says his father’s name as *Bapu* and the hospital employees reciprocates that *Bapu* is everyone’s father and that they need his real father’s name to enter in the records. This movie is the journey through the memories of dying Harilal Gandhi by employing flashback method. It is the tragic and heart wrenching story of a son who is at loggerheads with his father’s ideals and a patriotic father who considers his son his lost jewel, but his nation, his soul and spirit. Harilal Gandhi is not a weak person but the only son of Gandhi who has the courage to stand up against Mahatma Gandhi.

As Gandhi says in the movie “My son is brave. He makes no secret of his vice and his rebellion is an open rebellion” (*Gandhi, My Father*). There are several

factors that resulted to his downfall, but the major one is his persuasive nature. In his teenage days, Gandhi's family excluding Harilal is in South Africa for which Gandhi regrets later. Gandhi's intention behind leaving his son alone in India is to get him educated in his mother tongue. Before completing his studies, Harilal marries Gulab, going against the wish of Gandhi, who threatens to disown him initially, but later accepts him whole heartedly.

The rifts arise over different reasons. Gandhi's decision to send back Gulab and his daughter to India without asking Hari's opinion is the commencement of disparities between the Gandhi duo. This can be considered an event which inexplicitly shows Gandhi's wish for his son to be abstained from worldly pleasures. Gandhi provides Pranjivan bhai's exclusive personal scholarship, initially to his niece Changan Lal and then to Sarobjee, side-lining Harilal. Hari has moved far away from his father and his ideals. In Harilal's words "I have only received hard work and hard words, no love. My freedom is restricted by your ideals. I want to search my own path and identity. I am suffocated with Gandhi's dreams. I want to continue my education" (*Gandhi, My Father*). But Harilal had never succeeded in finding his own path.

Back in India, Harilal, the head of a family consisting of his wife and children is leading a life at the expense Gandhi provides him. He fails thrice in the exams. The disheartened Harilal announces publicly that "I am the good-for nothing son of Mahatma Gandhi. His surname is a burden for me. I am fed up of this identity. Gandhi's name is stamped on my face. I don't want to be his son." (*Gandhi, My Father*). All those prohibited acts which Gandhi despises like lustful acts, drinking, swindling and exhibiting an arrogant behaviour are a part and parcel of Harilal's life. He even goes to brothels for solace.

In the movie, *Gandhi, My Father* one can see Gandhi who is disheartened by his son's downfall. He is justified in the movie as a loving and attentive father who is presented as a sympathy evoking figure. All those criticisms on him as a patriarch who controls everyone under him are neglected. Gandhi's grey shades are smartly veiled by the film maker but Harilal's figure is visualised as a reprobate who is a failure in all roles of his life. This attempt is successful in demystifying the

mysterious camaraderie of father-son duo, though it deliberately masks Gandhi's drawbacks.

Untouchability is a disease that deteriorates and decays our nation. A film like *Papilio Buddha* has great social and political relevance. This is a pro-Dalit, pro-woman and pro-environmental film which captivates the spectator's attention towards the ordeals of Dalit-folk, especially in the remotest outskirts of Kerala. The whole movie is visualised in a picturesque fictional space called Meppara, a Dalit settlement. Titular 'Papilio Buddha' is an endangered species of butterfly which has no direct role in the theme but it can be compared to Dalits whose lives are jeopardised by the opulent elite. The Buddha in the name of the butterfly may have also inspired the maker as it deals with story which revolves around Dalits who adopt Buddhism as their last solace. Though the movie is abandoned by the normative governmental organisation, for its denigration of icons and stereotypes, it obtains a warm reception in the film festivals around the globe, especially outside India.

This directorial venture of Jayan. K. Cherian, *Papilio Buddha*, mirrors his iconoclasm. It involves queries which shatter the existing norms of our pseudo-democratic society. In the commencing part of the movie itself, one can observe the arrests of Dalit men as well as mistreating of their women, without a proper reason, by the authorities. Their land struggles are based on the teachings of Ambedkar, following non-violence.

District Collector, cops, Gandhi Seva Samithi, ministry, activists, media all are a few facets of privileged class where untouchables have no space to occupy. Their atrocities, griefs and even demise can only make a nullifying effect on the authority. The director claims that the movie is not anti-Gandhi but a counter narrative on Gandhian image. But the film fulminates on Gandhi in all probable ways. The elite activists ridicule him for being a homosexual, which points to Gandhi's, alleged sexual relation with Kallenbach. "I love Gandhi because he can fuck a man too" is the dialogue of an activist, who is a lesbian (*Papilio Buddha*). They went on mocking Gandhi by conveying that even his true lover is a Muslim.

Contradicting these elitist criticisms on his sexuality, Dalits' accusations on Gandhi are foregrounded upon his conniving plots which they consider a reason for their unprivileged lives deprived of even basic necessities. They announce in unison that "We are not anyone's *Harijans*" (*Papilio Buddha*). For them, Gandhi is a hypocrite who suppresses Dalits using *sanadhana dharma* and elitist Hindu ideology. Gandhi Seva Samithi and neo-Gandhians are attempting to conduct fasting in Meppara settlement. Ramdas is their leader who is the twenty first century reflection of Gandhi and his performing of fasts is compared to Sankaran by Gandhi's 1932 scheme of fasting to death, as observed by Ambedkar. Gandhi's 1932 attempt has denied separate electorates for Dalits. They have even garlanded Gandhi's effigy with chapels and incinerated it, accompanying with anti-Gandhi slogans. All these acts undoubtedly clarify their hatred for the *Mahatma* figure who is the worst soul for them.

Ambedkar and Ayyankali wae garlanded, considering the duo as their real leading power. In the final scene, the Dalits are proclaiming themselves as Buddhist followers. Buddhist verses and songs extolling Ambedkar are recited in parallel to *Raghu Pati Raghava Raja Ram* of the neo-Gandhians. The movie is anti-Gandhi in perception and it castigates Gandhi blatantly. The traumatised conditions are the repercussions of Gandhi's schemes and he is solely responsible for all these plights. The anti-Gandhian elements in *Papilio Buddha* reflect that the new millennium people, though a minority, are brave enough to unmask the divinity of Gandhi. In M. K. Gandhi's case, the praising of him as *Mahatma* is problematic and unsuitable. The problem lies with the epithet *Mahatma*. He is a philosopher, politician, freedom fighter and a humble human being but his many acts restrict people to address him as *Mahatma*.

Among these movies, *Gandhi* and *Gandhi, My Father* can be hailed as a celebration of Gandhi and his ideals. *Gandhi* and *Gandhi, My Father* are re-narrations of history in a subjective way. But *Papilio Buddha* voices the impact of Gandhi in this contemporary world. It blends in Gandhi and the present age. It breaks the image of the perfect Gandhi who was once being considered inviolable. *Gandhi* presents the great soul, the half-naked *fakir* image in awe- inspiring manner.

His evolution from a fallible normal man to the deity of Indians is narrated in this 1982 movie. *Gandhi, My Father* also lauds Gandhi as a lovable father who sidelined his personal relations for the nation's unity and prosperity. Both are Pro- Gandhian movies where Gandhi's life is glorified as pious and virtuous. Unlike them *Papilio Buddha* depicts Gandhi as a hypocrite who betrayed a whole community by leaving them deprived of basic essentials for life. This 2013 release is an Anti-Gandhi movie which desecrates the "Mahatma" element in Gandhi. The Gandhi of 20th century has evolved immensely. But the mankind is narrow- minded to accept that novelty with an unprejudiced mind.

Papilio Buddha is also the re- telling of the past events. But it is welcomed with a ban and rejection from all spheres except certain film festivals. The movie never reached the majority of the population. The element which benefits *Gandhi and Gandhi, My Father* is its glorification of Gandhianism which *Papilio Buddha* lacks. What the authority thinks as acceptable reaches the public. Thus, the likes and dislikes of people are determined by the monopolist authority that is severely normative. The rest is marginalised and censored. The anti-Gandhian factors are only discussed in academic circles but for the commoners, Gandhi continued to be a flawless idol. Thus, one cannot claim that the image of Gandhi has evolved notably, over these decades.

Though readings and interpretations on Gandhi is umpteen, they do not bring any change in the minds of the common people. Their perception of Gandhi is still that of a great soul who is an epitome of virtues and nobility. Thus, the popular image of Gandhi existing in this world is the 'Mahatma' image, and the attempts to unravel and shatter the divinity of Gandhi are often met with a lot of violence and protest.

Works Cited

Das, Surendra Lal. *Mahatma Gandhi and Untouchability: Since 1932*. S. K, 2009.

Gandhi, Mohandas K. *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Dover, 1998.

Gandhi. Directed by Richard Attenborough, Performances by Ben Kingsley, Candice Bergen, Edward Fox, Goldcrest Films, 1982.

Gandhi, My Father. Directed by Feroz Abbaz Khan, Performances by Akshay Khanna, Darshan Zariwala. Eros, 2007.

Hardiman, David. *Gandhi: In his Time and Ours*. Permanent Black, 2003.

Nanda, B. R. *Mahatma Gandhi: 125 Years, Remembering Gandhi, Understanding Gandhi, Relevance of Gandhi*. Willey Eastern, 1995.

Papilio Buddha. Dir. Jayan. K Cheriyan, Performances by Sreekumar, Kallen Pokkoodan, Saritha Sunil, Silicon, 2013.

Prasad, Ambika. *Gandhi: The Forgotten Mahatma*. Cyber Tech, 2012.

Roy, Ramashray. *Gandhi and Ambedkar: A Study in contrast*. Shipra, 2006.

SHAKESPEARE AND MACHIAVELLIANISM: EXPLORING MACHIAVELLIAN TACTICS IN SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDIES

¹ T K Kavya and ² Dr. B. Monika Nair

¹ Research Scholar, Department of English and Foreign Languages, SRM Institute of Science and Technology College of Engineering & Technology, Kattankulathur, Tamil Nadu.

² Assistant Professor, Department of English and Foreign Languages, SRM Institute of Science and Technology College of Engineering & Technology, Kattankulathur, Tamil Nadu.

Abstract

The study explores Machiavellian themes in Shakespeare's tragedies *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*, analysing power, ambition, and ethical degradation. The research examines Machiavellian political tactics, deception, and manipulation of Shakespearean characters through textual analysis. Richard III's ruthless ambition, Macbeth's descent into tyranny, and Iago's scheming exemplify Machiavellian principles. The findings reveal Shakespeare's deep engagement with power dynamics and moral corruption, contributing to ongoing scholarly discourse on political ambition in literature.

Keywords: Machiavellianism, Drama, Tragedy, Power and Deception.

One man in his time plays many parts.

— William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

One of the most acclaimed dramatists of all ages from the 16th century, William Shakespeare, is known for his diverse exploration of human conditions in his dramas, which still captivates audiences and scholars. His playwriting techniques encompass unparalleled storytelling and gripping command of language. Among his enormous literary works of dramas, poems, and sonnets, his tragedies stand out and take the spotlight for their impactful representation. The well-known English playwright, poet and actor William Shakespeare left an enduring legacy on the literary sphere through his exceptional control of unique dramatic language and storytelling. Shakespeare's tragedies take centre stage because they demonstrate intense

studies of humanity through severe explorations of human behaviour and circumstances.

The complex understanding of Machiavellianism combines pragmatic control with power realisation and ethical control-based approaches (Wiethoff). Numerous academic scholars have thoroughly researched Shakespeare's tragedy through diverse critical thematic and psychological approaches in their scholarly papers. The principal researcher, Watson, serves as the key element in the tragedy because his complete responsibility for destruction results from perfect observational abilities granted by absolute freedom of human autonomy. Lee states that the hero establishes the necessity of knowing and maintaining dignity during life's worst moments through his struggle against fate. According to current scholars, Shakespearean tragedies can only lead to tragic conclusions when the main characters recognise their duties.

Literature Review

The use of Machiavellianism theory in Shakespearean drama has received extensive scholarly attention from researchers. A scholarly work examines Faulkner's use of the "all-pervasive influence of the past, and past actions" by connecting Southern Gothic with *Macbeth* while exploring the regional aspects of Machiavellian themes. Griswold examines Shakespeare's transformation of source material that connects political actions to nonhuman natural powers which bring darkness to Scotland through Macbeth's traitorous violence. A source investigates the development of Machiavellianism by observing the "innumerable studies" conducted on this subject and the negative assessments directed toward Machiavelli's writings. According to this source, Machiavelli's ideas show more localised context dependency which emphasises the necessity of deeper analysis. The latest research on Machiavellianism presents a new extensive model that includes controlling power through demanding management styles and deceptive behavioural practices within professional environments. The enlarged system lends vital insight for researching Machiavellian aspects of Shakespeare's dramatic masterpieces.

Methodology

The research adopts a qualitative method to conduct textual analyses of Shakespearean dramas while reviewing scholarly documents related to Machiavellianism. This research mainly uses Shakespeare's theatre works as its principal documents to carefully evaluate characters and their motivating forces, and Shakespeare's dramatic methods which show Machiavellian themes. The analysis relies on secondary source materials consisting of scholarly academic journal articles alongside critical essays to obtain historical perspectives about Machiavellianism in addition to modern interpretations of literary expressions of this phenomenon.

Richard III: The Embodiment of Machiavellian Tactics

Richard III by Shakespeare is an enthralling depiction of how raw power corrupts individuals and drives them toward complete ethical collapse. As the Duke of Gloucester and the story's protagonist, Richard demonstrates multiple conflicting aspects that drive him to endless power-seeking status and brutal determination to be the king of England. The play evaluates the human pursuit of ambition by analysing Richard's cruel manipulations, which demonstrate that extreme people achieve power through unethical means that cause harm to others. The display of Richard's Machiavellian ways and his indifference to the impact of his actions is a warning about ambitious behaviour, which results in both loss of humanity and destructive power ambitions (Costa et al.).

Shakespeare's *Richard III* is a quintessential example of Machiavellian principles in action. Richard builds a path through deception, political assassination, and image management techniques throughout his quest to win the throne. The perception of Richard aligns more closely with Machiavellianism as the play continues because he demonstrates that power demands ruthless means to achieve desired objectives, according to Maritain.

Macbeth: Ambition and Manipulation in a Machiavellian Landscape

Through the tragic story of *Macbeth*, Shakespeare explores how ambition drives people to extreme actions and the emotional weight of guilt the choices generate. Throughout the play, *Macbeth* is the main character who

stands as a respected warrior, but the ambition and magical prophesies of the three witches drive him to commit murder. Shaline and Jockim in the paper titled " Literature and Digital Tools: An Exhaustive Study of the Themes, Stylistic Elements and Narrative Structure of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* " observes "Macbeth is over ambitious but this exceeding ambition is a result of his fate. His fate mingled with ambition makes him violent. In other words, fate is the cause and violence is the effect of the over- vaulting ambition of Macbeth" (326). Because of his reluctance and yearning for the throne, Macbeth allows his wife, Lady Macbeth, to push him toward killing the king, as shown in Costa et al. After Macbeth carries out the murder, he experiences a series of moral decline events, which ultimately results in psychological torment (Costa et al.); through exploring how guilt and power corrupt human nature, the play reveals an important lesson about how both mental well-being and values suffer when someone abandons his/her moral code. The complex relationships between Macbeth and his characters serve as power-based elements that the play demonstrates through its journey of tragic events (Costa et al.).

Through *Macbeth*, Shakespeare reveals how ambition heedlessly leads people into dark outcomes while Machiavellian thought patterns seep into everything. The main character follows his power hunger while his controlling wife, Lady Macbeth, guides him toward immoral acts that result in murdering King Duncan to seize the throne. When Macbeth becomes more powerful, he adopts Machiavellian strategies to survive and manage those around him until he dies.

Othello: Iago and the Quintessential Machiavellian Schemer

Othello represents Shakespeare's most famous tragic exploration of how jealousy destroys lives through distorted perceptions. Othello is the primary character throughout the piece since he represents a noble, respected Moor whose trust in Iago ultimately leads him to believe that Desdemona committed adultery. Through perfect manipulation of Othello's understanding, while Othello allows himself to doubt and fear, he experiences a tragic downfall that ends in Desdemona's murder and drives him to suicide. The

primary topic of the dramatic works focuses on analysing jealousy-based harm together with unstable social relations.

Throughout *Othello*, Iago displays a quintessential mark of a Machiavellian schemer. As Iago continues acting through envy and resentment, he gains power while consistently manipulating all surrounding characters, including the admirable Othello. Iago demonstrates the traits of Machiavellian villainy when he deceitfully manipulates information and disregards the welfare of other people, thus becoming one of Shakespeare's most terrifying antagonists.

Discussion

The main character of *Richard III* follows Machiavellian principles through his ruthless approaches coupled with intense ambition. (Wiethoff). Through the tragic plays *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*, Shakespeare delivers an intense study of Machiavellian principles regarding power-seeking and ethical degradation (Kessler et al.). The Machiavellian political style includes behaviour such as deceptive tactics, removing opposing leaders, and controlling how others view reality. Richard's actions in the play's development lose their moral foundations as he demonstrates the fundamental beliefs of Machiavellian philosophy, which centres around pragmatism and self-interest.

In the eponymous tragedy, Macbeth advances through a path where ambition erodes him, and he accepts Machiavellian principles. The protagonist moves toward becoming a Machiavellian figure when he assassinates King Duncan and then attempts to preserve his power by employing stealthy control methods and executing anyone he sees as a risk to his throne. Power-seeking activities in Macbeth reveal the destructive spiritual and ethical burdens that mirror Machiavellian strategic methods.

The character of Iago displays Machiavellian scheming in *Othello* through a blend of resentment and envy and his ambition to achieve greater power. Iago displays dangerously complete skills in deception while using carefully planned lies and showing heartless disregard for others' well-being, which solidifies him as a perfect example of a Machiavellian character (Maritain) (Wiethoff) (Kessler et al.) (Nederman).

Conclusion

The study results show that Shakespearean theatre exposes various complex influences of Machiavellian principles through its dramatic presentation. Through their characters in *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*, the playwright represents different parts of Machiavellian traits, which study political ambition and moral decay along with their subsequent outcomes (Costa et al.) (Kessler et al.). Through his works, William Shakespeare reveals a deep understanding of Machiavellian principles by providing an exceptional perspective for studying human nature, power ambitions, and the moral choices they create. The Shakespearean tragedies display unique examples of Machiavellian characteristics through *Richard III*, *Macbeth* and *Othello*, demonstrating why these themes persist in the literary canon according to Wiethoff, Nederman, Maritain and Kessler et al. Multiple experts agree that external manipulations from other characters drive various tragic storylines. The central argument in Greek tragedy evolves from the character's emotional journey through threatening love experiences instead of focusing on protagonist defects, according to "A Cultural History of the Emotions in Antiquity." Academic studies about Shakespearean tragic heroes continue as a scholarly focus despite a robust tradition of critical analysis (Hardy) ("A Cultural History of the Emotions in Antiquity") (Iyinoluwa).

The plays of William Shakespeare depict Machiavellian principles in multiple dimensions, revealing profound views about human character alongside power-seeking and the moral costs that result from sacrifice. These masterpieces by Shakespeare establish an enduring academic discussion about Machiavellian manoeuvre because they prompt continuous scholarly evaluations of how people navigate the complexities between power and morality.

References

- "A Cultural History of the Emotions in Antiquity." Bloomsbury Publishing Plc eBooks, Bloomsbury Publishing plc, 2019.
- Costa, Carlos A. Bana e, et al. "MACBETH." International Journal of Information Technology & Decision Making, vol. 11, no. 2, World Scientific, 1 Mar. 2012, p. 359.

- Griswold, Jeffrey B. "Macbeth's Thick Night and the Political Ecology of a Dark Scotland." *Critical Survey*, vol. 31, no. 3, Berghahn Books, 1 Sept. 2019, p. 31, <https://doi.org/10.3167/cs.2019.310304>.
- Iyinoluwa, Afolabi Blessing. "Love and Betrayal in Shakespeare's Hamlet and Macbeth." *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1 Jan. 2018, p. 608,
- Jenifah D, Shaline. and Jockim. " Literature and Digital Tools: An Exhaustive Study of the Themes, Stylistic Elements and Narrative Structure of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*." *International Research Journal for Humanities*, vol.14, no.1.1, March 2024, 326.
- Kessler, Stacey R., et al. "Re-Examining Machiavelli: A Three-Dimensional Model of Machiavellianism in the Workplace." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 40, no. 8, Wiley, 1 Aug. 2010, p. 1868.
- Li, Ruoqi. "The Complex Relation of Self-Determination to Destiny in Oedipus Tyrannos." *English Language and Literature Studies*, vol. 5, no. 4, Canadian Center of Science and Education, 30 Nov. 2015, p. 115.
- Maritain, Jacques. "The End of Machiavellianism." *The Review of Politics*, vol. 4, no. 1, Cambridge University Press, 1 Jan. 1942, p. 1.
- Nederman, Cary J. "Amazing Grace: Fortune, God, and Free Will in Machiavelli's Thought." *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 60, no. 4, University of Pennsylvania P, 1 Oct. 1999, p. 617.
- Watson, G. J. "Shakespearean Tragedy." *DRAMA*, Scandinavian University Press/Universitetsforlaget, 1983, p. 49, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-17121-7_4.
- Wiethoff, William E. "A Machiavellian Perspective on the Rhetorical Criticism of Political Discourse." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 77, no. 3, Routledge, 1 Aug. 1991, p. 309.

ECOCRITICISM IN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC: A STUDY OF TAYLOR SWIFT’S “WILLOW” AND JVKE’S “THIS IS WHAT FALLING IN LOVE FEELS LIKE”

Irene Bijo Abraham

Independent Scholar, Alappuzha District, Kerala.

Abstract

Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary field that examines the relationship between literature and the natural environment. This critical approach explores how literature reflects, challenges, and shapes human understanding of nature. Ecology refers to the relationship between living organisms and their physical environments. Nature and man are inseparable. S. T Coleridge once spoke of how nature is “the eternal language which God utters”, intertwining men, nature and the spiritual. Nature and art are deeply connected. The genre of music videos is rarely considered or discussed as art. Music videos are in fact, great forms of art that creatively employ symbols and images to paint caricatures and glimpses of human thoughts, emotions and struggles. The following study seeks to highlight the nature symbolism in the songs and how these potent nature elements act as powerful symbols conveying significant emotional and mental states of love and pain.

Keywords: Eco-criticism, Art, Ecology, Music Videos, Nature and Symbolism.

Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary field that focuses on the relationship between literature and the environment. It is a critical approach that studies how art reflects and portrays nature whilst exploring the relationships between human beings and the natural world. The term was initially coined by William Rueckert in the essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” (1978). It can be defined as the “study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty and Fromm 18). It analyses how texts deal with the subject of nature. It offers a critical lens to explore how art, literature, and media reflect, critique, and shape societal attitudes toward nature and the environment. It expands the notion of “the world” to include the entire ecosphere” (Glotfelty and Fromm

19). Added to this, it examines the complex relation between individual experience and ecological consciousness and sheds light on the “interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artefacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land” (Glottfelty and Fromm 19). In short, one can refer to ecocriticism as the “study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis” (Buell 20).

In the context of ecocritical examination, symbols derived from nature are helpful instruments. By reiteration, a natural symbol might include a tree, river, mountain, animal, and sometimes even air and water, all representing ecological cycles, while also representing human emotions and cultural values. Existentially, literature may engage ecocritical discussions from a standpoint of human impact upon nature and it already begins the process of personifying nature, or might engage aspects of nature by presenting ecological ideas and dilemmas within the narrative to stimulate ecological interest, and consideration of sustainability and other ecological issues. Music videos, often overlooked in ecocritical studies, can be viewed as works of art replete with ecological themes and symbols. The lyrics and visual imagery in the music videos help create a powerful narrative that resonates with humans’ relationship with nature. Moreover, they can be treated as a rich tapestry of symbolism and meaning. Throughout history, music videos have incorporated natural iconography to convey added emotional, or thematic meaning much like they do in literature. Lakes, forests, trees, and animals are examples of natural elements that may symbolize notions of change, growth and cycles of life. In songs discussing romantic relationships, and reflection, there may be imagery of butterflies, that symbolize innocence or love, while big spaces, such as oceans or mountains, may connote a more expansive, spaciousness, or ideas of existence. In the music video context, these symbols in nature contribute a visual layer to understanding the emotional texture of the music through visuals, enriching the storytelling experience, or connecting audiences to the beauty or fragility of the natural world outside of the human experience.

Taylor Alison Swift is an American singer-songwriter and a leading figure in popular culture. She is known for her autobiographical songwriting and artistic style. Her suggestive song lyrics, poignant videos and active presence in public domains make her a powerful force in the artistic world. She is renowned for how she integrates nature themes into her music using them as vivid metaphors to highlight human emotions and relationships. Her song called “Willow” is part of her album *Evermore*, renowned for its rich use of natural imagery and its thematic engagement with the natural world. The song “Willow” is regarded as a mystical masterpiece that beautifully depicts a wholesome, spiritual journey. The video begins where her previous music video, “Cardigan,” left off where the main character opens the lid of her piano and enters into it holding onto a golden thread. She is seen entering an enchanted mystical forest and moving from one environment to another which convey different stages of love and connection. Each scene is quite symbolically enriched with natural elements of water and fire that highlights the themes of destiny, longing, and the enduring power of love. Overall, Taylor’s voice coupled with the captivating visuals of the video creates a fairytale-like narrative that conveys the devotion, and the magnetic pull between two lovers who are destined to be together.

Jacob Dodge Lawson also known as JVKE is an American singer-songwriter, producer, and social media personality. In 2022, he released his debut album, *This Is What ____ Feels Like (Vol. 1–4)*, which reached number 40 on the Billboard 200. His song called “This is What Falling in Love Feels Like” is the exact expression of innocent love and pure joy that one feels when in love. The chorus of the song suggests how being in love feels like the warmth of the sun on one’s cold skin. The video of the song evokes a sense of pure wonder. The gentle music beautifully harmonizes with the visual beauty of the setting with the blue butterflies and lush gardens. Together they convey the fluttering excitement of new love. The video begins with JVKE in an amusement park where he spots a girl near the candy shop and he experiences what can be called “love at first sight”. The girl eventually leaves her necklace behind for him to find. The necklace has a butterfly pendant and once he takes the necklace into his hand, it is transformed into a real blue butterfly and he is

teleported to a greener landscape. Where autumn leaves lay still in the air and everything starts blooming and sprouting as the main character walks in pure joy on being struck by love. In short, with its colourful and surreal visuals, the video beautifully depicts the euphoria and whirlwind emotions that come with falling in love. In essence, the video for "this is what falling in love feels like" captures the thrill and passion of falling in love through imaginative visuals.

The following paper focuses on the ecocritical analysis of two modern music videos: Taylor Swift's "Willow" from her album *Evermore* and JVKE's "This is what falling in love feels like". These songs are not only celebrated for their poignant lyrics but also for the evocative use of nature as a symbol of emotional and psychological states. Additionally, the paper highlights the complex ways in which contemporary music videos highlight human experiences and ecological consciousness, and examines how nature symbols convey themes of love, past, resilience, hope, spiritual reawakening and innocent romance.

Analysis

The following study attempts to analyse Taylor Swift's "Willow" and JVKE's "This is what falling in love feels like" from an ecocritical perspective. Both the songs qualify as ecopoetry with nature as a metaphor to foreground the themes of love, transformation, and emotional resilience. Both Swift and JVKE's songs focus on narratives that reverberate with ecological and emotional depth.

In Swift's "Willow" the imageries of a willow tree and the dark woods symbolize timelessness, resilience, and spiritual reawakening. Similarly, in JVKE "This is what falling in love feels like", the gardens and blue butterflies signify innocence, love, and hope. These nature symbols are deeply engraved in the visuals and lyrics of the songs. Their music videos depict a "harmonious vision of rural independence, strength of mind and character, and a strong human bond with 'nature' or the land" (Filipová 3). Moreover, they reflect how nature acts as a medium for expressing emotions. The songs can be upheld as modern forms of ecopoetry where ecological themes and the human-nature relationship are underscored. Both the music videos employ rich natural imagery to depict deeper emotional and spiritual

truths. With the clever naming and depiction of the song “Willow”, Swift transforms the song into a lyrical exploration of resilience, love, and transformation. The lines from the song, “Life was a willow, and it bent right to your wind,” use the tree as a metaphor for the speaker’s emotional state, suggesting a fluid, responsive nature that is shaped by external forces, much like a willow bends with the wind. The visuals of the song depict Swift as she navigates through diverse natural environments, from dense woods to flowing rivers. Each of these scenes reflects the evolving nature of her emotional journey. The vibrant backdrop stands as a “source of individual identity whereby a solitary sojourner can find respite in the natural world” (Filipová 3). The use of light, shadow, and seasonal change within the visuals echoes the cycles of life and emotion, further pressing the role of nature: both as a reflection and a catalyst in personal growth.

Similarly, with the presence of lush gardens, random blooming of trees and flowers, and fluttering butterflies, JVKE crafts a story of love at first sight that intertwines with the vitality and fragility of the natural world. Moreover, it seems like “he was an actual part of the countryside” (Coupe 42). The vibrant green gardens symbolize growth, and fertility and are used in the video to depict the blossoming of love and the nurturing of emotional connections. The soft light in the video, the greenery, and close-ups of natural elements immerse the viewer into a world where nature and emotion are so intertwined that serenity and introspection come with it. JVKE’s music video seems like a “fairy tale ideal of an ecosystem of achieved and unchanging harmony” (Garrard 64). Further, the recurring appearance of the blue butterfly communicates the metamorphosis of calmness, tranquillity and reflection that comes with young love. In this sense, the song becomes a narrative on the fragile, transformative nature of love.

Through the unique music, lyrics and visual symbolism, both songs transcend the traditional genres of soulful music and establish Swift and JVKE as ecopoets. They have strategically used their art to engage with and illuminate the profound connections between human emotions and the natural environment. By analysing these music videos from an ecocritical point of view, this study aims to uncover the layers of meaning and depth that lay

behind the natural imagery and explore how they supplement the overall narrative of love, pain, and human connection.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a theoretical framework based on ecocritical theory and a detailed qualitative content analysis to analyse the role of natural imagery in Taylor Swift's "Willow" and JVKE's "This is what falling in love feels like." The study begins with an initial exploration of the music videos of both songs focusing on the use of natural symbols in them. This process involves analyzing the use of a natural environment, colour palette, lighting, and camera techniques to analyze how the visual aspects create a mood, and enhance and contextualize the lyrical aspects of the song. About the natural elements represented in the videos, attention is given to how they serve to generate interest and complement and elaborate on the symbolic aspects of the lyrics. The focus is on the unravel of how nature is used to depict human emotions and experiences. The theoretical framework of ecocriticism helps to study the interconnection between nature symbolism and the human-nature relationship. Additionally, the research involves a thorough reading of relevant literature on ecocriticism. As a result, more insights regarding the significance of nature imagery in literature are obtained. Moreover, a personal interest in the fields of ecocriticism and art serves as an impetus for the research. The study, on the whole, aims to uncover the nature imagery inherent in Taylor Swift's "Willow" and JVKE's "This is what falling in love feels like" to highlight the myriad ways in which contemporary music engages with ecological concerns. Thus, this study involves a thorough and systematic approach to examine the role of nature in Taylor Swift's "Willow" and JVKE's "This is what falling in love feels like," and in turn emphasizes how contemporary music engages with nature imagery.

Findings

The following study aims to analyse Taylor Swift's "Willow" and JVKE's "This is what falling in love feels like" from an ecocritical point of view. The prominent insights gained help to summarize the relevance of ecocritical analysis in popular culture. Firstly, both music videos are potent forms of art that engage with environmental and emotional themes. In both

the songs and videos, nature is not just the setting but acts as a central metaphor for the emotional journeys of the artists. Additionally, both the artists act as “mediators between poetry and the biosphere” (Glottfelty and Fromm 28). The willow tree and the forest setting serve as symbols of resilience, adaptability, and spiritual transformation in “Willow” while JVKE’s video symbolizes the fragile and transformative nature of love through a garden and blue butterfly imagery. In both cases, these natural symbols are firmly embedded in the narratives of the songs, conveying the powerful notion that human emotions are intricately connected to the natural world.

Secondly, the visuals suggest ecological themes. It reinforces the themes to create an ethereal atmosphere that parallels the song’s themes of resilience and spiritual awakening. Similarly, the visuals in “This is what falling in love feels like” with the lush green backdrop and butterflies, create a sense of calmness, serenity and peace which aligns with the themes of unbridled joy and innocent love depicted in the video. Nature is thus portrayed as “a stable, enduring counterpoint to the disruptive energy and change of human societies” (Garrard 63). This highlights how the visual elements in music videos act as powerful tools for conveying deeper ecological meanings. Thirdly, music acts as a powerful medium for ecocritical expression. Both Swift and JVKE use their music to depict emotions that are otherwise difficult to express. Lastly, the study emphasizes the profound interconnectedness between the human and natural worlds both artists reinforce the notion that human experiences are deeply intertwined with the environment. This study suggests that music and its visuals are valuable subjects for ecocritical analysis, providing fresh perspectives on how nature is represented and understood in contemporary art forms.

This study provides an ecocritical analysis of Taylor Swift’s “Willow” and JVKE’s “tThis is what falling in love feels like” by throwing light upon how contemporary music artists employ nature symbols, in their videos, to highlight and convey complex emotional and psychological states. By analysing the symbolic use of nature in their music videos, the study conveys that nature symbols are not just employed as embellishments but are

intricately connected to the theme and narrative. An ecocritical reading of both music videos help to study how these nature symbols contribute to the overall narrative of love, transformation, and personal growth. The study mainly aims to contribute to the emerging field of ecocriticism by extending its application to contemporary music.

This study also upholds the importance of music as an ecocritical medium by showcasing how artists employ natural imagery as a framework to describe feelings and experiences that embody ecocritical sensibility. The discussion touches on the supplementary impact that music videos have as an interpretive tool to add and enhance the power of ecological concepts that permeate the lyrics. This infusion of ecological themes in contemporary forms of art suggests the impact nature has on our emotional and psychological landscapes. This elucidates the interconnectedness of the natural world and human beings. In a more general sense, this study situates itself in the ever-growing body of ecocriticism by expanding its reach and application to include popular music. It argues that popular music and its visual components are worthy subjects of inquiry to examine human experience and its connections to nature.

References

- Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 20.
- Coupe, L. *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, Routledge, 2000, p. 42.
- Filipová, Lenka. *Ecocriticism and the Sense of Place*. Routledge, 2022, p. 3.
- Garrard, Greg, *Ecocriticism*. New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 63-64.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll and Harold Fromm. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, 1996, pp 18-28.
- Weintraub, Linda. "Introduction to Environmental Art." In *To Life! Eco Art in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet*. University of California Press, 2012. <http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/647>

TRACING MYTHICAL NARRATIVES FROM MEMORIES: KODUNGALLUR BHARANI FESTIVAL AND THE NUANCES OF THE 'TIME' IN THE MODERN MYTH TELLING

Athira. A

Research Scholar, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta.

Abstract

A myth is seen as an integral part of the everyday lives of individuals. The preservation and reinterpretation of a myth are influenced by the context of the time in which it is read and understood. This paper aims to explore the mythical references associated with the Kodungallur Bharani festival in Kerala and the changes that occur in the beliefs formed around these mythical references with the changing socio-political times.

Keywords: Myth, Religion, Kodungallur Bharani, Time and Narratives.

'Memory' and 'Myth' are two interwoven words and when combined, both can produce a result in which human beings' belief systems have flourished. Myth is a difficult term to define and its basic meaning, used by mythologists and anthropologists, is "sacred narratives of traditional societies generally involving superhuman beings, etc"(Heehs 2). A myth can be understood as a complex amalgamation of memory, creativity, imagination, and processes of forgetting and remembering. Memory transcends temporal boundaries, navigating through historical events such as wars and conquests, while being enriched by the extraordinary narratives of individuals associated with specific epochs. According to Norenzayan et al. "Religious and supernatural narratives, including those that exhibit counterintuitive elements found in myths, legends, and folktales, represent remarkably enduring components of human cultures across the globe" (548). Predominantly transmitted orally through generations, these narratives have profoundly shaped diverse populations' beliefs, values, and behaviours. Hence it could be said that the "mythology of a culture is the sum of the charters of its several institutions" (Munroe 117).

The mythical references of the Kodungallur Sree Kurumba temple situated in the town of Kodungallur, Thrissur district, Kerala makes its

presence here due to the complex stories and multitude of myths and legends associated with the origin of the temple and its ritual practices to date. The festivities in the temple are famous for its array of mesmerizing rituals, which include the gathering of velicchapadus (oracles) from various parts of the state and its neighbouring areas of Tamil Nadu. These oracles, adorned themselves in bright coloured clothes with ornaments carry sabres and other ritual instruments in their hand. They immerse themselves in devotion, allowing themselves to be possessed by the goddess's divinity which ends up in them spilling blood, by hurting their forehead with the sabre they carry.

The historical advent of the town of Kodungallur has been known for its trade relations with the Jews, the Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Romans, and the Arabs even before the beginning of the Christian era. From one of the edicts of King Ashoka, it is assumed that the kingdom named Chera/Kerala had existed independently during the middle of the 3rd century BC (Jayan 17). They established their capital in Vanji, which is believed to correspond to the present-day Tiruvanchikulam in Kodungallur. Furthermore, imprints of Jainism and Buddhism have been discerned in Kerala since the 3rd century BC. The works of scholars such as Caldwell (1999) and Thomas Samuel (1977) attest to the tangible sway of Buddhism and Jainism upon Kerala's societal fabric until approximately the 6th century CE, as evidenced through the establishment of learning centres and religious practices. A rich cultural field germinated from the matrix of Tamil cultural underpinnings and progressively forged its distinctive adaptations of Sanskrit and indigenous literary forms with the later intervention that took place, through the forms of power and ideology. These constant changes and cultural dynamics epitomize an evolving process of literary, spiritual, and cultural identity across temporal epochs (Freeman160). As mentioned, Kerala's genesis finds its roots intertwined with the Tamil tradition, a connection that began to diverge around the 12th century in favour of embracing Sanskritic culture. This trajectory led to the evolution of a distinct Dravidian poetic and linguistic heritage, underscored by reimagined Sanskrit epics and Puranas, and the assimilation of pan-Indic Hinduism, along with the indigenous Hindu ethos of Kerala's temples. Hence, the formation of myths and narratives was not a

tough task for a port city as it is used to trade experiences from different shores around the world.

To explore the different forms of myths, one of the most powerful stories is the Tamil legend of Kannagi, from the book *Silapathikaram* written by Ilango Adigal. Kannagi was married to a merchant named Kovalan, who was executed for being wrongly accused of stealing the anklet of the queen of Madurai. The enraged Kannagi tore off her left breast and threw it to the Madurai kingdom to set fire to it. The angry chaste widow walked towards Kodungallur, where King *Cheraman Perumal* enshrined her as the mother Goddess of Kodungallur. The devotees are encouraged to celebrate the month of Meenam in Malayalam asterism and sing provocative and ‘abusive’ songs (songs comprised of sexual terms and derogative terms) to bring joy to the chaste widow who has been considered to be honoured in this way. This mythical narrative receives greater acceptance as it includes all the essential elements of a story such as a strong base, imagination, divinity, exaggerated images, and the ‘possible- unrealities’ that are needed for a story to endure over time and a possible geo-location, which essentially brings forth the bodily desires of a young woman and its medium of satiation being a Goddess.

Another set of myths further encompasses the confrontation between Goddess Kali and Daruka, the demon who is infamous for his malevolent actions. Oracles and devotees who are mythically referred to as the warriors of the Goddess frequent the temple to commemorate this historical struggle and to celebrate their triumph over the demons. This narrative is consistent with widely held Hindu ideologies and may have emerged after the Brahminization process in present-day Kerala.

The emergence of the myth of Parasurama, regarded as the alleged creator of Kerala, provided a significant foundation for the claims of Brahmins seeking dominion over the region, a sentiment that is further bolstered by the ruling authorities. According to the myth articulated in chapter forty-one of the “Kerala Mahatmyam”, Lord Parasurama encountered a divine spirit at a small tribal temple dedicated to Kurumbamma, situated approximately one kilometre away from the current temple site. In a ritualistic

act, he offered a thousand pots of alcohol and roosters as sacrifices to reestablish the deity as Bhadrakali. Upon expressing to Devi the logistical challenges of performing such rituals on a daily basis, she instructed him to carry out these forms of worship on a designated day—Bharani in the month of May. Subsequently, he called upon all Keralites to participate in the worship of the Goddess on this particular day. This narrative illuminates the process through which tribal cultures and lower-caste rituals are incorporated into the practices of the upper caste, reflecting broader themes of cultural appropriation and social stratification (Chandran 2).

From the pre-established religious stories, an encounter of a narrative that is decolonial, offers a fresh approach in the creation of stories as sub-myths which may not completely complement any existing strong mythical lines but go in tandem with the historical developments of the region. One such sub-story articulated that the conflict is described as the war between the Goddess and the demons is the war between the goddess and the Dutch, who sought to seize control of the port town of Kodungallur. Historically, Kodungallur has sustained trade relations with different nations in advance of the advent of the Christian era. Notably, it is documented that the Dutch East India Company obtained the rights to govern Cranganore (Kodungallur) through a Treaty of Peace established with the Zamorin on December 17, 1717 (Jayan 18).

The narrative is set and furnished over a known historical event that has been actuated as fact over fiction and hence it demands more attention as the reception or rejection of the story stands over the chances of people taking it on ‘possibilities.’ The mode with which it has been produced, half of the story has a real sense and a half in which the Goddess waging war with the Dutch as a figurative sense of an idea, contradicts the flow of both reality and myth and hence the chances of it being transcended through generations is highly unlikely and it getting rejected as a myth is pretty much higher to the existing myths on the same topic. Rather than coexisting with the grand narratives, these half-myths exist in the realm of a personal interpretation of events with one's ideas of the world around them.

The discourse surrounding the reinterpretation of myth necessitates an acknowledgment of the active engagement of individuals perpetually in contact with these narratives. Consequently, a novel set of myths emerges, deeply contingent upon the subjective perceptions of those who interact with them. This process of reinterpretation is not unidirectional; rather, it is intricately intertwined with the historical and political contexts that inform the interpreter's experiences, as well as the information gleaned from diverse sources, like the narratives of the war between the Goddess and the Dutch coming up as a source of information of someone engaging with the historical grounds.

The underlying reasons in which there can be a chance of seeing some narratives stay the same and some narratives fade away with time depends upon the elements in the story, that capture the minds of the people, and the way they can relate it to their conscience. Stokoe and Edward state "People call something "just a story" to refer to its weak claim to credibility" (qtd.in Polleta et al.). When it is a myth, especially associated with the religious spectrum in which their faith has been invested, then the story receives another dimension to look into. According to Ewick and Silbey, "Storytelling was conceived as an explicitly normative project, a way of subverting the discursive bulwarks of disciplinary authority (qtd.in Pollata et al.). Narratives that persist among devotees and other communities, as well as those that are less widely known, facilitate a discussion regarding objectivity across time and the impact of popularity on the perception of these narratives. This imparts the major question why does one mythical narrative dominate discourse over another? Why are collective groups unable to discredit a narrative if it is untrue even when individuals in the group are not sure of the narration? A plausible answer is that the dominant story aligns with deeply held ideological values. Nevertheless, when examining mythical references, the impact of these myths is significantly augmented by their interconnections with other narratives.

Bringing the concept of time into the landscape of discussion, reading the myths at different points of time, when it has an attributed role in the politico-social scape, when the myth of giving goddess happiness by singing

abusive songs' faces counter attacks from people who hold the concept of morality in rites, which finds the rites as obscene and vulgar to a point which is demanded to be stopped at the earliest. Myths in this respect, even if concrete, can be questioned for the political stance it takes, compared to the trend in thriving contemporary politics. A myth is not away from the ongoing socio-political climate and it reflects in the reinterpretation of that particular myth or the new sets of meaning attached to it. This could be seen in the ritual of sacrificing roosters on the holy stone situated in front of the temple, which has been prohibited lawfully and instead, a red cloth has been submitted on the stone resembling the blood of the roosters. This interchangeability and the new sets of meanings attributed to a different object resonates with the flexibility of a concept when the socio-political scenarios change. It is in this sense that rituals associated with the myths do tell time: they proclaim culturally significant periods, mandate group recognition of specific moments in time, and endow them with layers of interpretation (Robbins 74). Myth exists in dialectical relation with the cult; when integrated into the liturgy of essentially temporal rites, it has the potential to deepen and transform their meaning. Given the existence of both a ritual calendar and a mythological corpus, the relations between the two maintain a certain fluidity that allows each to sustain the other in a language with its semantics and its internal logic (88).

Locher states that "the advantage of the predominance of politico-social myths in the series provided above is that this also demonstrates the strong influence of society and of specific groups in society on the contents of the myth" (192). It is essential to consider whether myths respond to the contemporary context in which they exist. How does the concept of time play a significant role in understanding rituals or festivals based on the narratives they encompass? Myths and their accompanying narratives can either be responsive to their time or remain passive and dormant. For instance, protests against the "obscene songs" of a festival have often been overshadowed by the reactive nature of these narratives.

It is possible that any cultural narrative is likely to go through several generations of repeated transmission and recall, this advantage, even if small

at the start, accumulates from generation to generation, leading to massive differences in eventual cultural success (Locher 192) but when individuals are confronted with a social problem that necessitates a legitimate solution, one that could fundamentally transform the future of a ritual, their responses frequently overlook the evolving narratives associated with the issue. Instead, their reactions tend to concentrate on the underlying causes of the problem, thereby preserving the fundamental essence of the myth that supports the social actions in question. According to Robbins, “When attempting to locate the origins of social institutions and practices in a mythical past, it is evident that it illustrates the practical utility of mythology and its ability to deepen the range of meanings attributable to elements of time-reckoning” (84). It is also required to be noticed that a myth is not just connected to an individual but a collective entity, and “groups required shared stories, incoherent stories weakened solidarity, and communities with strong collective narratives were better able to withstand setbacks than those without such narratives” (Polleta, 114). The influence of communities in shaping and preserving narratives has the power to determine the fate of a myth.

In exploring the existence of multiple myths, respondents frequently express a preference for those narratives that are more widely disseminated. The folk element and the oral tradition of storytelling facilitate the modification of core narratives through the addition and subtraction of various elements. Notably, the degree of interrelation among myths often correlates with their acceptance within cultural contexts. Each myth possesses a unique and significant power; however, the reasons for one myth's predominance over another can often be traced back to its representation and application in diverse contexts, such as literature, music, and even in scholarly works discussing temples. Ultimately, the structural integrity and stability of a myth play crucial roles in shaping its acceptance and enduring impact within a given cultural framework. The exploration of time in the context of mythical narratives involves examining the elements utilized in their creation, as well as the sociocultural and political factors present during pivotal historical moments. These factors significantly influence whether a myth will persist, flourish, or ultimately fade away.

Works Cited

- Caldwell, Sarah. *Oh terrifying Mother: sexuality, violence and worship of goddess Kali*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.1999.
- Chandran, V.R. *Sree Kodungallur Amma*. Ayyapa Seva Saangham, Kodungallur, 2015.
- Freeman, Rich. "The Literature of Hinduism in Malayalam".The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism, edited by Gavin Flood, Blackwell publishing, 2003,pp.159-181.
- Heehs, Peter. "Myth, history, and theory." *History and Theory* (1994): 1-19.
- Jayan, Nimisha. "Gender, Space and Performance: A Study of the Visual Narratives of Kodungallur Bharani Festival"(2020).Calicut University. PhD Dissertation.
- Locher, G. W. "Myth in a changing world." *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde* 2de Afl (1956): 169-192.
- Monro, D. H. "The concept of myth." *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 42,no.1,1950, pp.115-132.
- Norenzayan, Ara, et al. "Memory and mystery: The cultural selection of minimally counterintuitive narratives." *Cognitive science*, vol. 30, no.3,2006, pp. 531-553.
- Polletta, Francesca, et al. "The sociology of storytelling." *Annual review of Sociology*, Vol.37, no.1,2011,pp.109-130.
- Robbins, Ellen. "Time-telling in Ritual and Myth." *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* Vol.6,no.1,1997,pp. 71-88.
- Samuel,V,T. *One caste one Religion one God: A study of Sree Narayana Guru*, Sterling publishers,1977.

AGEING AND MEMORY: EXPLORING VULNERABILITY IN GEETANJALI SHREE'S *TOMB OF SAND*

Dr Bulbul Gupta

Associate Professor of English, M.M. College, Modinagar.

Abstract

The study through the character of Ma, the octogenarian female protagonist of Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* attempts to find answers to questions such as how does ageing influence Ma's construction and re-construction of her 'self'; how does memory play out in rewriting of 'self' of Ma; does the severe loss of Ma's husband when she is in her 80s make her vulnerable; does she succumb or win over the vulnerability owing to many factors like the advancing age, demise of her husband and loss of her identity.

Keywords: Ageing, Memory, Vulnerability, Self and Partition.

Catherine Degnen has identified three research gaps in the anthropological literature particularly of old age which are as follows- one, the anthropological literature that deals with questions related to the self, experience, and subjectivity has not given enough consideration to the impact ageing has on the construction and experience of self. Two, the anthropological literature concerned with old age primarily present old age as a problem beset marked by fragility and decay on account of issues such as dementia, role-loss and loss of status, and does not explore elderly people's lives that are neither demented nor need care. Three, older people often face serious losses such as retirement or death of loved ones such as lovers, friends, etc. which do not figure largely in anthropological literature on the self but the truth is that such conditions propel the rewriting of the self, a possibility that has again gone unexamined. The present study that takes as its framework memory studies and gerontology (from a literary perspective) is thus an attempt to fill the above-given research gaps through the character of Ma, the octogenarian female protagonist of Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*.

Cambridge dictionary defines 'vulnerability' as the ability to be easily hurt, influenced, or attacked or something that is vulnerable. In the review article, "The Many Faces of Vulnerability," 'vulnerability' is defined as 'a

fundamental feature of the human condition, biologically imperative and permanent...(and) connected to the personal, economic, social and cultural circumstances within which individuals find themselves at different points in their lives.’ Ma, the octogenarian female protagonist of Geetanjali Shree’s *Tomb of Sand* who has recently lost her husband is depicted as a vulnerable being in multiple ways – she is physically weak, emotionally devastated and mentally disinclined and disinterested in the world and its affairs. "She swings between polarities...Ma always lives in-between. She lives in between two countries, two pasts, two families, two children and two lives", says Poornima in her article titled “Delineation of Internal Polarity and Liminal State of Women in Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*” (113). However, Ma’s physical and emotional state is in stark contrast to what it was prior to the tragic event of her husband’s death. During her days of looking after her husband, Ma displayed qualities of agility and devotion to ensure his health and happiness. Ma was “alert, at the ready, no matter how tired. Busy getting ground to a pulp; very much alive. As though Papa (Ma’s husband) was her only reason for living,” observes the author. But soon after her husband’s demise, Ma’s life comes to a standstill with practically no purpose or worth whatsoever: “I am useless now, I’m of no use to anyone,” Ma feels. Then follows a life of inactivity and futility for Ma. She refuses to get involved in any activity at home or to interact with anybody. She sleeps excessively becoming ‘a half-dead bundle’, ‘indifferent to every role’, ‘huddled against the wall’, ‘lifeless back turned towards the world.’ She shows no interest in the shining sun, food, blooming flowers, children playing outside the house, reading newspaper, listening to music or anything else. She keeps her ‘eyes and nose closed, ears shut, mouth sewn, mind numb, desires extinct’ proving herself to be as good as ‘dead’.

Ma’s vulnerable condition is aggravated after her husband’s demise as she finds herself in her son’s home with a typical patriarchal middle class family where ‘men always get the high-quality dal and women just leftover mash...’; a ‘household... constantly rolled with controversies over social codes, tradition, culture...’; where sibling rivalry exists between brother and sister who compete with each other to revive and uplift their mother’s spirits

after their father passes away; where the daughter's freedom to grow and develop intellectually is curtailed by the family but the daughter moves on to work in public sphere and to live alone rather than succumb to domination of men of the family. There is a stereotypical set-up of the family after the head of the family's death and the role of the son further strengthens the image of a 'traditional set-in-its-ways house' – a house that believes in age-old notions regarding an ageing woman such as her vulnerability to extreme sadness, physical and emotional debility and powerlessness; 'interprets distress as a sign of illness and to be judged sick' in case of an ageing woman; and adheres to the belief that an ageing woman is incapable of resisting adversity without the support of a son particularly. Ma's response to her altered role as a wife and a mother as well as a person – fragile and disinterested physically and mentally - appears vulnerable on the surface but deep within it is actually Ma's acute sense of loss of identity, of belonging to nowhere and nobody and of rootlessness.

In this state of extreme vulnerability or rather, crisis of identity, it is memory that comes to Ma's aid – memories of her past when she lived in Pakistan in a big family, in a big house, her ardent lover, and her escape from the widespread terror and violence in Pakistan after India's partition. Ma's plan to visit her homeland, Pakistan is in fact her quest to establish her identity once again – to assert her lineage, her close association with a home, and her enduring relationships with a family and friends. Memory is employed by Ma as a 'historical resource' that lends meaning to unusual and inexplicable adverse contemporary events and also reassures her that the current crisis can be overcome. The fact that Ma, on her own tries to cross the India-Pakistan border despite her fragile body and weak mental state point to Ma's decision to resolve the crisis, not to perpetuate it. Ma draws strength from the memories of the horrifying past when she escaped violence post Partition of India. Resignation to present situation of losing her husband, feeling worthless and lifeless – all negative feelings are replaced by the hope of finding and reclaiming her true 'self': I'll just be me, and no one else. I'll have my own rhythm, none other. No one else will make me fall, make me

wobble. Ma's spirits soar with the belief and assertion that loss can be overcome, future can be glorious and 'self' can be rewritten.

However, Ma's attempt to escape to Pakistan all alone turns out to be a fiasco raising the question: Will Ma allow her vulnerable physical 'self' defeat her thereby lending support to Zhukora's observation that vulnerability often becomes an obstacle for human agency. Ma's answer is a sure 'no' as she shifts to her daughter, Beti's home and with the help of her old friend and confidant, Rosie prepares herself in every possible way to ensure she successfully visits Pakistan and her long-estranged family, friends and Anwar, her lover. Ma's strenuous efforts to regain her physical strength and mental courage bear fruits and she, along with Beti reaches Pakistan. On reaching Pakistan, Ma recalls every bit as she moves from one place to another in Pakistan whether it is the people or places or events associated with her youth. Even at the ripe age of eighty, Ma's cognitive faculties have not undergone degeneration and remain sharp as ever thereby refuting stereotypical beliefs that ageing ushers memory-loss, irrelevant information interspersing the conversations or/and incoherence. Ma remembers people exactly by their names and enquires about them from the old man residing in her maternal home; she is able to recognize the places even with her eyes closed – as she enters her maternal home in Lahore (Pakistan- post partition of India), she spells out its minutest detail – the number of storeys or of rooms, the types and location of various rooms such as the trunk room, the sitting room, the articles kept in a particular room. She revisits the events in all their vividness and delineates the widespread violence that spread across Pakistan post Partition of India, her escape from the massacre with a small girl called Rosie, and her eventual separation from her homeland and from her lover, Anwar.

A noteworthy aspect of Ma's memory is the flawless combination of episodic memory and semantic memory that bespeaks the authenticity of her past experiences in Pakistan prior to Partition as well as her astute wisdom of the world and its affairs. She interweaves her experiences as a person born and brought up in Pakistan with that of the world and its ways at large. The official reprimands Ma for having crossed the India-Pakistan border without a visa and tries to make her aware of the concomitant dangers as falling into the

hands of the Taliban or getting buried somewhere in the hills. But Ma refuses to be cowed down. Drawing from her episodic memory, Ma asserts that she is, in all truthfulness, not an immigrant in Pakistan but a native who has returned to the country. Her semantic memory comes to the fore as she begins to speak of the term border in a larger context and perspective. From mere physical entity, she expands the concept of *border* into a multi-dimensional entity calling border 'love', 'a line of meeting', 'a confluence', and 'a game'. Instead of looking at the term border from a narrow perspective that limits, encloses or obstructs, Ma sees it as an opening, as something that gives recognition and ornamentation to both sides, a bridge between two connected parts.

An interesting and pertinent concern that relates well to Ma's recalling of her past days in Pakistan has been raised by Catherine Degnen in her article 'Temporality, Narrative, and the Ageing Self'. It shows how older people remain 'lost' in the past which is a 'marker of oldness itself.' The article comments upon the differing temporal relationships that an ageing person, young and middle-aged adults have, the way they perceive the past, the manner in which the past informs the present, and how these temporal relationships affect the construction and maintenance of an ageing person. To apply and test the above-mentioned comment of Degnen in Ma's context, the following excerpt from the conversation that takes place between Ma (whose name is Chanda) and the official at Pakistan is worth an analysis:

'Who is Chanda? Where did she come from? Why did she come into this?
I am Chanda, Ma says to him loudly. *C-h-a-n-d-a*. Chanda. From here. Now she presses her hand into the soil. I came of my own volition.

This name is not in your passport.

Chanda was sent off without a passport.

You have no visa.

Chanda was sent away without a visa.

Your address is in India, which is very far from here.

It is where it is, you're the one who's far, son.

I'm from here, you've travelled here.

No, son, I didn't come here, I left here.'

Each reply of Ma here resonates with her heart and soul connection with the land of Pakistan that she originally belonged to. It is neither a nostalgic nor a nagging reiteration of Ma but a firm conviction of her rootedness and identity resting in Pakistan. There is also an underlying hint at a person's pain and agony of having been displaced from one's motherland perforce owing to external factors (here, partition of India) and to return to which requires no permission or legal document or verification. Thus, to the official, the land of Pakistan may merely be a physical entity entering or leaving which has its own set of legal rules but as far as Ma is concerned, her bond with the land of Pakistan bears emotional significance. For the official, the legalities to enter or exit Pakistan might have been established or changed due to Partition but for Ma, there is no such temporal ordering. Emotional bondage with the motherland, for Ma is above and beyond any outer alterations and thus, her old name *Chanda* and her address everything remains the same even after the partition of India.

Ma's words spoken to her daughter on being reprimanded by her for behaving unreasonably and even embarrassingly calling some Anwar her husband: "Forgetting is dying. I'm not dead. I'd buried everything from my past in the sand. Today I've returned to that sand." strike the keynote of this study – how remembering the past helps Ma overcome her vulnerability – to rise from her bed-ridden self-imposed isolated state after her husband's death; to renew her physical and mental vigour in order to travel to Pakistan to meet her lover; and to defeat every obstacle that crosses her way in her arduous journey to unite with her lover in Pakistan. Ma certainly overthrows the commonplace ideology of memory particularly in declining years of one's life as making a person nostalgic, sad, incapacitated and resistant to action and hope in life.

Another significant negative representation of old age is the fixed beliefs and dogged attitudes of elderly people that are also overthrown by Ma. Ma exhibits a remarkable capacity to listen to, understand and even alter her earlier notions and ideas. In Pakistan many years after Partition of India, Ma is overwhelmed with emotions of love on reuniting with her estranged love who she considers no less than her husband. In the course of her conversation,

Ma reveals the deeply buried annoyance that had stayed with her since the time partition of India happened and she was led to India separated from Anwar. She expresses how she had expected Anwar to come to her when she was alienated during the partition but he did not. Anwar explains his own expectations too of her trying to find him out in refugee camps. The conversation of misunderstandings and understandings goes on and the 80-year-old accepts with dignity, love and forgiveness of herself and her lover: “You didn’t come, Ma said, I forgive you. I didn’t come, do forgive me.”ⁱ Ma’s experience of this sublime purity of hearts is not just a rewriting of her ‘self’ but even of history where the divine virtue of forgiveness alone has the power to ‘erase distance...bridge chasms.’

Works Cited

- Degnen, Cathrine. “Temporality, Narrative, and the ageing self” *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 25.2 (2005): 51-52.
- Brown, Kate et al. “The many faces of vulnerability” *Social Policy & Society* 16.3 (2017): 498. doi: 10.1017/S1474746416000610
- Mukherjee, Tutun. “Metaphor, Memory, Myth: Recasting Partition as in Salil Choudhary, Manas Ray, Helene Cixous”. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 43.19 (May 10-16 2008): 73.<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40277445>
- Memory: A short introduction, p. 39.
- Poornima, K. “Delineation of Internal Polarity and Liminal State of Women in Geetanjali Shree's Tomb of Sand.” *Interdisciplinary Research Journal for Humanities*, vol.13, no.2, October 2023, ISSN 2249-250X.

**THE CONSPIRACY OF THE TRIPLE BURDEN AND
VICTIMIZATION OF THE FEMALE BODIES IN BABURAO
BAGHUL'S *WHEN I HID MY CASTE***

Sneha Chauhan

Postgraduate, University of Mumbai, Maharashtra.

Abstract

The paper deals with Baburao Baghul's short story collection *When I Hid My Caste* which focuses on the triple marginalization of women through the stories: "Monkey", "Pesuk", and "Streetwalker" which explores how bodies of women who belong to different parts of Bombay are controlled, exploited, and subjugated. It portrays the voices of the oppressed, revealing the extreme inhumanity and heinous atrocity done by the caste-ridden society and how the patriarchal world has left them despairing and disillusioned.

Keywords: Triple Marginalization, Dalit Female Bodies, Casteist Patriarchs and Gender Studies.

The Conspiracy with 'The Female Bodies' – An Introduction

The pages of history show us how humans are stratified, victimized, and detested by the people of their kind. Human beings are distinct from each other, because of the social construct which categorizes humans based on race, ethnicity, ethics, customs, beliefs, thoughts, actions, perceptions, class, caste, gender, and other social values. These categorizations are sometimes so intense that they affect the psychological and physical instincts.

One such notional construct turned into a social construct is the defamation of women by the male hegemony. Men who always had an upper hand over their women and crushed them in the shackles of toxic patriarchy used these women's bodies against them. Several writers like Baburao Bagul, Meenakandasmy, Sujatha Gidla, Urmila Pawar, and Baby Kamble, showcase the grinding realities of women and the world where women go through the marginalization and intersectionality within society. To be a woman is already barren, but to be a Dalit woman makes it torturous.

This paper unveils the voices of the Dalit women and the triple marginalization of these women who belong to different parts of Bombay,

where one is a prostitute, one is a dedicated wife, and the other one is a miserable woman. The agony, aggressiveness, estrangement, and forlornness which are picturized by the experiences these women go through unites them. Based on class, caste, and gender the women's bodies are used against them by the male tyrants which is projected by the pioneers of Modern Marathi and Dalit literature, Baburao Bagul shows the atrocities of women in the most realistic way without fictionalizing his short stories in *When I Hid My Caste*.

When I Hid My Caste: Dalit Women- Their Triple Burden

Women's voices have always been dragged down and several stories of women are veiled under the shackles of male constitutions. Therefore, writers like Baburao Bagul are the voices of these unheard women and through their stories, they exhibit the cruelty and mishaps of these women in the most unfiltered way.

When I Hid My Caste is a collection of short stories showing the lives of marginalized individuals, including rebellious youngsters, migrants, sex workers, street vendors, slum-dwellers, and gangsters, all afflicted by the brutal caste system. Originally published in Marathi (*Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti*) in 1963, this work has been translated into English by the award-winning author and translator Jerry Pinto.

The stories like "Pesuk", "Monkey". and "Streetwalker" are not fictionalized rather these women characters speak to the readers, by projecting the voices of the downtrodden which are violent, and harsh in tone, and showing the grim reality where they are born and how the institutions created by caste-ridden society and patriarchal world had left them with despair and disillusionment.

Distressed, Downtrodden Women in "Monkey", "Streetwalker", "Pesuk"

'We are victims of violence because we are poor, lower caste & a woman' (*Dalit Woman Interview, 6th Oct 2020, BBC News India Article*). The triple burden on Dalit women is not only based on empirical grounds but it is also based on reality grounds and the social reality that is hidden by the Casteist patriarchs. Baburao Bagul takes his accountability as a Radical Dalit panther who highlights the real stories of Bombay and the original people who represents Bombay in a very striking way.

Bagul's female characters, through these stories speak about various forms of atrocities that they go through in their everyday lives, and how the conspiracy of casteists and the hegemony of men make these forsaken women fall into the shackles of misery and inhumanness. Each woman is brutally victimized, tortured, controlled, and chained under the toxic patriarchal norms, leaving no room to treat them worse than animals. These stories are not novelized because these are the realities that Baburao Bagul wanted to show its presence in mainstream literature. However, these women, despite going through the ills of society and the triple burden that subjugates them from having basic rights, voice their existence by revolting and being rebellious to showcase the power a woman holds.

"Streetwalker" exhibits the story of a pain-stricken woman 'Girija' who works as a sex slave because she belongs to an economically deprived community. Girija sacrifices her life, body, and self-esteem to earn some pennies for his sick son who lives in the village.

'It seemed to her the day was a dungeon and the men had locked her in it.' (*When I Hid My Caste* 35). Girija is not merely presenting the life of a sex slave rather she represents every other woman who dares to survive and create an identity as a human. Girija is a prostitute not by choice, but by her worst circumstances. Even if she loaths this job and gets abused every day by these lusty men, she has no choice but to keep her customers happy because her customers are the only medium through which she would earn some money to treat her ill son. Even though she wears makeup, heels and dresses most elegantly, she is deeply distressed with the life she lives.

Girija is continuously ostracized and belittled for working as a prostitute, and apart from that she is forced to sell her body to these men because she is the puppet in this male capitalist society. 'She fussed and frolicked and even as she faltered, she laughed with all she had' (*When I Hid My Caste* 36). Here Girija's body is accessible by these hypocritical men who at one time fulfil their sexual desires by using her body, and on the other side they consider her to be filthy, untouched when she is menstruating.

The institution of prostitution is again a myth created by these high castes' men in which Devadasi and temple prostitution is accepted as holy and

Brothel women are considered dirty moles in the society. Even men like the restaurant owner who helps her financially often considers her less than a human. These men tagged Girija as 'A Woman Like Her' by portraying her as a slave who is used as a commodity by these lusty men.

"Monkey" is the story of an ordinary woman 'Sakhu' who is married to a wrestler Bapu Pehlwan who uses rage, fear, and hatred towards his wife to inflict violence on her body. Throughout the story, Sakhu is considered a lusty distraction from which Bapu should maintain a vow of celibacy to defeat the Kohli Mahar's Pehelwans. However, Sakhu is blamed for her husband's failure in his wrestling match and is treated by her mother-in-law and husband a useless commodity. Sakhu is called a slut, prostitute, and Rambha by her mother-in-law. "She was depressed at the thought that Sakhu's touch had vitiated everything: the Gandha dor, the langot, the dhotar were all unclean" (*When I Hid My Caste* 59). This is the representation of the Brahminical upper caste norms which manipulates people like Bapu Pehelwan and his mother to oppress Sakhu. The mother-in-law being a woman brutally treats another woman; this also shows how women are positioned by the Brahminical caste system.

Throughout the story, Sakhu becomes the punching bag of the mother-in-law and her son. Her desires are not accounted for, and her body is seen as a distraction from the reality principles of life. Sakhu making love with her husband is seen as a filthy act because she comes from the lower strata of the society, and her touch would pollute Bapu's celibacy and his chances of winning the match. Through rage and Bapu's toxic masculinity, he crushes his wife until death and leaves her body to rot on the ground. The hypocrisy of these casteist patriarchs can also be seen through the story 'Monkey' where Sakhu's desire for a husband is considered lustful and sinful, and a husband's desire for her wife is normalized.

"Pesuk" is the most traumatized story which illustrates the extremities of inhumanness through the character Savitri who turned from a naive woman into an evil Pesuk. Savitri is the story of that every woman who is married off by their parents, in return for attaining abundant power and economic supremacy. Even though these families know that the exchange of marrying

their daughters into a corrupted family would make their daughters' lives miserable, they still choose to take this path of selling their daughters' bodies. "She did not need anyone, no need of anything. She was now devoid of humanity; she was like an animal with a bestial cruelty.She feared women and attacked men. She was no longer human...." (*When I Hid My Caste* 89).

Savitri who is married to Jaidev, a High-class Kshatriya who intentionally abuses her every day to get a male heir in his family. Jaidev is not the only one who chains Savitri with his lusty and violent behavior. Even some people working under Jaidev controls Savitri with their sexual oppression. "Her dark hair had turned the color of mud. Its beautiful velvety texture had gone; it was now matted and tangled..... Her entire body had been devastated" (*When I Hid My Caste* 87 - 88). It explains how inhumanity is inflicted upon her leaving no opportunity for her to survive as a human. The social construct set by men makes an innocent Savitri turn into Pesuk, an evil being.

The question here arises, who is evil? Savitri or these monsters who are holding the supremacy of exploiting innocent beings? Savitri is not a human anymore; she wanders into the village to cut the noses of men who wanders at night. Her rage is a form of protest against these men who torments her. Her protest is made into a legend and named a mythical story in which an evil spirit hunts down men. Jaidev and his people are the creators of this myth who wanted to hide their sins through the tale of Pesuk so that their reputation and power remain in the village. His first wife had committed suicide.....And so, he married a beautiful woman to save his pride, his honor.' (*When I Hid My Caste* 90).

Jaidev has power, lust, and money in his hands, through which he suppresses the innocent ones under him. Women in particular are his aim, to destroy and gamble with women by marrying them is his main motto. He marries seven times but never respected or treated any of them as human beings. His inhuman behaviour is not only towards Savitri but also towards his other wives. He uses his wives as toys just to get a male child who would continue his line. "Pesuk" is the story of extreme levels of atrocities where

women are the victims which pushes them to fall into the well created by the upper-caste males to defame a woman on all grounds of inhumanity.

Dalit Marginalized Women - Breaking the Cage of the Brahmin Patriarchy

Girja, Sakhu, and Savitri are all on the extreme margins of society. Baburao Bagul exposes the on-ground reality of the systemic oppression faced by these women, especially the downtrodden women who suffer in both public and private spheres. The levels of atrocities inflicted on the minds and bodies of these women made them vulnerable to survive, but the rage and hope to live force these women to revolt and protest against the corrupted high-caste males. Each one of them, whether as a prostitute, as an ordinary woman, or a woman tied to corrupted marriage or business institutions is chained with a common characteristic of getting victimized by the males who own them. “But when this child, born of her immeasurable sacrifice and her terrible ordeal, had gone, she had begun her merciless and determined attacks. (*When I Hid My Caste* 89). Savitri in ‘Pesuk’ revolts when she loses her child. The rage in the mother is portrayed through this quote. When she loses her child, she takes revenge through violence by cutting men's noses. “And she fell, a mother maddened by love, burned by her sorrow.....her tongue bursts from its home behind the door of her teeth” (*When I Hid My Caste* 40). Here Bagul represents a mother who is a prostitute and sells her body to provide her child with medicines for his sickness. Girija's revolt is projected through the burst of her anger when the customer tries to cheat her by not giving her money and tries to treat her on a monetary basis. She takes revenge by killing the customer. These women are considered a triple burden and their bodies are used aggressively by stratifying their rights.

Conclusion

The patriarchal society has always shown the stratification, oppression, and persecution of society's weaker members. Baburao Bagul's short stories demonstrate male superiority and insensitive behavior against women, as one witnesses how belonging to a specific gender and caste causes one individual to be disadvantaged in the society created by high-caste men. The gruesome realities that Baburao Bagul depicts through these female

characters, as well as the voices of these women, should be included in mainstream literature to create a new dimension and propel these stories into a new paradigm in which women will be the sole proprietors of their own lives.

Works Cited

Baghul, Baburao. *When I Hid My Caste*.1963

Banu, Arifa. "Women in Baburao Bagul's Short Stories From 'When I Hid My Caste'" *Feminism in India*, 5 Oct. 2021, [feminisminindia.com/2021/10/05/women in baburao bagul short stories from when i hid my caste](https://feminisminindia.com/2021/10/05/women-in-baburao-bagul-short-stories-from-when-i-hid-my-caste).

Bagul, Baburao. 'When I Hid My Caste.' *Indian Cultural Forum*, 20 Nov.2020, indianculturalforum.in/2018/08/23/when-i-hid-my-caste.

L, M. "When I Hid My Caste - Stories by Baburao Bagul - Modern Literature." *Modern Literature*, 8 Sept. 2018, www.modernliterature.org/hid-caste-baburao-bagul

Pant, Parth. "The Epic of Dalit Literature: When I Hid My Caste by Baburao Bagul." *Feminism in India*, 15 Dec. 2019, [feminisminindia.com/2019/12/16/The epic of Dalit literature when I hid my caste by baburao baghul](https://feminisminindia.com/2019/12/16/The-epic-of-Dalit-literature-when-I-hid-my-caste-by-baburao-baghul).

THE POPULAR CULTURE AND EROTICISM IN INDIAN CINEMAS: THE RISE OF SOFT PORNOGRAPHIES ON OTT

Roudrajjal Dasgupta and Debika Mukherjee

Independent Researchers, West Bengal.

Abstract

Erotic movies in Indian cinema have been popularized since the 80s with the advent of the B and C grade movies. A parallel cinema industry emerged and became popular side by side along with the A grade mainstream industry; though the influence came from the Western pornographic movies. Stars like Mithun Chakraborty, Dharmendra, Sanjay Dutt, Akshay Kumar helped to elevate the erotic movie culture in Indian cinematic market through their various successful theatrical runs. Indian theaters witnessed these erotic movies throughout the 80s and 90s, but the graded erotic movies in Indian cinema stopped its breath in terms of theaters and box offices with the emergence of OTT (Over the Top) platforms from the second half of the 21st century. Various transnational and Transworld OTT platforms, i.e., Netflix, Amazon Prime, Alt Balaji, Zee, Voot, in recent years have basically given access to their audiences to watch the modernized version of B and C graded movies and series with ample of sexual and nude contents on their respective platforms. Each of these platform's offer content from the youngest to the oldest generations in various forms. This paper aims to study how eroticism gets synonymous with OTT shows and how a paradigm shift happened in Indian popular culture with the shift of semi porn in theaters to soft porns on OTT's.

Keywords: Popular culture, Erotic Movies, Indian Cinema, Sexuality and Over-the-Top Platform.

Men are visually aroused by women's bodies and less sensitive to their arousal by women's personalities because they are trained early into that response, while women are less visually aroused and more emotionally aroused because that is their training. This asymmetry in sexual education maintains men's power in the myth: They look at women's bodies, evaluate and move on; their

own bodies are not looked at, evaluated and taken or passed over. But there is no “rock called gender” responsible for that: it can change so that real mutuality--an equal gaze, equal vulnerability, equal desires--brings heterosexual men and women together.

- Naomi Wolf

For more than a century, Indian cinema, has had a big impact on the country's culture, society, and entertainment. It has influenced public perception and societal conventions in addition to reflecting the rich fabric of Indian society. When depicting romantic and intimate relationships, Indian films, which are renowned for their vibrant song-and-dance sequences, generally embrace delicacy and censorship. The dynamics of Indian cinema have, nevertheless, undergone a substantial upheaval in recent years.

Over-the-top (OTT) Platform Development in India: Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms have proliferated, ushering in a new era of entertainment in India as a result of the country's digital revolution. These services—including Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+ Hotstar—have completely changed how Indians consume media. OTT platforms have become a mainstay in the lives of millions of Indians because they provide simple access to a sizable collection of movies, web series, and documentaries. This change has put up a fight against the dominance of conventional movie theatres and television networks and given a stage for diverse and creative storytelling.

The OTT Platforms' Shift toward Explicit Content: The progressive renunciation of the traditional standards of modesty and control that have marked Indian cinema for decades is one of the most obvious aspects in this digital change. Increasingly more OTT platforms are testing the boundaries by creating and distributing video with explicit subjects like erotica and sexuality. This change has raised discussions about how intimacy and sensuality are portrayed in a culture that is firmly based on traditional values.

In light of these developments, this study seeks to explore the changing Indian film industry, with an emphasis on the appearance of soft pornography on OTT platforms. This study's main research question is: How have Indian popular culture and societal norms been impacted by the growth

of soft pornography on OTT platforms? The following goals are established in the study to address this question:

- To investigate the cultural background of sexiness and censorship in Indian films.
- To research the development and impact of OTT platforms in India.
- To evaluate this change's effects on culture, society, and the arts.
- To assess the legal issues and debates surrounding the explicit content on OTT platforms.
- To observe how these modifications may affect India's film industry and artistic expression.

Methodology

The data set has been collected from Kaggle which is a reputed platform for open data sources. This data is publicly available for analysis. The data set contains movie name, year of release, imdb rating, age category and wide variety of movies from 1943 to 2020. The researchers have used exploratory data analysis or EDA with some plots like violin plot, histogram, wheatmeal etc. The tools used for analysing the data are Pivot table, Google Colab, Python, Microsoft Excel. This analysis is based on secondary data and it is a blend of qualitative and quantitative data.

Literature Review

For the purpose of this research paper, the following secondary sources have been referred to:

"Streaming Soft Pornography: A New Wave in Indian Entertainment" by Ananya Mishra (2020) examines the psychological effects and behavioural changes that might be seen in young people who engage with web-based entertainment and information.

"The rise of soft porn in Malayalam cinema and the precarious stardom of Shakeela" by Darshana Sreedhar Mini (2019) examines how Shakeela became a key player in the nuanced interaction between Malayali society and ideas about sex and desire as a result of her outsider status and unusual physical attributes.

"Translating porn studies: lessons from the vernacular" by Darshana Sreedhar Mini & Aniban K. Baishya (2020) dives into South Asian

pornographic societies. It is influenced by queer and area studies, rejecting oversimplified classifications and acknowledging the nuanced histories and nationalities of South Asia.

"The Bad-Shahs of Small Budget: The Small-budget Hindi Film of the B Circuit" by Bibhusan Subba (2017) highlights on Kanti Shah, who was known as the Sultan of B and C grade movies, and how he popularized the adult movies in different genres from horror to erotica in limited of the limited budgets.

"Between Aunties: Sexual Futures and Queer South Asian Auntie Porn" by Kareem Khubchandani (2021) investigates the controversies surrounding the appearance and portrayals of the fat, older South Asian aunties in Auntie Porns as the protagonist and how the subject propelling kinks and desires.

"Queering Bollywood" by Gayatri Gopinath (2008), analyzed the themes of queer sexualities and non-heterogeneous relations in Bollywood cinemas.

"Lonely night watchman's art: Circuits of exclusion, C-grade film and hybrid aesthetics of Miss Lovely" by Ramna Walia (2018) commemorates the emergence of Bombay cinema and its long history and the advent of B and C grade movies.

Cinema, Popular Culture and Eroticism in India

Popular culture is something which reflects the society's interest for a certain time period which is in trend in the field of entertainment. It can be music, art, literature or cinema. The popular culture or 'pop culture' always creates a mass appeal, reaching a large and diverse audience by creating a media influence on mass masala movie, TV shows, radios, internet, social media and start producing culture icons like figures, celebrities, characters, symbols, musicians and logos which create a diverse culture.

Consumerism comes into the picture by social commentary, cultural hegemony and production. Consumerism is an integral part of popular culture. When it comes to an entertainment zone India has very rich history of consuming erotic culture as a form of entertainment. Cinema has always held a prominent position in popular culture, influencing the values, behaviors, and

beliefs of the common masses. There exists a distinction between popular culture and high culture. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, popular culture encompasses those aspects of culture that are widely enjoyed by ordinary people, rather than being exclusive to the highly educated. It includes various forms of entertainment such as cinema, literature, debates, music, and dance. Cinema, being a dynamic art form, has a profound impact on society and serves as a vibrant foundation for social culture. It has the power to shape people's perceptions and educate them on a myriad of subjects. The relationship between cinema and popular culture is inextricable, as cinema reflects and influences societal norms in any given society.

In post-independence era, producers and filmmakers started exploring erotic themes in Indian cinema. For example, *Garam Hawa* (1973) and *Julie* (1975) contains sexuality and erotic themes. In this era, directors like Shyam Benegal and Govind Nihalani started putting sensual movies through social issues. In early 80's and 90's C-rated and soft core movies started gaining popularity. The approach of sexuality started changing and became more open.

In 1990, globalization exposed Indian cinema to the influence of western content which includes international influences, more liberal thoughts towards sexuality and eroticism in Indian cinema. Films like *Fire* (1996) explore more female sexuality and breaks the taboos of conservative society. Movies like *Lipstick Under My Burkha* (2016), faced censorship issues due to its adult content and now it is available on Amazon Prime.

Now in this digital era, OTT has gained 36% compound annual growth rate in India (By the report from KPMG and FICCI). The consumption of OTT becomes more because it allows more explicit contents known as 'soft pornography' and gives film makers a lot of freedom to explore erotic themes. Diverse contents like 'Gandi Baat', "Sacred Games" are giving the narrative of thought-provoking sexuality.

Rediscovering Erotic Classics

Exploring erotica in Indian cinema offers a rare chance to uncover and re-frame great movies that already featured subtly erotic elements before explicit material became common. Filmmakers frequently employed symbolic

and metaphorical aspects to depict sensuality, which viewers of the time naturally understood. For instance, the rain-soaked song sequence with Waheeda Rehman and Guru Dutt was a defining moment of sensuality in the 1957 Bollywood classic *Pyasa* directed by Guru Dutt. The interaction of feelings, music, and rainfall created a strong sensation of yearning and longing even though there was no explicit material.

It is possible to have a deeper understanding of the creativity at work while seeing such historical movies via the prism of current erotica debates. It also demonstrates how early filmmakers overcame censorship and social mores to add layers of sensuality to their stories that still speak to viewers now. This viewpoint essentially encourages one to see erotica in Indian cinema as a timeless and developing art form, full with undiscovered treasures just waiting to be reinterpreted and appreciated in the context of contemporary cinematic discourse.

Raj Kapoor's 1978 film *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* examines the contrast between outer beauty and inner beauty. Shashi Kapoor plays a man who falls in love with Zeenat Aman a woman with a deformed face. The sensual sequences and overarching concept of acceptance in the movie went against conventional wisdom. In the Shakti Samanta-directed movie *Amar Prem*, 1972, Rajesh Khanna and Sharmila Tagore play the main characters. The narrative centres on a man who develops a strong emotional bond with a lone woman. Thought-provoking is the movie's examination of loneliness, emotional closeness, and societal criticism.

Soft Pornography

The idea of soft porn started when actor Manish Agarwal played sensual role of cuddling, kissing and panting in airless room for 10 minutes. The movie was *Hot Ashiq*. These types of movies were low budget which were shot indoors. Although *Kamasutra: A Tale of Love* took the first place in “soft pornography” in India.

Indian censorship laws are the biggest challenge for the movies which contains erotic content, sexual and soft porn contents. According to a survey done by India Times “India is third largest consumer of pornography but 34% still want it to be permanently banned.” Indian cinema and Indian society

share a symbiotic relationship, with one elevating each other. The world of Indian cinema is diverse, encompassing various genres such as action, romance, and mass masala entertainment. Delving deeper into these categories reveals different versions of films tailored to diverse audiences. These films can be categorized into age groups, such as movies suitable for all ages, those intended for viewers aged 13 and above, and those designated for adult audiences.

Within the adult genre, there has always been a controversy surrounding the portrayal of sexuality, nudity, and desirable scenes. The roots of eroticism in Indian cinema trace back to the eras of the 60s and 70s when films began to explore themes of sensuality and desire. In the early days of Indian cinema, there were no distinct concepts of eroticism or graded movies. Films were either categorized as "A" grade or adult movies, marked by scenes such as bikini-clad actresses or mild intimate moments suitable for mature audiences.

The gradation system in Indian cinema emerged in the 1980s, introducing categories like A, B, and C grade movies. This gradation provided different versions of films to cater to various segments of society. For instance, A grade represented mainstream cinema, while B and C grades created their own niche fan base, regardless of age, gender, or social class.

Actor, Actress and Soft Pornography

Several A graded actor and actress who worked in B and C graded movies like Mithun Chackraborty, Amitabh Bachchan, Rekha, Akshay Kumar, the wife of Sanjay Dutt, Maanayata Dutt etc. Some actors have started their career from B and C grade movies. In south industry, Shakeela and Silk Smitha got popularity in B and C graded movies.

“The inclusion of Malayalam word ‘veshya’, meaning ‘prostitute; and Tamil word that loosely translate as ‘fuck’ in the midst of Hindi words signifies that localization of Shakeela as south Indian figure despite the fact that her films had a pan Indian appeal, thanks to the dubbing industry that flourished alongside soft-porn films” ----Darshana Sreedhar Mini (From her paper named “The rise of soft porn in Malayalam Cinema and precarious stardom of Shakeela.”

The Influence of B and C Grade Movies

B and C grade movies played a pivotal role in challenging societal norms and popularizing eroticism in Indian cinema. These movies, influenced by Western pornography, found resonance across various societal strata, transcending barriers of caste, gender, and age. This influence from Western culture and pornography significantly impacted Indian society. For example, the movie *Raat Ke Andhere Mein* (1987) is considered India's first B Grade movie. Kanti Shah is known as one of the well-known C Grade movie directors in 90s. He is also known as the 'King of C grade'.

In the 21st century, the advent of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms have transformed the landscape of Indian cinema, ushering in the era of soft pornography. This shift has had profound implications not only for the cinematic industry but also for viewership patterns. The consumption of such content has increased, aligning with the flow of popular culture. C-Grade films are more honest and are characterized by violent, gory, and mostly sexual content and a minimum of artistic interest. They are not even trying to mimic A-Grade films and often have something unintentionally interesting going on.

The Impact of OTT Platforms on Eroticism in Indian Cinema

OTT platforms have become a significant vehicle for the presentation of eroticism and sensuality in Indian films. These platforms have challenged conventional norms and censorship, offering viewer's unedited content without restrictions. They have become a medium where A-list actors also participate in B and C grade productions, signaling a shift in the industry's dynamics. Shows like "Twisted," "Maaya," "XXX Censor," "Mastani," and "Lipstick Under My Burkha" exemplify this trend, where well-known actors engage in such projects. Some B and C grade movies choose to focus solely on the explicit content without a substantial storyline. However, family-oriented movies are relatively less prevalent on OTT platforms. A comparison between Western and Indian OTT content reveals how evolving patterns show sexual content.

The Transformation of Pornography and Eroticism

The 2000s have witnessed the influence of Western pornography on Indian media, impacting levels of sexual fantasies and desires in B and C grade movies. The rise of OTT platforms in 2016-17, with platforms like Amazon, Netflix, ALT Balaji, and Ullu offering content like *Gandi Baat*, *Mirzapur*, *Sacred Games*, and *Ragini MMS* further blurred the lines between A, B, and C grade productions. In the OTT landscape, A-list actors have ventured into B and C grade movies and series. These platforms provided a platform for experimentation and normalization of sexual content. However, B and C grade movies are not limited to eroticism; some focus solely on explicit content.

The Ongoing Evolution of Indian Cinema

As OTT platforms continue to thrive, the comfort zone between societal conservatism and modern progressive cinema is bridged. The platforms have normalized sexual content and offered more sexual liberty in terms of desire portrayal. These platforms have given opportunities to underrated filmmakers, unknown actors, and producers, especially those working with lower budgets. They have diversified and broadened the scope of eroticism, making it more inclusive and representative of a diverse audience.

Censorship vs. OTT

Unlike traditional cinema, OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon prime, Disney+Hotstar and, hoichoi are not subjected to the same level of censorship by Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). OTT platforms in India works on self-regulation platform which GIVE creators the freedom to make more open explicit contents without any cuts through web series, movies or shows. The creators on OTT have produced such contents which would have not received the approval for theatrical release due to Indian censorship laws.

Currently, Indian government is expressing concern over OTT platforms. For the first time, the government, under the ambit of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, has brought in detailed guidelines for digital content on

both digital media and Over the Top (OTT) platforms, while giving overriding powers to the government to step in. Some OTTs are facing legal challenges because of the complaints raised by individuals who find the content objectionable. India is struggling between balancing creative freedom and cultural sensitivity through OTT platforms and commercial movies.

Examples of Soft Pornography on OTT

Gandii Baat (ALTBalaji): This web series is known for its explicit content and exploration of erotic tales from rural India. It has garnered both praise and criticism for its bold storytelling. *XXX Uncensored* (Eros Now): As the title suggests, this series delivers adult content, focusing on various facets of human desires. It pushes the boundaries of what was traditionally shown in Indian cinema. *Lust Stories* (Netflix): A collection of short films directed by prominent Indian directors, "Lust Stories" touches upon themes of sexuality, desire, and relationships. It was praised for its mature and nuanced storytelling. *Mastram* (MX Player): This series is inspired by the life of a well-known Hindi erotica writer and delves into the world of adult literature and fantasy.

Some Other Alternative Platforms

Not only in OTT, now-a-days social media is also playing a significant role in showing adult and B, C graded contents without facing censorship regulations but people have authority to complaint against these social media contents and accounts. Making reels, videos, post on sensual content are open for public and getting huge public views have become a part of popular culture. In social media, people are consuming global content on nudity and sexuality which becomes a trending part of popular culture. Various B and C graded movie clips are also shown in social media which are free and accessible for all the age group.

Analysis and Comparison between Adult Content and Other Content on OTT based on IMDB Rating (1943-2020)

The Ormax OTT Audience Sizing Report 2022 estimates that there are already 424 million OTT subscribers in India. In India, 119 million of these are active paid OTT subscriptions. With 43 million users, Disney+ Hotstar is the most well-liked OTT service in India, followed by Netflix (5

million) and Amazon Prime Video (17 million) 2. Other well-known OTT services in India include SonyLIV, which has 2.5 crore users, and ZEE5, which has 3.7 crore.

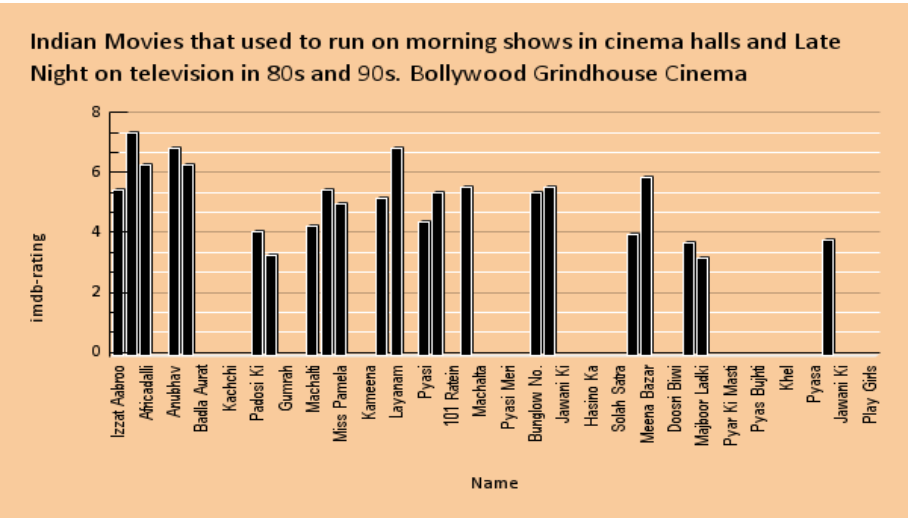


Fig. 9 shows the IMDB rating of some B and C graded movies which are used to run in the theaters in 80’s and 90’s. Most of them got more than 4 star rating. Data set- The data set has been collected from Kaggle. Kaggle is a reputed platform for open data sources. This data is publicly available for analysis. Data description- The data set contains movie name, release year, Imdb rating, age category and having wide variety of movies in the year from 1943 to 2020.Analytical tools- Pivot table, Google colab, python, Microsoft Excel.

Plot 1

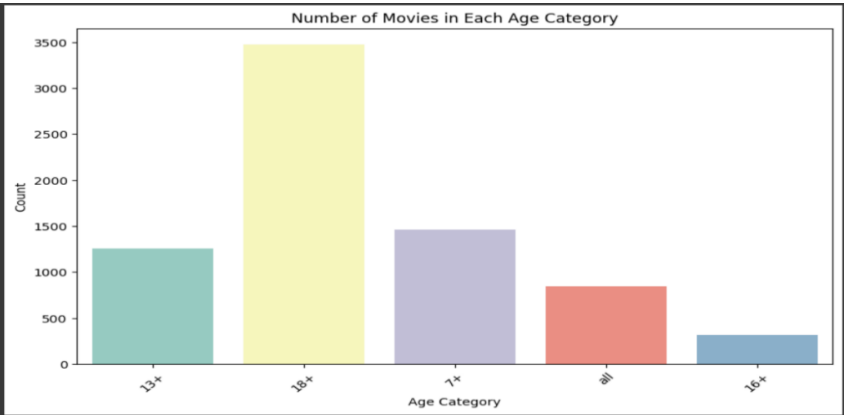


Fig- 11

Plot 1 is a count plot which shows the count of the movies age category wise. It is showing that number of 18+ movies are more in OTT and other platforms.

Plot 2

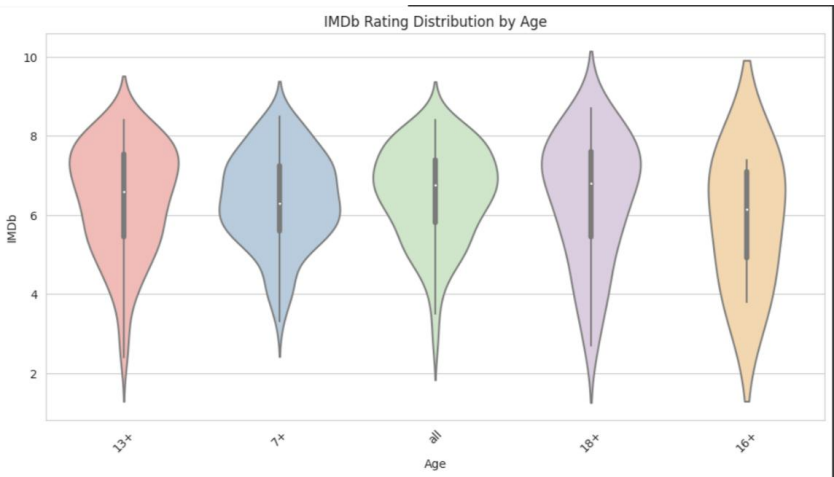


Fig- 12

Plot 2 is showing the violin plot where it is clear that the rating of 18+ content is more based on imdb as compared to other contents.

Plot 3

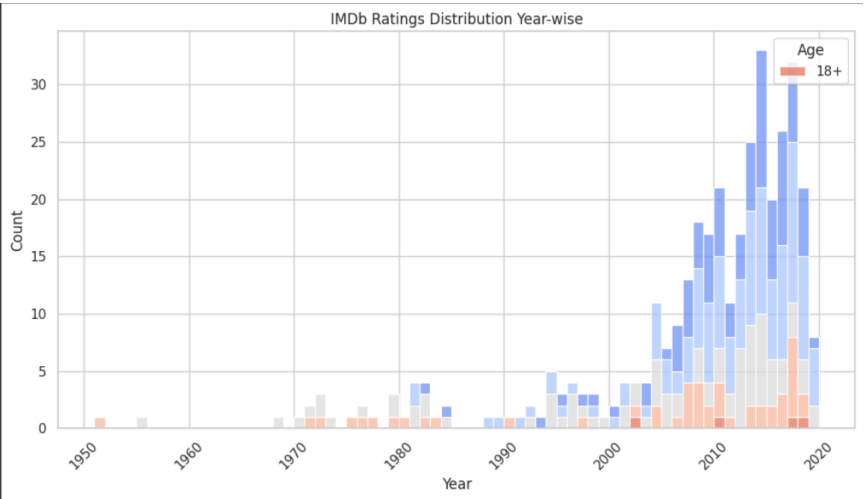


Fig- 13

Plot 3 is showing the histogram plot throughout the years where it is showing that imdb rating of 18+ contents are increasing over the years.

Plot 4

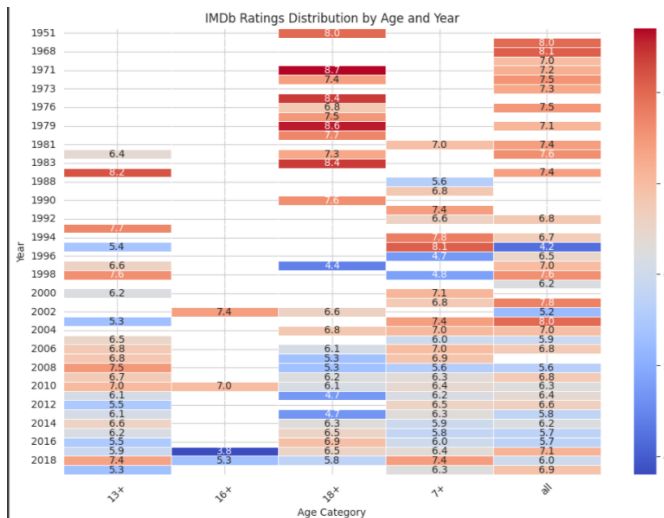


Fig- 14

Plot 4 is showing a wheatmeal in which the older 18+ movies have the highest rating and late 90s and early 20s have got low rating. However, it started increasing again .

It is evident that in the era when OTT platforms were not there, film makers were struggling to release their adult content because of censorship laws and people had less access to B and C graded movies. The count of rating and the rating itself got decreased. Again the count of rating got up after 2014 when OTT platforms in India started getting popularity.

Findings and Discussion

- 1) From this research, it has been found out how the concept of sexiness in Indian film industry changed in the popular culture from erotic sculpture to BDSM, from 'rasa' to OTT platform, from showing body curves, sensual music to blurred genitalia.
- 2) It is clear that the OTT platforms are now dominating commercial film industry on the basis of freedom of creation and open adult content.
- 3) It is clearly visible how the audience's desires and choice of sexuality have changed over the time. From early 20's it became more westernize rather than

Indianised because of the exposure of International soft porn in OTT platforms.

4) OTT platform does deal with strict censorship laws although it may be possible that government will impose the censorship laws on OTT as well. But the social media platforms are also giving freedom to adult contents, which can be an alternative in near future as well.

5) It is hereby proven that how British censorship laws from the colonial period affected the aesthetic sexual culture and artistic expression of Indian film industry and has been affecting till now.

6) By all the analysis, it can be predicted that the 18+ and adult content will be more accessible through OTT platforms and the consumer of the B and C graded movies will increase over time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the evolving landscape of Indian cinema, driven by the rise of OTT platforms and soft pornography, reflects the changing societal norms and preferences. While challenges persist, such as censorship and conservatism, these platforms have opened new avenues for storytelling and have had a significant impact on popular culture. "The Rise of Soft Pornography on OTT" reflects a broader cultural shift in India's media landscape. It illustrates how digital platforms have disrupted conventional norms and provided creators with opportunities to explore diverse themes, including those related to erotica. While these developments are met with both enthusiasm and critique, they undeniably represent a fascinating evolution in Indian popular culture and cinema. Researchers and scholars continue to examine this phenomenon, seeking to understand its implications on society, media, and artistic expression.

References

- Walia, N. (2010, February 26). Is porn now popular culture? *The Times of India*.
- Data source- *Movies on Netflix, Prime Video, Hulu and Disney+*. (2021, December 16). Kaggle.

- Mini, D. S. (2019). The rise of soft porn in Malayalam cinema and the precarious stardom of Shakeela. *Feminist Media Histories*, 5(2), 49–82. <https://doi.org/10.1525/fmh.2019.5.2.49>
- Baishya, A. K., & Mini, D. S. (2020). Translating porn studies: lessons from the vernacular. *Porn Studies*, 7(1), 2–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2019.1632540>
- Mini, D. S., & Baishya, A. K. (2019). Transgressions in Toonland: Savita Bhabhi, Velamma and the Indian adult comic. *Porn Studies*, 7(1), 115–131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2019.1590228>
- Walia, R. (2018). “Lonely night watchman’s art”: Circuits of exclusion, C-grade film and hybrid aesthetics of Miss Lovely. *Flame*.
- Gopinath, G. (2000). Queering Bollywood. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 39(3–4), 283–297. https://doi.org/10.1300/j082v39n03_13
- Khubchandani, K. (2021). Between aunties: sexual futures and queer South Asian aunty porn. *Porn Studies*, 9(3), 346–364. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2021.1969993>
- Subba, V. (2016). The Bad-Shahs of Small Budget: The small-budget Hindifilm of the B Circuit. *Bioscope: South Asian Screen Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0974927616668009>

CAMERA AS AN OPPRESSING MEDIUM FOR WOMEN: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF MARGARET ATWOOD'S *SURFACING*

¹ Shaline Jenifah. D and ² Dr. D. Jockim

¹ Research Scholar of English (Reg. No: 23111284012016), St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Palayamkottai. Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tamil Nadu.

² Assistant Professor of English, St. Xavier's College, Palayamkottai.

Abstract

Margaret Atwood, a Canadian writer is considered a feminist who deals with power politics in her works. *Surfacing* (1972), her second novel portrays the plight of women in the male chauvinistic society. In this novel, David, in order to shoot a movie, compels his wife Anna to undergo a traumatic experience of being naked in front of his friends. Here the camera serves as an oppressing medium for women. Right from the latter part of the twentieth century, the world is being driven by digitized technologies. In the contemporary times, digital media serve as a menace to all, especially to women. Women are generally regarded as the marginalized section of society and to make matters worse digital media makes them doubly marginalized. The male chauvinistic society employs digital media as one of the major weapons to subjugate women. In the era of digitization, people develop digital phobia as a result of its deleterious effects. Some people even undergo digital fasting or digital detoxification for a while. This research aims at analyzing the impacts of digital media in the contemporary world. It also attempts to trace the role of digital camera in the suppression of women with respect to the novel *Surfacing*.

Keywords: Digital Media, Digital Camera, Digital Phobia, and Digital Fasting.

Margaret Atwood is an acclaimed Canadian author who has contributed magnificent works to the realm of English Literature. She was awarded the Booker Prize twice, for her novels *The Testaments* (2019) and *The Blind Assassin* (2000). She elucidates a vast variety of themes such as feminism, survival, identity, religion, trauma, memory, environment and

technology in her works. These writings serve as her mouthpieces in raising her voice against the subjugation of women.

An unnamed narrator is the protagonist of the second novel of Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing*. This novel revolves around two journeys of the protagonist: the literal journey in search of her father and the metaphorical journey in the quest for her identity. Anna is a character in the novel who is forcefully made voiceless in the male chauvinistic society. The trauma she faces in the name of media is hardly noticed. This study analyses the role of digital media in the suppression of women by taking Anna as an exemplar.

In the chosen novel *Surfacing*, Anna is the friend of the unnamed protagonist. David, Anna's husband is a womanizer who is of the opinion that Anna is uncivilized and treats her as a mere object. He wants his wife to satisfy all the beauty standards. There are some men who generally expect women to be radiant and charming, and David is one among them. Anna says, "He [David] wants me to look like a young chick all the time, if I don't he gets mad" (156). So, she wears make up everyday to appear stunning to her husband. She says, "He [David] doesn't like to see me without it" (52). Thus, the relationship between David and Anna is not on good terms.

David buckles down to make a movie. He uses a rented camera for shooting. He carries it wherever he goes. Anna is humiliated by David on numerous occasions but this mortification reaches its peak when David compels Anna to be naked in front of his camera for his movie, *Random Samples*. David's friend, Joe waits with the camera to shoot her. Anna rebuffs with her full might to evade this embarrassing situation but all her efforts end up in vain. Her emotions are not valued by anyone. David says, "It won't hurt you we need a naked lady" (171). He thinks that Anna will become famous by exposing her body. Moreover, he is a voyeur who gains gratification in observing the nakedness of women. He questions about Anna's body, "We all love it, you ashamed of it?" (172). David stands as a symbol of sheer male chauvinism. From the context of ecofeminism, Jockim, in his paper titled "Nature and Women: An Ecofeministic Reading of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*" observes, "As man ignores nature as lifeless thing, he [David] ignores the emotional needs of their women also" (237). It is true that David

has no importance for Anna's feelings and uses camera as a medium to subjugate her.

The inhumane action of her husband pushes Anna to become a marginalized and voiceless being. Anna has been experiencing profound trauma for a prolonged period of time because of the vicious activities of David against her. This makes her develop a severe hatred against David and she remarks angrily "David is a schmuck" (125). The physical humiliation of Anna has effects on her psyche as well. When the narrator questions David about his act, he easily puts the blame on Anna saying that she has cheated on him and justifies his act. Blaming women to hide the setbacks of men has been in practice for quite a long time now. It is a widely believed notion that God sends angels at the time of distress. The unnamed narrator comes as a guardian angel and destroys David's film before leaving to the forest.

For ages, women are considered inferior to men. They are deprived of their basic needs and are bound by the stereotypical notions within the four walls of their houses. They put efforts to break these notions and become equals to men but as they move forward they encounter several stumbling blocks. The marginalized women are further marginalized through media. This double marginalization of women in the patriarchal society is still prevalent in the 21st century and it is a great concern of today's world.

There was a time when old-fashioned people believed that a camera would capture the soul with the image. They also believed that the life span of human beings would decrease with each photograph taken. It is said, "...cameras weren't ordinary then, maybe they thought their souls were being stolen, as the Indians did" (136). This thought prevented many people from using cameras in the early stages of its invention.

Initially, camera obscura, a dark room with a small hole in one wall was used to take a series of images. Later, heliograph was able to capture and reproduce images. In line came the daguerreotype, which was similar to the photographic camera. Then there was the arrival of the color photography technique in the first half of the twentieth century. Over the years, the camera has undergone great advancements and now it is the age of digital cameras. The digital camera has developed umpteen features of both convenience and

annoyance. The greatest exasperating element of digital camera is that it has been serving as an oppressing medium for women since its invention. With regard to *Surfacing*, it is evident that even in the 1970s camera was used as a medium to suppress women. The condition is still worse in the 2000s.

In the present world, women are under constant surveillance. In the current scenario, the digital camera is installed in several places for security reasons but at the same time, it barges into the privacy of individuals. For instance, it is installed in hotel rooms, women's dressing rooms and restrooms without the knowledge of women. Ultimately, they fall into the trap and become victims of morphing and pornography. The ostentatious images of such women uploaded in digital media become viral. At the end of the day, these women commit suicide out of embarrassment. One such unfortunate incident happened for a woman from Salem, Tamil Nadu. When she rejected the marriage proposal of a man, he uploaded the morphed and vulgar image of that woman on Facebook twice. On seeing her morphed image for the second time in the internet, mentioning her father's mobile number with her image, she hung herself. Morphing is to be taken very seriously. In the recent times, several bad news regarding morphing and pornography are being circulated. Many scenes in the recent movies also discuss such issues against women. In the digital world, with the aid of internet, it is possible to stalk someone digitally using the cameras installed in someone's digital devices even without his/her knowledge. This instills fear in the minds of the people. In Times of India, the report released by The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) shows that "Kolkata had the highest number of attempts to defame or morph photographs of female victims in India in 2022."

Women are treated as objects of body having no heart, mind and soul. They are expected to be voluptuous and mere puppets in the hands of men. Some men seek pleasure in viewing the nudity of women. There are few husbands who exhibit their masculinity over their wives by forcing them to expose themselves. To satisfy the erogenous pleasures of men, women become the victims. It is crucial to bring to light the existing elephant in the room which is 'objectification of women' and assert that women are humans with flesh and blood. In the words of Simon de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*,

“The young girl feels that her body is getting away from her... on the street men follow her with their eyes and comment on her anatomy. She would like to be invisible; it frightens her to become flesh and to show flesh” (333). The digital cameras are like eyes that follow women wherever they are. Moreover, women are usually treated as sex objects in advertisements, magazines and movies. The photographs and videos of women taken with the help of digital cameras are manipulated using artificial intelligence and technology such as deep fake technology to seek sexual gratification which raises agitation among women.

The fear of the hazardous effects of digital media makes people develop digital phobia. The women suffer from digital phobia more than men. They are frightened to use digital media because of cyber threats such as cyber stalking, cyber bullying and doxing. This continuous digital oppression of women arises concern and anxiety as this will affect the future of women. In the coming days, women will be portrayed digitally as mere puppets in the hands of men. Their outer bodies are valued but their inner emotions and feelings are hardly noticed. Women are undergoing a metamorphosis from being chained creatures to empowered individuals, and it is mandatory to prevent digital oppression of women which makes them marginalized again.

The Government of India has been taking efforts to put an end to pornography through laws and acts. According to the Information Technology Act of 2002, anyone publishing sexually vulgar material in electronic form is punished. Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act of 1986 prohibits the dissemination of the stuffs that depict women indecently. IPC (Indian Penal Code), Section 292 punishes with penalties, the publishers of obscene materials. The offenders selling sexually explicit objects to minors are punished under IPC, Section 293. The projection of indecent acts in public places is strictly prohibited under IPC, Section 294. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B) blocks over-the-top (OTT) platforms that presents pornographic content. In spite of all these measures, it is pathetic to know that the digital camera still serves as an oppressing medium for women. The laws have to be amended in such a way that harsh punishments are given

to the offenders. The National Commission of Women has been raising voice to curb the publication of obscene content on OTT and social media sites.

The development of digitized technology is a dire necessity of the day but it need not be at the expense of the hardships of women. The privacy of women should not be superseded by others. The vulgar images of women in digital media should be censored. The portrayal of women as objects or sex objects should be banned. It is high time to undergo digital detoxification or digital fasting where a person does not use the digital devices for offensive purposes. Women have feelings, emotions, desires and goals like men. They must live a life free from the clutches of chauvinistic men and detrimental digital media. There ought to be staunch legal rules against those who encroaches into the space of women. The world must be a safe and peaceful abode and let not digital media be used for any sort of obnoxious activities.

Works Cited

Atwood, Margaret. *Surfacing*. United Kingdom, Virago, 1979.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2009.

Jockim, D. "Nature and Women: An Ecofeministic Reading of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*." *Text as Context*, 2017, 237.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhubaneswar/morphed-photos-of-women-odisha-records-highest-cases-ncrb-report-reveals/articleshow/105741454.cms>

SHADOWS OF TRADITION: UNFOLDING THE ENIGMATIC WORLD OF RITUAL HUNTING IN BENGAL

Prapya Putatunda

Research Scholar, Jadavpur University.

Abstract

In the Indian subcontinent, hunting has been a common activity of leisure or ritual since ancient times. Bengal's cultural fabric heavily emphasizes ritual hunting, which illustrates the mutually beneficial interaction that exists between people and the natural environment. The rich history of ritual hunting in Bengal is examined in this research article, along with its genesis, development, cultural significance, socioeconomic ramifications, and current applicability. Further, this research article intends to shed light on the complex history of ritual hunting in Bengal by analyzing historical evidence and narratives, emphasizing the practice's cultural significance, socioeconomic dynamics, and enduring legacy.

Keywords: Hunting, Bengal, Nature, Tradition, Animals and Forest.

Hunting has a long history that may perhaps predate the origins of humanity. Evidence carved into prehistoric rock paintings depicts the ancestors in the ape-like act of seeking food. Beautiful cave paintings of Bhimbetka (India) and Lascaux (France) portray the primitive hunting practices of animals. Weaponry has developed with human civilization, starting with the primitive stone tools of the Paleolithic period and ending with the complex firearms of the contemporary age. Humans have used chariots, carts, horses and elephants as mounts, among other modes of transportation, to traverse these vast terrains. Dogs are by far the most common and essential assistance animals.

There has been a long-standing debate over the disruption of the Indian environment due to colonial forest policies. Ramchandra Guha in his seminal work "*The Unquiet Woods*," emphasises how the imperial strategies ignored conventional ecological knowledge, leading to ecological imbalances and destruction. In "*This Fissured Land*," Madhav Gadgil highlights the harm that colonial exploitation has caused to indigenous communities, affecting

their livelihood. The British had divided the forest into 3 categories - reserved, protected and village forests, where the village forest could be utilized by the local populace for fuel and fodder. Arguably, these laws were one of the first attempts to barricade the hunting practices by indigenous communities.

Hunting in India

In India, hunting has always been revered as seen in the stories of gods and other mythological characters who go hunting. Among the Hindu trinities, Lord Shiva is most worshiped as "Mrigavyadha," referring to his skill at hunting deer. Legendary rulers and princes from epics such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are highly esteemed for their skill in hunting. Hunting became a royal pleasure during the feudal and colonial periods, encouraged by Mughal emperors and later British officers. Firearms appeared under Akbar's rule, and the elite hunters known as *Shikaris* were employed. This custom continued until hunting was outlawed in India in 1972 under the Wildlife Protection Act. The painting of Nawab Alivardi Khan's hunting, emblematic of the Murshidabad school, encapsulates the intricate cultural and political implications of hunting in India, especially in periods of strife. It was a meticulously choreographed display of power, discipline, and royal masculinity. Alivardi Khan's hunting in Rajmahal over the winters was most likely a planned diversion from the ongoing Maratha raids, demonstrating his capacity to keep cool and control even during political instability. By retaining this practice, he strengthened his image as a ruler who kept courtly customs and governance, implying that the interruptions of war had not jeopardized the stability or dignity of his regime. Later on this practice was passed on to the Britishers. Scholars such as Monica Juneja and Shah Parpia showed in their work how hunting scenes included an image of public welfare in order to create cultivable land and royal hunting as a representation of the king's divine aura. Saving people from the hands of terrifying beasts was considered as a part of divine intervention by the God and the Savior was valiantly portrayed no less than a hero.

Hunting Iconography in Bengal's Temples

Bengal's wealthy merchants and landlords played a major role in enabling the construction of the region's medieval temples. It was practically

natural that painters would be encouraged to depict hunting scenes in temple art, given the elite's general fondness for the sport. This support may have come indirectly, as hunters often made interesting subjects for their paintings, or directly, through the patronage of those who paid for the building. As a result, the medieval temples of Bengal have a vast collection of hunting scenes, most of which are painted, carved, or captured in terracotta. Bas-relief terracotta plaques are the most commonly used medium in temple embellishments. But these creative representations also feature elements of other media, such as woodcarving, stonework, and stucco. Although native Indians make up the bulk of the hunters portrayed in temple hunting scenes, there are also occasional representations of European hunters. Temples like the Krishnachandra temple in Kalna, Purva Bardhaman district, and the Gopinath temple in Dasghara, Hooghly district, are notable instances of the latter. Most often, hunters are seen either on foot or mounted on different animals. But chariots and carts, for example, are conspicuously absent from this series' hunting scenes. Temples like the Radhakrishna temple in Ula-Birnagar, Nadia district, and the Nabaratna Shiva temple in Panchthupi, Murshidabad district, are home to foot hunters. Notably, a picture of European troops on foot using a lance or spear to pursue a tiger may be found in the Krishnachandra temple in Kalna. The *spear or lance* appears to be the most popular weapon among hunters because it is depicted prominently in nearly all temple scenes. Hunters are shown riding horses, riding elephants, and even walking while brandishing *spears*. The second most popular hunting tool is a sword, which is frequently used to hunt tigers and lions. Daggers are not very long, thus they are not the best weapons for hunting, although they are sometimes seen in scenes with bears and tigers as the target. The Mughal era saw the introduction of firearms, which are also seen in temple decorations. Hunters with muskets are portrayed in a number of temples, including Krishnachandraji in Kalna and Charbangla in Baranagar. Furthermore, two temples in the Birbhum district—the Lakshmi Janardan temple in Ghurisha and the Radhabinod temple in Joydev-Kenduli—depict the "Satnoli," a special weapon employed by traditional bird hunter tribes in western West Bengal. Certain decorations found in temples illustrate the dangers of hunting by

showing scenes in which untamed animals' assault. Illustrations of bears ambushing hunters may be found in the Charbangla temple and the Lakshmi Janardan temple in Ghurisha. The Ramchandra temple in Guptipara has scenes of tigers assaulting hunters, while the Gangeshwar temple has a clay plaque that depicts an elephant attacking a man and terracotta panels portraying rhinoceros, bear, and tigers attacking men individually. While similar panels from the Jorbangla temple in Bishnupur show two tigers mauling a man, perhaps a hunter.

The Charbangla Temple Complex in Baranagar attributed to Rani Bhabani depicts men and women engaging in different entertainments, groups of hunters hunting and chasing animals, a procession of animals, fighting scenes, and others.⁸ Another interesting set of narrative panels can be seen on the basal friezes of the southern wall, and in niches of the western temple, pertaining to secular themes. One of these depictions pertain to a group hunting scene, where a group of armed men can be seen hiding behind a forest grove. All of them can be seen wearing hats, coats and trousers. They can be seen targeting rhinoceros deep inside the forest, which also says that such rhinos were a part of the local habitat in earlier times. If one looks at the other part of the forest, one can notice two elephants. An armed man, riding on a horse pointing his swords towards an animal can be seen on the extreme left side of the panel. The following hunting scenes are silent reminders of control and exploitation of forest resources.

Hunting in Bengali Literature

There is a longstanding relationship between ecology and literature in bangla literary writings. Hunting was a common point of interest for several authors and cinema directors. In Rabindranath Tagore's *Shesher Kobita* (The Last Poem) the protagonist Amit was engaged in the hunting activity while visiting a forest. Although, its not the main subject but Tagore explores the bond between humans and animals. Perhaps, one of the biggest reference about the enigmatic world of ritual hunting can be found in the story "The Hunt" by Mahasweta Devi. Broader themes of resistance, power and justice are reflected in this story. The backdrop of ritual spring hunt provides both a real and symbolic setting for Mary Oraon's act of retaliation against Collector

Singh, who harrases her.

The following is one of the story's most important quotes that sums up the hunt's significance; “Last night the Spring festival fire burned very high and reddened the sky for quite some time. Today from first light the men are wild with drink and songs and color. The very old women are looking after the children. For twelve years men run the hunt. Then comes the women's turn. Like the men they too go out with bow and arrow. They run in forest and hill. They kill hedgehogs, rabbits, birds, whatever they can get. Then they picnic together, drink liquor, sing, and return home at evening. They do exactly what the men do. Once in twelve years.”

In this plot, the ritual hunting in the above lines are performed by women, which comes after an interval of every 12 years. This also shows how the gender roles are reversed in hunting. After the hunt while everyone is celebrate killing, Mary is full of joy too, as she has murdered the ‘biggest beast’, Collector. ‘Mary laughed and held him, laid him on the ground. Collector is laughing, Mary lifts the machete, lowers it, hits, lowers. A few million moons pass. Mary stands up. Blood? On her clothes?’ Mary's act of murder is a recovery of power through an indigenous custom as well as a kind of personal retaliation. Mahasweta Devi transforms hunting from a need of survival to a symbolic act of defiance against tyranny by equating her deed with the hunt. The way that oral traditions and indigenous activities may be reinterpreted to challenge structural power systems is demonstrated by this junction of ritual hunting and writing. Although Jibanananda Das's poem ‘Shikar’ or hunting, does not specifically deal with ritual hunting. It silently shows the effect of hunting and associated customs.

Translation: “A strange sound , The river water turned red like the petals of the Machka flower , Fire burned again—the warm red flesh of the deer was prepared.” A sense of tranquility is created by the dawn, the mist, and the grazing deer, but it is broken by the hunt. The meat of the deer is cooked after the hunt for consumption as done in the ritual hunts. Translation: “Under the stars, on a bed of grass, old dew-laden stories are told.” These lines tell how after a fulfilling hunt and feast, a gathering

happens under the sky where the hunters sit and relax for some time. The ritualistic tradition of storytelling happens where post hunt remembrance and transmission of hunting knowledge happens. In this community, gathering often claims how they have once killed a large animal like a tiger or bear. In Balai Chand Mukhopadhyay's prose "Hate Bazare" (In the Market), hunting is depicted as a sporadic means of subsistence for rural communities. Satyajit Ray also explores hunting through his detective novel series Feluda's *Royal Bengal Rohosho (Mystery of Royal Bengal Tiger)*.

Recent Reports of Hunting

A sense of pity prevails when the news on hunting is heard. During the 2021 Bengal legislative assembly election when the primary focus of media outlets were into the voting and political rallies, some poachers silently killed a deer for a feast. This incident occurred in the Alipurduar district of West Bengal and was reported by *Ei Samay*, a Bengali newspaper. Folodharini Kali puja is celebrated on the day of Amavarsya (mostly in June, Bengali month of Jaistho). Amidst the ongoing puja celebration, some local villagers had the audacity of boarding a local train from Howrah to Medinipur along with the body of hunted animals. This incident was reported by HEAL (Human and Environment Alliance League), a community initiative to protect wildlife. The district police chief incharges were summoned by Calcutta High Court on 10th May, 2023 in response to a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) case filed by HEAL activists.

The PIL alleged that the police officers were reluctant to stop ceremonial slaughtering of wild animals and neglected the matter. Another instance was cited by the petitioner in which the claim was that in the month of April (4th, 13th and 19th), large scale hunting was carried out. A number of animals were brutally slaughtered and publicly displayed as trophies. The World Wide Fund for Nature & TRAFFIC (Trade Records Analysis of Flora & Fauna in Commerce) published a report about the illegal hunting of sharks along the Bengal coast in Kakdwip and Digha. Especially, during the Covid pandemic when the government supervision was limited more sharks and other endangered fishes were caught by the locals for sale and recreation.

According to a news article by *Times Network*, approximately 2500 people gathered in the Jhargram annual animal fair area in April 2021, for buying wild animal meats.(Some even cooked the meat and consumed it in the fair itself). However, this hunting is primarily more focused on economy and high cost of shark's body parts, rather than any religious significance.

The Hunting Festivals of South Bengal

The festival that happens during the month of Baisakh is known as “Disum Sendra” or “Shikar Parab”. Some tribes celebrate this during Budh Purnima, which completely shatters the non-violence preaching of Lord Budhha against animal slaughter. The Hindu newspaper is informed by S. Kulandaivel, Chief Conservator of Forests, WB, that ritualistic slaughter is practiced around the full and new moons (amavasya and purnima), especially “Jyestha Amavasya.” Hunt festivals are frequently arranged by village officials like gram pradhans using pamphlets or loudspeakers to advertise, involving the males of the household. Individual hunts can also happen depending on the will. Ritual hunting is practiced by various tribes in India with different names. In Jharkhand's Dalma wildlife sanctuary it is known as ‘Vishu Shikar’, ‘Sendra’, or ‘Jani Shikar’.

Ritualistic hunting is noticeable especially in the districts of Purulia, Jhargram, Bankura, and West Medinipur - Jangalmahal region. These regions are home to wolves, hyenas, pangolins, elephants, and fishing cats (baghrol - which is also the State Animal of West Bengal)—species that are critically endangered worldwide. Although it was formerly a major problem in Howrah, Burdwan, and East Medinipur, it has recently received a lot of attention while there is occasional hunting happening in Birbhum and Murshidabad. In between the agricultural areas and villages, are these regions' scattered deciduous forests, wetlands, and scrub lands that are a hub of biodiversity. Mostly these forest lands are targeted by the hunters as it is easily accessible by local transports. Overall, 53 distinct species of animals are hunted - 36 common birds (67.9%), 11 species of mammals (20.8%), five reptiles (9.4%), and one insect (ants). The most desirable hunted animals are wild boar, hare, quail, jungle cat and monitor lizard.

The Hunters

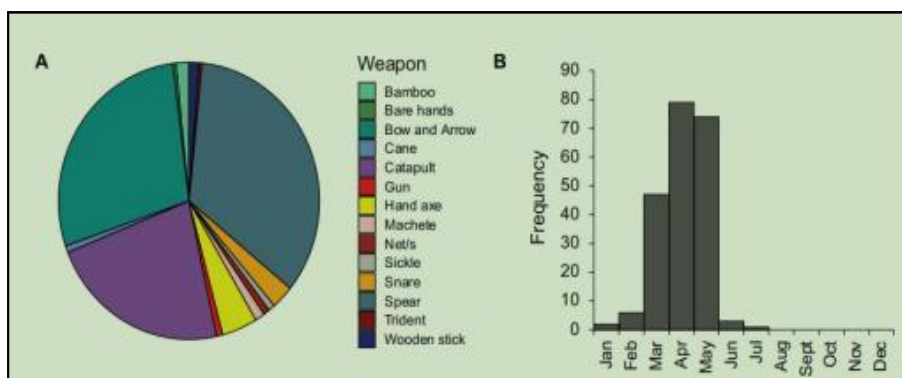
Some non-Aryan tribes in northeastern and eastern India hold an annual ritual spring hunt that is quite significant. It occurs at the start of the lunar year or in its early phases. Elwin referred to this as "the time of great agricultural activity"—the dry, hot season that comes before the rainy season. Tribes from each village seem to have their own hunt, so inter-village hunts were apparently confined to the plateau of Chota Nagpur region. Based on the records that are accessible, it can be inferred that the Santals (who contribute to 50% of Bengal's tribes), Birhors, Juangs, Gadabas, and Bison Horn Marias all follow the rule of widespread involvement by all men. Every hamlet in the Oraons must have a representative, but the young males without wives appear to be primarily responsible for the hunt. Pakmaras are a group of tribes who only hunt birds and reside near the banks of river Ajay in Bardhaman district of West Bengal. They use a customary instrument called Satnali for this, especially when they are chasing Hornbill birds. Herbert Hope Rizzle in his book *Tribes and Castes of Bengal* wrote stories long ago, in the murky depths of history, with Chirimar, Bede, and Minashikaris communities as associates. While documenting Pakhibandh Hunt fest in Jhargram HEAL organization found a sizable number of hunters from non-tribal communities. This hunting behavior is not driven by need, unlike popular opinion but people from all walks of life like students, teachers, farmers, laborers, shopkeepers and workers participate. However, many might not know that the hunt festivities they attend have ceremonial origins, these so-called 'ritual' hunters frequently join together in raucous groups and hunt whatever wildlife they come across. Following their hunts, hunters bring their game back to public areas where they slaughter, skin, and cook the animals in full view of onlookers. Camps are erected close to hunting grounds. Armed with weapons, hunters raid woodlands and divide their loot in gathering places. Multiple hunters use wooden spears(lathi), axes (tangi), guns, bows, and arrows (Kaar bansh/Teer dhonuk) to pursue animals at the same time, or strike them with bamboo clubs until they are dead. Skins and body parts are traded often, and carcasses are either processed on-site or sold.

Motive Behind the Hunt

Whenever questioned, hunters frequently said that they hunt for "phurti," or fun, viewing it as a pastime. They acknowledge that hunting is not motivated by need, despite blaming religion and society, which has resulted in a fall in conventional morality such as abstaining from hunting young and pregnant animals. According to some hunters, the most common usage of dead animals is in large feasts, while some claim spiritual usages as well. For example wild boar's teeth are used to ward off evil spirits around new born babies and bones of birds (kite, vultures and owls) are used for traditional medicines. Monitor lizards and chameleon's skin are used for clothing and decorative items. The best-selling animals are russell viper, turtle and flying fox. Skulls of killed animals are hung outside the tribal houses in-order to showcase glory and prestige. This practice is common in many affluent households, where even today one can find animals, skulls hanging from the walls at the entrance or meeting rooms. Colorful feathers of birds are used to decorate houses in Bankura and are worn as ornaments by the Santhal tribes during festivals, especially in the Northeast. Similar usage of animals are prevalent among other Indian tribes too. Meats and body parts of the animals are mostly used for local consumption. The price of Indian hare's meat is about 500 rupees per kilogram, while wild boars meat cost about 300 rupees and 150 for golden jackles.

When entire animal families are attacked, it is clear that conservation is not being prioritized. Some hunters also participate in the illicit wildlife trade, taking advantage of creatures such as monitor lizards in order to make large sums of money. Another specific conservation worry about the illicit wildlife trafficking in India is the expanding internet component of the wildlife product trade. For instance, the Indian- based 'hatha jodi' trade targets monitor lizards, such as the yellow and Bengal monitors, for their dried hemipenes, which are fictitiously offered for sale online as rare and holy Himalayan plant roots that are said to have spiritual qualities in Buddhist and Chinese beliefs.

This highlights a worrying trend in which the pursuit of pleasure at the expense of moral and environmental issues leads to a decline in biodiversity. In hunter's group, it is customary for young hunters to take down one endangered wild animal. As a means of competitiveness, hunters must take down a significant number of wild species. It is challenging to assess how ceremonial hunts affect the biodiversity of nearby forests. However, the quantity of participants and the variety of species targeted raise questions over the long-term potential of contributing to "defaunation," the sustainability of the accompanying offtake, and possible hazards to endangered and vulnerable species. A cross-country study team performed an interview with ritual hunters. The majority of respondents who were asked how often they had participated in ritualistic hunting during the previous 12 months stated that they only did it once or twice. Some also claimed that they were involved into more frequent hunts.



(Fig : Showing weapons used in hunting (A) and its frequency in different months.(B) Source :

Preventing the Slaughter

Laws

The 1972 Wildlife Protection Act (WPA) (updated in 2022), outlaws hunting in all its manifestations and declares it a crime for which there is no bail. Moreover, it declares that hunting festivals are unlawful. Offenders may be sentenced to up to seven years in prison and/or fined of up to Rs. 25,000. There are no exemptions for customary or ceremonial hunting under the

WPA, 1972. Hunting of wild animals on the pretext of traditional practice is supremely prohibited by the Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers under (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006 (FRA). In a way this rule snatched the power from the hands of the tribes who once owned the forest and balanced the ecosystem. However, as compared to the earlier times the number of animals has become less so this rule is beneficial for the ecology and is the need of the hour. The legislation prohibited the locals to hunt, capture, or take any part of a wild animal's body from forest grounds. In 2019, the Supreme Court issued strict orders to stop hunting wild animals and consumption of animal meat was made illegal, especially after Covid as many zoonotic diseases might spread from it. In 2023, the Calcutta High Court equated the unlawful killing of animals with a murder of a person under IPC (Indian Penal Code) Section 302. Due to these strict measures a large number of hunters head back home unharmed the animals.

Government Initiatives

The governments, both Central and State have taken up numerous initiatives like awareness campaigns, meetings, street plays, posters, distribution of handbills etc. The local state government has provided a monthly income of Rs. 1200 to every tribal woman in the form of Lakshmi Bhandar scheme which also benefits other members of the family. Hunting is not driven by economic needs anymore. Rather it is a game of entertainment and showcases male gaze. To control the ongoing onslaught of animals, the government forest officials have formulated strict regulations on the entry of protected forests and killing of local wild animals in deciduous forest lands. The promotion of eco-friendly activities such as bird watching, wildlife photography, nature resorts and jungle safari could be a better alternative source of employment and enjoyment. This form of community behaviour is not a new phenomenon in India because since the 1990s Angami tribe of Nagaland's Khonoma village is practising it when they stopped the hunting of endangered bird Blyth tragopan. In Northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, some tribal communities and village panchayats (councils) have self imposed hunting bans in their forest lands. Instead of animal based traditional

medicines, plant sourced products should be encouraged more in the market.

Conclusion

Ritual hunting is deeply ingrained in the minds, customs and cultures of Bengal. The longstanding debate over hunting in Southwestern Bengal indicates a complex interaction of sociological, ecological and legal factors that bind with hunting. Legally, it is not permitted but the practice of hunting is seen as a part of culture. The dichotomy between protecting ecology and continuing culture reflects the struggle between human and nature. Although there is a ban on hunting, the tribes continue to disobey the rule and frequently venture into the forest for a hunt. A balance is required between conservation and ecology. When a place is deforested, more number of trees will be planted as a replacement. But in-case of animals, it is difficult to do as hunting takes place every year and animals need time to reproduce. Moreover, plants stand still but animals move from one place to another in search for food, making it difficult to keep a track. Some hunters also tried to justify their killing by saying even large animals hunt small preys for food and so humans do. But this is not true because humans have better alternative source of food which the animals does not have. Education and public awareness are the keys to stop such practices. Rituals that hurt the mankind must be stopped. In the 18th century, even the gatekeepers of religion were against the ban of sati and widow remarriage on the pretext of everlasting ritual. But it was countered with solid evidences. In this case, even if the law is there prevention and protection need to be more stringent. Diverse viewpoints exist, ranging from the necessity of conservation to the safeguarding of cultural identity. Engaging in discussion that recognizes the complexity of hunting traditions and promotes sustainable methods that uphold ecological integrity and cultural legacy become essential as one negotiates this complex terrain.

Works Cited

Ramachandra Guha, The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990)

Asok Kumar Das, "A Medley of forms and Styles: Art in the Eighteenth

- Century Bengal” in A Comprehensive History of Modern Bengal 1700- 1950, Vol. I, ed. by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (The Asiatic Society, Kolkotta: Primus Books, 2020), p. 541.
- Shah Parpia, “Hunting ground, agricultural land and the forest: sustainable interdependency in Mughal India 1526-1707”, *Landscape History* 39, no.2, 2018, pp. 25-29.
- Monica Juneja, “On the Margins of Utopia - One more look at Mughal Painting.” *The Medieval History Journal* 4, no.2, 2001, pp. 222-223. <https://doi.org/10.1177/097194580100400203>
- Chatterji, Shyamal. “Art and Architecture of the Temples of Baronagar, Murshidabad.” *Chitrolekha Journal on Art and Design* 2, no. 1(2012): 74 80.
- Times News Network (2021). Animals, birds hunted and cooked in open at West Midinipur Fair.
- Sarkar, M., & Modak, B. K. (2022). Rituals and festivals of indigenous people of Chota Nagpur plateau of West Bengal: A positive correlation with the environment. In U. Chatterjee, A. Kashyap, M. Everard, G. K. Panda, & D. Mahata (Eds.), *Indigenous people and nature*, pp. 465–491. Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-323-91603-5.00020-8>

DATA PRIVACY DILEMMAS IN INDIA'S DIGITAL FUTURE: CHALLENGES AND LEGAL PERSPECTIVES

Haseena K

Research Scholar, Department of Politics and International Studies,
Pondicherry University.

Abstract

India's embrace of digital technologies in governance and civic life has transformed the traditional contours of its democracy. The digital transformation from biometric identification to digital payment systems has reconfigured how citizens interact with the state and one another. The aim of this paper is to analyse how these technologies are helping to strengthen digital democracy, along with an attempt to explain the concerns that arise from using various digital technologies. This paper will also investigate India's existing legal and regulatory framework, and its effectiveness in safeguarding citizens' data rights.

Keywords: Digital Democracy, Data Privacy, Transparency, Data Protection and Political Polarisation.

1. Introduction

The introduction of digital technologies has transformed the democratic process. Digital democracy means extensive use of information and communication technology (ICT) and Computer-mediated communication CMC to enhance citizen participation in the democratic process (Dijk and Hacker). It removes traditional physical limitations of time and space in political participation while complementing rather than replacing traditional democratic practices (Dijk and Hacker). This transformation creates new opportunities for engagement while preserving valuable aspects of the traditional democratic process. However, this digital transformation comes with challenges, including disseminating false information, digital divide, transparency, accountability, security and privacy concerns.

In India, digital democracy transforms government from “representative” to a more “individual-based” form and from “passive to

“proactive” (Devanesan and Chandrasekaran). Digital technologies in government help to ease administrative processes, bring more effective policies, prevent bureaucratic hurdles, and promote active citizens. The incorporation of technology into government systems has significantly increased. Moreover, the citizens are able to access these technologies. For example, by the end of 2022, India had a substantial landscape, with 114.4 crore mobile connections and a tele density that reached 84.67% in October 2022. Furthermore, internet connections jumped from 25.15 crore in March 2014 to 83.69 crore in June 2022, registering a growth of 232% (Year End Review 2022: Ministry of Communications).

The Indian government launched the Digital India Initiative to transform India into a digitally empowered society focusing on digital infrastructure, governance and service. Other initiatives are Aadhaar for digital service delivery and the MyGov platform for citizen engagement. A promising development is unfolding in India, as individuals from the lower socioeconomic segments have swiftly embraced digital services in the past ten years. Through various platforms like Aadhaar, which provides unique digital identification, and the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), a mobile-based digital payment system built on a shared technological framework, along with the growing mobile network coverage, telephone access, and internet utilisation, people from these less affluent backgrounds are amassing significant digital data even before experiencing substantial economic prosperity (Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture).

2. Data privacy dilemmas in digital democracy

Digital democracy means citizens engage in the governance process using technology as a medium. It strengthens citizens’ participation and access to political participation; however, these digital democracies exhibit certain disadvantages. These include the ease of disseminating false information, amplifying hate speech, and the difficulties in ensuring equitable opportunities for all individuals to participate, often persistent ‘digital divide’ limiting equal access (Helbing et al.). The high data generation due to the emphasis on digital democracy is also a concern for data privacy issues. India

has no proper mechanism to deal with the issues that arise from it. In the current scenario, privacy and consent have become increasingly fluid due to the ease with which various stakeholders can access and manipulate information about individuals.

The Cambridge Analytica scandal involved the unauthorised collection of personal data from millions of Facebook users. The firm used this data to create psychological profiles of voters, influencing political outcomes, such as the US presidential election 2016 and the Brexit referendum (Macnish and Jai Galliot). A similar concern arises with Pegasus spyware, developed by the Israeli cyber intelligence firm NSO Group, which can access smartphones and extract data without the user's consent. Reports indicate that Pegasus spyware has targeted politicians and journalists in India, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia (Marczak et al.). Using big data for political communication, voter targeting, and commercialising data for profit by governments and private entities can gradually erode citizens' trust in political institutions.

The use of dig data witnessed a dramatic change in informational governance and the emergence of "algorithmic governance" (Kitchin). Algorithmic governance represents a paradigm where data-driven algorithms are central to decision-making and policy implementation (Kitchin). It replaces human representatives with algorithms in the decision-making process. However, it provides new challenges, like excluding beneficiaries from welfare schemes due to underrepresentation in datasets, the possibility of algorithmic bias when addressing complex social issues and lack of personal accountability in algorithmic decision-making systems. The complex nature of algorithms can obscure decision-making processes, making it difficult for citizens to understand how choices are made (García-Marzá and Calvo). This algorithmic governance may transform traditional democratic norms by diminishing the deliberate participation of people in the decision-making process.

3. Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative research approach through a desk review, with data mainly collected from secondary literature such as policy documents, books, journal articles, and newspapers. The paper analyses various acts regarding data protection in India and how these acts are effective in dealing with privacy and data breaches in India.

4. Research Questions

- 1) To what extent does digital democracy impact the lives of citizens and ensure the protection of their rights?
- 2) To what extent are existing regulations and policies effectively safeguarding individuals' privacy?

5. Challenges of Digital Democracy

5.1 Disinformation and Misinformation

The spread of disinformation and misinformation on social media can weaken constructive discussion in society. Disinformation refers to intentionally fabricated information, often propagated by entities like "troll farms," whereas misinformation encompasses inaccurate or false information, not necessarily distributed with malicious intent (Helbing et al.). These phenomena are facilitated by deceptive content, susceptible readers lacking media literacy and poorly regulated social media platforms (Rubin). Disinformation campaigns can spread through traditional and social media, and destabilise democratic systems by manipulating public opinion (Helbing et al.).

The Indian government has introduced Information Technology (Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 to address misinformation and content regulation on digital platforms. The rules focus on fake news, tracing the origin of messages, and monitoring illegal content. Social media platforms with over 5 million registered users are classified as significant social media intermediaries and face stricter compliance requirements. Rules propose that social media platforms need to remove content if the Press Information Bureau's (PIB) fact-check units find that the content is fake. The Rules 2021 have not given any procedural

safeguards when law enforcement agencies request information from intermediaries. So, a comprehensive law is needed to respect the individual's privacy.

5.2 Political Polarisation in the Digital Age

Political polarisation is a threat to democracy. It means creating social division, where individuals align themselves with two opposing and hostile political camps, with little room for compromise or mutual understanding. The influence of technology amplifies the effects of political polarisation through various digital platforms that can be used to spread biased information, fuel animosity, and promote a 'winner-takes-all' mentality in politics (Arbatli and Rosenberg). This trend can encourage individuals to prioritise their partisan interests over democratic values. So, polarisation can challenge the functioning of the democratic process itself (Arbatli and Rosenberg).

Personalised information is driven by big data, or the division of the internet into a group of people who share similar interests. Facebook and Google provide the individual's interest and remove opposing views of their political beliefs, so each person gets different results for the same keyword search in these online service media (Bozdag and van den Hoven). Because of the filter bubble, citizens miss the bigger picture of society. It can reinforce their existing belief and limit exposure to opposing viewpoints. Moreover, personalised marketing and content production, driven by big data, challenge the shared social and civic space necessary for effective democracy (Couldry and Turow).

Political campaigns increasingly use big data analytics to target voters with personalised messages, potentially compromising fair elections and political equality (Kosinski et al.). Political campaigns based on big data analytics can create an uneven playing field. For example, the concentration of data collection and analysis capabilities in the major parties can create a barrier to entry for smaller parties or independent candidates in the political system (Anstead). Big data analytics can accurately predict political party affiliations using social media data (Kosinski et al.) This trend denies basic

principles of justice, like equal opportunities to participate in the election process.

5.3 Breach of privacy in social welfare programs

Technology is a significant tool for improving welfare schemes' efficiency, accountability and transparency. The introduction of Aadhaar is a classic example of ensuring access to government welfare benefits in a transparent and corruption-free manner. However, implementing this scheme raised allegations of mass surveillance, violation of individual privacy and data leakage to third-party entities (Singh). The program's reliance on biometric authentication has led to "anxieties of recognition " when beneficiaries face difficulties due to failed authentication attempts. This results in the denial of benefits, undermining the dignity of marginalised groups (Singh). Besides Aadhaar, various states have used sensitive data to implement schemes, showing various privacy breaches. A notable example is the Water Resource Organization of the Public Works Department of the Tamil Nadu government, which implemented a management information system for its irrigation basins to help farmers monitor water supply and crop quality. However, inadequate data security leads to data leaks to third parties, it led to extortion and ransom calls targeting farmers (Jha and Bose). In all these schemes, marginalised sections of society are the primary beneficiaries.

6. Recommendations

Numerous legislative measures and policy documents have been introduced in India to promote inclusive digital governance, encompassing acts like the Information Technology Act 2000, the "Strategy for New India @75" by NITI Aayog, Justice BN Srikrishna Report, The Personal Data Protection Bill 2019 (PDP, 2019), the Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture (DEPA) by NITI Aayog, and the Non-Personal Data Governance Framework (NPDGF) by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY). Despite the efforts to enhance digital democracy, gaps persist due to technical, administrative, and social challenges. This paper provides recommendations to address these challenges.

6.1 Strengthening of Data Privacy Regulations

The central government introduced the Information Technology (Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethic Code) Rules in 2021 to prevent the spread of disinformation and misinformation. However, rules should add procedures when law enforcement agencies request information from intermediaries while respecting individual privacy. In 2023, the Indian Parliament passed the Digital Personal Data Protection Act to manage citizens' data. The bill aims to regulate the processing of digital personal data within India, both online and offline, and outside the country for goods or services. The bill grants individual rights like information access, correction and erasure and grievance redressal. This law has many shortcomings, such as the Central Government may exempt government agencies for security, public order, and offence prevention. The bill grants the Government discretion to notify countries to allow the transfer of personal data outside India. The act lacks clarity regarding the consequences if the government breaches specific provisions. So the government, with unlimited access to personal data, nullify the three tests of legality, necessity and proportionality given by the Supreme Court in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) vs Union Of India. The current legal framework should be balanced between safeguarding data and addressing the legitimate requirements of the government, and should ensure transparency in processing individual data.

6.2 Transparency and Citizen Participation

Policymakers should ensure that the use of Big Data in decision-making is transparent and includes active civic engagement. Participatory and deliberative data collection should be promoted to avail government service instead of passive data collection. Citizens must have a say in how data is collected and processed for policy decisions. The idea of "opacity respect" (Macnish and Jai Galliot) is relevant to the issues of privacy and the ethical use of big data in democratic processes. "Opacity respect" means that individuals should maintain privacy and opacity in their personal lives; the government and other entities should not constantly observe individuals. If it does, it will undermine the human dignity of the individual.

7. Conclusion

The digital democracy function is made to ensure equal access for all to an affordable, inclusive, fair and safe internet, where freedom of expression, the right to privacy, with particular regard to the protection of personal data, and the principle of net neutrality are protected, as well as equal access to public online and e-government services are provided (Atondo). Digital technology can improve or undermine democracy. Right now, it is controlled by too few. No democratic state or system has sorted out how to deal with this challenge to the fundamental legitimacy of democratic processes (Lievrouw and Loader). Democratic nations must strike a delicate equilibrium between preserving public safety and safeguarding individual rights. The involvement of private firms in data collection and analysis warrants close examination. Equally important is fostering digital literacy among individuals, cross-party cooperation, community-level dialogue, and involving the public in policy decisions, which can contribute to an inclusive society.

Works Cited

- Anstead, Nick. "Data-Driven Campaigning in the 2015 United Kingdom General Election." *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, vol. 22, no. 3, June 2017, pp. 294–313, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161217706163>.
- Arbatli, Ekim, and Dina Rosenberg. "United We Stand, Divided We Rule: How Political Polarization Erodes Democracy." *Democratization*, vol. 28, no. 2, Oct. 2020, pp. 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1818068>.
- Atondo, Ramón Jáuregui. "REPORT on E-Democracy in the European Union: Potential and Challenges | A8-0041/2017 | European Parliament." Europa.eu, 2017, www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2017-0041_EN.html. Accessed 18 Mar. 2025.
- Bozdag, Engin, and Jeroen van den Hoven. "Breaking the Filter Bubble: Democracy and Design." *Ethics and Information Technology*, vol.

17, no. 4, Dec. 2015, pp. 249–65, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-015-9380-y>.

Couldry, Nick, and Joseph Turow. “Big Data, Big Questions| Advertising, Big Data and the Clearance of the Public Realm: Marketers’ New Approaches to the Content Subsidy.” *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 8, 2014, p. 17, api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:3088947.

Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture. NITI Aayog, Aug. 2020.

Devanesan, V., and P. Kingsley Alfred Chandrasekaran. “E- Democracy in India -Implications and Imperatives.” *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 72, no. 2, 2011, pp. 395–401, www.jstor.org/stable/42761424. Accessed 20 Feb. 2025.

Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023.

www.meity.gov.in/static/uploads/2024/06/2bf1f0e9f04e6fb4f8fef35e82c42aa5.pdf. Accessed 28 Jan. 2025.

Dijk, Jan van, and Kenneth L. Hacker. *Digital Democracy*. SAGE Publications Limited, 2000.

García-Marzá, Domingo, and Patrici Calvo. *Algorithmic Democracy*. Springer Nature, 2024.

Helbing, Dirk, et al. “Democracy by Design: Perspectives for Digitally Assisted, Participatory Upgrades of Society.” *Journal of Computational Science*, vol. 71, July 2023, p. 102061, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jocs.2023.102061>.

Information Technology (Intermediary Guideline and Digital Media Ethics Code), Rules . 2021, mib.gov.in/sites/default/files/2024-02. Accessed 20 Feb. 2025.

Kitchin, Rob. “Thinking Critically about and Researching Algorithms.” *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 20, no. 1, Feb. 2017, pp. 14–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2016.1154087>.

Kosinski, Michal, et al. “Private Traits and Attributes Are Predictable from Digital Records of Human Behavior.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 110, no. 15, Mar. 2013, pp.

- 5802–5, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1218772110>.
- Lievrouw, Leah A., and Brian Loader. *Routledge Handbook of Digital Media and Communication in Society*. Routledge, 2019.
- Macnish, Kevin, and Jai Galliot. *Big Data and Democracy*. Edinburgh University Press, 2020.
- Marczak, Bill, et al. “HIDE and SEEK: Tracking NSO Group’s Pegasus Spyware to Operations in 45 Countries.” *The Citizen Lab*, 18 Sept. 2018/. Accessed 15 Mar. 2025.
- Rubin, Victoria L. “Disinformation and Misinformation Triangle.” *Journal of Documentation*, vol. 75, no. 5, Sept. 2019, pp. 1013–34, <https://doi.org/10.1108/jd-12-2018-0209>.
- Singh, Pawan. “Aadhaar and Data Privacy: Biometric Identification and Anxieties of Recognition in India.” *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 24, no. 7, Oct. 2019, pp. 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2019.1668459>.
- “Year End Review 2022: Ministry of Communications.” *Pib.gov.in*, 2022, www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1884072. Accessed 20 Feb. 2025.

ON GENDER DYSTOPIAS: THE HEMA COMMISSION REPORT AND THE HANDMAIDENS OF MALAYALAM CINEMA

Amal Krishna P S

I M.A, Institute of English, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram.

Abstract

The paper seeks to draw a parallel between the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood and the contemporary report released by the Hema Commission which analyzed the status of women in the Malayalam film industry. The basic features attributed to a female dystopian fiction, as Sally Miller Gearheart proposed include contrasting the present with an envisioned idealized society, offering a comprehensive critique of the recent social situations, seeing men or male institutions as a major cause for present evils and that women are the soul arbiters of their reproductive rights. The novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood reflects all the aforementioned features. The brutal and oppressive means that Atwood's handmaids have to face manifests itself in various angles in our contemporary society. The findings that the Hema Committee put forward serve as a requisite eye-opener that all need, considering the state of our society, and its take on gender. The primary intention behind this paper is to show how the dystopia visualized by Atwood in the novel is becoming more or less a reality.

Keywords: Gender, Gender Dystopia, Female Dystopian Fiction, Malayalam Cinema and Handmaidens.

“In a world where women are commodities, a woman who refuses to sell herself will have the thing she refuses to sell taken away from her by force” (Angela Carter). A eulogized reading, conceptualizes a dystopia as a highly futuristic, imagined universe where oppressive societal control and the illusion of a perfect society are maintained through corporate, bureaucratic, technological, moral and totalitarian control. The dystopian imagination creates a scenario where a political or social norm is delineated, foregrounded, and vehemently criticized. Some of the popular features

associated with a dystopia includes but is not limited to, (i) a central propaganda that determines the way an ‘individual’ and in extension the society should perform, (ii) a presence of a totalitarian figure or agency, the society is expected to collectively respect and worship, (iii) the citizens live in a severe dehumanized state, where any form of freedom, civil rights, or even individual thought is suspended, restricted or censored, (iv) a severe form of surveillance is practiced to ensure that the propaganda is followed, and that no form of resistance surface. In the Orwellian tradition, the feature of constant surveillance, is at times exaggerated to such an extent, that one would find even one’s thoughts and emotions being monitored by the central agency as well.

The novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* by Margaret Atwood is one of the finest examples of a dystopian narrative. Even though it came out in the year 1985, the relevance it continues to have in contemporary society, stands undisputed. This is evident from how many of her observations on gender dystopia that she made in the novel, are valid even now, especially when one takes into consideration certain shocking revelations concerning the patriarchal nature of Malayalam cinema, that came about in Kerala. The way Atwood has crossed the borders, and made herself loud and relevant even in a completely different cultural context, shows the power of literature to form vast ideological networks.

This paper entitled ‘On Gender Dystopia: The Hema Commission Report and the Handmaidens of Malayalam Cinema’ attempts to analyze the recently released Justice Hema Commission Report which exposes the patriarchal face of Malayalam Cinema, using the critical paradigms offered by Atwood’s dystopian consciousness. The oppression that Atwood’s handmaidens had to undergo manifests itself in various angles in contemporary society. The primary intention of this paper is to show how the dystopia visualized by Atwood is becoming more or less of a reality now.

The word dystopia was coined by J S Mill in 1868, in a political speech he delivered in Ireland, where he used the term as a contrast to an utopia. But by limiting the definition of a dystopia to be something, in

contrast to an utopia alone did limit the perimeters of the very concept that had great potential for study. Later, the Oxford English Dictionary, on the basis of Mill's speech, went on to define a dystopia as "an imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible". As time progressed, the area of literary dystopia has been perceived in many ways throughout the twentieth century. The changing political scenarios all over the world, the spread of capitalism, and the diminishing nature of humanity in general, prompted many to resort to this literary genre to vent their frustration on what was happening around them. According to Tom Moylan, "Dystopian narrative is largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century. A hundred years of exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease, famine, ecocide, depression, debt and the steady depletion of humanity, through the buying and selling of everyday life provided more than enough fertile ground for this fictive underside of the utopian imagination" (Moylan, 2000, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*). Later on, as newer studies and experiments were done in the genre of dystopian fiction, newer perspectives and definitions associated with dystopia also began to emerge.

As time progressed from the twentieth century to the twenty first century there has been a great evolution in the terms of the scope and nature of dystopian literature. While the scope of the twentieth century dystopian literature was solely limited to the themes of political totalitarianism and nuclear annihilation, dystopian works of the twenty first century incorporated a number of themes including technology, environment, identity, resilience etc. This level of inclusivity that the twenty-first century dystopian literature hosted was not only in terms of technological evolution, but also in the case of character dynamics and depth.

The thematic evolution that dystopian literature met with, made possible the arrival of various other themes than mere political totalitarianism, which include corporate surveillance, technological manipulation, Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality, Data Privacy, environmental degradation, climate change etc. When the area of character dynamics and agency is concerned, it can be inferred that the dystopian

protagonist who unlike that of the twentieth century counterparts who had to face insurmountable oppressive forces with limited agency, now are depicted as more empowered and resourceful, engaging in resistance and self-discovery. There has also been a certain level of sophistication that has been brought about when it comes to the case of crafting the dystopian protagonist. In most of the cases the characters are presented in a very morally ambiguous manner, in such a way that the line bifurcating the traits associated with a hero and an anti- hero is blurred. This shows how modern dystopian literature has moved towards a more nuanced form of character development. The thematic shifts and narrative innovations that the genre of dystopian literature witnessed is a testimony to the various social, political, economic, environmental, and personal concerns of the contemporary period. Dystopian literature grapples with the conditions of power, freedom and the plight of humanity.

Dystopia manifests itself in various forms in the realm of literature. It is in the form of a politically totalitarian society that a dystopia is presented in George Orwell's magnum opus *1984*, whereas it is a climate dystopia that appears in the work *The History of Bees* by Maja Lunde, and in the case of Margaret Atwood's seminal work *The Handmaid's Tale*, it is a gender dystopia that is presented. This brings one to the observation that dystopian literature may concern itself with various aspects like politics, technology, environment and gender which humanity has been selfishly exploiting and manipulating over time. This paper would be focusing on the aspect of gender in particular, and how the horrors portrayed in a gender dystopian work is becoming more or less a reality.

The representation of gender in dystopian literature serves to be a multifaceted lens for exploring societal trends, power politics and other forms of resistance. The area of gender has been used by many authors in order to rebuild the notion of gender, gender stereotypes and the power politics which is in play in society. These narratives explore how gender has been used as a tool by patriarchal structures to set norms and relegate women to subordinate positions. In a gender dystopian society, gender norms and roles are strictly

defined and enforced, in such a way that it reinforces patriarchal hegemony. The mind as well as the body of the womenfolk are regulated and controlled by a central hegemonic structure.

In a gender dystopian work, the author explores the consequences of gender essentialism, challenges conventional gender norms and moves on to explore alternative possibilities for gender expression and identity. These narratives usually portray societies where gender stereotypes are defined along binary lines. Taking Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, one can see how the World State conditions the individuals in such a way that they are assigned predetermined gender roles and functions. These gender roles and duties are assigned with the assumption that these are quintessential for the proper functioning of the society. In such a society, women are mostly limited to their reproductive functions alone, as one can see in *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. Gender dystopian narratives also challenge the conventional understanding of gender binaries and exhort readers to contemplate on gender fluidity and more diverse ways to express themselves. An example of a work which embodies this feature is Ursula K. Le Guin's exploration of ambisexuality in her work 'The Left Hand of Darkness', where the characters are capable of shifting between male and female reproductive roles, thereby prompting the reader to think above the conventional binaries associated with gender. These narratives mostly embody characters who challenge traditional gender stereotypes, such as the character Katniss Everdeen, from *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, wherein Katniss is presented as a character embodying values that are traditionally masculine, in contrast to the socially formed feminine values, that is enforced upon a woman. Gender dystopias also aim to bring in the theme of intersectionality within their narratives, as one can see in the novel *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler where there is an intersectionality of gender, class and race in a dystopian American society which is ravaged by climate change, and societal collapse.

These narratives often offer glimpses of alternative futures where oppressive regimes are challenged, and just societies are envisioned, in such a

way that the reader is exhorted to think about social change and empowerment. Resistance and solidarity is another important feature of gender dystopian narratives. One sees how marginalized communities and individuals come together to contest and disrupt the oppressive system, ultimately striving for freedom, and social transformation. This theme of resistance can manifest itself in various forms in a gender dystopian narrative, that is it can range from individuals coming together to form resistance communities, to even engaging in small acts of defiance where a character moves on to perform a seemingly normal act (extraordinary for them indeed) which is prohibited by the central agency, in such a way that they assert their consciousness and silently (yet loudly) resist the authoritarian norms set upon them. For instance, one can see how in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the protagonist Offred engages in small acts of theft, sexual thoughts, and even prohibited interactions, in such a way that she asserts her consciousness and defies the order, the same goes with the case of Winston Smith from the novel *1984* where he engages in acts of resistance against the norms set by the 'Big Brother', by engaging in forbidden thoughts, and by embracing his individuality.

So, the representation of gender in a dystopian narrative, sheds light on the social and political issues that the author thinks that needs a change, and also prompts the reader to confront their own prejudices when it comes to the whole issue of gender. By deconstructing the power dynamics within a society, gender dystopian narratives often visualize the need to create more just and equitable societies. Even though many seminal works have come in the area of gender dystopian narratives, the one this paper will give emphasis on will be *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood.

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* envisions a bleak future, where women are driven to the status of a child delivering machine, in a highly tyrannical and theocratic society (Gilead) where presbyterian norms are enforced upon a folk of people, who has mostly become barren because of intense chemical and nuclear pollution. The few fertile women that are left are reduced to the status of 'Handmaids' who are to produce babies for the

male agency, the 'Commander' and his 'Wife', through surrogacy. What one sees in the novel is a fundamentalist translation of the Bible, where women are mere objects to be owned by the male figure. The 'she' in the novel is reduced to the status of a two-legged womb, who is devoid of any individuality, rights or freedom. Even when it comes to the identity, one can see how their original names are taken away from them. They are reduced to an 'of somebody', and their identity seems to revolve solely around that. For instance, in the novel, the protagonist is named 'Offred', for she is deemed to be the personal possession of the Commander whose name would be Fred. Quoting from the novel itself, "My name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because its forbidden' (Atwood 37). As many critics like Jessie Givner have noted, the desire Gilead possesses to remove the names of the handmaids is as strong as their desire to remove their faces as well.

One can see how Atwood develops a sense of a female dystopian consciousness through the protagonist Offred. It is by assuming the role of a story teller, who has the capacity to control 'her story' that Offred asserts this consciousness. Quoting from the novel, "I'm also a story that I'm telling, in my head as I go along. Tell, rather than write, because I have nothing to write with and writing in any case is forbidden" (Atwood 34). Even though Offred describes this act of storytelling as something over which she has no control over, one is able to see how the meticulous nature of her discourse and the stream of consciousness nature of the narrative propel the reader to view with great clarity and precision the happenings in Gilead. The fact that Gilead stays conscious of the happenings around her, as well as the pre-Gilead era, is a brilliant technique of subversion that the novel employs. In a highly insane world, the fact that one can stay conscious may also mean that one is sane, and the fact that it is one's sanity that one should hold one to, when times are bad, rather than fall into the spiral, is highlighted in the novel. Quoting from the novel, "Sanity is a valuable possession, I hoard it the way people once hoarded money. I save it so I will have enough, when the time comes" (Atwood 115).

The act of the Commander, trying to inseminate the Handmaids is referred to as the ‘Ceremony’, which is nothing but a celebrated form of rape. The whole act of rape is criminally celebrated in Gilead, to such an extent that the Ceremony becomes an important activity for the welfare and the progress of a nation. Here the rapist is performing his duty, and so is the rape victim. Quoting from the novel, “This is not recreation, even for the Commander. This is serious business. The Commander, too, is doing his duty” (Atwood 101), and also, “There is supposed to be nothing entertaining about us, no room is to be permitted for the flowering of secret lusts; no special flavors are to wheedle, by them or us, there are to be no footholds for love. We are two-legged wombs, that’s all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices” (Atwood 142).

The area of power dynamics is viewed very interestingly in the novel. A great instance from the novel, that can be taken into consideration to analyze this whole issue of power dynamics, is the scene where Offred and the Commander meet in secret. One can see how the whole concept of power dynamics is reversed in these scenes. One can see how Offred enjoys a great sense of command over the Commander. She manipulates his feelings, to get certain prohibited things done for her (getting the face lotion is an example). The Commander becomes an obedient child in front of Offred, willing to do anything to win her favor. Quoting from the novel. So, how power shifts between the authority and the subject is treated freshly and innovatively in the novel.

The way Atwood has crafted Gilead warns the reader about a world where women become subjects, and more than that mere objects for sexual gratification, and exploitation. The authority, which manifests itself in various ways over the centuries, has found slyer ways to occupy spaces and exercise power. The relevance Atwood and her observations have in the twenty first century, can be seen when one goes through the recently released ‘Justice Hema Commission Report’ in Kerala that points out the levels of exploitation that women artists in the Malayalam Cinema Industry have to undergo in order to survive within the industry. Going through the report, one

understands how prophetic Atwood was with her observations about gender exploitation, and how the dystopia she predicted is becoming more or less a reality now. The Government of Kerala created the Justice Hema Committee in 2017, after an infamous case of kidnap and rape, that a prominent Malayalam actress had to endure. It was based on the petition filed by the WCC, to the state government that a committee headed by Justice K Hema was formed, to investigate the levels of exploitation faced by women artists in Malayalam cinema.

Once the report was released to the public, the grim face of the famed Malayalam film industry was exposed, and was met with vehement criticism. The fact that the Malayalam film industry was becoming nothing short of an exclusive 'Boy's Club', and that the world behind the curtain was a whole different thing for women artists, came as shocking revelations to the public. The patriarchal mentality of the Malayalam cinema industry that was raking with sexual abuse, unethical bans, discrimination, inhuman working conditions, drug use, and wage disparity was exposed by the Hema Commission report, to such an extent that the findings of the report even led to the obliteration of certain worshipped idols within the Malayalam cine industry. Going through the report, one can see how women artists were denied even the basic amenities including proper sanitation facilities. Quoting from the report, "Almost all women who were examined before the Committee stated that there is no toilet facility or changing room on the set, especially while shooting is done in many outdoor locations, which will be in remote places. What is being done now is, the women themselves will find some space in a nearby interior place like forest or behind the bushes or a fat tree to pass urine, while on outdoor shoot". This might remind one of *The Handmaid's Tale*, where the handmaids were forced to use washrooms which had no locks, and had to do their business while a 'Martha' was monitoring it from outside the door. So, if it were washrooms with no locks for Atwood's handmaids, for the handmaidens of the Malayalam cine industry, it was mostly cases where they had no washrooms at all (Hema Commission Report 28).

The most disturbing aspect of all this is how male counterparts

respond to this whole issue. Rather than acknowledging it and striving to make a change possible, they react as if it is quite a common thing in the industry, one that is natural and adjustable. This response alone, is enough to point out the inherent patriarchy in the Malayalam cine industry. Even though, it is the duty of the production set to make sure that these basic facilities are made available to the women in the film location, it seems to be neglected and ignored to such an extent that it appears as if it is an obligation that the women artists ought to undertake if they are to survive in the industry. According to the report, another issue that women in the film industry face is sexual exploitation. Sugar coated terms for this being ‘adjustments’ and ‘compromise’, it is something that women in the industry have to face from the very beginning of their career. Quoting from the report, “She is also told that if she wanted to get a chance to act in cinema and grow to heights, she will have to make certain adjustments and compromises” (Hema Commission Report 44).

The convention that women who want to establish themselves in the film industry, ought to succumb to the sexual demands of men, are also bolstered by the men in the industry, so that new – comers are forced to oblige by these beliefs. Those artists who do intimate scenes in movies, are perceived to be those who are willing to do it in real life as well. They are approached by many prominent ‘Commanders’ of Malayalam cinema, with sexual demands in return for better chances in movies. The response given by various prominent men within the industry, when confronted with the question of sexual exploitation that women have to face within the industry was surprising, quoting from the report, “Various men in cinema, tried to impress upon the committee that the sexual harassment exist not only in cinema but is there in every other field. Therefore, sexual harassment in cinema may not be blown out of proportion” (Hema Commission Report 54). One can see how Malayalam cinema adopts the excuse of sexual harassment happening in other sectors, to justify and normalize what is happening within one’s own field, rather than addressing it.

Even in the movie sets, the whole concept of privacy is undermined, for women artists, especially junior artists and unestablished actresses, who would have to bear the sexual approaches of men, who are mostly intoxicated by drugs and alcohol (the unrestrained availability of drugs and alcohol within film sets is another major issue to be concerned about as well). Women artists find it extremely unsafe to stay alone in the accommodation provided, for they have to stay there with the constant fear of men knocking their doors, and even barging in to their rooms. Quoting from the report, “Many women have stated that knocking will not be polite or decent but, they repeatedly bang at the door, by force. On many occasions, they felt that the door would collapse and that men would make an entry into the room by force. So unless women take somebody from the family when they go for work, they fear that they will not be safe at the workplace” (Hema Commission Report 56).

The undue importance given to sex, and objectification of women into mere objects to sexually gratify men, all highlight the subservient position that women in the film industry have to endure. The most uncanny of , is that women and her rights have been relegated to such an extent that, they even cannot approach the police or the court to address the issues they are facing within the film industry, because they will have to deal with threats to their career, their lives and even the lives of their close ones. The way the society, and its perception of women is (the idea of women in the film industry being willing to cater to the sexual needs of men in the industry, so as to procure better opportunities), even though they muster the courage to expose what is happening within the industry, met with vehement criticism and intense cyber bullying, thereby completely demoralizing them. The idea that women are willing to do anything, succumb to any needs raised by the men in the industry, for fame and money, is one established within the industry. This establishment undermines the very fact that women are also passionate and creative. Quoting from the report, “The men in cinema cannot even imagine that it is because of the passion for art and acting that woman comes to the movie. But the impression is they are coming for fame and money and they will sleep with any man for getting a chance in a movie. If a person thinks that

a woman is a problem-maker, she will not be called to the cinema again. Therefore, women who are passionate about acting will be suffering all the atrocities, silently” (Hema Commission Report 72).

The report reminds one of the kinds of situation, that a particular section of the society is relegated to merely because of the fact that there is a particular ideology, a particular thought process, that remains so inherent in the psyche of the society. A society where a particular section has to live in a state of constant paranoia, of being manipulated, monitored and molested, in such a way that the people lose their state of individuality, and consciousness, in short highlights the dystopia, everyone is a part of. It is not only the women who are forced into emotional and physical submission, who are trapped in the web of a dystopia, who accept compromises to be normal to any industry, and who diplomatically choose to be a mute spectator to these happenings but everyone is reeling within this dystopia.

‘The deep state’ has its ideologies spelt out well and clear, and all that lies before one is to perform these norms, that they are taught like obedient children. Quoting from *The Handmaid’s Tale*, “Everything will be alright soon. I promise. There will be peace. You must trust. You must go to sleep, like good children” (Atwood 89). When all are ‘sleeping’, there will always be certain ‘Offreds’ and ‘Moiras’ who hold on to their consciousness, sanity, and the feeling of the self, finding ways to revolt against the system. But all that awaits them is the same fate, the fate that Offred’s predecessor, the Handmaid who previously occupied Offred’s room, from the novel ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’ had to face, the fate of being silenced, being wiped off in such a way that the voice that resists become too trivial to be even a part of one’s memory. There shouldn’t be any memory of any other way.

Quoting Atwood, “This is the heart of Gilead, where the war cannot intrude except on television. Where the edges are we aren’t sure, they vary, according to the attacks and counterattacks; but this is the centre, where nothing moves. The Republic of Gilead, said Aunt Lydia, knows no bounds. Gilead is within you” (Atwood 29). Everyone is a part of Gilead, the very concerns raised by Atwood manifests itself in more sophisticated ways even

now, and the ‘Justice Hema Commission Report’ is just a pointer of that, a reminder. What Atwood’s handmaidens faced in Gilead is in no way different from what the handmaidens of the Malayalam cinema is facing. The Commanders, the Marthas, the Guardians are all performing their duty flawlessly even now. The State is reaching the zenith of its glory, the ideology is blooming, the winter is on with no spring to follow. ‘Nolite Te Bastardes Carborundorum’.

Works Cited

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Vintage, 1996.

Hema Commission Report. Justice Hema Committee. 2024.

Feminist and Gender Theories. Sage Publications.

https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/38628_7.pdf

Isomaa, Korpua, Jouni Tettinen. *New Perspectives on Dystopian Fiction in Literature and Other Media*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020.

Dash, *Gender Representation in Dystopian Literature: A Critical Analysis*. ISOR Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 2024.

<https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol.29-Issue4/Ser-2/B2904020711.pdf>.

Suganya, *Dystopian Exploration in Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale*. INJRD.org, 2023. <https://www.ijnrd.org/papers/IJNRD2310342.pdf>

Pandya, *The Changing Face of Dystopia: A Comparative Study of Literature in the 20th and the 21st Centuries*. Educational Administration: Theory and Practice, 2023. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381710386_The_Changing_Face_Of_Dystopia

[A Comparative Study Of Literature In The 20th And 21st Centuries](#)

Gupta, *Me Too Saga in Malayalam Film Industry: All you need to know on origin, key findings and aftermath of Justice Hema Committee Report on sexual abuse and ‘casting couch’*. Oplindia.com, 2024. <https://www.opindia.com/2024/09/origin-key-findings-and-aftermath-of-justice-hema-committee-report/>

CONVERGING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE WITH INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM: ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS IN THE UGC FRAMEWORK

¹Dr. E Sahaya Chithra and ²Dr. S. Vijayalakshmi

- ^{1.} Assistant Professor of Artificial Intelligence, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Palayamkottai
- ^{2.} Assistant Professor of Visual Communication, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Palayamkottai

Abstract

Indian knowledge system (IKS) and Artificial Intelligence enhance the higher education academics curriculum and research. In Indian context, the incorporation of traditional knowledge with interdisciplinary subjects in the modern technological era brings a different perspective. In this context, the current research, examines the ethical, technological and instructional challenges associated with IKS and AI implementation of University Grants Commission (UGC). This work highlights the importance of upholding academic integrity and intellectual property rights alongside responsible AI application to protect and spread traditional knowledge. The current research focuses on the ethical and technological barriers and academic struggles which are associated with AI and IKS in terms with curriculum development by UGC, the area which is needed to be focused more on policy making, faculty development and training AI integrated IKS.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge System (IKS), Artificial Intelligence (AI), AI-Driven Education, Indigenous Knowledge, and Interdisciplinary Learning.

1. Introduction

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is a sophisticated and comprehensive system founded in an extensive variety of traditional wisdom, scientific traditions, and philosophical systems formed over centuries. Based on ancient scriptures such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas, IKS covers areas such as Ayurveda, Vedic Mathematics, Astronomy, Philosophy, Linguistics, Metallurgy, and Yoga.

In a variety of professions, including cognitive research, environmental sustainability, holistic health care, traditional knowledge systems have proven essential. The greatest of the most recent developments in modern technology is Artificial Intelligence (AI). It provides computational tools that improve productivity, facilitate decision-making, and optimize data processing by using components such as automation, machine learning, spoken language processing, and neural networks for learning. AI is an essential part of the information age because of its amazing developments in a variety of fields, including healthcare, education, government, and industrial automation.

Combining IKS with AI presents an unprecedented opportunity to blend technology with ancient wisdom. The integration of IKS and AI has the ability to capture, preserve, and transform ancient knowledge into forms that can be pragmatically used in today's world. The automation of Ayurvedic medical evaluations as well as the translation of old documents may use advanced technologies, along with the design of educational programs incorporating IKS. The combination of both elements will enable one to modernize the knowledge of IKS and make it useful in today's world.

While integrating IKS into AI-based learning systems under the University Grants Commission (UGC) curriculum offers several challenges. Among these are no standard curriculum, poor faculty training, limited resources, and ethical implications of the commodification of indigenous knowledge. Furthermore, the blending of AI with IKS-based learning calls for collaborative work among scholars, technologists, policymakers, and business leaders from different disciplines.

This paper attempts to investigate the major concerns involved in the integration of IKS and AI in the UGC curriculum and suggest viable solutions for the effective integration. Through a discussion on the challenges and exploitation of the benefits of AI and IKS, this research tries to create a systematic approach to make Indian traditional knowledge systems more accessible, relevant, and sustainable in modern education. The study also

underlines possible policy suggestions, moral implications, and strategic actions required for effective implementation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Importance of Indian Knowledge Systems in Education

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is of utmost relevance to some domains such as philosophy, science and education. A research finding by Sharma (2018) is on modern education and how IKS can be integrated into its framework, and he proposes its adoption in contemporary schooling systems. According to Deshpande and Kulkarni (2019), original Indian knowledge systems(IKS) is inter disciplinary with Astronomy, Linguistics and Ayurveda.

2.2. Challenges and Possibilities of AI in Higher Education:

Many researches reported the need of AI in higher education. According to Kapoor (2020), the role of AI in education is invaluable especially in transforming the learning system through personalized education, automation, and data utilization. Kumar and Patel (2021) point out the ethical concerns of AI in education, such as the bias of machine-learned models and breach of academic honesty.

2.3. Digitization and AI-Driven Knowledge Preservation

Other studies focus on the use of AI in knowledge retaining processes. Banerjee (2022) analyzes the possibility of using AI-based Natural Language Processing (NLP) to comprehend and transform Ancient Sanskrit for modern day audiences. Verma (2021) posits that legacy information may be stored and processed due to the existence of digital files that function as AI powered archives.

2.3. The Role of Digitization and AI in the Preservation of Knowledge

There are various pieces of literature that focus on the role of AI in different forms of knowledge preservation. Verma (2021) claims that AI powered digital repositories have the capacity of archiving and analyzing traditional knowledge. This is along the claim made by Banerjee (2022) who researches the application of AI enabled Natural Language Processing (NLP) in deciphering the ancient Sanskrit manuscripts to enhance their accessibility.

2.4. Association of IKS and AI on Socio-political and Legal Issues

There has been much debate on the social issues regarding the use of AI in integrating IKS. For example, Sen (2021) claims that many communities have been economically exploited without credit being provided to them for their culture in terms of marketing or exploitation. Gupta and Mehta (2020) stressed the same view on their research.

2.5. Training and Educational Approach

Singh and Bose (2021) said that the faculty training programs help to develop the faculty with AI and IKS knowledge. In addition to that, Chaudhary (2020) suggests that multi-disciplinary blends among AI can enhance the delivery system when it is integrated with IKS and AI.

2.6. Recommendations for Regularity and Guidelines Suggestions

The recommendation for regularity and guidelines suggestions are more needed to be addressed in the current context. The similar perspective is stressed by Narayan (2022). Similarly, Mishra (2020) highlights that government intervention is crucial in funding research initiatives that bridge the gap between AI and traditional knowledge.

2.7. Training of Staff and Their Pedagogical Adjustments

Singh and Bose (2021) emphasize that faculty training programs need to be designed to give teachers IKS and AI skills. Also, Chaudhary (2020) notes that collaboration between AI domain specialists and scholars in traditional knowledge disciplines can improve the teaching of AI-embedded IKS courses.

2.8. Policy Suggestions and their Systematization

Numerous experts have provided insights concerning the role of policy in the application of AI and IKS within the UGC context. Narayan (2022) states that there is a need for an undifferentiated accreditation model for the AI-IKS courses within UGC programs in order to safeguard uniformity and reliability from different institutions. In the same way, Mishra (2020) points out that there is a need for government support to finance research which attempts to unify AI and conventional knowledge.

The reviewed literature pointed out the need for using IKS with AI and some integration of ethical consideration, technological scrutiny, and pedagogical examination. Although AI can ensure the preservation and modernization of traditional knowledge, it has to be exercised in a manner that does not affect academic honesty and to foster inclusivity.

3. Issues In Integrating IKS And AI In The UGC Framework

3.1. Lack of Standardized Curriculum

Integrating AI and IKS poses one of the greatest challenges due to the lack of a defined curriculum. The UGC has not fully implemented IKS in higher education and there are no guidelines to integrate it with AI. Sharma (2020) states that many higher learning institutions do not offer courses that adequately combine the application of Algorithms with indigenous knowledge systems. The absence of a universal syllabus results in a variety of teaching styles and output levels, proving very challenging to implement across different types of educational institutions.

3.2. Limited Faculty Training

Integration of AI into IKS cannot be achieved with untrained staff on either side of the divide. Unfortunately, most teachers are either conventional trainers or AI dependents. Singh and Mehta (2021) commentary on the gamification of discipline claim that there are no adequate training programs for faculty on AI blended IKS teaching, hence the gap. Educators are unable to make effective use of the tools designed for teaching and learning using AI and IKS due to lack of appropriate training.

3.3. Resource Constraints

A restriction many institutions face, especially in the countryside, are a significant lack of resources such as the absence of AI tools, digital manuscripts, AI libraries, and computational facilities. Patel (2019) highlights the burying of ancient manuscripts. Lack of technology and economic support are the main causes to not to provide AI and IKS combined programs.

3.4. Cultural and Ethical Considerations

Concerns about authenticity, cultural appropriation, and data ownership arise when integrating AI with IKS. Banerjee (2022) reported that

AI algorithms using IK should be able to operate without the risk of misrepresentation or distortion of culture. Moreover, there is a danger that commercialization of IKS through AI will lead to the challenge is on how to make education with AI integrated IKS useful to the students and their prospects.

3.5. Student Readiness and Industry Relevance

AI may have a more clear application in the field of medicine and healthcare, but in IKS education there needs to be more clarification. According to Kumar (2023), students are usually reluctant to take up classes with little to no direct industry or employment opportunities. Without industry-academia collaboration, AI-IKS graduates will sadly be left with fewer employment options.

3.6. Regulatory Challenges

The absence of explicit instruction from UGC regarding policy on AI-IKS education brings risks to the colleges and universities. As Verma and Joshi (2020) noted, there is still development of policy around the use of AI in education, and IKS makes it much more complicated. These institutions require clear directions on accreditation, available funds, and implementation plans in order to make sure that AI-based IKS courses will be offered.

4. Challenges in Implementation

4.1. Digital Infrastructure

The integration of AI with IKS under the UGC framework is severely restricted by a lack of digital infrastructures. Most universities and colleges in rural and semi-urban areas lack computing devices, high-speed internet, and AI-based educational systems. As Verma and Joshi (2020) pointed out, the so-called 'digital divide' in India has a disproportionate impact on the access and equity of AI learning assistance programs.

4.2. Data Availability and Representation

Institutions without adequate hardware and software resources cannot deliver IKS courses in integrated AI-IKS model. Most IKS is recorded in ancient manuscripts, palm-leaf scriptures, and oral traditions. The process of scanning and digitizing records is difficult enough; making records AI

compatible is monumental. As Patel (2019) emphasizes, the primary sources of available datasets for training AI systems are western-focused, resulting in poorly trained machines incapable of incorporating Indian knowledge. Further, the absence of annotated data in the Sanskrit and other classical languages create a bottleneck for developing AI systems capable of understanding and analyzing IKS.

4.3. Resistance to Change

Most academic institutions and traditional scholars are likely to oppose the use of AI in education of IKS because such use is bound to dilute indigenous knowledge. Chatterjee (2021) observes that a large number of practitioners of IKS strongly feel that the scepticism among traditional scholars regarding the reliability and authenticity of AI-based interpretations creates a significant roadblock in the implementation process.

4.4. Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Integrating AI with IKS requires collaboration among AI experts, traditional knowledge scholars, and policymakers. According to Singh and Mehta (2021), there is a lack of understanding of IKS and AI by researchers and academicians. This is the challenge in the integration of IKS and AI within the curriculum framework.

4.5 Legal and Ethical Issues

There is another concern with the data privacy. Intellectual Property rights (IPR) pipeline with the IKS and AI. Banerjee (2022) said that the utilization of IKS without prior permission from the local communities with the help of AI is another threat of profit sharing and acknowledgement of the work. Hence there is a need for ethical security and assurance in the field of utilization of IKS which is incorporated with AI.

4.6. Standardization and Accreditation

Academic institutions face unstable situation to implement the IKS with AI in their curriculum. Verma (2020) found out that even though the institutions implemented the approaches in IKS and AI in their curriculum there are difficulties to find out the evaluation methods. Hence standardized

policies can only address these issues related to the implementation of national educational objectives.

5. Solutions and Recommendations

5.1. Enhancing Digital Infrastructure

To successfully integrate AI into IKS education, significant investment in digital infrastructure is necessary. This includes improving internet connectivity, providing access to computational tools, and creating AI-powered digital platforms for learning. According to Verma and Joshi (2020), educational institutions must collaborate with government initiatives such as the National Digital Education Architecture (NDEAR) to bridge the digital divide. Focus should be on developing digital repositories that are accessible to the public which contain the IKS manuscripts. According to Patel (2019), there are some resources available, so institutions need to apply AI methods like OCR and NLP for processing classical languages like Sanskrit, and deeply work in them.

5.2. Interdisciplinary Faculty Training Programs

One of the most important prerequisites for adequate delivery of the curriculum is training faculty members in the AI and knowledge subjects simultaneously. Singh and Mehta (2021) recommend the development of interdisciplinary teacher training workshops and certification courses aimed at developing skills of teachers in AI and IKS. The sponsoring of exchanges of staff members from the engineering colleges to IKS research institutes could improve collaboration between disciplines.

5.3. Encouraging Industry and Academic Collaboration

The collaboration of industry and academic work can ensure that the new AI infused IKS courses meet the requirements of the job market. Kumar (2023) comments on the need for cooperation of AI industry and education institutes for the purpose of producing applicable IKS systems, like Vedic teaching systems, or AI diagnosis systems for Ayurveda. Students can engage in actual experiential learning through practice and AI instruction research work.

5.4. Standardizing Curriculum and Accreditation

The UGC certainly should create guidelines for AI-integrated IKS education, ensuring standardization and certification of programs. Verma (2020) suggested to create a flexible curriculum that allows for integrated courses, stackable credits, and interdisciplinary degree programs. A structured evaluation system should be introduced to assess students' proficiency in both AI techniques and IKS principles.

6. Conclusion

The convergence of Artificial Intelligence with the Indian Knowledge System in the UGC system is of tremendous potential to bring the traditional knowledge system up to date and give it a contemporary outlook. Yet, the journey must overcome several huge hurdles pertaining to digital infrastructure, availability of data, interdisciplinary approaches, and ethics. A carefully planned standardized course with the government's support, academic collaboration, and technological inputs will create a viable AI-IKS model of education. Subsequent research can be aimed at increasing the capability of AI to understand and process indigenous knowledge appropriately, without sacrificing its accessibility and authenticity. Through a coordinated strategy of implementation, India can lead the world in integrating AI with indigenous knowledge systems, inducing innovation without losing its enormous intellectual capital.

References

- Banerjee, Rajesh. *AI and Sanskrit: The Future of Ancient Knowledge Processing*. New Delhi: Academic Press, 2022.
- Chaudhary, Meena. "Interdisciplinary Collaboration for AI in IKS Education." *Journal of Indian Education* 45, no. 2 (2020): 112–128.
- Gupta, Anil, and Priya Mehta. "Intellectual Property Rights and the Protection of Indigenous Knowledge." *Indian Journal of Legal Studies* 35, no. 1 (2020): 87–105.
- Kapoor, Ramesh. "Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities." *International Journal of Educational Technology* 12, no. 4 (2020): 56–72.

- Kumar, Sandeep, and Ravi Patel. "Bias and Ethics in AI-Based Educational Tools." *AI and Society* 17, no. 3 (2021): 45–61.
- Mishra, Alok. "Government Policies for AI-IKS Integration in India." *Policy Research Journal* 28, no. 5 (2020): 92–109.
- Narayan, Sudha. "Accreditation and Standardization in AI-Integrated IKS Courses." *Higher Education Policy Review* 14, no. 2 (2022): 130–148.
- Patel, Dinesh. *Machine Learning and Ancient Texts: The Role of AI in Preserving Knowledge*. Chennai: KnowledgeTech Press, 2019.
- Singh, Rajesh, and Ananya Bose. "Faculty Training Programs for AI in Indian Education." *Journal of Digital Learning* 18, no. 3 (2021): 78–96.
- Verma, Ashok. "AI-Powered Repositories for Traditional Knowledge." *Technology and Heritage* 11, no. 2 (2021): 44–61.
- Verma, Neha. *The Future of AI-Integrated Learning: Policy and Practice*. Hyderabad: FutureTech Publishers, 2020.

Call for Papers – October, 2025

Our journal, **Interdisciplinary Research Journal for Humanities (IRJH)** (ISSN 2249-250X), a **Peer Reviewed Journal** was started in 2012. It is a biannual journal. We publish authentic and unpublished articles under the branch of humanities for the last ten years. This includes subjects like Tamil, English, Folklore, Social Work and Social Science.

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Call for Papers for October, 2025 Issue

We invite researchers, scholars and authors to submit their scholarly articles to our peer reviewed interdisciplinary research journal.

Last Date for Submission: 30.06.2025

Send the papers to: editor_idrjh@stxavierstn.edu.in

Thrust Areas:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ▪ Literature and History | ▪ Cyber narratives |
| ▪ Cultural Studies | ▪ Chick literature |
| ▪ Diaspora Studies | ▪ Culinary literature |
| ▪ Postcolonial Studies | ▪ Memory studies |
| ▪ Gender Studies | ▪ Refugee literature |
| ▪ Eco-criticism | ▪ Border studies |
| ▪ Popular Culture | ▪ Blue studies |
| ▪ Ecology and Literature | ▪ Medical Humanities |
| ▪ LGBTR | ▪ Animal studies |
| ▪ Pandemic literature | ▪ Digital narratives |
| ▪ Conflict and traumatic narratives | ▪ Language Teaching (Tamil & English) |
| ▪ Graphic narratives | |

Instructions to the authors

1. Use British English spelling in the manuscript uniformly.
2. Manuscripts should not have been published elsewhere and should not be under review for publication in other journals or proceedings.
3. The editorial board is responsible for the final selection of content of IRJH.
4. The Editorial Board reserves the right to reject any material deemed inappropriate for publication
5. Responsibility for opinions expressed and the accuracy of facts published in articles and reviews rest solely with the individual authors.
6. The suggestions of the review committee should be carried out by the authors before submitting the final draft of the paper.
7. Papers with more than 20% plagiarism will be sent back for revision.
8. Papers with AI content will be rejected.

Format

- Font : Times New Roman
- Font size : 12
- Space : 1.5
- Style : MLA 9th Edition
- Abstract : 50 to 75 words
- Key words: 5 to 7
- Full Paper : 2000 to 2500 words
- Work Cited: Only the works cited in the article should be mentioned.
Bibliography/ References are not accepted.

Subscription Details

(i) Annual subscription

For Individuals and Institutions in India: Rs. 1000/-

For Individuals and Institutions in Foreign Countries: \$ 500

(ii) Subscription can be made to the following account through DD/ online to the following account: "**The Principal, St. Xavier's College, Palayamkottai**". (Account number will be sent on request)

Note

- No Processing Fee
- Free Soft copies of the journal will be sent to the authors
- Hard copies will be given to individual authors on request (Printing charges & Postal expenses (Rs.100) applicable)
- One page author profile with designation, institutional address, contact number and e-mail ID should be sent along with the paper.

Contact

Dr.D.Jockim, Editor-in- Chief,

Interdisciplinary Research Journal for Humanities (IRJH)

Assistant professor of English

St.Xaviers college (Autonomous), Palayamkottai

Email:

editor_idrjh@stxavierstn.edu.in