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SOUTH ASIAN MIGRATION AND DIASPORA STUDIES



GUEST EDITORS

DR. SHAHIN FATMA

MATLOOB AHMAD

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*ROUTES, ROOTS AND REMEMBERED
HOMES SOUTH ASIAN MIGRATION AND
DIASPORA STUDIES*

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EDITORIAL NOTE

Routes, Roots and Remembered Homes: South Asian Migration and Diaspora Studies

The present special issue of DABEER is devoted to the theme “Routes, Roots and Remembered Homes: South Asian Migration and Diaspora Studies.” At a time when movement across borders has become one of the most significant realities of the contemporary world, migration demands scholarly attention. South Asian migration, shaped by colonial histories, postcolonial transitions, labour movements, education, trade, conflict, climate pressures, and aspirations for better futures, has created dynamic communities across the globe. These movements have produced not only economic and social transformations but also complex cultural, emotional, and intellectual experiences. Migration has therefore become a powerful site for examining memory, identity, belonging, displacement, nostalgia, and the changing meanings of home.

This special issue brings together research that explores the varied experiences of South Asian migrants and diasporic communities through interdisciplinary approaches. The papers included here draw from literature, cultural studies, history, sociology, political science, gender studies, media studies, and related fields. Together, they examine how migration narratives are formed through historical movements, colonial and postcolonial encounters, religious affiliations, linguistic negotiations, racial formations, economic transformations, and new forms of transnational connectivity. By placing perspectives in conversation, the issue highlights the richness and diversity of South Asian diasporic experiences. A central concern of this volume is the idea of “home.” For migrants and diasporic subjects, home is rarely a fixed or singular space. It may be remembered through language, food, family stories, rituals, music, festivals, photographs, and inherited memories. It may also be reimagined in locations, shaped by changing social conditions and intergenerational experiences. The contributions in this issue examine how memories of homeland are preserved, transformed, contested, and rearticulated across time and geography. They show that home can be a place of attachment and a site of longing, both a lived reality and an imagined construction. The theme “Routes, Roots and Remembered Homes” captures this complex relationship between movement and belonging. “Routes” refer to the journeys, displacements, and transnational movements that shape migrant lives. “Roots” indicate cultural inheritances, ancestral memories, and emotional ties to places of origin. “Remembered homes” point to the ways in which homeland is reconstructed through memory, narrative, and cultural practice. The issue therefore examines the tensions between mobility and settlement, continuity and change, belonging and estrangement.

The special issue emphasizes the resilience, creativity, and agency of migrant communities. South Asian diasporic subjects do not merely experience displacement; they actively create new identities, build communities, negotiate multiple cultural worlds, and contribute to the societies in which they live. The papers also address contemporary concerns such as digital diaspora, climate-induced displacement, labour migration, gendered migration, race and ethnicity, citizenship, border politics, and the emotional dimensions of transnational life. These discussions are relevant in the present moment, when questions of migration, mobility, and belonging are central to global debates. Through its diverse contributions, this issue seeks to advance scholarly conversations on globalization, diaspora, cultural memory, and identity formation. It also foregrounds the distinctive histories and lived experiences of South Asian communities across different regions of the world. We hope that this collection will encourage further research, dialogue, and critical reflection on the enduring relationship between movement, memory, and identity.

As Guest Editors, we express our sincere gratitude to all the authors for their valuable contributions and to the reviewers for their thoughtful comments and constructive engagement during peer review. We are also thankful to the Editorial Board of DABEER for their support and commitment to rigorous academic scholarship. We hope that this special issue will serve as a contribution to South Asian migration and diaspora studies.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/o1**MIGRATION GOVERNANCE AND REGIONAL COOPERATION IN SOUTH ASIA****DR. ABDULLAH-AL-MONZUR HUSSAIN**Professor and Dean, Faculty of Law
Dhaka International University, Bangladesh**Abstract**

Migration has been a key characteristic of South Asia since the dawn of colonization, and it is driven by differences in wealth and the changing nature of international labour markets. Today, the region is one of the most important migration systems in the world, with a variety of types of mobility, such as labour migration, forced displacement, irregular migration, and migration due to climate change. Although remittances have an important macroeconomic significance in countries like the Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the developmental impact of migration varies, with structural inequalities, labour market segregation and high recruitment costs being important factors. This chapter explores the concepts of migration governance in South Asia using a three-layer analytical framework, which combines the perspectives of migration governance, South Asian regional cooperation and migration systems approaches. It has underlined the fragmentation of governance and the lack of coordination at national, bilateral and regional levels, as well as the policy disparities and the sovereignty issues between these levels hindering good governance. Although bilateral labor agreements are the main sources of operational governance, the institutions at regional level, such as SAARC, are less developed and new institutions such as BIMSTEC are still in the process of development. The analysis highlights the prominent governance issues that need to be addressed, such as policy fragmentation, institutional weaknesses, human rights issues and poor migration data systems. Low-skilled and female migrants are more vulnerable to exploitation and less well covered by social protection measures and are hit hardest by these challenges. Meanwhile, new phenomena like digital aid systems for recruitment, feminization of migration and climate-induced displacement are changing the nature of migration in the region. The chapter makes the case for enhancing regional cooperation as the key to a better migration outcome. It recommends policy actions such as creating a regional migration governance mechanism, streamlining recruitment processes, improving data-sharing and rights-based protection measures. Migration in the South Asian region can be made inclusive and development-focused with the help of coordination.

Keywords: Migration Governance, Regional Cooperation, Labor Migration and South Asia, Climate-Induced Migration.

1. Introduction

Migration is an integral part of the South Asian societies; reflecting the region's colonial past, agricultural-based economies and changing nation state systems. South Asia has traditionally been a key sending region and receiving region for migrations, not just during British colonization but also in today's times. During the post-colonial era, the national boundaries became rigid and influenced the traditional mobility networks, but did not end cross-border and transnational mobility. Instead, migration is growing more and more diversified, ranging from economic flows and forced migration to irregular migration and, more recently, migration due to climate change (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014). Today's global economy is one of the biggest migration corridors in the world, with South Asia as one of these corridors. Migration has become a structural part of national development strategies as a result of large-scale migration to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Southeast Asian countries and OECD countries. The remittances from migrant workers are an important source of foreign exchange and income of households in countries like Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Remittance's inflows are seen as a vital contributor to poverty reduction and household welfare gains by international organizations, despite the lack of reliable cross-country comparability, because of the different data systems. (World Bank, 2023) The outcomes of migration for development are, however, not necessarily uniform and are often determined by the segmentation of the labour market and the costs of recruitment and by migrant skills.

In addition to economic migration, multiple and complex forms of mobility are becoming more prevalent throughout the region. In many refugee situations, forced migration is the consequence of humanitarian emergencies and limitations in regional governance, such as the Rohingya situation in Bangladesh. Climate change also exacerbates mobility pressures due to environmental degradation, river erosion, salinity intrusion, and extreme weather events, which increase the vulnerability of people to mobility and result in internal displacement. Moreover, illegal migration via informal recruitment channels and smuggling routes is a symptom of legal migration channels constraints and barriers to migration visas in destination countries (International Organization for Migration, 2024).

Governance in South Asia is extremely fragmented even in the face of scale and diversity of migration flows. The national level is the primary focus for the management of migration and there is a low level of policy harmonization between states. The lack of good institutional coordination and under-developed regional cooperation mechanisms often impede the effective implementation of water and sanitation services. Despite the normative capacity of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the organization has not been able to develop efficient migration governance mechanisms yet because of the political tensions and institutional inactivity. This leads to regulatory disparities, disparities in labor

protection standards and inadequate labor data exchange among states (Ratha & Shaw, 2007).

This fragmentation poses big governance challenges. Those who recruit migrant workers often charge high fees for their services, have limited legal protections, and subject migrant workers to exploitation in the form of poor working conditions. The recruitment practices affecting women and insufficient institutional mechanisms for their support make them particularly vulnerable. Moreover, lack of coordination within regional frameworks means migration flows are not regular and labour standards are poorly enforced along migration routes. The governance shortcomings are indicative of a need for a more cohesive and collaborative way of managing migration.

The norm and the purpose of regional cooperation on migration in South Asia is twofold. Normatively, migration is a phenomenon shared by the region, transcending the national level, and needing a collective policy response, based on human rights principles. Coordinated governance has the potential to increase the efficiency of labour mobility, decrease the risks of irregular migration, boost the utilisation of remittances and boost regional economic integration from a functional perspective. Theoretical approaches to migration governance highlight that multi-layered policy regimes can lead to inefficient policy application and protection gaps, while collaborative policy arrangements can have a positive impact on policy implementation and protection outcomes for migrants (de Haas, 2010).

In this context, this chapter critically explores how migration governance and regional cooperation are being considered in South Asia for three main purposes. First, it provides an overview of the history and current dynamics of migration in the region to examine the economic, social and environmental aspects of the migration process. Second, it critically evaluates the governance structures at national, bilateral and regional level, identifying their strengths and weaknesses. Third, it assesses the potential and challenges of regional cooperation for strengthening more coherent and rights-based migration governance, with a particular focus on SAARC and the growing subregional cooperation, to develop these arrangements.

The chapter is organized so that the reader can follow it step-by-step. This introduction is followed by a conceptual and theoretical development that concentrates on theories of migration governance and regional cooperation. The third part focused on migration in South Asia and factors shaping migration. Part 4 looks at the current governance structure at each level. The fifth section outlines some of the governance challenges such as institutional fragmentation and governance protections. The sixth section is on the potential for regional cooperation and policy innovation. Finally, policy recommendations are presented for enhancing cooperation in the governance of migration in the South Asian region.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This section builds the conceptual and theoretical bases to analyze migration governance and South Asian regional cooperation. It infuses migration governance theory, regional cooperation frameworks and migration systems thinking to provide an understanding of how migration is governed in the region within the context of multiple political spaces and the region's governance gaps.

2.1 Migration Governance

Migration governance is the norms, rules, institutions and practices that govern migration processes at the local, national, regional and global levels. This includes formal state-based processes as well as informal processes, such as through recruitment agencies, diaspora networks and international organisations. Migration governance is not a single, monolithic process, but is a multi-layered and multi-actor process with overlapping jurisdictions and conflicting interests (Betts, 2011).

State, bilateral, multilateral, and informal governance are all key aspects of migration governance. State governance relates to internal migration policies and practices, including citizenship laws, visa regimes, labour migration laws and border controls. Bi-lateral governance refers to bilateral agreements, mainly on the regulation of labour migration flows, recruitment processes and mechanisms of worker protection. Bilateral labour agreements between origin and destination countries in Gulf states, in particular, in relation to south Asian countries are of a special importance. Multilateral governance happens when the laws and principles governing safe and orderly migration are set by international and regional organizations like the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Labour Organization (ILO). Informal governance consists of groups and individuals that recruit migrants through intermediaries, informal migrant networks, and migrant diaspora communities, and that influence the decisions about migration away from formal regulatory frameworks (Koser, 2010).

Policies, institutions, and international norms are central components in the context of structuring migration governance. Who is allowed to migrate and under which conditions and protections is determined by national policies? These policies are carried out by institutional bodies, including ministries of labour, immigration services and border security services. Normative documents like the Global Pact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration do serve as guiding principles for rights-based migrants governance at the international level, albeit non-binding. These elements contribute to the existence of a disjointed but interdependent governance system which influences migration outcomes.

2.2 Regional Cooperation Theory

Regional cooperation theories offer valuable lessons on the understanding of the why and how of the cooperation between states in the management of cross-border phenomena like migration. The classical functionalism emphasizes the mutual cooperation developing out of the common functional needs, mainly in the

technical and economical field. From this point of view, cooperation in one part of the process, e.g., in the movement of labor, can help to create a spillover effect into other parts of the integration process, eventually leading to deeper regional interdependence (Mitrany, 1943).

Neo-functionalism expands on this argument by placing importance on the function of supranational institutions and elite-influenced processes of integration. It argues that if the initial cooperation is limited to certain policy areas, then this can push for further integration via spillover, institutionalization and policy convergence (Haas, 1958). Towards migration, neo-functionalism suggests that mutual cooperation for migration and the protection of migrants may be extended to other regional governance structures.

However, regionalism exists in different structural frameworks in the developing regions like South Asia. South Asian regionalism differs from the EU model in that it is shallow, lacks depth of institutionalization, and has unequal power distribution and geopolitical tensions. This means that regional cooperation is often narrowly focused, bilateral, and politically limited, and lacks the depth of institutionalization.

It is also argued that the manifestation of migration flows is the result of asymmetric, but interdependent, relations between states, according to interdependence theory. The migration generates dependency in the sending countries, especially in the labor markets and remittance systems, as well as in the receiving countries. Some of the migration corridors in the South Asian region, like Bangladesh–Gulf, Nepal–India, and Pakistan–Middle East, exemplify the economic interdependence that encourages continued migration even in the absence of formal governance systems (Keohane & Nye, 1977).

2.3 Migration Systems Approach

The migration systems approach is a conceptualization of migration as a dynamic network of countries connected to each other through economic, political, social and demographic factors. In this context, migration is not just a function of individual push and pull factors but a function of structural relationship between the places of origin and destination (Mabogunje, 1970).

The push-pull model is still a basic of the migration theory. Push factors are unemployment, poverty, political instability and environmental stress in the origin countries; pull factors are demand for labour, wage rates and improved living standards in the destination countries. High unemployment, income gaps serve as compelling push factors in South Asia while lack of jobs in Gulf economy serves as powerful pull factors.

The migration systems approach can be applied to the South Asian region, where migration patterns are mostly determined by historical, cultural and economic relations. In terms of the procedures in place to facilitate migration, for instance, India–Nepal migration is largely under "free movement" and Bangladesh–Gulf migration is conducted through formal recruitment systems and remittance

channels. These corridors illustrate the interconnectedness of migration and regional inequalities and opportunities.

2.4 Governance Gaps

While there are several layers of governance, there are still gaps within the migration governance in South Asia. The first major gap is on the policy front, with diverse and not adequately harmonized migration policies in countries. This results in divergent standards for recruitment, lower standards for protection of workers, and unequal access to legal channels for migration.

The second gap is related to the sovereignty constraints. The concept of migration is strongly linked to the principle of national sovereignty, especially in the fields of border crossing and citizenship management. Supranational governance is often limited, with States being hesitant to give up control to regional mechanisms. This sensitivity towards sovereignty is particularly high in politically charged relations in South Asia.

The third gap is institutional asymmetry (uneven administrative capacity and governance effectiveness between countries). Some States have relatively well-defined migration management systems and others have underdeveloped systems for controlling the recruitment agencies, monitoring conditions of migrant workers and controlling the engagement of the diaspora. This imbalance will make it difficult to develop coherent regional arrangements.

All these gaps in governance contribute to disorganized migration systems and constrain the impact from national and regional policy interventions. For this, technical coordination is not enough; the political will to establish common standards and strengthen institutions is also needed to meet these challenges.

3. Migration Dynamics in South Asia

The reasons behind migration in South Asia are diverse and complex, influenced by a variety of factors including history, economic differences, political conditions, and environmental pressures. The region is one of the most important migration systems in the world both in terms of international migration labour mobility and intra-regional migration. These dynamics are part of the different development structures present in the region, which is highly unequal, and the changing patterns of global labour demand, and thus, South Asia is a key region to study migration processes today.

3.1 Key Migration Flows

One of the most important intra-regional migration corridors is the Bangladesh–India flow. Although efforts have been made to monitor migration to India in recent decades, migration from Bangladesh to India still exists due to geographic proximity, historical ties and economic differences from Bangladesh and India. Movements are frequently seasonal, not organized and related to agricultural work, construction, and domestic work. But irregular migration is also a sensitive political issue and often is a part of security discourses.

Nepal–India migration corridor is one of the most open in the world. Nepalis are allowed to move and work in India under the treaty of Indo-Nepal (1950) without any formal visa restriction. This has established a long-term circular migration pattern, with Nepalis hired for jobs in the tourism industry, security services and construction, among other sectors. This corridor is a reflection of the fact that historically negotiated agreements still influence today's labour mobility.

However, Pakistan-Gulf migration routes are largely contractual labor migration–orientated. Millions of Pakistani nationals enter Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries annually, mostly in the field of low and semi-skilled jobs. These migrations are responding to the labor need of the construction and transport sectors and the domestic work sectors. The economy of this corridor is of immense importance as remittances from the Gulf countries are a significant portion of the Pakistan's external income.

Likewise, the labour export system in Sri Lanka and Maldives are also heavily geared towards foreign employment. Female labour migration, especially in the domestic labour market sectors in the Middle East, has a long history in Sri Lanka. Because of its small population and a service- and tourism-based economy, the Maldives heavily depends on foreign labor from South Asia in the construction and service sectors. These patterns are indicative of labour market interdependence of small and middle-income group South Asian economies.

3.2 Types of Migration

In South Asia, migration can be classified broadly in different forms and types with some overlap. The most prevalent form is labour migration, with both highly and less highly skilled individuals. The skilled migration involves the migration of professionals like IT, healthcare, engineering and others to OECD countries, and unskilled migration is mainly in the construction, domestic service and manual labour sector in the Gulf countries.

Forced migration is also a major type, especially with regard to refugees and IDPs. The Rohingya crisis is one of the largest forced migration scenarios in the region, with mass exodus to the Bangladesh. In addition, IDPs are a continuing problem in areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan due to conflict and political instability.

Climate-induced migration is a growing type of migration that is now being recognised as a major emerging dimension of migration. The most vulnerable and densely populated regions like Bangladesh, India and Nepal are most vulnerable to environmental degradation, river erosion, cyclones, flooding and sea-level rise. Climate migration is typically an intra-border movement rather than trans-border; however, it plays an important part in rural-urban migration pressures.

Last but not least, migration can be distinguished between internal and cross-border migration. Intra-country migration forms the bulk of mobility in South Asia, particularly the migration from rural to urban areas. Regardless, cross-border migration, although smaller in its scale, is important because of the international regulatory aspects it has, both economically and politically.

3.3 Drivers of Migration

There are several structural causes of migration in south Asia. Economic inequality and unemployment continue to be the key factors. Income gaps, slow industrial growth and a high unemployment rate in rural areas encourage people to move to the urban areas of their own country and to the international labor markets. Demographic pressures are also important. The region of South Asia is highly populated with youthful population especially in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. These are recurring pressures of migration because there is a mismatch between labour market absorption capacity and labour force growth. The political unrest and conflict add to the forced and irregular migration. Displacement and migration across borders are caused by internal conflicts, governance issues and political marginalisation in a few areas. It is especially noticeable in contexts of Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan, or the movement of the population of the Rohingya in Bangladesh. Rising concerns over degradation of the environment and climate change are important drivers. Research shows that the South Asia region is also very climate sensitive to various hazards such as flooding, droughts, cyclones and glacial melting in the Himalayas. This environment changes impacts livelihoods, notably in rural areas dependent on agriculture, leading to migration both within and across borders.

3.4 Emerging Trends

One of the key emerging features of South Asian migration is 'feminization of migration'. Women migrate on their own, for work – especially in domestic work, health care, and services – and this has increased over time. Although this trend has the potential to improve the economic independence of women, it can also lead to increased vulnerability to exploitation, trafficking, and precarious working arrangements for women (UN Women, 2020). Another major trend is the emergence of “irregular” migration networks. Informal migration channels have grown due to restrictive visa regimes, high recruitment fees and lack of legal avenues. Unsafe migration is often made possible through smuggling networks and unregulated recruitment agencies which may result in high vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking. The International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2024) notes that continued difficulties in cross-border cooperation and weak enforcement, especially along the coasts and river crossings, continue to be a governance challenge in the region that is reflected in irregular migration. Additional trend that is gaining momentum is the spread of digital recruitment solutions. The digital platforms and digital labor brokerage systems are growing in use to connect workers with employers, especially in-migrant flows to the Gulf countries. Digitalization can help to increase transparency and lower costs of recruitment, but also introduces new risks such as misinformation, fake job offers and less regulation in digital labour markets. The fourth component is on Governance Architecture of Migration in South Asia. The fourth is on Governance Architecture of Migration in South Asia.

4. Migration governance in the South Asian region

Migration governance in the South Asian region is complex and multi-layered, with different national governments, bilateral agreements, regional bodies and international organisations involved. Governance frameworks are not integrated or coherent, and are sometimes reactive, and not equally distributed. This is a manifestation of wider political divisions, the uneven power of the states and their different economic reliance on migrants throughout the region.

4.1 National-Level Governance

The migration governance at national level in South Asia is largely governed through its national laws, administrative institutions and policy instruments. Migration governance systems vary by country based on the nature of their migration dependency, and their economic structures. Bangladesh has the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act (2013) which legislates on the recruitment process, contracts and welfare of migrants. Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) is the main agency for the management of overseas employment. The government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has also created the Wage Earners' Welfare Board which is tasked to assist migrant workers and their families.

Migration governance in India is more inward looking because it is a both a sending and receiving country. Emigration is controlled by the Emigration Act (1983) and domestic migration is mainly governed by labour law and welfare schemes at state level. The responsibilities of institutions are shared between the Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of Labour and Employment and the state labour departments.

Nepal has established a somewhat structured governance structure for its labour migration with the Foreign Employment Act (2007) that regulates labour recruitment firms and encourages safe migration. The Department of Foreign Employment is responsible for the management of labour migration and the Foreign Employment Welfare Fund is responsible for financial protection mechanisms for migrant workers.

Migration governance in Pakistan is in the hands of Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BEOE) under the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development. The policies of the country are heavily geared towards allowing movement of labour to the countries in the Gulf.

Migration governance is tightly intertwined with strategies for labour export in Sri Lanka and Maldives. The Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) is one of the key actors in the migrant worker recruitment and protection of migrant workers, especially women domestic workers in Sri Lanka. The Maldives is highly dependent on foreign labor and therefore, has a strong reliance on immigration control mechanism.

Institutional structures are generally found at the national level and consist of ministries of labor or foreign employment, regulations on border crossings,

migrant welfare funds, and nations' regulatory bodies on recruitment. Institutional capacity is great variation and this impacts on the implementation and effectiveness of policy and enforcement.

4.2 Bilateral Agreements

Bilateral agreements are an important governance mechanism in South Asian migration systems, especially when there is a lack of effective regional governance mechanisms. The India-Nepal open border system is one of the most unique migration systems in the world. The citizens of the two countries are free to travel without any visa requirement based on the Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1950. This provides for the possibility of large-scale circular migration, especially in employment of labour. But even though it is open, problems like informal employment or the absence of social protection remain. The labour agreements with Bangladesh and the Gulf countries are a key element in Bangladesh's migration governance framework. Bangladesh has inked several Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations for controlling the recruitment of workers. The main element of these agreements is concerned with how workers will be deployed, how they will be recruited and the responsibilities that employers will have. But, in practice there are issues of enforcement and malpractices of recruiting (Rahman, 2012). Likewise, the contractual relations between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are the key aspects of Pakistan's system of labour export. Saudi Arabia is one of the biggest countries that Pakistani migrant labourers head to. Labor contracts, visa systems and channels of recruitment are regulated by bilateral frameworks. But these are frequently unequal with destination countries having better control over the terms and conditions of migration. In general, bilateral agreements offer a framework for migration, but are narrow in scope, inconsistently enforced and are disproportionately affected by geopolitical and economic imbalances.

4.3 Regional Institutions

South Asia's migration governance is weak, as is the cooperation between the States in the region, relative to other areas, including Europe or Southeast Asia. Development of effective migration governance frameworks has been relatively underdeveloped in the South Asian region, primarily through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). SAARC has signed a number of conventions regarding trafficking and migration of labour, however, there is limited implementation of these conventions owing to political tensions, especially between India and Pakistan. Migration has not been given much importance as an agenda item in SAARC and institutional framework for policy coordination is weak. BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), on the other hand, has turned out to be a viable alternative forum for subregional cooperation. The BIMSTEC has more functional advancement in its connectivity and labour mobility talks, with countries from South and Southeast Asia. But its governance mechanisms for

migration are still being developed at an early stage. Other new platforms are informal regional dialogues and technical cooperation forums facilitated by international organizations. However, the regional level of South Asian region has not developed a strong institutionalized migration governance regime.

4.4 International Actors

International organizations have a strong influence in the development of migration governance in South Asia. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) offers technical assistance, policy guidance and capacity building assistance for migration management systems. It also has a crucial role in the collection and response to data, including during displacements. The International Labour Organization (ILO) is also a contributor by setting international labour standards and advocating for decent work principles of migrant workers. It has an impact on national policies on labour migration, including those related to worker protection and recruitment regulation. The research on remittances, labour mobility and development impacts are all important areas of work for the World Bank in relation to migration governance. It has continually emphasized the macroeconomic significance of migration for the economies of South Asia, and has advocated for policy changes to lower migration costs and increase transparency in migration recruitment (World Bank, 2023).

Apart from formal institutions, Diasporas are also an important, yet under-investigated governance actor. The remittance economy, transnational investing, transnational knowledge transfer and transnational advocacy are all areas of significant contribution that come from South Asian Diasporas. Social capital and informal recruitment processes are also mediated by these networks, shaping migrants' decisions. Diaspora organizations in some instances actively participate in policy advocacy and policy development in countries of origin.

Institutional multiplicity, with structural fragmentation, is the hallmark of the governance of migration in South Asia. National systems are the main framework for regulation, bilateral agreements are the key level for operational management of migration, and regional institutions are lacking in strength. These are complemented, but not replaced, by intergovernmental institutions and networks from the Diasporas. More integrated, rights-based and cooperative migration governance arrangements are needed in the region, this reflected architecture is a clear indication of the needs.

5. Challenges in Migration Governance

The governance of migration in South Asia faces several interrelated challenges that threatens the working of policies, institutions and regional cooperation mechanisms. These challenges are not stand-alone, but institutionally rooted in wider political, economic and institutional processes. Amongst these are the fragmentation of policies, political and security issues, the weakness of institutions, social and human rights shortcomings, and the ongoing data gaps.

They help create an environment of reactive, unequal, and sometimes insufficient governance of migrants.

5.1 Policy Fragmentation

The key issue in South Asia in the governance of migration is the absence of synchronization of migration frameworks over countries. State laws and regulations differ from state to state and from one country to another, leading to different policies, recruitment rules and protection for workers. One example of this fragmentation is in the governance of labour migration, where the sending countries -- Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan -- have distinct regimes of governance to destination countries in the Gulf. This fragmentation is compounded by weak coordination among the States. There are no comprehensive mechanisms for migration governance as of now, at the regional level, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is the only body that exists, but its institutional capacity is not very strong, and the political tensions are not conducive to the development of migration governance. This leads to a dominant bilateral approach to migration governance, in which bilateral agreements are often very imbalanced and have weak enforcement mechanisms. This policy environment is further segmented and inhibits the progressive development of uniform coverage for migrant workers and causes mixed governance outcomes in the region.

5.2 Political and Security Concerns

The context of migration in South Asia is often political and security related, especially in the context of irregular migration. Authorized trans-border movements are sometimes viewed as a security threat by states, and this has been reflected in the militarization of borders and tightening of immigration measures. Securitization tends to focus on the protection of the border rather than migrants' protection, and can lead to more vulnerable persons taking more dangerous and irregular paths to migrate (Koser, 2010). The migration governance in the region is further complicated by refugee politics. Large refugee populations, especially Rohingya in Bangladesh, have posed a challenge in the humanitarian and political arenas. There may be conflicts between international protection obligations and domestic political pressures for host states. These challenges are aggravated further in the absence of any regional refugee protection framework in South Asia, and the governance of refugees is mostly left to piecemeal national responses. Often, state sovereignty is also a key factor in the development of migration governance. States do not like to cede authority to supranational or regional bodies and tend to see migration control as an integral part of national sovereignty. The sovereignty-sensitive context restricts the

possibilities for harmonization of regional policy and for regional governance structures.

5.3 Institutional Weaknesses

Lack of institutional capacity is a significant challenge for effective migration governance in South Asia. Limited capacity for enforcement in many countries in the region, including in the enforcement of recruitment agencies, monitoring of labour contracts and compliance of migrant's protection standards. Poor institutional coordination between the ministries, border agencies and labor departments also hinder policy implementation. One of the recurring problems is corruption and malfeasance in migration processes. Migrant workers are susceptible to exploitation prior to departure through informal recruitment networks and fraudulent agents and excessive recruitment fees. Research shows that high migration costs and low oversight by governmental institutions play a big role in migrant vulnerability, especially for low-skilled migrants (International Labour Organization, 2019). Fragmentation also impacts return/reintegration policies. Inadequate institutional linkages and reintegration frameworks create problems for many migrants in accessing welfare after they return home. This has a negative impact on the developmental gains of migrants and vulnerability of the returnees.

5.4 Social and Human Rights Issues

Social and human rights issues are also serious problems for migration governance in the South Asian region. Migrant workers often are subjected to exploitation not just in their country of origin but also in destination countries, such as wage theft, poor working conditions and limited mobility. They are more common in jobs that are low-skilled, like domestic work, construction, and agriculture. Human trafficking is still a major issue in the region, and is frequently linked with irregular migration routes. Inadequate border crossing infrastructure, impoverished migrants and their lack of awareness put them at risk, especially when they are female and children. Responses to trafficking are further complicated by the lack of legal migration channels and trafficking networks taking advantage of this. South Asian migration systems are highly vulnerable to gender-based vulnerabilities. Women migrants are subjected to double discrimination as both women and migrants. But domestic workers in destination countries, especially women workers, face the risk of being mistreated, isolated and without legal protection. Gender responsive governance frameworks have not been fully developed in the region (UN Women, 2020), although there has been a growing feminization of migration. Further, there are few social protection measures in place for migrant workers. During migration and upon return, many migrants do not have access to healthcare, insurance, or legal or social security. The lack of protection systems is a reflection of the low

level of integration of migration policy with other social protection policies in many countries in South Asia.

5.5 Data Deficiency

One of the key challenges in migration governance is the lack of reliable and harmonized migration data systems. Migration statistics for South Asia tend to be inconsistent, incomplete and may be outdated between countries. This is partly because of the high prevalence of irregular migration which is difficult to measure and partly because of inadequate institutional systems to collect data. Information has been lacking, making the scope of evidence-based policymaking very narrow. Governments tend to use administrative or estimated data from parts of the migration or data from international organizations, which may only reflect part of the migration picture. Lacking data, it is hard to create effective regional responses, evaluate the effects of migration, or plan policies that address migration needs.

Moreover, data deficits are problematic when it comes to tracking violations of migrant rights and migrant labor market performance. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) stresses that the modernization of migration data systems is vital for better governance, better protection systems and for planning sustainable development in countries of migration (IOM, 2024). The migratory governance in South Asia is bound by complex institutional, political, social and informational issues. The policy fragmentation and low level of regional coordination restricts harmonization, and political and security issues influence restrictive migration policies. Vulnerabilities for migrants are exacerbated by institutional weaknesses and corruption that affects the enforcement and protection mechanisms. Persistent human rights problems create vulnerabilities for migrants and enforcement and protection mechanisms are undermined by institutional weaknesses and corruption. Lastly, there is limited information to enable the development of good governance systems and approaches. Technical measures are needed but they must be accompanied by a greater political will to build cooperation at regional level and migrant-focused governance structures to overcome these challenges.

6. Cooperation in the governance of migration in the region

Although the South Asian region is characterized by high cross-border mobility and the need for cross-border workers, regional cooperation in the field of migration governance is rather uneven, patchy and underdeveloped. Cooperative governance mechanisms have not developed quickly enough to deal with the complexity of migration flows in South Asian economies, although they are a structural component of these economies. There have been some efforts through

SAARC, bilateral and international partnership and BIMSTEC, but they are limited by political tension, weakness of institutions and lack of enforceability.

6.1 Current Cooperation Efforts

The prominent regional platform for cooperation in South Asian is South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). SAARC has embraced a number of conventions that relate to migration governance such as the SAARC Convention on the Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution (2002). But its implementation is not strong owing to the lack in institutional enforcement value and the ongoing geopolitical tensions between India and Pakistan. Despite the fact that migration hasn't yet been incorporated into SAARC's operational agenda as a policy field in its own right, the cooperation frameworks have been a bit disjointed with symbolic elements that are more of a talking point than a reality (Rajan & Kumar, 2023) (Springer Link).

Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is considered more pragmatic subregional platform as compared to this. BIMSTEC is also a group that is not specifically defined as a migration governance forum, but the movement of migrants, skills building, and connectivity have gradually become part of BIMSTEC's overall economic cooperation programmed. Transport connectivity, skills recognition and human resource development are being promoted at recent initiatives as indirect supports of the labor mobility governance in member states. BIMSTEC's cooperation on migration is still in its infancy, however, and there is no specific institutional mechanism for protection of migrants, nor are there any consistent rules of migration in terms of labor mobility within BIMSTEC.

Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and Labor Agreements are the backbone of Migration Governance in South Asia at the bilateral level. Some countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan have bilateral agreements with the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to control recruitment and working conditions and repatriation processes. These agreements are formalized migration pathways, but are typically one-sided in terms of who has the power to determine the labour conditions and visa regime. Consequently, bilateral cooperation is more likely to concentrate on the aspects of administrative coordination, rather than rights-based governance structures.

6.2 Best Practices

Despite such constraints, there are some good practices which have been developed regionally. Some of the notable examples include the case of Bangladesh's recruitment regulation reform that has put in place licensing regime for recruitment agencies, digital tracking and standardized procedures for contracts under the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act (2013). The changes are designed to decrease the cost of recruitment and to prevent exploitation by intermediaries, but there remains a lack of enforcement. The

development of digital migration management systems is another important development that can be seen. A number of countries have established online platforms for emigration clearance, skills certification, and monitoring of emigration. Some countries like India and Sri Lanka have established online platforms for emigration clearance, skill certification, and monitoring emigration. Digital systems increase transparency, decrease transaction costs and improve data collection for policy planning. The International Labour Organization (ILO) points out that these digital innovations are playing a growing role in improving the efficiency of migration governance in Asia, for example, by facilitating fair recruitment, skills matching systems, and more (International Labour Organization, 2023). Thirdly, there are the remittance facilitation systems. Remittances are a key source of income to families and stability to the macro-economic environment in South Asia, which is one of the world's largest recipients of remittances. To lower the remittance transfer fees in the formal banking system and in financial digital services, some countries like Nepal and Bangladesh have taken steps and have established policies. Through these measures, these policies not only advance financial inclusion, but also boost the developmental effects of migration by increasing the share of remittances that reaches household beneficiaries.

6.3 Barriers to Cooperation

Political tension is one of the major barriers, especially between India and Pakistan that has affected SAARC's effectiveness in the past. The conflict has also caused stasis in these institutions; thus, no effective regional migration governance has been put in place. Consequently, cooperation on migration is more likely to be channelled to bilateral or subregional processes or platforms than to multilateral regional ones. The other major challenge is the lack of trust between the states. Migration governance is generally understood in a security lens in South Asian countries, which equate the cross-border movement with trafficking in persons and irregular migration or national security threats. This perception undermines the readiness to share data on migration, harmonize policies and to agree on binding regional agreements. The third constraint is the state sovereignty concerns. Migration control is intricately linked with national sovereignty at various levels of governance, including border management, citizenship and labor market regulation. There is limited supranational governance mechanisms due to lack of willingness by states to cede authority to regional institutions. In this sovereignty sensitive area, institutional integration is limited and regionalism is not well-enforced.

6.4 Emerging Opportunities

A key opportunity is the creation of a framework for cooperation on climate migration. Displacement of people from the effects of floods, cyclones, river erosion and sea-level rise is a major risk in South Asia. Climate induced migration has been identified as a policy issue that needs to be addressed with a

regional approach. Cooperation at the regional level might help to ensure early warning systems, advance relocation planning, and establish climate resilient livelihoods programmes, especially for riverine and coastal communities in the region that are at particular risk. The idea of South Asian Skills Mobility Partnerships is another emerging idea. The frameworks strive to link countries' skills development systems and their needs to the labor market, thus facilitating a more organized and mutually beneficial labor mobility. Such co-operations could help in decreasing the irregular migration by providing more legal avenues for skilled and semi-skilled persons. They can also help to build up competitiveness in the region of the global labor market through coordinated human capital development.

An additional opportunity is to integrate the labor markets at the regional level. While South Asia is one of the least integrated regions in the world today, there is a good complementarity between inputs and outputs of labour markets. For example, labour mobility can be facilitated through structured cooperation, to improve productivity, cut down on recruitment costs and boost migration protection results. The economic benefits of enhancing labour mobility within and from South Asia could be substantial for both sending and receiving countries, provided this is managed in a well-coordinated and well-designed manner (World Bank, 2023).

International organizations also contribute to the promotion of these opportunities. The ILO and IOM offer technical assistance on fair recruitment systems, protection of the rights of workers and dialogue platforms at the regional level. The importance of collaborative and comprehensive governance frameworks is becoming increasingly highlighted by these institutions, which incorporate labor standards, human rights and development goals (ILO, 2023; IOM, 2024).

South Asia is not lacking the capacity for regional collaboration on governance issues related to migration but there is still much that can be done. Although these are less effective, the governance of migration is influenced by bilateral agreements and international partnerships as well. Though these are less effective, the bilateral agreements and international partnerships are still influencing the migration governance in practice. There are signs of incremental progress in areas of best practices on digital governance, in recruitment reform and in the facilitation of remittance. However, deeper integration is hampered by ongoing obstacles, such as political tensions, sovereignty issues and mistrust of institutions. There are opportunities for future cooperation via emerging governance trends in climate migration, skills mobility partnerships and skills integration in the labour market. These mechanisms need to be further

strengthened to develop a more coherent, rights-based and development-oriented migration governance system in South Asia.

7. Policy Recommendations for Migration Governance in South Asia

Increasingly, migration governance in South Asia needs to move away from the fragmented, nationally-centred approach towards a more coordinated, rights-based and regionally integrated approach. In view of the size, complexity and developmental significance of migration in the region, the response to migration must focus on filling institutional gaps, strengthening cooperation mechanisms and strengthening the protection system for migrants. The recommendations below are informed by existing evidence on constraints to regional governance and international migration policy frameworks (IOM, 2024; World Bank, 2023). The development of South Asian Migration Governance Framework (SAMGF) under a regional platform is a priority. This framework should provide common principles, minimum standards and policy guidelines for the regulation of the transboundary movement of people in South Asia. It should be directed towards safe, orderly and regular migration in line with international pledges including the Global Compact for Migration. Such a system, which is flexible and non-binding in nature, may be put in place at first with coordination and communication mechanisms, and then gradually developed into a more formal governance structure, as the need arises and current regional institutions are inadequate.

The regional institutions like SAARC and BIMSTEC should be revitalized as special task forces on migration. Slowly, SAARC is the only platform where politics do not come in the way and BIMSTEC is a more functional subregional platform in South Asia with rising momentum. The creation of specific migration units in these bodies could help to enhance the policy dialogue, technical cooperation, and harmonization of migration standards. Regional cooperation theory indicates that with the gradual development of functional sectoral cooperation, wider institutional integration (Haas, 1958) may be achieved.

The lack of reliable and harmonized data is one of the main missing elements in migration governance. There should be a regional data sharing system to enhance transparency, planning and evidence-based policy making. This system should be interconnected throughout countries with the data from the labour ministries, border agencies and recruitment bodies. Normalization of data protocols would enable governments to monitor migration movements, identify risks and more effectively address unfair migration and trafficking. Data coordination plays a vital role in good governance of migration (IOM, 2024).

Recruitment systems in the region of South Asia are still very disjointed and susceptible to misuse. There should be a regional coordination to harmonize the recruitment process such as licensing of recruitment agencies, transparency of contract and recruitment ethics. This may help to minimize unnecessary recruitment costs, eliminate fraud and enhance accountability. A harmonization of labor protection mechanisms should also be provided to guarantee minimum

standards in wages, working conditions and dispute resolution in destination countries. This would make bargaining more powerful for the sending states and lower the risk of exploitation.

It is time to make promoting migrants' rights a main part of regional governance. Countries should strive to make social security benefits such as pensions, health insurance and employment related protection portable, across borders. The lack of national systems that are connected to provide access to services for migrant workers tends to disadvantage the long-term welfare outcomes. Considerations should also be given to enhancing consular protection, legal assistance and grievance redressal systems for migrants abroad in the context of the regional agreements. The ILO (2023) emphasizes that a rights-based governance approach is crucial to promote decent working conditions and to prevent exploitation in international labor migration systems.

Secure Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration Pathways

Having additional legal pathways to migration is vital to help curb irregular migration and risks. The countries in the South Asia region must cooperate with the countries of migration in developing new visa regimes, skills migration and circular migration. These can decrease reliance on informal brokers and smuggling networks, and enhance the efficiency of the labour market. Besides, there should be improvement in the migrant employability and safety through pre-departure training and skills certification system. The governance of migration in South Asia needs a coordinated and multi-level approach with an integration of national and regional measures. Creating a shared governance structure, building regional institutions, strengthening data systems, having a consistent approach to recruitment and supporting migrant rights protection are key steps toward creating a more cohesive migration system. Finally, migration should be addressed not just as a security issue, but as a common developmental opportunity which calls for regional concerted action.

8. Conclusion

Migration in South Asia is a multi-dimensional and structurally embedded phenomenon that was predetermined by its history, economic disparities, demographic pressures and environmental vulnerabilities. As illustrated in this chapter, the region is one of the most dynamic migration systems in the world, with varying types of migration movements such as labour migration, forced migration and climate induced migration. Migration is essential for regional development, as remittances, labour market integration and transnational connections are also important. The benefits of migration, however, are not evenly distributed, and can be linked to governance challenges. Analysis underscores the high levels of fragmentation in the migration governance landscape in South Asia, whereby policies implemented at the national level are more influential on the policy landscape than those at the regional level. While there are some forms of bilateral governance and international governance bodies, these are not

comprehensive enough to tackle the complexity of migration flows and vulnerabilities of migrants. Governance inefficiencies are also caused by institutional asymmetries, poor institutional capacity and policy inconsistencies. In particular, migrant workers – particularly those in low skilled industries and women migrants – continue to be vulnerable to exploitation, to protection and to access to social security systems. The potential of regional cooperation has not yet been fully realized. The political tensions and restricted mobility of institutional arrangements like SAARC have restricted the functioning of these organizations and migration governance is underdeveloped in new institutions like BIMSTEC. There are on-going obstacles to further regional integration, such as geopolitical tensions, sovereignty concerns and lack of trust. On the other hand, new policy innovation and cooperation possibilities are opening up with emerging trends like digital migration systems, climate induced mobility and skills-based labour migration. This chapter's findings indicate that a shift from a fragmented to more coordinated governance at the regional level, with a rights-based approach, is both needed and achievable. To improve migration governance in South Asia, it is necessary to develop frameworks of policies, strengthen institutional coordination, develop data systems, and establish common mechanisms in recruiting and protecting migrants. Portability of social protection benefits and access to legal protection are also critical elements of including migrant rights in governance, as are other protections granted to migrants within a specific country. Finally, migration in South Asia should not only be considered a security or control issue but, as a regional development opportunity. A cooperative governance approach, based on mutual trust, institutional development and evidence-based policy-making and decision-making, can make migration an asset to inclusive growth and social stability. It will be crucial for migration in one of the world's most migration-intensive regions to move forward such a framework for safe, orderly and equitable migration outcomes.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/o2**THE LEGACY OF PERSIAN LITERATURE IN THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT: CONTINUITY AND TRANSFORMATION****DR. MIRZA JUNED BEG**Associate Professor, Faculty of Law
Integral University, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India**Abstract**

Over the past six centuries, Persian literature has played a key role in shaping the Indian subcontinent's intellectual, cultural, and literary traditions. There were a number of cultural exchanges between the two traditions preceding the present era as well as an increasing number of people taking up Persian literature as their medium of creative, artistic, and academic expression, starting in the late 19th century. Persian literature became an essential language in the administration of both the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal empires for practical everyday purposes and for creative artistic expression. This paper examines the legacy of Persian literature as it has developed historically; its impact spanning more than 600 years, as well as its evolution and adaptation with respect to each different historical age. Various forms of Classical Persian literature (ghazals, masnavis, and qasidas), were all developed within the Indian subcontinent, thereby demonstrating that their significance within this area has been and continues to be profound. Authors associated with some of India's most distinguished literary traditions have produced works that are both Persian in their aesthetics and rooted in Indian culture thereby establishing a uniquely Indian literary tradition. This research also examines how the Persian language evolved into the vernacular Urdu on the Indian subcontinent and shows how literature created in Persian had a profound influence on the literary tradition developed in Urdu due to shared literary forms and poetics, use of Persian vocabulary, and so on; thus, this study analyzes both continuity and change, demonstrating that Persian literature on the Indian subcontinent is not simply a historical artefact; it is a living and growing tradition. The study will stress that while it is important to maintain the literary traditions established in Persian, it is also critical to recognize the extent to which those traditions are central to the identity of contemporary literature from South Asia. The research will take place against the backdrop of current academic and cultural revitalization studies that are rooted in the living presence of Persian literature today.

Keywords: Persian Literature; Indo-Persian Culture; Mughal Era; Literary Transformation; Urdu Influence.

1. Introduction

“The Persianate world was not a fixed geographical entity but a dynamic cultural zone, continually reshaped through the movement of people, texts, and ideas.” -**Nile Green**

The history and tradition of Persian literature represent one of the longest-lasting aspects of the Indian subcontinent's intellectual heritage. Although Persian was introduced to the Indian subcontinent via ongoing interactions between central Asia, western Asia, and the Indian subcontinent, it eventually became a language that could be associated with power, government, and culture. During both the period of Delhi Sultanate and the period of consolidation when the Mughal Empire established its authority, Persian served as an instrument of unity to promote both administratively efficient systems and a rich, thriving literary and scholarly community (Eaton 112). Persian spread not only within the hierarchical systems created by royal households but through Sufi networks, schools, and literary gatherings thereby creating an enduring presence in the culture of the region.

The role of Persian as an administrative tool was just one of the many functions it served within South Asia. It acted as a medium of exchange between intellectuals and poets, enabling the sharing of ideas and poetry, as well as providing philosophers with a common framework to discuss their philosophies. The ability to produce poetry, history, and ethics in Persian is an example of this sophisticated interaction between two different realities (local and transregional). As such, Persian served as the cosmopolitan language that provided connections between South Asia and the larger Persianate world, and allowed for the movement of ideas, literature, and aesthetics (Green 23).

Understanding the Indo-Persian literary tradition as a progressive development of a culture rather than just a passive introduction is important. The way in which the Persian tradition evolved can be seen through how various aspects of Persian culture were assimilated to meet the linguistic/cultural/intellectual context in southern Asia. Persian literature was written in ways that integrated local imagery, domestic storytelling, and regional sentiments to develop distinctly hybrid traditions which have roots in established classical literature but are also influenced by their environments (Alam and Subrahmanyam 67). This localization of the literature illustrates the ability of South Asian writers to use the Persian language to express their own realities through their own creativity.

2. Persian as a Cosmopolitan and Administrative Language

From a series of political, trade and intellectual exchanges with Central Asia as well as Iran, Persian has developed as a language of sophistication and authority within the Indian Subcontinent. Then, with the emergence of the Delhi Sultanate in the 13th century, Persian became the official language for the administration, law and diplomacy providing a standardised language through which to govern the culturally diverse region (Alam 321). The use of Persian was beyond just being practical; it symbolised how the Indian Subcontinent had been incorporated into

the wider Persianate culture that stretched across much of Eurasia, thus giving both rulers and elites the opportunity to share in the same cultural and intellectual heritage that extended beyond any given country (Asher 185).

In the Mughal Empire, the prestige and power of Persian reached its pinnacle. Not only did it serve as the official language for governing and administration, it also served as the main language for all kinds of historical writing, literature, and intellectual discourse (Habib 345). Many poets, historians and other Persian scholars were financially supported by the Mughal emperors throughout their reigns, which resulted in an incredibly flourishing literary culture for Persian writers during this period. Many historical texts recorded the time period of the Mughal emperors in the Persian language at the court of the Mughal emperors with such as the "*Akbarnama*", which was one way that the Mughal dynasty articulated its ideology and wrote its own regal history. At the same time, the Persian literature produced in the courts of the Mughals integrated both culturally and artistically the various elements from the diverse cultures of India into the Persian literary tradition through both content and type of imagery.

Persian is known as a cosmopolitan language in South Asia as it was an effective means of uniting diverse cultural groups through the way it communicated. Therefore, Persian served as a shared means of communicating across cultural boundaries (regardless of where one lived, what religion one practiced or what ethnic background one belonged to). The resulting artistic creativity and intellectual exchange that emerged from this intercultural communication is nicely expressed through the following verse of Amir Khusrau (Khusrau 67):

سخن پر سر سیم از و هندم ز
امک رده هم به را جهان دو هر که

The translation of above couplet is "*I speak from Hind and from Persia, for I have united the two worlds.*"

3. Classical Persian Literary Forms in India

A rich and long Indo-Persian literary legacy resulted from the creative adaptation of classical Persian literary forms in India, such as the ghazal, masnavi, and qasida, which combined Persian aesthetics with native topics.

3.1 Ghazal

The Persian ghazal established itself as the primary literary genre in the Indian subcontinent, both ethnically and culturally influential and aesthetically refined. It has the themes of love and longing for separation at its heart, yet the ghazal is also an expression of a mystical longing. The ghazal has served as a model for adaptations of its form (i.e., couplets that are both thematically related and have independent structural forms) throughout the cultural landscape of South Asia (Schimmel, 112). By including indigenous images of Indigenous peoples, their landscapes and metaphors, the ghazal became more rich form of expression than it had previously been. The Manifestation of Indic motifs in Persian poetry exemplifies this indigenization process:

را مادل آرد دست به شد یرازی ترک آن اگر
را به خارا و سمرق ند به خشم دویش هن خال به

An example of early Indo-Persian imagery can be found in this well-known couplet by **Hafiz** because of its use of the term “*Hindu mole*” as a reoccurring theme throughout the later aesthetic traditions of South Asian ghazals. Because of the ability of the ghazal to adapt, it continued to survive through different languages and remains the primary poetic form of literature in Urdu (Faruqi 25).

3.2 Masnavi

The masnavi is a form of Persian literature that consists of rhyming couplets and extended narrative structures. It has historically played an important role in the telling of stories in Persian literature. In India, the masnavi became an adaptable form to include native stories, legends and moral tales. Persian poets from South Asia used the masnavi to retell local stories in a classic Persian style, which mixed together two different types of storytelling (Sharma 54).

The presence of both Indo-Persian aspects can be seen through the evolution of both romance and didactic literature specifically, through examples of romance (with Indian cultural, geographical, ethical subjects) and didactic literature (where Indian subjects were realized through Persian literary practices). The masnavi acted as a vehicle to connect two separate cultures by allowing a smooth flow of narratives between them, and by continuing to develop a style that is consistent with other parts of the greater Persianate world.

3.3 Qasida

Qasida as a form associated traditionally with the praise of sovereigns/courts underwent great change within the Indian subcontinent. It remained a means of celebrating those who ruled over or patronized its poets, but it also began to become more than just that it began to include aspects such as philosophical reflection, ethical observations, and commentary on social issues and politics (Alam 332).

Throughout the Ahmadabad culture, the qasida has served to capture the multifaceted dimensions of life at court and the intellectual enlightenment of that era. Poets used rich metaphors, complex images, and numerous rhetorical techniques in order to express their loyalty and admiration for a patron/king while simultaneously expressing subtle dissatisfactions with or moral critique of governmental behaviour. The qasida's evolution indicates how classical Persian poetic forms have evolved/redefined themselves around the perceived need for new forms of expression to reflect changing cultural and political contexts in South Asia.

4. Sufi Influence and Literary Syncretism

Sufi networks were instrumental in spreading Persian literary art, connecting many cultures and religions through the wealth of mystical expression that was represented by the new genre of Persian literature. Divine love and unity

connected well with the local traditions of these cultures. This connection created a common vocabulary for both spirituality and literature.

4.1 Sufi Networks and the Spread of Persian

The Sufi orders helped to promote Persian language and literature in the Indian subcontinent. They did this through the creation of channels to transmit knowledge (teaching, recitation, and dissemination of manuscripts) through their *khānqāhs*, *pilgrimage circuits*, and *itinerant disciples*. As a result, Persian became the primary medium for teaching, communicating, and writing poetry in these networks and connected local communities with a larger Persianate community (Green 78). The open and diverse nature of Sufi spaces allowed for the transmission of Persian outside of royal courts and into towns and villages, so it had a wider social and literary readership.

Sufi orders used and passed down their methods of teaching through oral instructions, poetry, and manuscript copying which continued to help spread Persian literature. Sufi poets and writers communicated their feelings about being a mystic by writing in a way that many people in the Persian language spoke at that time. They wrote about what it means to have an ethical life and shared their spiritual experience in such a way that the reader could understand them through the influence of his/her culture upon what they were saying. These interactions resulted in a vibrant exchange of both cultures and of languages, for example, through Persian literature making references to native cultures the writer had encountered and likewise referencing back (Orsini page 230).

Hence, Sufi networks acted as important cultural channels, as well as religious ones. The role of Sufi networks in spreading Persian language and literature was instrumental in creating a common Persianate society across many different political and geographic boundaries, and has made an enduring contribution to the intellectual and literary history of South Asia.

4.2 Persian as a Language of Mystical Expression

The Persian language was given a special place in the Sufi literature tradition as a means of expressing complex ideas about non-physical realities (e.g., *ishq*, *fanā*, and *tawhīd*) in a poetic fashion using a variety of metaphors and visual images. There were multiple forms of poetry used in Sufi literature, including ghazals and masnavis, which were appreciated because they could provide many different degrees of spiritual value, thus enabling both the initiated followers of Sufi literature and the general public to have access to a large range of spiritually diverse information. The emotionality of Persian poetry created an originally ungraspable set of abstract theological concepts into the lived experience of the reader's sensations (Bruijn 31).

4.3 Syncretism and Cultural Integration

The interaction between Sufism and the cultures of local peoples led to a blending of literature and culture, creating a new way of expressing ideas about God. Persian-language writings produced in the Indian subcontinent combined

elements of Indian culture, Indian languages and idioms, and references to customs found in India, resulting in text which appealed equally to all those who read the work, regardless of their religion or language (Ernst 212). The use of local symbols in a text created a sense of connection among readers from various backgrounds without diminishing the original meaning of Persian symbolism. When Sufi authors combined the common themes present in mysticism with locally representative cultural symbols, they established a common language for expressing devotion within the communities in which they lived, even among those who were not formally educated in Islamic doctrine.

4.4 Enduring Legacy

The impact of Persian literature spread through Sufism across South Asian literary traditions; it shaped poetic style, influenced dialects used in poetry and helped to create a diverse intellectual setting for creative writers. Today, these same values of love, oneness and self-examination that were important to Sufis continue to have an influence on South Asian literature; thus, reminding us of Sufi-related peremptory language, as it relates to today.

5. Translation and Intellectual Exchange

The translation activity of the Mughals illustrates a profound occurrence of intellectual collaboration. Examples include works written in Sanskrit like Mahabharata translated into Persian, thus allowing for the cultivation of a dialogue between cultures. Additionally, these translations contributed to an enhancement of Persian literary works and the continuance of the philosophical tradition of India.

5.1 The Mughal Translation Movement

The Mughal Empire experienced a significant increase in the number of translations of texts in many languages throughout the empire, which promoted continuous and lasting exchanges of knowledge between the Persian and Sanskrit traditions. The emperors, most notably Emperor Akbar, were involved in supporting and financially supporting the translation of important texts from Sanskrit into Persian and creating a space for interaction (knowledge exchange) with individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Kinra 401). This process was not only useful for administrative and literary purposes, but also allowed for the Mughal court to encourage broader concepts of cultural inclusivity and integration of knowledge.

5.2 Persian Renderings of Sanskrit Texts

A significant accomplishment of this translated program was the Persian version of the *Mahabharata*, called the *Razmnama*, which was accomplished through a combined effort of both Sanskrit scholars and Persian writers to produce an adaptation drawing from the philosophy of the original text, while maintaining the Persian literary sites (Truschke 132). Additional works, including portions of the *Upanishads* and the *Ramayana*, were translated into Persian in order to provide a way for Persian speakers in South Asia to learn about the metaphysical and ethical

views of India (Lefèvre 258). By translating Indian works into Persian, the themes and ideas associated with literature written in Persian were enriched in South Asia.

5.3 Intellectual Synthesis and Cultural Dialogue

The movement of translation made it possible for scholars across multiple cultures to share their understanding of ideas. Scholars who had studied Persian, for example, frequently analyzed the texts of Sanskrit, and frequently found ways to restate those concepts within the framework of Islamic philosophy or Sufism (Ernst 198). This type of exchange ultimately aided in developing a composite intellectual culture, wherein multiple ways of knowing coexisted and worked together.

5.4 Enduring Significance

Through their attempts at translation the Mughals preserved and shared the Indian knowledge traditions in writing in Persian, thus allowing future generations to keep these teachings alive. All of these translated writings served as historical documentation of a time of interaction between two different cultural traditions; they each gained from the exchange. Through translation, the two will foster greater appreciation for one another's cultures, and also provide new forms of creative literature.

6. Transition from Persian to Urdu

As a result of the decline of Persian in the colonial period, Urdu became the dominant language of literature. That transition did not, however, represent a break with the past; rather, Urdu continued to borrow from Persian vocabulary and poetics, as well as carry forward similar aesthetics.

6.1 Colonial Shift and Linguistic Change

North India's linguistic landscape went through the biggest transformation of its kind in the 19th century, as a direct result of the British colonial government's growth around India. As the British colonial state continued to grow, eventually replacing Persian with both English and the regional vernaculars, this was the final step of this transition to the point of turning the official record of the British Empire into English; in 1837, the official removal of Persian from the official record would give way to Persian being removed from the records (Rahman 58). While the removal of Persian as an official language caused a reduction of its institutional status, it did not remove its long-standing cultural and historical legacy. In its place, a new contemporary linguistic system, Urdu began to emerge in the realm of literature and public life, especially in the urban areas of Delhi and Lucknow (King 142).

6.2 Persian Legacy in Urdu Formation

Persianate framework has shaped Urdu, contributing a wide-range of vocabulary, and certain conventions, as well as the style related to Persian poetry, which have remained unchanged over the years: The use of '*Nasta'liq*' for the script of Urdu, rhetorical styles found in Persian, and types of poetry (the ghazal in particular) developed from this legacy (Pritchett 28). The majority of early Urdu poets were

well-versed in the traditions of Persian literature and displayed considerable capacity for combining Persian Images with regional dialects. The influence of Persian aesthetic values in Urdu goes beyond lexicon it also includes metaphor, symbolism, and styles of poetic expression, resulting in a consistent use of Persian aesthetic values throughout the creation of an independent literary identity for Urdu.

6.3 Poetic Expression of Continuity

The intimate relationship between Persian and Urdu is succinctly expressed in a celebrated verse by **Mir Taqi Mir** (Mir Taqi Mir):

میر ہے نہ سب بت یہ کہی اردو سے فارسی
ہے ہونہ کی کو بیٹے سے ماں جی سے

The translation of this metaphor is “*Urdu's relation to Persian, O Mir, Is like that of a son to his mother.*” This metaphor emphasizes heredity and transformation while highlighting a lineage of continuity rather than rupture.

6.4 Cultural and Literary Continuum

The process of moving from Persian to Urdu demonstrates adaptation as a result of shifting political and social circumstances. As Persian dropped out of official use, the literary vitality of Persian continued in Hindi via Urdu, continuing forward from one context to another (Orsini 217). When Persian gradually lost popularity as a preferred language, the fact that it was established as a base of literary culture in South Asia ensured its continued influence as an important part of the literary culture of South Asia.

7. Continuity in Modern South Asian Literature

Modern South Asian literature has been significantly impacted by Persian literature. Urdu poetry has preserved many Persian verse forms, including the ghazal. Further, many contemporary scholars are beginning to recognize that the Persianate tradition has had a major impact on the development of Urdu poetry.

7.1 Persistence of Persian Forms

The literary output of South Asia continues to be affected by the legacy of Persian literature. This can be observed by the ongoing popularity of the ghazal as a prominent genre in Urdu poetry (with many of its traditional structural devices such as the ‘*matla*’, ‘*maqta*’ and ‘*radif*’ having undergone modifications based upon modern theme(s) and sensibilities (Matthews and Shackle 112). Furthermore, contemporary Urdu poets demonstrate a shared Persianate aesthetic when borrowing from both classical Persian poetry for subject matter and style. The resulting works therefore continue to show a modification of the original characteristics of Persian literature; thus, it can be seen that the artistic conventions of Persian literature have developed along with changes in the market of literature (Kugle 89).

7.2 Lexical and Stylistic Continuities

South Asian languages exhibit more than the presence of Persian poetry. For example, Urdu has a large number of Persian vocabulary and still utilizes certain

Persian rhetorical devices, like '*ihām*' (double entendre) and '*talmīh*' (allusion) (Bailey 29). These devices affect all aspects of the written word including poetry, prose, and critical literature through which public discourse may occur. The continued use of words or phrases from Persian origins in both written and spoken language illustrates just how deeply embedded into the culture of this region are those words or phrases.

7.3 Revival in Scholarship and Cultural Discourse

In recent years, there has been an increase in scholarship on South Asia's Persianate culture since its decline during the British Raj. Scholars are translating, creating digital archives, and conducting research to recover and reinterpret Persian literature as a means to understand more about regional history and identity (Amanat and Ashraf 14). Cultural institutions and literary organizations have also played a role in reviving interest in the history of Indo-Persian literature through their promotion of Persian studies and the organization of events celebrating Indo-Persians. An increasing number of newspapers and websites are highlighting the need to protect the shared heritage of the Persianate culture in a globalized world.

7.4 A Living Literary Tradition

The ongoing existence of Persian forms, vocabulary, and thought patterns in South Asian literature today indicates a tradition that continues to be alive rather than one that is simply inherited from the past. The continued presence of this legacy may be found both through adaptation within its different genres and through the preservation of its classical foundations. Therefore, the ways in which Persian literature has influenced the development of contemporary literary and cultural expressions demonstrates the lasting impact of Persian art on the creation of current artistic production and expression.

8. Challenges and Revitalization

The study of Persian was always going to be challenging due to its long-standing historical significance and a lack of institutional support. It also has limited access to manuscript materials. However, digital archiving and an increase in interest from researchers offer many new possibilities for revitalizing the field. Thus, the challenges and revitalization are outlined below:

- a) ***Institutional Decline and Pedagogical Gaps:*** Persian Studies in South Asia have experienced a decline in institutional support, despite their long-established presence. Numerous university programs have been eliminated or placed on the periphery, due to the growing emphasis placed on English and other global languages, with these being prioritized over all other languages. As a result of this decline in institutional support for Persian Studies, there has been a reduction in the number of trained scholars and limited opportunities for advanced research. Furthermore, due to a lack of curricular integration into other subject areas, student engagement with classical Persian texts has diminished, making it more

difficult to pass linguistics and literary proficiency from one generation to another.

- b) **Limited Access to Manuscripts and Resources:** There are other inhibiting factors as well, such as access to primary source material. There are many, many large collections of Persian manuscripts, in libraries and private collections around the world, but many of these collections are poorly organized and poorly preserved. Conditions of the manuscripts, lack of digitally reproduced manuscripts, and restrictive policies regarding access to manuscripts have resulted in limited scholarly work on Indo-Persian manuscripts, and have therefore restricted the academic community's engagement with the history of Indo-Persian manuscript. Therefore, results in the majority of the intellectual heritage of Indo-Persian remains unexamined.
- c) **Digital Humanities and Emerging Opportunities:** Thus, new avenues for the revival of Persian studies have been made possible by recent advances in the digital humanities. Manuscripts are made accessible to a worldwide audience through digitization, internet repositories, and other cooperative platforms. Meanwhile, projects under the auspices of universities, cultural institutions, and independent scholars are leading to preservation and dissemination of Persian texts beyond any geographical and institutional limitations.

9. Conclusion

The development of Persian literature in the Indian subcontinent has demonstrated a long-standing pattern of modifying, passing on and renewing its literature over time. From when Persian was first used as a language of government and elite culture to how it later transformed itself into various vernaculars, Persian has helped shape the foundation of intellectual and artistic life in South Asia. The legacy of Persian has continued through both classical forms of writing and language constructions as well as in providing the artistic context for modern writers to express themselves creatively. There is thus an ongoing tradition of Indo-Persian as a representation of cultural exchange and creative fusion rather than merely a historicising period.

To acknowledge this legacy, an integrated methodology in scholarship and education should be developed. Persian studies programs at institutions of higher learning must develop new curricula to better integrate the teaching of languages and literature. Institutions can use a number of methods, including linguistics-based approaches, to teach both language and literature (including the study of historical written works and the study of literature created in other languages), and can use interdisciplinary collaborative research to explore how these texts reflect common cultural experiences. Finally, through timely cataloguing and digitisation of the manuscripts created over time to provide better access to and preservation of historical materials.

It is just as important to promote community involvement as it is to promote community participation through various means such as literary festivals, translation projects, and digital platforms to expand the reach of Persian literature to a more extensive audience and connect again researchers and cultural audiences. This can be accomplished by creating bilingual, annotated versions of the primary texts to ensure that new readers have access. Persian literary heritage will endure in South Asia if academia remains committed to researching and preserving it through new methods and approaches. By preserving and reinterpreting this literary tradition, it will have a place among the ever-evolving literature and intellectualism of the region.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/03**FORENSIC CITIZENSHIP: EVIDENTIARY BURDENS, TEMPORAL PROOF AND THE JURISPRUDENCE OF LIVED TIME IN INDIA'S NRC****DR. DEEPSHIKHA BHATTACHARJEE**Assistant Professor, Department of Law
Assam University Silchar, India**MADHABENDU CHAKRABORTY**B.A. LL. B Honours, Department of Law
Assam University Silchar, India**Abstract**

The research problem lies in the NRC's radical reconstitution of citizenship as a forensic evidentiary construct shaped by temporal proof and archival logic. Rather than presuming belonging, the mechanism compels perpetual evidentiary production. Legal recognition now turns on continuous documentary inscription across a rigid historical threshold. In this shift lived identity is eclipsed by bureaucratic legibility and the jurisprudence of lived time falls under archival domination. Scholarship on statelessness and documentation in India's citizenship regime is voluminous yet critically incomplete. It has concentrated on descriptive accounts of exclusionary outcomes while leaving untouched the deeper evidentiary and temporal logics that organize the NRC's adjudicatory machinery. This omission has concealed the epistemic politics of proof that redefines personhood through state-mandated archival continuity. The paper adopts a doctrinal methodology anchored in landmark decisions such as *Sarbananda Sonowal v. Union of India* and the Assam Public Works litigation. It integrates these with theoretical resources drawn from Foucault on knowledge and power, Derrida on the archive, Scott on state legibility, Arendt on statelessness, and Agamben on bare life. This is supplemented by close interdisciplinary scrutiny of NRC procedural norms to forge a fresh theoretical framework. The intervention yields four conceptual contributions. Forensic citizenship recast's identity itself as an evidentiary artifact. The temporal burden of proof enforces archival continuity over the jurisprudence of lived time. A jurisprudence of absence arises in which documentary voids produce legal erasure. Archival violence names the state's generative exclusion of marginal groups through bureaucratic standards of legibility. This reframing shows how the NRC's epistemology of time and proof undermines constitutional protections articulated in *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India* once the absence of records is treated as the absence of personhood.

Keywords: Forensic Citizenship, Temporal Proof, Jurisprudence, NRC, Assam, India

Introduction

What does it mean for law to recognize a person across time? This question exposes a central paradox in every juridical order. Personhood cannot be taken as given; it must instead be demonstrated through unbroken sequences of evidence. Recognition therefore functions as an active demand for archival inscription. It privileges bureaucratic continuity over the open texture of lived experience and place's identity under the sovereign rule of proof. The National Register of Citizens enacts precisely this logic as a legal mechanism. It converts citizenship adjudication into a forensic process. Legal status now rests on perpetual evidentiary production across a fixed temporal boundary. Lived identity is displaced by archival legibility. The jurisprudence of belonging is thereby subordinated to the state's archival apparatus.

Scholarship on India's citizenship regime has yet to confront this evidentiary temporality. Analyses of exclusion and procedural fairness are plentiful. They remain confined to descriptive and normative registers. They leave untouched the epistemic shift through which rules of evidence and temporal mandates themselves constitute personhood. The resulting gap in legal-theoretical inquiry is decisive.

This paper argues that citizenship under the NRC is transformed into a forensic evidentiary construct governed by temporal proof and archival logic. Positioned at the intersection of constitutional law and critical legal theory, the analysis probes how evidentiary burdens intersect with doctrines of recognition and personal liberty. It thereby reveals the structural limits of constitutional guarantees when they encounter the state's temporal-archival power.

The argument proceeds in clear stages. It first charts the shortcomings of existing literature on statelessness and state legibility. It then sets out the doctrinal-theoretical methodology that joins case analysis to conceptual critique. Subsequent sections develop the framework of forensic citizenship and examine the imposition of a temporal burden of proof, the emergence of a jurisprudence of absence, and the operations of archival violence. These strands converge in an account of the state as the active producer of citizenship. The conclusion returns to the constitutional stakes and asks whether protections of liberty and equality can survive a regime in which the absence of records is treated as the absence of legal existence.

Literature Review

Scholarship on citizenship and statelessness establishes the ontological violence of denationalization yet cannot explain the procedural alchemy through which the National Register of Citizens in Assam turns legal recognition into an evidentiary trial. Hannah Arendt diagnoses statelessness as the loss of the "right to have rights," showing how the absence of national membership dissolves any possibility of juridical protection (Arendt 296). Giorgio Agamben radicalizes this insight. He argues that sovereignty can produce homo sacer, bare life stripped of

political qualification and exposed to sovereign violence (Agamben 8). Together these frameworks demonstrate that citizenship is not a natural attribute but a contingent legal status that can be withheld. Still, they stop at the threshold of status and rights. They never enter the archival mechanics of adjudication. As a result, they leave untouched the NRC's real innovation: the conversion of citizenship into a forensic construct whose validity depends on the temporal continuity of documentary proof rather than on any substantive political belonging.

A parallel literature on documentation and state legibility sharpens our understanding of bureaucratic power but equally fails to theorize the temporal mandate that sets the NRC apart from earlier documentary regimes. James C. Scott shows how the modern state renders populations legible by imposing standardized records that officials treat as authoritative evidence of membership (Scott 2-3). Keith Breckenridge traces biometric and documentary identification regimes from colonial to postcolonial settings. He reveals how birth certificates, registers, and identity technologies fabricate governable subjects (Breckenridge 165). Kamal Sadiq's notion of "documentary citizenship" further exposes how paper itself can manufacture or withhold state recognition (Sadiq 112). These studies map the state's archival monopoly over existence with clarity. Yet they treat documents as static instruments of legibility. None asks what it means for law to demand an unbroken chain of proof spanning decades. This archival temporality turns citizenship adjudication into a forensic reconstruction of the past. The NRC's evidentiary logic, which penalizes gaps in the documentary record across generations, therefore remains theoretically invisible.

Indian constitutional scholarship on the NRC has largely focused on exclusion and due process failures. It tends to stay within empirical and policy frameworks that miss the regime's deeper epistemic shift in how citizenship is understood. Scholars like Anupama Roy and Upendra Baxi have carefully documented Assam's exclusionary politics, the human costs of denationalization, and the constitutional vulnerability of the stateless populations the NRC creates (Roy; Baxi). Their analyses, together with other empirical studies on welfare denial and procedural unfairness, highlight how the process can generate mass statelessness on a large scale. These contributions are vital for understanding the immediate harms of exclusion. Yet by concentrating on measurable outcomes such as exclusion rates, shortcomings in legal aid, and comparisons with other denationalizations exercises, they treat the NRC mainly as an administrative tool or a rights-limiting mechanism. They do not fully see it as an evidentiary system. No study so far has examined the NRC as a kind of forensic temporality, one that fundamentally redefines citizenship itself as something proven through archival records.

Only literatures on statelessness, legibility, and the NRC supply essential context. At the same time, they uniformly occlude the core question of evidence and time. No scholarship has theorized citizenship adjudication under the NRC as a forensic

evidentiary construct governed by temporal proof and archival logic. This paper addresses that gap.

Methodology

This hybrid doctrinal and theoretical methodology is essential because the NRC reconstitutes citizenship as a forensic evidentiary regime governed by temporal proof and archival logic. Doctrinal analysis therefore involves a close reading of the statutory and judicial corpus. *Sarbananda Sonowal v. Union of India* (2005) gave constitutional status to the 24 March 1971 cut-off date and placed the burden of documentary proof on the claimant. *Assam Public Works* laid down the procedural framework for Foreigners Tribunals, while *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India* (1978) broadened the requirements of procedural justice under Article 21. These judgments are not just background rules. They form the actual legal foundation that turns questions of belonging into matters of archival records and evidentiary ranking. Without this kind of close reading, any theoretical argument would float free of the real mechanisms that decide exclusion.

Critical theory offers a necessary reversal of perspective. Foucault's ideas on knowledge and power, Derrida's notion of archival violence, Arendt's account of rightlessness, and Agamben's concept of bare life together show how the NRC works. It does not merely verify who people are; it actively creates the category of the citizen through processes of exclusion. In this setup, citizenship becomes the outcome of specific dates and the ability to produce documents, rather than something people inherently possess.

Bringing together law, the sociology of state legibility, and political theory is not decorative. It is essential. Only this combined approach can reveal how the NRC's rules of evidence turn citizenship into something forensic, an archival object. The deeper logic at work would stay hidden if we looked through the lens of legal doctrine alone or theory alone.

Forensic Citizenship

Forensic logic is the evidentiary approach that belongs to courts and laboratories alike. It insists on standardized proof, cross-checked against independent records, and an adversarial process that treats every assertion as something that must be contested and proven rather than simply accepted. In this setup, identity loses its lived, social character and is rebuilt as a purely technical object, one whose truth depends entirely on whether the chain of documents holds together without gaps. When this logic is brought to bear on citizenship, political belonging turns into the end product of an evidentiary exercise. The National Register of Citizens in Assam does not simply list people who already hold a status; it tests whether any claim can survive the full machinery of verification. Family ties, long residence, and everyday community life are broken down into separate, certifiable items such as birth records, land deeds, and electoral rolls. Each item is then traced backward through time and measured against the state's archival standards. Citizenship

therefore exists only to the extent that it can be located inside that documentary grid.

The process marks a fundamental change in what citizenship actually is. In ordinary practice, belonging is presumed by birth or naturalization, and the state carries the burden of showing otherwise. The NRC reverses this entirely. Now the individual must prove eligibility against a strict historical cutoff, so that the absence of matching documents becomes proof of exclusion. The citizen is no longer someone who holds a right by default but someone who must keep applying, forever subject to the archive's backward gaze.

James C. Scott's account of state legibility explains the administrative engine behind this reversal. The NRC enforces a narrow set of simplified categories, patrilineal descent, property titles, and prescribed document formats, that make populations readable to bureaucratic authority. Only those who fit these templates can produce the continuous paper trail the system demands. Anyone who cannot is rendered invisible in administrative terms and, by the logic of the exercise, simply does not count. The state's categories become the single tune to which every claimant must move or be left behind.

Michel Foucault's idea of power-knowledge brings out what is at stake epistemically. The NRC does not record citizenship; it manufactures its truth through the state's own archival system. Documents are not neutral evidence but the sole medium in which legitimate subjects are allowed to appear. Whatever cannot be written into the official record is erased from knowledge itself, turning the archive into both storehouse and final judge of who counts as a political being. Forensic citizenship therefore names a distinct theoretical idea. It captures the exact transformation in which citizenship under the NRC stops being a matter of social or political status and becomes instead a forensic construct shaped entirely by rules of evidence, fixed dates, and archival logic. Belonging no longer precedes the procedure; it is the outcome the procedure produces. The concept reveals how the state's forensic gaze rewrites the very grounds of membership, making the archive the place where political subjects are finally decided.

Temporal Burden of Proof

The National Register of Citizens in Assam turns citizenship into a kind of forensic exercise shaped by temporal proof and old official records. At its heart is a retrospective proof requirement. Eligibility rests on the 1971 cutoff date set by the Assam Accord, which fixes March 25, 1971 as the point after which residence counts as legitimate. Claimants must prove they descend from an ancestor listed in the legacy data, mainly the pre-1971 electoral rolls or similar official documents from that era. This is not about confirming current ties to Assam. It forces people to show that their family line was already recorded by the state at that exact historical moment. The burden is total. Without a document linking back before 1971, legal recognition disappears, no matter where someone was born, where they live now, or how long they have been part of the community.

Under this system the law demands proof that stretches across time, not just an assessment of someone's current status. Ordinary ideas of citizenship, whether based on birth in the country, blood ties, or formal naturalization, judge identity through present-day evidence or statements. The NRC works differently. It requires a chain of records that shows continuous presence through different periods of documentation. Each generation has to link backward through an unbroken series of papers. One missing link in time breaks the entire claim. Citizenship therefore stops being something you simply are. It becomes something you have to achieve through evidence. The real task is not to prove who you are today but to show that your ancestors were officially recognized by the state many decades earlier. Time is no longer just the background of life. It turns into the core of what the law demands as proof.

Because of this, the passage of time itself becomes the main test for evidence. Being listed in official records amounts to legal existence; but absence from them signals to the non-belonging. The state does not merely archive events. It treats the passage of time itself as a tool to evaluate claims of presence. Any gap in documentation, whether from clerical errors, the scarcity of formal papers in rural areas, or the practical difficulties of record-keeping in earlier decades, becomes proof of non-entitlement. In effect, the law demands continuous visibility in official ledgers as a precondition for recognition as a person before the state. Citizenship thus requires unbroken documentary presence over decades.

The courts have upheld the 1971 cut-off, notably in *Sarbananda Sonowal v. Union of India* (2005). They affirmed the constitutional validity of it but stopped short of scrutinizing how this time-based evidentiary burden works on the ground. The bench acknowledged the imperative to protect Assam's demographic character while leaving the mechanics of documentary proof intact.

Drawing on Michel Foucault's idea of biopower, the NRC exercises a distinctive kind of control over time. The state's record-keeping systems don't just manage people. They decide who gets to become visible at all within the frameworks of life and politics. Only those who show up in the records before 1971 receive full legal standing. From this perspective, being absent from those records isn't simply a matter of missing proof. It means the person has no legal existence whatsoever in the state's timeline. The law acts as if they were never part of the community. This turns citizenship into an ongoing task of proving yourself through archives. Time itself becomes the main tool for deciding who stays and who is pushed out.

Documented vs Lived Identity

The NRC reconstitutes citizenship as a forensic evidentiary construct governed by temporal proof and archival logic. It therefore installs documented identity as the sole legitimate register of belonging. Documentary identity consists exclusively of state-archived records fixed to prescribed historical cutoffs. The citizen appears only as a verifiable data point. Lived identity, however, consists of the experiential, relational, and communal practices of social existence. These

practices resist reduction to temporal inscriptions. The NRC nevertheless privileges the documentary register and systematically nullifies lived identity as legally inconsequential.

This privileging enacts a categorical collapse of identity into documentation. Law no longer encounters the citizen as an embodied social agent. Instead, it confronts an archival artifact whose legitimacy rests solely on the presence of certified temporal proofs. The forensic regime therefore converts citizenship from a status grounded in social ontology into a performative archival survival. The absence of documents now equates to the absence of legal personhood.

Benedict Anderson's account of the nation as an imagined community shows that national identity arises through shared cultural narratives and temporal imagination rather than bureaucratic verification. The NRC fractures this imaginative construction. It subordinates the social imaginary to a regime of forensic data points. Archival logic replaces the horizontal bonds of imagined community with vertical, state-mediated evidentiary hierarchies (Anderson 7).

Partha Chatterjee's distinction between civil society and political society reveals the epistemic violence at work. Civil society engages the state through formal, documented protocols. Political society, by contrast, articulates the lived claims of populations that stand outside those protocols. By collapsing identity into documentation, the NRC erases political society altogether. It enforces the governmental logic of legibility over the heterogeneous practices of everyday belonging (Chatterjee 38-41). State truth thereby becomes identical with records. Human truth is rendered ontologically irrelevant.

Jurisprudence of Absence

Under the National Register of Citizens, citizenship becomes a forensic evidentiary construct shaped by temporal proof and archival logic. The absence of documents is not mere evidentiary weakness. It is ontological negation: legal non-existence before the law. Ordinary courts treat gaps in the record as probative weaknesses open to rebuttal. The NRC, by contrast, makes archival silence the very ground of legal non-personhood. Citizenship thus ceases to function as a substantive constitutional status. It shrinks instead to the bare presence or absence of a verifiable paper trail anchored to the state's chosen temporal markers.

Jacques Derrida's archive theory offers the clearest lens for this jurisprudence. In *Archive Fever* the archive is never a neutral storehouse. It is an archontic power that "produces as much as it records" the events it pretends only to preserve (Derrida 17). The NRC performs exactly this act of consignment. Only what is deposited inside the authorized memory machine gains juridical legibility. Whatever slips outside that inscription is not simply forgotten. It is actively erased, exposed to what Derrida calls the archive's "violence of the letter" (Derrida 12). The state's command over the trace therefore decides more than memory. It decides who may exist as a citizen-subject. Absence, on these terms, is no evidentiary gap. It is the archive's own decree of non-being.

The law converts evidentiary silence into negative proof. Long-standing presumptions of innocence or neutrality give way to a reversed ontology: the undocumented stand presumed non-citizens from the outset. Silence ceases to be ambiguity. It becomes affirmative disproof. The unarchived life is treated as self-incriminating. These negative hermeneutic refuses burden-shifting or contextual inquiry. Absence of proof and proof of absence collapse into the same legal fact. Evidentiary absence therefore turns wholly determinative. It bypasses the procedural fairness required by *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India* (1978), which read “reasonable, just and fair” process into Article 21 (Maneka Gandhi). The NRC’s binary filter of document or exclusion replaces adjudicative reason with archival mechanics. Due process shrinks to data validation. Constitutional personhood yields to archival legibility. In this jurisprudence the state does not discover citizenship. It archives citizenship into being or non-being. The citizen is simply what survives the archive. Everything else is rendered legally spectral.

Archival Violence and Structural Exclusion

Citizenship under the NRC becomes a forensic evidentiary construct governed by temporal proof and archival logic. Applicants must produce a continuous chain of state-issued documents that link them to the 1951 NRC or to legacy data predating 1971. Identity is thereby rendered verifiable only through bureaucratic archives, not through lived presence or community recognition. This evidentiary system inflicts archival violence. It places written records above every other way people understand and prove they belong, turning ordinary administrative gaps into complete denials of a person’s status.

The burdens of proof were never fair. They fell most heavily on the most vulnerable, whose everyday lives had already kept them distant from official documents. Poor rural families with low literacy levels, especially in Miya Muslim communities, rarely possessed many papers. Years of poverty, informal work, and repeated displacement due to river erosion in the char areas left them with almost no opportunity to gather the required records.

Women faced even steeper barriers because of patrilocality and marriage traditions. After marriage, name changes, dependence on their husbands’ documents, and the absence of their own parental linkage papers made it nearly impossible to prove their legacy. As Sabhapandit shows, the NRC’s strict patrilineal linkage rules made these problems worse for rural women, who often lacked pre-marital documents matching the required cut-off dates (Sabhapandit 256). Displaced tea-garden labourers and families affected by floods went through the same ordeal. Their constant movement, forced by ecological disasters and the daily struggle for survival, simply wiped out any consistent proof of residence.

This exclusion works through Amartya Sen’s idea of capability deprivation. The NRC did not just deny people legal status. It took away the real freedoms they needed to live as full citizens: access to welfare, the ability to move freely, education, and a political voice. Sen’s capability approach helps us see how the

lack of official documents, which itself stems from earlier poverty and disadvantage, leads to a deeper loss of agency. Poor people simply cannot turn their everyday lives and connections into the kind of proof the state requires (Sen 75-78). What looks like a failure to produce documents becomes a failure of capability itself, turning structural weakness into formal illegality.

The exclusion was not accidental but built into the system. Rules that seemed neutral, like demanding the same documents from everyone and fixing strict cut-off dates, ended up clashing with deep-rooted inequalities in schooling, land records, and gender relations. This produced entirely predictable results. Siddique's work on the punitive gap shows how patriarchal inheritance practices and child marriage left Miya women with even fewer papers, while poverty made the time, money, and travel needed to gather records far harder to bear (Siddique 7). In the end, the whole design simply turned the absence of archives into the absence of legal rights, reproducing the very inequalities it claimed to ignore.

Archival violence, thus, serves as a tool for structural exclusion. The NRC ties citizenship to rigid, forensic proof from the past. In doing so, it turns the state's own record-keeping system against people who have long lived outside its official paperwork. The outcome is not mere administrative error. It is the deliberate creation of a system that strips people of their basic capabilities. Marginalized groups are rendered ineligible precisely because their lives have been structured by the same inequalities the archive refuses to recognize.

State as Producer of Citizenship

The NRC process in Assam marks a decisive ontological shift. The state no longer merely recognizes a pre-given citizenship; it actively produces citizenship through its own evidentiary norms. Citizenship thus becomes a forensic evidentiary construct governed by temporal proof and archival logic. Validity now attaches only to those who can furnish documents calibrated to the state's rigid timeline. Existence itself becomes legible solely within the archive. Birth and statute recede as origins, while bureaucratic ratification emerges as the constitutive act.

This productionist logic enacts Agamben's sovereign power. The sovereign, for Agamben, is she who decides the exception, drawing the line that separates bios from bare life (Homo Sacer 15). Under the NRC, that decision is delegated to administrative adjudication. The state pronounces, through documentary sufficiency or insufficiency, who belongs to the political community and who is consigned to the threshold of statelessness. Inclusion and exclusion are no longer constitutional facts but sovereign decrees rendered in the language of files.

The same apparatus simultaneously materializes Foucauldian biopolitics. Power here operates not through law's prohibition but through the management and classification of populations, making some lives politically viable while rendering others illegible (The History of Sexuality, Volume 1). The archival machinery does not record citizenship; it manufactures the conditions under which certain lives qualify for rights and others are administratively erased.

Citizenship under the NRC is therefore a manufactured category. The state legislates history by freezing some biographies in files and liquidating others through evidentiary disqualification. Sovereign and biopolitical authority converge in the forensic gaze: the state alone decides who counts.

Conclusion

By refining our core thesis, the Assam NRC transforms citizenship into a forensic evidentiary construct, one that rests entirely on temporal proof and archival logic. No longer a presumptive constitutional status, belonging is now adjudicated as a documentary artifact whose validity depends solely on the state's archival verification of continuous existence.

This forensic paradigm draws the preceding arguments together by placing the jurisprudence of lived continuity beneath an evidentiary jurisprudence. The absence of records is equated with the absence of citizenship, embedding a logic of perpetual suspicion that prizes bureaucratic inscription over ontological presence and renders human lives legible only through state mediated artifacts.

Constitutionally, this evidentiary absolutism collides with the procedural due process required by *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India* (1978) under Article 21 (*Maneka Gandhi*), which insists on fair, just, and reasonable safeguards against arbitrary deprivation of liberty and dignity. It also fractures Article 14's equality guarantee, for uneven archival access turns formal legal parity into substantive disenfranchisement for those lacking documentary capital. Can a constitutional democracy survive when personhood itself shrinks to provable paperwork, forcing every individual to affirmatively demonstrate their own existence or dissolve into archival silence?

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/o4**CRISIS IN MANIPUR: AN ASPECT OF THE BURMESE CAMPAIGN
OF 1942-45****DR. NONGMAITHEM ROBIN SINGH**Mody University of Science and Technology
Laxmangarh, Rajasthan, India**Abstract**

Manipur is located in eastern India, along a southward extension of the eastern Himalayas near the Indo-Myanmar border. In 1942 Japan invaded Burma/Myanmar and Manipur became the target. To both Imperial Japan and Allied power, Imphal became a focal point as base for Launching Burmese liberation and for air raid in China while Japan fulfilling its propaganda of Freeing Asia from Western Power. Thus, The Battle of Imphal and The Battle of Kohima played a key role in The Burmese Campaign. The paper focus on the socio-political and economic crisis in the state during the period. Construction and infrastructure activity in Manipur picked up dramatically in the latter half of 1942 and through 1943. The small state became the recipients of large number of labor from other states, Allied Armies and the refugees from the infamous long March or the exodus from Burma of 1942. Suddenly the state faced the surged in price in rations and other materials. The price of rice, staple food of Manipur, was rose from Rs. 1 per maund to Rs.25 per maund. There were also increase in pity criminal, especially theft. Further the state prison was breached, leading to escape of many criminals, which generated social panic in the valley. The paper also captures the dilemma amongst the locals in determining their allegiance whether to support the British, against whom there has been a numerous uprising had already occurred such as Nupi lal, kuki Rebellion and Naga rebellion, or Japan who were there to liberate them from the British colonialism.

Keywords: Exodus, Labour, Second World War, Psychology, Memories

Introduction

Manipur is located in eastern India, along a southward extension of the eastern Himalayas near the Indo-Myanmar border. To the north of Manipur is Nagaland, and to the east Myanmar/Burma. Imphal is the capital of the state and it is barely 110 km to border of Myanmar. The state of Mizoram lies to the southwest, while Assam is its western neighbor. The population of the region has varied from each clan, in majority they are Meitei, Kuki, Naga, Mizo, and other smaller sub-clans' tribal communities. The Imphal Valley hosted the kingdom of Manipur, and the Meitei practice Hinduism. The Meitei kingdom was one of the prominent states in the South East Asia before it became a part of British India in 1891. Manipur remained a princely state under British sovereignty till 1947. In World War II, at

the Pacific war, Imphal became crucial to both Imperial Japan and Allied power as base for Launching Burmese liberation and for air raid in China while, Japan fulfilling its propaganda of Freeing Asia from Western Power. Thus, The Battle of Imphal and The Battle of Kohima played a key role in the Burmese Campaign.

Sources

The primary sources of the study can be widely discussed in two categories, i.e. The Colonial archival sources, like Manipur Administrative Reports, Month Reports, Secret Cipher Telegram, Weekly Letters, forms the core sources for the historical development of the paper. The colonial archival sources were mainly prepared annually/monthly/weekly by the colonial officer in Manipur, mainly by political agents and the president of the darbar. These reports focused mainly on documenting the revenue collection, demography, laws, and orders. These colonial reports lack the local agencies, and voices are frequently underrepresented, but these administrative reports remain highly valuable in reconstructing the history of Manipur due to the lack of indigenous and locally produced documentation from the region. The presence of few memoirs offers a rich insight into the topic that was gapped in the administrative reports, i.e., the voice of the common people and psychological aspects of the period. The memoirs include the oral interview, autobiography, and personal accounts of the army personal.

Dr. N. Lokendra Singh and John Parratt, in Manipur during World War II (1941–45): Socio-economic Change and Local Responses and Manipur and WWII in the Battle of Imphal 1944 (archives) respectively, agreed that socio-economic and political changes during the war time, provided material as well as ideological basis for a strong political movement during the 1946–49 period. It was during such a time that the Manipuri middle class was strengthened through massive investments in transportation, supply and construction works. Ideologically, the Manipuri middle class was exposed to the national and international political trends and was, therefore, on the lookout for opportunities to fight for broad socioeconomic and political changes in the state. It does change the political spectrum, however both Lokendro and Parratt missed explaining the process or the reasons in detail from the point of gun distribution.

Books and articles have been written on the Burmese Campaign, including the Battle of Imphal and the Battle of Kohima, focused on the military tactics and achievements, but various aspects of the campaign have been constantly ignored. A few of the aspects that the paper would like to focus on are the long-term impact of the firearms distributed to certain communities by the Allied Army to encounter the Imperial Japanese Army and the essence of dilemma of the people of Manipur regarding whom to support during this critical period. It is also seen that this dilemma concerning allegiance was faced by the British officers as well. Furthermore, the paper will also provide the economical struggle faced by the people. One may ask the question why determining an allegiance became an

essence of the dilemma. To address this question, it is important to know the historical background of the region before the war came.

Prelude to the War

After Anglo-Manipur War of 1891, Manipur came under British colonial control, and the king was reduced to a symbolic puppet ruler. The colonial administration disbanded and disarmed the Manipuri arm. At the same time, society was gradually brought under colonial domination through various political and economic measures. Within a short span of time, the colonial policies brought significant transformations to every aspect of Manipuri society. The introduction of a new revenue system further intensified public dissatisfaction and laid the foundation for growing resentment and rebellion among the people.

In the month of July 1904, there was a series of incidents of burning of houses/bungalows belonging to British officers in the heart of Kangla Fort. To be more specific, on the 6th and 16th of July, the bungalows of Captain Nathal and Mr Dunlop were set on fire (Manimohan, 2000). Mr. Maxwell, the political agent, and the superintendent of the state ordered on 30th September, 1904, asking all the able-bodied men above 16 years of age in Imphal to reconstruct the bungalows. There was an appeal to the superintendent to reconsider the order, but the appeal was denied. A public meeting was organized on September 30 against Mr. Maxwell's order. The police arrested the six princes and exiled them from Manipur under a trial conducted by Mr Maxwell on 10th November 1904 (Manimohan, 2000). In response, the market women of the Imphal Khwairamband market started an agitation. They stopped the able-bodied men who came to build the bungalow and threw the building materials into the river. The defiant women took upon themselves the task of challenging the colonial policies of the British. This uprising has been entitled the *First Nupi Lal* by the locals.

After the uprising in the Imphal valley, the force labour was abolished in 1913 but continued in the hill areas of the region. The year 1914 has been a prominent year in the history of human civilisation. It is widely agreed to believe that the British performance in the Great War was significantly dependent on the resources, including labour and army, from its colonies. At the outbreak of World War I, King George V made a direct appeal to the people and princely states of the Indian subcontinent, urging their support for the British war effort. The King sought to mobilize both loyalty and a sense of shared responsibility among his colonial subjects. While over a million Indian soldiers served in various theaters, the need for non-combatant labour led the British to turn to its princely states, including Manipur. The Northeast frontier, particularly the hill tribes of the Assam Province, including the Khasi, Garo, Lushai, Naga, and Kuki peoples, were identified as ideal targets. To facilitate recruitment, the President of the Manipur State Durbar passed a decree to the hill regions, demanding labor contributions. This conscription was not only the imperial service the communities were facing, there were layer of subjugation that included compounding the exploitative house tax

system. This time it was Kuki who rebelled against the colonial administration. In the process the rebel Kukis raided the Manipur State forest toll stations in Imphal and Naga villages. The rebels continued the jungle warfare and dismantled the trade route and British Army movement. According to the Administrative Report 1919-20, the Meitei prince Chingakhamba Sanajaoba extended his hand to the rebel Kukis and declared war against the British government, thus the Kuki chiefs and Chingakhamba Sanajaoba were tried by a special tribunal and deported under Regulation III of 1818 or sentenced to terms of imprisonment.

The second *Nupi Lal* happened in 1939. The main cause of the movement was the irregular administrative system of the state by the British government. Another reason was that of the prevailing export policy of the British authority and the Marwari traders, which created a serious economic problem resulting in the shortage of food grains. The export of rice was done freely by the British officials under the new policy. Besides this, in 1939, excessive rain had seriously damaged the crops, which were further beaten and destroyed again by the hailstorm, thus resulting in a severe shortage of rice during 1930-40, and the state was heading toward a famine-like situation. Karam Manimohan is of the view that although the immediate cause of the women's uprising was economic in nature, the strong feeling of dissatisfaction with the state administration and, above all, the long-suppressed feeling of discontentment caused by the imposition of various taxes on the poor public also contributed to the outbreak of the second *Nupi Lal* (Manimohan, 2000).

Surge of Population and Dacoity

One of the factors for the rise of the population was the sudden exodus from Burma due to the Japanese occupation of Burma. This movement was the Long March, which is less known amongst the other part of the country. The scenes were described by people in their memoirs. Many have described it as chaotic, and compared to the opening of Pandora box, and also added that women and children were mostly sick. The refugee camps were established at koirengei, Kanglatombi, and many other places in Imphal valley. With malnutrition and weakness amongst the refugees, an epidemic was unavoidable. Dysentery, malaria, and smallpox became the fatality in most of the refugee camps in the valley. The situation became such fragile that everyday 20 to 25 patients became the victims of those diseases. It further spread to the villages near the refugee camps. It was a tragic situation from the local points of view, in the first Imphal air raid most of the government officials ran away or relocated far away from the valley, including the doctors. So, doctors or modern medicines were unavailable and they were treated by the local priest (*maiba*) by chanting certain mantras. Many women and children became the victims of the epidemic due to the absence of proper medical care. Kh. Nimaicharan Singh in his memoirs even said that the people who were dead due to the epidemic were greater in number than those who were killed by the firearms. (Nimaicharan, 2012).

The numbers of allied armies were increased up to 30000 in the state in the early April only which was later increased by multiple folds. Various further camps for 30 thousand army were set up in the different parts of the valley. One concern which was given the priority was the road which is important to keep the supply line open for the Burmese Campaign as well as for the evacuation of the refugees. Two particular road, namely Pallel to Tamu and Imphal to Dimapur via Kohima, became extremely important during this phase of the war. The labour to make the roads were another community that has led to the surge of population in the Imphal valley. The administrative report also informed that another 5000 Chinese soldiers and civilians were amongst the thousands of refugees who came from the Burma. According to the Administrative report, there was air-raid on Imphal on two occasion i.e 10th and 16th May of 1942. The air raids destroyed the front gate of the Residency and main gate of the state prison. As a result, civils administration of the state collapsed. In the Residency garden, twenty-five bomb craters were recorded. Although many windows were shattered, roofs damaged, and interiors affected such as a broken mirror and falling plaster the only direct structural hit was on the front flight of steps. The Royal family, President Agent (Mr Sharp), and other clerical staff including police and doctors were all away from Imphal to a safer place. The state policemen failed to report for their duty the next day leading to the escape of various criminal from the state prison. (Lydall, 1945). Within hours, nearly every house in central Imphal was deserted as residents fled to nearby villages seeking safety. It is recorded that the Imphal valley was almost emptied only few civilians, pilferers and looters were remained. The initial sight was of thousands of refugees moving along the road to Dimapur without food, struggling against heavy military traffic Marwari traders also left, though their departure drew little attention. More alarming was the disruption of essential services, especially water and electricity. Firefighting units also fled, leaving fires unchecked, and the bazaar was destroyed. For several days, no one remained to bury the dead, both human and animal, reflecting complete collapse. A second air raid occurred on May 10, causing significant damage and chaos. Due to the damaged of main gate of the jail and cease of state police functioning, allowed several dangerous prisoners to escape and engage in widespread dacoity before being recaptured. Interestingly, some returned voluntarily after Mr. Sharpe, President of the Darbar, announced that protective slit trenches had been dug within the jail premises.

By the early June there was reduction in dacoity and robbery but the pity crime mainly theft and house breaking increased steadily. The administrative report recorded that these unfortunate activities, theft and housebreaking, were increased due to four reason i.e. (1) economic condition and the price of rice which was around Rs 45 per maund, (2) the turning of large numbers of Manipuris out of their houses which were requisitioned by the army, (3) the unusually large amount

of money in possession of many people owing to the large increase in wages, (4) inadequate staff to deal with the volume of crime.

Economy

Market remains closed. It is informed that by the early April of 1942, there was a price rise in all the commodities. Particular price of the rice rose sharply and other items like atta, dal, flour, and sugar were almost unobtainable in the state. The situation was worsened due to the arrival of the monsoon in the state. Goons have become increasingly common in society, contributing to a growing sense of insecurity among residents. Furthermore, the practice of buying goods on credit has risen sharply in both small and big shops across the locality, reflecting economic strain among people. Incidents of theft have also been reported in many parts of the state, further worsening the situation. These problems are particularly noticeable in Imphal and its surrounding areas in the valley, where such activities appear to be more frequent and widespread, creating concern among the local population and authorities alike regarding safety and stability.

In the early week of May, the price of the rice had risen to Rs 25 per maund and it had reached the peak of Rs 50 and even went beyond Rs 60 per maund. (Lydall, 1945). There was so much of rice and vegetable scarcity that the allied military borrowed paddy to feed the allied troops on the promise that the repayment of the rice would be returned with interest. The government collected from the Imphal villagers over 10,000 maunds of rice. Furthermore, there was killing of livestock of the villagers on every occasion of on the eve of any battles. In mid-April 1944, authorities ordered the evacuation of all villages between Moirang and Bishenpur as the main British-Indian defensive line along the Tiddim Road shifted from Torbung to Bishenpur. Around 25,000 residents were given only two days to leave their homes, causing widespread disruption and distress. As part of a “denial policy,” British forces destroyed remaining rice stocks in the abandoned villages to prevent supplies from falling into enemy hands. Ian Lyall Grant, a sapper with the 17th Indian Division, vividly recounts this operation, highlighting the harsh realities faced by civilians during wartime. Problem of payment for houses and for field that had been destroyed by the allied army was another problem (Lydall, 1947). British approached the Land and Hiring Service to deal with the people whose house were destroyed in war. In June the British Government generously announced that they would take the responsibility for the rehabilitation of those people from the distress area.

The situation worsened due to the arrival of the monsoon in the state. The report of bad harvest due to excessive rain was recorded in the administrative report. It is recorded that “From the August 5, cultivation suffered from the want of rainfall. From then until the August 20th, on the other hand, damage was done to the standing paddy by floods due to excessive rainfall, the Iril river overflowing and flooding 5 square miles of paddy. Again, from November 19th until March 17th insufficient rainfall impeded the growth of the vegetable crops” (Lydall, 1945). In

order to supply the inhabitant, the government imported rice from Assam, however the flow of the trade was also often halted due to the rain. Transportation in the state internally and externally were extremely impact due to the muddy. In such a situation the price of the rice touches the sky high of Rs.85 per maund in the month of November. The colonial reported that there was a sheer starvation amongst the local people particularly in Bishenpur (Lydall, 1945).

Arming up of the Nagas and the Kukis

The British government strictly ordered not to sell any arms to the hill peoples. It is recorded in annual report 1868-69 that the use of firearms among the hill tribes subjected to Manipur was restricted as much as possible due to the problem faced by the colonial government of Bengal. According to the administrative officers, the government of British India focused on maintaining the peace and sovereignty of Manipur in the hill areas, and it was impossible with guns on their possessions. The region had disruptive historical events, which include raids, depredation and outrage, uprisings, and other forms of conflict due to the colonial administration, hampering the peace and, more importantly the economic activities in the north-eastern frontier of British India. Chief Commissioner of Assam even expressed the increasing danger faced by the plantations and other economic interests. And To deal with such situation, there were suggestions to teach the use of firearms to the tea planters and their 'coolies', were as well as to 'drill for the defence of their gardens'. Furthermore, the colonial government furnished the native power, the Raja of Manipur, with firearms to fight against the hill communities which colonial officials describe as "wild tribes".

The restriction of selling guns to the Nagas and the Kukis was justified by the raids and uprising against the British and King. Brown also said that the weapon was used in the hill tribes who were subjugated to Manipur. However, it was informed that the fear of modern firearm among the hill tribes had been decreasing day after day and they had also started possessing it and acquainted with its uses after 1875. It might be because of the lucrative business of European firearms. During 1860 to 1890s there was large number of illegal arms traffic happening in the North East Frontier of British India. Even some of the British Indian soldier were stealing the firearms from the barracks and selling them to the surrounding hill. It was recorded in 1890 annual report that, "A British Indian Sepoy of 40th Bengal Infantry was caught selling firearms to a Manipuri and in another occasion ten riffles were stolen. However efficient use of firearms by the hill tribe against the Manipur authority or British authority in Manipur state was never reported" (Brown, 2001).

In the process of the allied campaign to defeat the Imperial Japanese Army, the government granted the distribution of guns to the Nagas and the Kukis. Furthermore, the established of the "V- Force" magnified the possession of guns amongst the Naga and the Kuki by granting guerrilla training. It has been recorded, "In the Sadar Subdivision there were 322 guns, 93 held by Kukis, 110 by Mao

Nagas, 27 by Maram Nagas, 11 by Kacha Nagas, 12 by Khoiraos and the rest by other tribes. There were also 16 loan guns. In the West Subdivision there were 362, 232 held by Kukis, 42 by Kabui, 23 by Kacha Nagas, 2 by Chirus and 26 by the state servants. The Kabuis had 1 cannon. There were also 16 loan guns. In the East Subdivision there were 194 guns. And in addition, there were large numbers of arms distributed by the V Force in the course of the operation” (Lydall, 1946). Even after the war was over the firearms were not recollected or not returned by the communities. In the 1945-56 Administration Report, it is recorded that there were total of 1234 guns, excluding the gun which was procured from the Japanese armies, were still in Sadar, Tamenlmg and Ukhul.

The participation in such a large military campaign, the Nagas and the Kukis were exposed to the modern warfare system, military organization, and competing political force. This participation led to the establishment of NNC (Naga National Council) in 1946 representing the Naga body to inspire the people to start one of the oldest movements in world. Similar, the Kuki Company was formed in 1948, as an organizing body of united kuki to carry forward the political identity of the community. The process of weapon distribution thus created the uneven power structure which was intensified in post-independence with separate identities amongst the tribe. It is clearly visible that the ethnic conflict amongst these tribes in the current time is due to a systematic structure of ethnic identity created by the colonial power. Furthermore, the possession of modern weapons shaped one of the important factors that mediated the contemporary issue of the region, i.e., ethnic violence, widespread displacement of populations, creating a culture of fear and insecurity that erodes community cohesion and undermines the rule of law.

Maintaining Allegiance: Propaganda and Emotions

In Manipur, WW2 was given the name Japan *Lal* which literally means ‘Japan War’. It is interesting to see responds of the local population during this period, because two years back there was a huge uprising, Second Nupi *Lal*, due to the lack of rice. And same situation happened during WW2 in Imphal, this time even on the verge of starvation but these people remained silent during this period. The probability of this is varied however it is also cannot be neglected that the local had seen the magnitude of the war which they had never seen or never even imagined and understood the consequences. Considering the events involving only the valley, it would be wrong to assume that majority of the Meitei were pro Allied or pro-Japanese. It didn’t mean the local were with the colonialism. At the heart of the dilemma was uncertainty. As military control shifted during wartime, local communities found themselves caught between opposing forces. Each side used propaganda, rumours, and promises to gain support. Aligning with one power could bring immediate benefits security, food, or protection, but it also carried the risk of being labelled a collaborator if control changed. In this situation, it is important to understand why do individuals maintain allegiance even in adverse conditions?

The presence of the army in everyday life further complicated but there were moments of cooperation and even familiarity. There was mingle of valley people with the army most of the time due to daily routine road constructions. Local depends on these armies for survival during this war time. The army helped households by providing sugar, salt, and other things. There was also movie showed in the army where the locals enjoyed with such modern feature that they hadn't seen before. Football matches were sponsored by the army. The peace and development harmony was created between the people and the army. Further, local residents were informed by the government about the importance of digging protective pits during air raids, and these measures were widely shared and practiced across the state. People came to understand such pits as essential for survival during sudden attacks, especially in times of air raid or battle. What is particularly interesting is how this practical wartime instruction gradually transformed within local religion memory. These pits moved beyond mere safety measures from the government and became embedded in collective imagination, eventually evolving into local myths and narratives that reflected the religious or faith. A rumour had been spread in the Imphal valley that the safest place during the battle or air raid is to stay at the place starts with "K" (Nimaicharan, 2012). In Manipuri language pit is called "*Kom*". Thus, the safety instruction had turned into the collective belief or faith that was foreseen in the "*puyas*" within the community Further, Meitei "*puyas*" already predicted there would be a war in the valley, there will be group of three and the one from east would turn out the victorious in the war.

Only few people were aware of the National Freedom Struggle in India and also the Azad Hind Fauz Army (INA). Although the majority of the people in the Manipur Valley remained largely aloof from both the pro-Japanese and pro-Allied camps, preferring to maintain neutrality amidst the uncertainties of war, the end of the conflict was marked by official celebrations. Following the Allied victory, four days victory celebration was organized at the palace, featuring traditional games, religious processions, and prayers (Lydall, 1947). These festivities reflected the restoration of political stability and the reaffirmation of the existing authority after a prolonged period of wartime disruption. Thus, while the general population largely avoided direct alignment with either side during the conflict, the formal celebration of the Allied victory symbolized the state's recognition of the outcome of the war.

Conclusion

The wartime had significant economic consequences, as prolonged conflict disrupted agriculture, trade, and traditional livelihoods, forcing many people to depend on military supplies and irregular sources of income. The destruction of villages, displacement of populations, and scarcity of essential commodities further weakened the local economy. At the same time, differential experiences of cooperation and interaction with the Allied armies and distribution of modern

weapons contributed to rise of communities' base political organisation leading to the current ethnic tensions.

Further, the dilemma faced by civilians was deeply rooted in the ambiguities of everyday life under military occupation and conflict. Their actions reflected neither complete allegiance nor outright opposition but rather a pragmatic effort to endure unprecedented disruptions. The shifting fortunes of war meant that military control over certain areas could change rapidly. Civilians often found themselves caught between competing forces, each demanding loyalty or cooperation. Under such circumstances, survival became the primary concern. Rather than making firm political or ideological commitments, many people adopted flexible strategies that allowed them to navigate changing conditions. People adjusted their behaviour according to the demands of the moment, seeking to minimize risk while maximizing opportunities for survival. The lines separating oppression, accommodation, and coexistence remained blurred, and local communities navigated these uncertainties through strategies of adjustment that prioritized immediate survival over fixed political identities or long-term ideological commitments.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/05**COSMOPOLITANISM AND COLONIAL RESIDUES IN THE TRAVEL
NARRATIVE *THE GLOBAL SOUL: JET LAG, SHOPPING MALLS, AND
THE SEARCH FOR HOME*****DR. SNEHA ELCY JACOB**Associate Professor and Principal i/c, St. Thomas College, Ranni
Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala, India**Abstract**

This paper examines Pico Iyer's travel book *The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls, and the Search for Home* within the framework of South Asian diasporic studies, focusing on literary representations of migration, transnational life, and shifting notions of home. The study interrogates the paradox at the heart of Iyer's narrative: while the text ostensibly functions as a counter travel narrative that resists fixed identities and celebrates cultural hybridity, it simultaneously reveals the persistence of colonial modes of perception. Drawing on postcolonial line of thinking, the paper reads *The Global Soul* against the grain to uncover how Iyer's cosmopolitan subjectivity is shaped by privilege and global mobility. As a diasporic figure—born to Indian parents, educated in England and the United States, and long resident in Japan—Iyer embodies transnational fluidity. However, this very mobility enables a vantage point that is often detached and evaluative. The analysis argues that Iyer's narrative voice, while rejecting overt exoticism, subtly reproduces colonial tropes through generalizations, aestheticized observations, and an implicit authority to interpret cultures. His position as a “global soul” thus becomes ambivalent: it gestures toward post national belonging while simultaneously echoing the colonial gaze of colonial Western travel writers. **Keywords:** Cosmopolitan, Colonial, Postcolonial, Travel, Transnational, Global Soul

Introduction

Pico Iyer's *The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls, and the Search for Home* (2000) has generated diverse critical responses, with reviewers praising its philosophical engagement with globalisation and transnational experience while simultaneously critiquing its implicit superior identity claims and detached cosmopolitanism. The text is widely regarded as a significant contribution to contemporary travel writing and transnational literature, although many critics observe tensions between its counter-travel narrative stance and its reproduction of privileged global perspectives.

Several reviewers commend Iyer's ability to represent the anxieties and fluid identities of an increasingly globalised world. *Publishers Weekly* characterises the work as a “breathless look at today's world” and praises Iyer's descriptive abilities

and reflective engagement with modern rootlessness (“The Global Soul”). Similarly, *Spirituality & Practice* describes the book as a “dazzling collection of essays” that captures the spiritual and psychological dimensions of global mobility (“The Global Soul”). Such responses highlight Iyer’s sensitivity to questions of displacement, migration, and cultural hybridity. Critics have also appreciated the text’s exploration of home and belonging within transnational contexts. Readers who identify with migrant experiences frequently find Iyer’s discussions of airports, hotels, shopping malls, and multicultural cities deeply resonant, particularly his representation of identity as fluid rather than territorially fixed. At the same time, the book has attracted substantial criticism for its style and ideological positioning. Some reviewers argue that Iyer’s prose becomes excessively abstract and fragmented. *January Magazine* notes that although the work insightfully diagnoses the emotional disorientation of globalisation, it often fails to provide emotional depth or analytical coherence (“The Global Soul”). Other readers similarly describe the narrative as intellectually dense and occasionally repetitive, suggesting that the form itself mirrors the instability and fragmentation characteristic of transnational life.

However, *The Global Soul* occupies a distinctive place in contemporary travel writing as long as it challenges many of the conventions traditionally associated with the genre. Unlike classical travel narratives that celebrate exploration, discovery, and cultural encounter, Iyer’s text foregrounds hybridity, globalisation, and the instability of identity. The narrative replaces the romantic image of the traveller discovering foreign lands with that of the “global soul,” a transnational subject suspended between cultures, nations, and homes. Consequently, critics and scholars frequently interpret the book as a counter-travel narrative that dismantles conventional binaries such as home/abroad, self/other, and centre/periphery.

The book departs significantly from traditional travel writing in structure and thematic emphasis. Rather than presenting a linear movement from origin to destination, the narrative unfolds through fragmented reflections on airports, hotels, shopping malls, and cosmopolitan cities. These transient spaces symbolise the placelessness of globalisation and the erosion of stable cultural identities. Subarna Bhattacharya argues that the text functions as an “experimental travel narrative” that rejects the conventional structure of travel literature and redefines travel as “an essential condition of the self” in the postmodern world. In this framework, travel is no longer a temporary journey but a permanent existential condition.

A central feature of the counter-travel narrative in *The Global Soul* is its rejection of fixed notions of home and belonging. Traditional travel writing often depends upon the distinction between the traveller’s home culture and the foreign world being explored. Iyer destabilises this binary by presenting himself as culturally hybrid and perpetually displaced. Born to Indian parents, educated in England, and later living in America and Japan, Iyer embodies what he terms the “global

soul,” an identity formed through continuous movement across cultural borders. Bhattacharya notes that the narrative portrays globalisation as producing a condition of “perpetual exile” in which the feeling of home remains elusive. The traveller therefore becomes not an explorer of difference but a figure of displacement and uncertainty.

Critics also observe that the spaces emphasised in the text differ sharply from the landscapes of conventional travel literature. Instead of exotic locations or untouched cultures, Iyer repeatedly focuses on airports, malls, hotels, and cosmopolitan transit zones. Andy Beckett, reviewing the book in *The Guardian*, argues that Iyer investigates “the life of the modern-day nomad” whose existence is shaped by corporate globalisation and perpetual mobility. Beckett further suggests that the narrative reflects a world in which identities have been colonised by work, travel, and consumer culture. These non-places symbolise the homogenisation of global experience and reinforce the book’s departure from traditional travel narratives rooted in geographical specificity.

Thematically, the book also shifts the focus of travel writing from geographical exploration to interiority and identity formation. Ahmed and Abbas, in their stylistic study of the text, argue that Iyer constructs transcultural identity through language that privileges fluidity, multiplicity, and movement. The traveller in *The Global Soul* is not engaged in discovering foreign cultures but in negotiating fragmented forms of selfhood within a globalised world. The narrative thereby transforms travel into a metaphor for cultural and psychological transition.

Tom Montgomery Fate’s review, “The Unanchored Self,” further develops this interpretation by describing the book as an exploration of unstable identity in modern cosmopolitan culture. Fate argues that Iyer replaces conventional travel adventure with reflections on “floating dispassion,” cultural ambiguity, and emotional dislocation. The traveller emerges as an unanchored figure whose mobility produces uncertainty rather than knowledge or mastery. This destabilisation of the authoritative traveller’s perspective is one of the defining characteristics of counter-travel writing.

The fragmented structure of the text itself reinforces its challenge to traditional travel narratives. Rather than offering chronological coherence or narrative closure, the book moves associatively across places, memories, and reflections. Such formal fragmentation mirrors the disorientation of globalisation and jet-lagged existence. Sean Thomas observes that the narrative functions less as a travelogue than as a “dissertation” on the shrinking and homogenisation of the world under globalisation. The episodic structure therefore becomes a formal expression of transnational instability and cultural flux.

Therefore, it can be argued that, to a certain extent, *The Global Soul* redefines travel writing for the age of globalisation by replacing exploration with displacement, destination with transit, and cultural discovery with fragmented identity. Through its emphasis on airports, transnational spaces, rootlessness, and

hybrid subjectivity, the text dismantles the conventions of traditional travel literature and presents travel as an ongoing condition of modern existence.

However, critics have also noted limitations in Iyer's representation of globalisation. Beckett argues that the narrative largely reflects the perspective of a privileged cosmopolitan elite and pays insufficient attention to the inequalities underlying global mobility. The ability to move freely across borders remains inaccessible to many migrants, refugees, and marginalised communities. Consequently, some reviewers contend that the book aestheticizes globalisation while underplaying its political and economic dimensions.

Several critiques also focus on the cosmopolitan privilege embedded in Iyer's narrative voice. Reviewers have observed that the author's mobility across nations and cultures enables a detached, evaluative perspective that can resemble the stance of earlier colonial travel writers. Although Iyer rejects overt exoticism, his observations occasionally generalise cultures and reduce places to symbols within a larger global argument. His ability to move freely through airports, luxury hotels, and global cities reflects a form of elite mobility unavailable to many migrants whose experiences of displacement are shaped by economic precarity and political restriction.

Therefore, it can be interpreted that *The Global Soul* occupies an ambivalent position within contemporary travel writing. On one hand, the text challenges conventional colonial travel narratives by emphasising hybridity, interconnectedness, and post national identity. On the other hand, Iyer's cosmopolitanism can reproduce subtle forms of cultural authority and hierarchical observation. His role as the "global soul" often places him in the position of a privileged observer who interprets cultures from above, echoing what postcolonial critics identify as the persistence of the colonial gaze within modern global discourse.

Written almost a decade after his first travel narrative, *The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls, and the Search for Home* reflects Pico Iyer's engagement with the effects of globalisation and the increasing phenomenon of worldwide displacement. In this work, as in his first travel book *Video Night in Kathmandu: And Other Reports from the Not-So-Far East* (1989) Iyer demonstrates an uncritical celebration of globalisation while largely overlooking its more troubling consequences. The book is composed of a series of interconnected journalistic essays, each examining globalisation and transnational movement from different perspectives. Through these essays, Iyer records his visits to major centres of globalisation: Los Angeles International Airport, which he describes as functioning like a modern metropolis; Hong Kong, where apartment complexes operate as self-contained urban units; Toronto, transformed into a multicultural city by immigrant populations; Atlanta, whose Olympic Village symbolises the mass-produced universalism of global culture; England, represented as a site of

reverse migration from the periphery to the centre; and Japan, where Iyer unexpectedly discovers a sense of belonging.

In *The Global Soul*, Iyer argues that globalisation has made the world so interconnected that traditional ideas of identity and belonging have become unstable and outdated. Drawing from his encounters with constantly mobile businessmen in Hong Kong and immigrant communities in Toronto, he suggests that globalisation possesses a liberating and transformative force. According to Iyer, the increasing intermingling of cultures, ethnicities, and lifestyles through global mobility has the potential to transcend historical conflicts and foster a new understanding of cultural difference. But it can be argued that Iyer appears to endorse globalisation uncritically, often ignoring the fact that its benefits are distributed unevenly across societies. Globalisation neither affects all communities equally nor provides equal access to its advantages. Unlike the economically marginalised who remain excluded from technological and informational networks, Iyer is a direct beneficiary of globalisation. As a prosperous graduate of Harvard University and a cosmopolitan intellectual leading a transnational lifestyle, Iyer is someone who derives power, privilege, and mobility from globalisation. His cosmopolitan identity enables him to establish new forms of social hierarchy, enacted through distinctions in professional status, mobility, leisure, and access to global networks (Lisle 118).

Individuals like Iyer, who enjoy the freedoms and privileges offered by globalisation, represent only a minority within the global population. Vast numbers of people across the world still lack access to basic technological resources such as the internet and telecommunications. While globalisation has facilitated international travel, migration, and the emergence of privileged “Global Souls” like Iyer, it has failed to eliminate global economic inequality. Although globalisation has generated new opportunities for international organisations, increased per capita income, and contributed to poverty reduction in certain regions, it has also frequently “widened material inequalities, increased ecological degradation, sustained militarism, fragmented communities, marginalized subordinated groups, fed intolerance and deepened crises of democracy” (Scholte 53).

In *The Global Soul* Pico Iyer offers a vivid portrayal of his hybrid and homeless identity as a “Global Soul.” Throughout the narrative, he projects himself as a representative cosmopolitan subject who benefits from the privileges associated with this unique global identity. As a cosmopolitan “Global Soul,” Iyer rejects fixed national, political, and cultural affiliations and elevates himself to a detached and superior position from which he claims to view the world with flexibility and openness. By disclaiming stable allegiances, he secures for himself an elite and privileged standpoint. Occupying the elevated position of the observer, Iyer employs surveillance—one of the central strategies of imperial dominance—and situates himself within a structure of power that privileges the observer over the

observed. This grants him the authority to interpret, judge, and represent cultures and places perceived as inferior. Surveillance, historically associated with colonial knowledge and power, enabled European explorers and travellers to occupy a panoramic position of visual command. Such a perspective metaphorically reflects the panoptic operation of the imperial gaze. When a travel writer assumes this invulnerable position of observer, characteristic of Orientalist discourse, it reinforces the binary structure of power that sustains that authority. Iyer's liberated and mobile lifestyle thus embodies the autonomy, confidence, and freedom traditionally associated with the Western traveller.

Travelling across the globe, Iyer frequently makes observations and judgements that implicitly affirm his superiority. Although he does not directly represent an imperial power and often distances himself from colonial complicity, he nevertheless appropriates the privileges of representation, judgement, and unrestricted mobility that historically emerged from imperial structures. The privileges associated with his "Global Soul" identity allow him to continue the tradition of Western travel writing, thereby aligning him with earlier colonial explorers. His identity is deeply shaped by advantages such as perpetual mobility, technological access, elite social networks, and institutional sponsorship.

Although numerous "Global Souls" appear in the narrative, not all possess the freedom of movement enjoyed by Iyer. Only a figure like Iyer—endowed with leisure, wealth, and unrestricted mobility—can afford to travel extensively enough to accumulate "1.5 million miles on one American airline alone" annually (*Global Soul* 23). Such mobility is unimaginable for ordinary "Global Souls" in the text, such as the undocumented Mexican immigrant in the United States or the Punjabi taxi driver in Toronto. While the Mexican immigrant moves from place to place performing menial labour to support his impoverished family in Mexico, Iyer perpetually "go[es] on circling the world, six miles above the ground, displaced from time, above the clouds, with all . . . [his] needs attended to" by multinational sponsors ("The Nowhere Man"). His cosmopolitan identity is therefore inseparable from extensive and privileged mobility.

In an interview with Rolf Potts, Iyer remarks that he was "lucky enough to be a traveller from birth" ("Travel Writer: Pico Iyer"). Born to Indian parents in England and raised in California, he travelled frequently between his parents' home in California and his school in London. Many of his formative memories emerged from these repeated journeys as an unaccompanied child flying alone between continents. Mobility eventually became integral to his identity. After high school, he worked in a Mexican restaurant in Southern California and saved enough money to travel extensively across Latin America. Later, during graduate school, he joined the *Let's Go* travel series, covering numerous towns in a short period while surviving under difficult conditions. Thus, from an early age, Iyer developed a fascination with movement and claims to have "always found . . . delight in movement" (Iyer, *Stillness* 4). For many people travel is traumatic and

exhausting, but for Iyer it is liberating and empowering. He describes air travel as something as natural as “picking up the phone, or going to school” (“The Nowhere Man”).

The Mexican immigrant in the narrative is also a “Global Soul” in terms of transnational movement and intercultural experience. However, unlike Iyer, he lacks the privileges that facilitate perpetual mobility. His socioeconomic position confines his movements within limited boundaries. As an undocumented immigrant in the United States, he wanders from job to job merely to survive and support his family. Similarly, the Punjabi taxi driver cannot imagine the kind of global mobility enjoyed by Iyer because family obligations and work restrict him to a provincial existence. Although both characters participate in multicultural experiences, they do not possess the institutional support, financial freedom, or leisure that allow Iyer to embrace a life of unrestricted travel. While Iyer’s identity is shaped by elite education, cosmopolitan upbringing, and constant international movement, ordinary “Global Souls” remain rooted in more localised and economically constrained realities.

At a young age, Iyer abandoned conventional employment in order to pursue travel writing full time. Graham Huggan describes him as “the epitome of the traveller as cosmopolitan speedster, globalization’s accelerated equivalent to the modern urban flâneur” (14). Highly mobile and professionally privileged “Global Souls” like Iyer form only a small minority when compared to ordinary global migrants whose mobility is largely driven by necessity rather than pleasure.

Iyer’s mobility is sustained by money, technology, and leisure. He travels because he enjoys movement and writing, whereas the Mexican immigrant moves purely out of economic necessity. While Iyer experiences mobility as freedom, the Mexican immigrant describes his life as monotonous and exhausting. Even after living in the United States for decades, the immigrant speaks little English, whereas Iyer, according to Geeta Doctor, belongs to “a new class of hybrid intellectual” equally at home in Asia, Europe, and America (15). Iyer’s cross-border experiences are “postmodern” and technologically enabled, whereas the immigrant’s movements are precarious and illegal (*Global Soul* 10). Consequently, when Iyer describes the “Global Soul” as someone whose “currency might be ‘airmiles’,” the description applies only to privileged cosmopolitans like himself and his affluent acquaintances (*Global Soul* 19).

One such acquaintance is Richard, an international management consultant based in Hong Kong, who travels constantly across nations for work and accumulates enough airline miles to send his wife around the world free of cost every month. The contrast between Richard and the Mexican immigrant, who rarely visits his family in Mexico, underscores the unequal distribution of mobility within globalisation.

Iyer’s privileged status is also reinforced through his elite social networks. Many of his travels occur alongside celebrities and former Eton classmates, including

figures such as Bruce Springsteen. During his stay in Hong Kong, for instance, he is hosted by Richard in a luxurious apartment complex equipped with facilities resembling an entire city, including a mini-airport. Such experiences reveal how elite cosmopolitanism is sustained through exclusive transnational networks.

Institutional support further enhances Iyer's freedom. As an internationally recognised writer, he is sponsored by multinational corporations and media organisations that finance his travels. Graham Huggan notes that Iyer travels "round the world on CNN and Time magazine's expenses" (16). In this respect, Iyer resembles eighteenth-century scientific travellers and missionaries whose journeys were financed by imperial institutions. His travels are carefully secured through prearranged tickets, hotel reservations, and corporate sponsorship. Geeta Doctor observes that despite his adventurous image, Iyer "travels very cautiously," always protected by systems of privilege and comfort (15).

Technology also plays a crucial role in sustaining Iyer's cosmopolitan identity. Living in Japan while working internationally, he depends on technological networks to remain connected across continents. He openly acknowledges that technology enables him to communicate globally and travel whenever necessary. Unlike the Mexican immigrant or the Punjabi taxi driver, whose lives remain locally constrained, Iyer fully participates in the technologically mediated culture of globalisation.

As Debbie Lisle argues, Iyer's subjectivity is not shaped by hardship but by privilege (118). He is neither a refugee nor a displaced migrant; rather, he is wealthy, educated, and socially advantaged, able to enjoy all the benefits of cosmopolitan life. Constantly moving between centres of financial and cultural power, he appears to thrive within the freedoms produced by globalisation and deterritorialisation. Yet Iyer's celebration of his own "Global Soul" identity often lacks self-criticism regarding the privileges that sustain it. He rarely acknowledges the inequalities that enable his cosmopolitan lifestyle or his ethical responsibility toward those excluded from wealth and mobility. His global and peripatetic existence frequently appears self-congratulatory and hierarchical, producing an implicit sense of superiority. As scholars such as Yael Levy, Maury Peiperl, and Karsten Jonsen suggest, highly mobile professionals often anchor their identities in flexible global networks rather than local communities (14).

In many respects, Iyer assumes the freedom of travel and representation once enjoyed by colonial explorers. His travel narrative celebrates liminal spaces that transcend culture, nation, and history. A striking example is his discussion of Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), which he treats as a significant cultural location alongside cities such as Toronto, Japan, and London. Airports and airplanes become metaphors for postmodern dislocation and homelessness. Since airports increasingly contain hospitals, shopping malls, hotels, and entertainment zones, Iyer regards them as modern global cities where cultures intersect and collide.

Although Iyer had frequented LAX since childhood, he describes it in *The Global Soul* as though it were an unfamiliar foreign city. Wandering through its terminals, he suddenly becomes fascinated by its infrastructure and diversity. Facilities such as the fire station, post office, police squad, and hospital evoke surprise and wonder. The airport, once merely a transit point in his life, becomes strange and exotic once he pauses to observe it carefully. At times he even feels “adrift in a world . . . [he] could not recognize” (*Global Soul* 45). Like the colonial observer discovering unfamiliar territory, Iyer approaches the airport with curiosity, amazement, and analytical detachment.

Educated at elite institutions such as Eton College, University of Oxford, and Harvard University, Iyer possesses the privilege to “pick and choose among locations” (Iyer, “The Nowhere Man”). He determines his own routes and destinations, thereby exercising authority over both the journey and the places visited, much like the Western colonial travellers. In many instances, he interprets the backwardness of places in terms of geography, culture, or local conditions while neglecting the histories of colonial exploitation and neo-colonial violence that produced such inequalities. In doing so, Iyer revives colonial modes of seeing and representation, even while presenting himself as a modern cosmopolitan “Global Soul”.

To conclude it can be argued that even though Pico Iyer’s *The Global Soul* is often read as a celebration of globalisation and cosmopolitan identity, the book also reflects colonialist or neo-colonialist perspectives, especially in the way Iyer represents cultures, mobility, and power. It can also be argued that Iyer is a transnational traveller with neocolonial gaze characterised by privileged mobility. Iyer presents himself as a “global soul,” moving effortlessly across borders—Japan, Thailand, Hong Kong, the US and the Europe. This freedom of movement reflects a privileged, Westernised mobility unavailable to most people in the Global South. His travel resembles the colonial traveller’s gaze: observing, interpreting, and defining other cultures. Local people often appear as background figures, while the travelling observer occupies the central position of authority. Globalisation is experienced as liberation for the elite, not as exploitation for migrant labourers or displaced communities. This mirrors colonial travel writing, where the coloniser narrates the world while the colonised remain largely silent. Iyer often romanticises spaces like hotels, airports and cities, turning them into aesthetic objects rather than lived realities. Cultures are described in poetic, generalised terms. Social inequalities, political struggles, and historical wounds are often minimised. One of the most significant criticisms is Iyer’s lack of sustained engagement with colonial histories. Global cities and multinational spaces are presented as neutral or harmonious. The violent economic and political processes that created these “global” spaces—colonial trade, imperial domination, cultural displacement—are rarely foregrounded. Globalisation is framed as a natural evolution rather than a continuation of imperial power structures. This

selective forgetting allows colonial hierarchies to reappear in modern, disguised forms. Iyer frequently argues that national identity is obsolete and that a global identity is the future. This idea often reflects a Western liberal universalism. For many postcolonial societies, national identity remains crucial due to histories of colonisation and cultural erasure. Declaring oneself “post-national” can become a privilege of those whose cultures were never threatened with extinction. Thus, Iyer’s “global soul” identity can be treated as a neo-colonial subject, transcending borders that others are still struggling to defend. Iyer writes in polished, literary English, positioning himself as an interpreter of global culture for a Western readership. He speaks about cultures rather than with them. Local voices are filtered through his consciousness.

It is also important to note that Iyer himself is of Indian origin and often acknowledges his hybrid identity. His work is not overtly imperialist. However, his position within global capitalism and Western publishing structures means that his perspective still aligns with neo-colonial power dynamics. The colonialist tendencies in *The Global Soul* lie not in explicit domination but in subtle forms of cultural authority like privileged mobility, aestheticization of non-Western cultures, erasure of colonial histories and universalism grounded in Western experience. As a postcolonial text, the book is best read critically, recognising both its celebration of global interconnectedness and its reproduction of colonial modes of seeing. The text remains intellectually influential for its exploration of migration, globalisation, and diasporic identity, yet it also exposes the contradictions of cosmopolitanism in the contemporary world. Its significance lies precisely in this tension: while the book seeks to transcend rigid cultural boundaries, it simultaneously reflects enduring structures of privilege and representational power.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/o6**GENDERED VIOLENCE AND FORCED MIGRATION OF WOMEN
DURING THE PARTITION OF INDIA: A FEMINIST AND
SOCIO-LEGAL ANALYSIS****DR. SADAF KHAN**Associate Professor of History, Faculty of Law
Integral University, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India**Abstract**

The Partition of India in 1947 set off one of the largest mass migrations witnessed in human history displacing close to fifteen million individuals. Although many scholars have concentrated their attention on the political discourse surrounding Partition and violence against civilians, the gendered aspect of such events remains a much less explored topic. In this paper, it will be argued that women encountered the Partition in their bodies through different types of violence that took the form of abduction, mass rape, forced conversions, sexual enslavement, honour killings, and coercion to marry. The present paper will explore different socio legal mechanisms of the treatment of female victims during the Partition of India by utilizing the theories and ideas put forward by feminist theorists to examine the influence of patriarchal norms and communal anxieties upon women and limitations in their freedom. Finally, a careful analysis of repatriation initiatives implemented in accordance with the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act of 1949 will be undertaken in order to assess the impact of such state measures on the agency and independence of female victims. Ultimately, the paper contends that a feminist, socio-legal lens is indispensable for reconstructing a more inclusive and truthful account of Partition's history.

Keywords: Gender, Women, Violence, Migration, Partition, Displacement

Introduction:

The Partition of India in 1947 remains one of the most violent and transformative events in modern South Asian history, resulting in the displacement of nearly fifteen million people and the death of an estimated one to two million (Talbot & Singh, 2009; Khan, 2007). The history of India's independence is often remembered as one of the most powerful and defining struggles in the country's past. Scholars have described it in many different ways some focusing on the triumph of freedom, others on the political negotiations and mass movements that made it possible. Yet, alongside the joy and pride of independence, there existed a deeply painful and unsettling reality that is sometimes overshadowed. The movement was not only about liberation; it was also marked by widespread violence and riots that tore through communities and disrupted countless lives.

Amidst this chaos, one aspect that has not received as much attention is the gendered nature of the violence. While historical records and discussions frequently highlight displacement and loss in general terms, they often fail to fully capture how deeply women were affected. A significant portion of those who were displaced were women, and their experiences went far beyond the loss of home and security. They were subjected to brutal forms of violence that added another layer of suffering to an already tragic situation of gender-based atrocities that unfolded during this turbulent time. The impact of such experiences did not end with the events themselves. The trauma endured by these women stayed with them, often unspoken, shaping their memories and affecting their emotional and psychological well-being for the rest of their lives.

Their stories, though painful, are an essential part of understanding the true cost of independence. Recognizing and acknowledging this dimension allows for a more complete and humane understanding of history one that does not only celebrate freedom, but also remembers those who bore its hidden wounds. While it has been extensively studied as a political and territorial rupture, the gendered dimensions of Partition have received comparatively less attention in mainstream historical narratives. Yet, women experienced Partition in ways that were uniquely brutal, intimate, and deeply tied to patriarchal notions of honour, community identity, and national belonging. Their bodies became symbolic terrains upon which communal vengeance, political anxieties, and familial control were enacted. Abductions, mass rapes, forced conversions, coerced marriages, public parading, and honour killings marked women's experiences, turning gendered violence into a deliberate weapon of both communal retribution and patriarchal control. (Pandey, 2001).

A critical examination of women's experiences reveals that Partition cannot be understood merely as a political event; it must also be approached as a gendered catastrophe that shaped the lives, memories, and identities of millions of women across Punjab, Bengal, Sindh, and Kashmir. Feminist historians such as Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin, and Veena Das have shown that women were not only victims of male aggression but also bore the weight of communal anxieties and patriarchal expectations. Families sometimes killed or abandoned women to "protect honour," (Butalia, 2000) while state-led recovery operations intended to "restore abducted women" to their original communities often disregarded women's choices, relationships, and agency. Thus, women were simultaneously violated by enemies, controlled by their own communities, and disciplined by the state.

A socio-legal perspective further illuminates how the post-Partition state attempted to regulate women's bodies and identities. The Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act of 1949, framed as a humanitarian response, empowered state authorities to trace, recover, and repatriate abducted women across the new borders of India and Pakistan. However, these operations often

exacerbated women's trauma by forcing them to leave relationships they had formed during captivity or denying them the right to decide where they wished to live. In many cases, the state's paternalistic approach reproduced the very patriarchal structures that had contributed to women's vulnerability in the first place. Women's consent was rarely considered, revealing how legal systems, even when framed as protective, can reinforce gendered hierarchies.

This paper argues that understanding Partition through a feminist and socio-legal lens is essential to reconstructing a more truthful, inclusive historical account. By foregrounding women's narratives both spoken and silenced it seeks to highlight the intersections of gender, violence, displacement, and state power. Drawing on oral histories, survivor testimonies, feminist scholarship, and legal documents, this study underscores that women's experiences of Partition are not marginal stories but central to understanding the human consequences of national division. Ultimately, a gendered analysis compels us to re-evaluate the meaning of citizenship, autonomy, and justice in the aftermath of one of the subcontinent's most defining events.

Historical Context of Partition and Women's Vulnerability

The Partition of India in 1947 did not emerge abruptly; it was the culmination of decades of political tensions, communal polarization, and colonial strategies that deepened identity-based divisions (Pandey, 2001; Brass, 2003). Beginning with the late nineteenth century, British colonial policies such as separate electorates and census classifications institutionalized religious categories, reinforcing the idea of fixed and competing community identities. By the 1940s, political negotiations between the Indian National Congress, the Muslim League, and the British government became increasingly fraught, leading to heightened communal mistrust and outbreaks of violence across undivided India. As the prospect of territorial division hardened, ordinary people became caught between political ambitions and fears of demographic majorities. This climate of uncertainty turned women into key markers of community honour and cultural purity, intensifying their vulnerability long before the formal announcement of Partition.

The communal riots that erupted in Bengal, Bihar, Punjab, and Sindh from 1946 onwards laid the groundwork for the catastrophic violence of 1947 (Menon & Bhasin, 1998). The Great Calcutta Killings of August 1946 and the subsequent riots in Noakhali, Tippera, and Bihar demonstrated how women were increasingly targeted as symbols of revenge and humiliation (Talbot & Singh, 2009). Their bodies became objects through which competing communities communicated dominance and retaliation. This pattern intensified during the mass migrations that followed the announcement of the Radcliffe Line in August 1947. Entire villages emptied overnight, and caravans of refugees largely composed of women, children, and the elderly moved across hastily drawn borders with little protection. Structural gender inequalities shaped women's vulnerability during this period. Most women had limited mobility, restricted public presence, and were dependent

on male family members for safety and decision-making. When families fragmented during the chaos of migration, women lost essential social protection networks. Patriarchal norms further dictated that women's sexuality was intrinsically tied to family honour, making them primary targets in communal conflict. Historian Ritu Menon notes that in this context, violence against women was "not incidental but intentional," serving as a weapon of humiliation aimed at entire communities. In Punjab, abducting or assaulting women became a widespread strategy to assert control during territorial and communal struggles (Zamindar, 2007).

The demographic magnitude of Partition nearly fifteen million displaced and up to two million killed created unprecedented humanitarian crises. Women often bore the brunt of these challenges: they were responsible for caring for children, managing scarce food, and protecting themselves against assault while traveling in overcrowded trains, makeshift refugee camps, and open-air caravans. Their suffering was magnified not only by external violence but also by pressures within their own families. Instances of forced suicides, honour killings, or voluntary deaths such as women jumping into wells to avoid capture reflect how deeply patriarchy shaped the meaning of "protection" during this moment (Butalia, 2000).

Women's vulnerability was also linked to the breakdown of state authority. As colonial governance dissolved and the newly formed nations struggled to establish administrative control, law enforcement mechanisms collapsed in many regions. This vacuum enabled organized abductions, trafficking networks, and localized militias to operate with impunity. The absence of stable institutions further allowed the scale of violence to escalate, particularly in rural Punjab where policing was minimal and communal militias dominated the landscape. Women's experiences during this period thus reveal how political transition, social upheaval, and gendered power structures intersected to create conditions of extreme precarity.

In this historical context, women's forced migration cannot be separated from the gendered violence that accompanied it. The decisions about when to flee, how to travel, whom to trust, and where to seek safety were deeply shaped by patriarchal norms and the fear of sexual violence. The chaos of Partition, therefore, rendered women not only displaced subjects but also symbolic battlegrounds on which communal anxieties, nationalism, and patriarchal control were enacted. Understanding this background is essential to analyzing the specific forms of violence women endured and the complex legal responses that followed.

Forced Migration and Women's Experiences of Displacement

The mass migration triggered by the Partition of India constituted an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, (Khan, 2007) with nearly fifteen million people crossing newly drawn borders in conditions of extreme uncertainty and violence. While displacement affected all communities, women's experiences of

forced migration were marked by heightened vulnerability due to existing gender hierarchies, caregiving responsibilities, and the pervasive threat of sexual violence (Butalia, 2000). Migration was rarely a voluntary or planned movement; rather, women were compelled to flee suddenly, often without resources, adequate information, or protection. In this context, women's journeys were shaped not only by fear of communal violence but also by patriarchal expectations that restricted their mobility and decision-making.

During migration, women frequently travelled in overcrowded trains, on foot in large refugee caravans, or in bullock carts under constant threat of attack. These journeys were physically and emotionally exhausting. Women often carried infants, looked after elderly family members, and managed household survival while enduring hunger, dehydration, and exposure to violence (Menon & Bhasin, 1998). Many accounts describe women giving birth along migration routes or in refugee trains without medical care, underscoring the gendered burdens of displacement. The fear of abduction or rape meant that families sometimes altered migration strategies, such as travelling at night, disguising women, or limiting their visibility in public spaces.

The breakdown of social structures during forced migration also intensified women's precarity. Families were frequently separated due to stampedes, attacks, or hastily planned departures, leaving women isolated and without male protection in a patriarchal society where safety was closely linked to family networks. Widows, unmarried women, and orphaned girls were especially vulnerable, often relying on strangers or temporary arrangements that exposed them to exploitation. In such conditions, displacement was not only a matter of geographic relocation but also a profound rupture of social identity and security for women (Butalia, 2000).

Refugee camps that emerged in India and Pakistan particularly in Delhi, Kurukshetra, Amritsar, Lahore, and Karachi offered limited relief (Zamindar, 2007). While camps were intended as temporary shelters, they frequently lacked basic infrastructure, sanitation, medical facilities, and privacy. Women's living conditions were especially precarious due to overcrowding and the absence of gender-segregated spaces. Sexual harassment and exploitation within camps, sometimes by guards or fellow refugees, added another layer of insecurity. Despite these hardships, women were central to sustaining life within camps: they organized food distribution, tended to sick family members, and recreated domestic routines amidst instability.

Forced migration also disrupted women's sense of identity and belonging. Crossing borders often meant losing not only homes and property but also social status, community roles, and kinship ties. Many women struggled with the stigma attached to displacement, widowhood, or sexual violation. Their experiences reveal that forced migration during Partition was not merely a movement across territory but a deeply gendered process that reshaped women's bodies, labour,

relationships, and futures. Understanding these experiences is essential to grasp the full human cost of Partition beyond demographic statistics (Das, 2007).

Socio-Legal Analysis: State-Led Recovery and Repatriation of Women

In the aftermath of Partition, the governments of India and Pakistan faced immense pressure to address the widespread abduction and exploitation of women. This led to the establishment of formal recovery and repatriation mechanisms, most notably through the Inter-Dominion Agreement of 1947 and the subsequent enactment of the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act, 1949 (Government of India, 1949). While these measures were portrayed as humanitarian interventions, a socio-legal analysis reveals that they were deeply paternalistic and often reinforced patriarchal control over women's bodies and choices.

The Recovery Operations aimed to locate, retrieve, and return abducted women to their "original" religious communities. Under the Act, abducted women were legally categorized as persons requiring state protection, but their consent was not a determining factor in recovery decisions. Women who had been forcibly married or had children during captivity were often compelled to leave behind their families and return to communities that sometimes rejected them. This approach prioritized communal restoration over individual autonomy, treating women as symbols of national honour rather than as rights-bearing citizens (Menon & Bhasin, 1998).

From a feminist perspective, the legal framework surrounding recovery operations reflected a gendered understanding of citizenship. Men were allowed to choose where they belonged after Partition, but women's identities were tethered to religious and familial affiliations decided by the state. In many instances, women resisted repatriation, expressing a desire to remain with their children or spouses, even when these relationships had originated in violence. The refusal to acknowledge women's choices reveals how the law functioned as an extension of patriarchal authority rather than a mechanism of empowerment. (Das, 2007).

The recovery process itself was often traumatic. Women were detained in transit camps, interrogated, and transferred multiple times under police or military supervision. These experiences replicated dynamics of surveillance and control, further undermining their agency. Moreover, families in destination communities were not legally obligated to accept returned women, leading to situations where "recovered" women were sent to rehabilitation homes or ashrams indefinitely. This exposed the limitations of legal protection when social stigma remained unaddressed (Das, 2007).

Socio-legally, the recovery operations exposed the contradictions of nation-building in post-colonial India. While the state sought to present itself as a protector of women's honour, it simultaneously denied women the right to self-determination. Feminist scholars argue that this legal framework transformed

women into instruments of national reconciliation rather than acknowledging them as survivors of violence with complex emotional and social realities.

Ultimately, the recovery and repatriation policies illustrate how law can reproduce gendered violence even when framed as protective. By privileging communal logic over individual rights, the post-Partition legal response failed to address women's lived experiences of displacement and trauma. A feminist socio-legal analysis thus reveals that true justice requires not only legal intervention but also the recognition of women's autonomy, consent, and dignity within post-conflict recovery processes.

Feminist Interpretations, Memory, and Silence

While official histories of the Partition of India have largely centred on political negotiations, territorial division, and communal violence, feminist scholarship has radically re-interpreted this event by foregrounding women's experiences, memories, and silences (Butalia, 2000). Feminist historians and theorists argue that Partition is not merely an episode of political rupture but a deeply gendered trauma whose full implications can only be understood by listening to women's voices both spoken and unspoken. Women's narratives complicate nationalist histories by revealing how violence, displacement, and state intervention were experienced at the most intimate levels of the body, family, and community.

One of the key contributions of feminist interpretations is the shift from archival state records to oral histories, testimonies, letters, memoirs, and literature as legitimate sources of historical knowledge. Scholars such as Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon emphasize that women's stories were often excluded from official documentation not because they were insignificant, but because they challenged the moral authority of the nation-state. These narratives expose uncomfortable truths about patriarchal complicity, honour-based violence, and the limitations of legal protection (Das, 2007). Through life stories of abducted women, widows, and refugee survivors, feminist scholarship reveals how women negotiated survival, care, and identity amid extreme violence.

Memory plays a central role in these feminist reconstructions of Partition history. Women's memories are often fragmented, nonlinear, and marked by emotion rather than chronology. Veena Das argues that trauma does not always find expression through dramatic recollection but is instead absorbed into the fabric of everyday life manifesting in silence, repetition, or bodily memory. Many women chose not to publicly recount experiences of sexual violence, abduction, or forced migration, not because they had forgotten them, but because silence functioned as a strategy of survival in societies that stigmatized violated women (Menon & Bhasin, 1998). Thus, silence itself becomes a meaningful historical text rather than an absence of testimony.

The gendered nature of silence during and after Partition reflects broader societal constraints on women's speech. Cultural norms that equated female sexuality with honour rendered discussions of sexual violence taboo, pushing survivors into

silence within families and communities. Women who had been abducted or raped were often urged to forget their past in order to restore familial normalcy. Even decades later, many women narrated their experiences indirectly through stories of loss, migration, or domestic hardship while avoiding explicit references to violence. Feminist scholars interpret these narrative gaps not as failures of memory but as evidence of deep social pressure and unresolved trauma.

Intergenerational memory further complicates the feminist understanding of Partition. Daughters and granddaughters often inherit silences, incomplete stories, and emotional residues rather than coherent narratives. These transmitted memories shape family histories, gender roles, and attitudes toward community and belonging. By examining how women pass down stories or choose not to feminist analysis highlights how Partition continues to live on within domestic spaces, shaping identities long after political borders were drawn.

Literature and cultural representation also provide critical insight into these gendered memories. Works by writers such as Amrita Pritam, Saadat Hasan Manto, Bhisham Sahni, and later feminist authors reimagine Partition through women's suffering and resilience. These creative expressions offer alternative archives that challenge state-sanctioned silence and restore emotional truth to historical discourse (Manto, 2012; Pritam, 2006).

Through feminist interpretations, memory and silence emerge as powerful tools for understanding Partition's enduring legacy. They reveal that women were not passive victims but complex subjects who navigated trauma, agency, and survival within oppressive conditions. By centering women's voices whether articulated or withheld feminist scholarship reconstructs a more inclusive and humane history of Partition, one that acknowledges gendered suffering as central rather than peripheral to the story of national division.

Conclusion

The Partition of India was not only a political division of territory but a deeply gendered catastrophe that reshaped women's lives through violence, displacement, and long-term silencing (Butalia, 2000). This paper has demonstrated that women's experiences of Partition were shaped by forms of harm that were distinct in nature and intent abductions, sexual violence, forced marriages, honour killings, and coerced migrations all of which transformed women's bodies into sites of communal conflict and patriarchal control. These experiences reveal that gendered violence during Partition was not incidental but structural, embedded within social norms, nationalist anxieties, and the collapse of institutional authority.

Through a feminist and socio-legal analysis, the study has highlighted how women were subjected not only to communal brutality but also to state intervention that frequently denied them autonomy. The Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act and related recovery operations, while framed as humanitarian responses, reproduced patriarchal assumptions by prioritizing communal honour

and national identity over women's choices (Government of India, 1949). In doing so, the post-Partition legal framework underscored the tension between protection and control, revealing the limitations of law when it remains disconnected from gender justice.

Feminist interpretations of memory, silence, and narrative further illuminate how women negotiated survival in the aftermath of violence. By treating silence not as absence but as a meaningful response to trauma and stigma, feminist scholarship challenges dominant historical narratives that marginalize women's perspectives. Women's oral histories, lived memories, and cultural representations offer alternative archives that deepen our understanding of the human cost of Partition (Das, 2007).

Ultimately, this study underscores that any comprehensive account of Partition must place women at its centre. A feminist, socio-legal approach is essential not only for recovering marginalized histories but also for rethinking citizenship, justice, and belonging in post-conflict societies (Menon & Bhasin, 1998). Acknowledging women's agency, trauma, and resilience allows for a more inclusive and ethically responsible engagement with one of the most defining moments in South Asian history.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/07**DISPLACEMENT AND INTERNAL MIGRATION IN CONFLICT
NARRATIVES: A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF QAIS AKBAR
OMAR'S A FORT OF NINE TOWERS****DR. AMAL BABU**Assistant Professor, Department of English and other Languages
Holy Cross Institute of Management and Technology, Calicut, Kerala, India**Abstract**

A Fort of Nine Towers (2013), is a touching memoir by Qais Akbar Omar that powerfully presents the atrocious acts of Mujahedin and Taliban during their reigns in Afghanistan. The work portrays the plight of the author's family and their multifaceted sufferings during the period of intensive war and violence. The element of internal migration is one of the distinctive features of the work. The family's journey from Kabul to other parts of the nation with an end lead a peaceful and comfortable life is a vindication of the diverse aspects of Afghanistan and its distortion during this period of intense war and violence. The work, through its tailored narratives, presents the multifarious sufferings of the family during constant events of displacement and migration. The memoir skilfully unravels the physical, emotional, and mental sufferings of the family and its individual members. However, the work does not confine to the episodic narration of the events of war and violence, and subsequent sufferings and trauma of the common folk in the nation, rather it vivaciously presents the unmatched narrations of survival, resilience, and fraternity that brings redemption to the family. Thus, the memoir is a powerful narrative that intertwines various aspects of migration and displacement during the dark period of the nation's history.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Internal Migration, Displacement, Trauma, Survival, Redemption.

Introduction

A Fort of Nine Towers is Qais Akbar Omar's memoir of his family's experiences during the tumultuous period in the history of Afghanistan that include the civil war, the rise of Taliban, and the invasion of the United States of America in Afghanistan. The memoir skilfully presents the unparalleled sufferings and survival of a family during the period of intense war and violence. The work presents the displacement and internal migration as experienced by the family and constitutes its narrative framework. Through the depiction of the family's suffering, the work presents how forced journeys frames identity, culture and unravels the past glory of the nation. The rise of mujahedin in the early years of the last decade of the twentieth century was initially accepted among the populace

of Afghanistan as they believed this group has casted out the Russians from the land. As Qais observes in the work:

“My grandfather, father, uncles, and Grandfather’s guests had often talked about the Mujahedin long before they came to Kabul. In fact, people had been talking about them from the time they were formed in Pakistan and Iran. When anyone spoke of them, they often referred to them proudly as “our Mujahedin brothers, who will come and liberate this county from these religionless and Communist Russians.” (25)

The mujahedin rule in its early days has brought groundbreaking changes in the nation. Unlike the Russian rule, unrivalled peace and tranquillity existed in the land, and the cost of living became economical and affordable for the common people. As Qais comments about the changed nature of life in Afghanistan:

Once mujahedin were in control, everything was cheap, and food became plentiful for a few months after they had opened the government food stores. For the first time in years, people could travel anywhere in Afghanistan without worrying about being caught in a crossfire if some group of fighters suddenly started attacking government cars or Russian military vehicles from their hiding places. (29)

However, the newly enthroned mujahedin rule experienced unprecedented crisis as the Russians have withdrawn their financial and material support for Afghanistan soon after their exit from the nation. Along with this, the inexperienced and uneducated leaders suffocated the common folk with outdated policies that marked radical curtailment of individual freedom. Furthermore, rigorous and continuous fights in various parts of Kabul between different factions of the mujahedin hindered the normal life in the city.

Instability and displacement were the chief characteristic features of common folks’ lives during the period of civil war in Afghanistan. The escalation and expansion of the civil war delayed their plan to migrate to other nations and forces them to move to different parts of Afghanistan and the internal migration of the family to various parts of the nation is inclusive of road transportation, air transportation, and pedestrian mobility. The emergence of the civil war in Kabul forces the family to move to Quala-e-Noburja, the outskirts of Kabul to escape from the rocket attacks, the expansion of the war drives the family to sought refuge in various parts of the nation such as Mazar-e-Sharif, Bamiyan, Hindu Kush region, and eventually returns to Kabul as they fail to move to any foreign country. Displacement and migration brought forth multifarious sufferings and torments to the lives of common people in the nation. The sufferings and torments were an amalgamation of physical and emotional aspects. The initial scenes of migration in the memoir exemplify the element of uncertainty, despair and fear that lurk among the people, “What we saw, I will never forget. Thousands of people like us were taking advantage of the ceasefire to flee from our part of the city. Thousands

and thousands of people, all walking in near silence. When they spoke, they whispered as if they had been forbidden to talk normally” (39).

Separation from the larger family is another key aspect of displacement in the work. The family is the microcosm of the Afghan identity as it depicts the various characteristic features of the Afghan society. The initial parts of the work present the family as a rich and educated extended family lives in the city of Kabul. The grandfather is the head of the family and he is a source of wisdom, a master of carpet designs, and a true adherent of tradition. His children and grandchildren live along with him in that large house in the city. The family is the place where the intergenerational transmission of tradition and custom take place in holistic manner. Along with these, the family is wealthy and educated during their stay at the city.

The family’s initial movement to the fort is the vindication of the unity and affection within the family. They moved to the fort in the outskirts of Kabul and continued their lives as it was in the city. The Fort simultaneously served as both security and confinement for the family. The fort provides comfort and security for the family during the period of uncertainties. The lush and peaceful atmosphere of the fort represents Afghanistan during the age of peace and tranquillity. As Qais comments, “We could hear the rockets, but the fighting seemed very far away. The cousins filled the days playing hide-and-seek in the vast garden, or splashing cold water on one another from the pool” (48). The fort further helps the family to practice the Afghan way of life where the family members engaged themselves in poetry, kite flying and carpet trading that helped them to preserve their self-identity during the chaotic period. However, the mayhem of the family really began when the effects of civil war broke the comfort of the family within the walls of the fort. At this juncture, each son of the father, along with their own family, moves to different parts of the nation as a matter of intense mental agony for the entire family.

Qais’ journey along with his parents and siblings to various parts of the nation for resort manifests the multidimensional aspects of displacement and migration. The family’s journey for survival to various parts of the nation has transformed the family as “modern nomads” (139). In this journey, they sought refuge in the river banks, houses of relatives, friends and unknown, and large Buddha statues in Bamiyan.

The family’s journey manifests the element of poverty that intrude into the Afghan society during the time of civil war. The family led a comfortable life in Kabul within a large house surrounded by large campus that manifested the richness of the family. The men and women in the family were placed in good jobs and the family enjoyed wide respect in the society. The children in the family enjoyed the freedom of education irrespective of gender differences and the feast-like dinners of the family exemplify their luxurious way of living. Qais narrates one such event during the pre-war period:

“Often, we all ate dinner together, more than fifty of us sitting on cushions around one sloth spread on the well-trimmed lawn that Grandfather had sown at one corner of our courtyard. Colourful little lightbulbs hung above us. After dinner, my grandfather and his sons sat in a circle talking about their businesses, or to which universities in Europe or America they should send my boy cousins and me.” (13)

On the contrary, displacement and the process of migration disrupts the financial stability of the family as a large majority of their material wealth is plundered by the warlords and the parents lost their jobs. When the family arrives at Quala-e-Noburja, their way of dining exemplifies the scarcity of food they experienced in Kabul during the early days of civil war, “We had not had a proper meal for weeks. Everybody forgot all their manners as we piled our plates high” (45). This scenario is further worsened during the continuous episodes of migrations that reflected in their way of living and transportation methods.

The civil war between various mujahedin factions and the Taliban rule in Afghanistan has brought unparalleled physical sufferings and torments to the lives of common people and the marginalized groups in Afghanistan. The memoir skilfully presents the inimitable sufferings of Afghan populace during the era. The shattered buildings, empty roads and shops, malfunctioning schools and other government institutions, continuous exploding sounds of bombs and rockets, and life-threatening injuries and untimely fatalities remained as a cause of suffering for the Afghan people. One of Qais’ revisits to their house in Kabul vindicates the devastated state of the building and its surroundings, “These beautiful rooms had no glass in their windows, and it looked as if it had been centuries since anybody had been living in them. There was no sign of any tree in the courtyard. They had all been cut down for firewood” (77).

The marginalized groups, particularly women, children, and ethnic minorities were the major victims of the civil war and the Taliban rule. The notorious Taliban reign for its infringement of individual rights remained ruthless towards women. During their rule, women were wiped out from the public domain of Afghanistan and almost locked inside houses. As the memoir reproduces one of Taliban pronouncements about women:

The parents should not keep their daughters inside their house. They should get them married as soon as they are ready. This is the advice from us, and since we are the Students of God, we know better than others. Poor and widow women should be assisted financially by their blood relatives. Widows should be remarried by her father-in-law’s family. Women should not step outside of their residences. In case of emergency, they can go out but they should not wear fashionable clothes to attract the attention of other men, because she belongs to only one man (Husband) or soon she will be property of a man (Husband). (281)

Subsequently, the Taliban treated women as mere objects for sexual gratification and punished vehemently even for trivial mistakes. The memoir contains plenty of instances where women are punished severely without serious reasons. As Qais presents one such event happened to his mother, “‘some guy with a big black turban and torn clothes and a long beard whipped me on my legs,’ my mother exclaimed.... ‘Because I was not wearing a *burqa*,” my mother said. We could all see that she was suffering from the lashes” (273-274). The Mujahedin warlords were also treated women as lesser to humans and sexual assaults were common during their rule. The memoir presents such intimidating actions of the warlords in the memoir. As Qais presents one such scenes in the captive camp, “Then he looked at the woman who was not handcuffed and said, ‘It is better you don’t struggle and yell or curse. It is better you take off your clothes now for me. Soon, one by one, we will be finished. You cannot imagine how fast we release. We are away from our homes and our wives. We are at war, and war without sex is like poison’” (103).

In addition to such inhuman and unruly actions, the Taliban has prohibited girl students from schools and expelled female workers from workplaces that forced women to be completely dependent on men. Such a scenario has brought complete fiasco in the lives of women who were devoid of a male member in the family. Qais touchingly presents his personal encounter with one of such women who previously worked as a teacher now turned into a prostitute. She comments about her plight, “She stood before me, but not as close as before, and said with great sadness, ‘I’m not doing this for the joy of it. I’m doing this because I have to. Selling myself is the only possible way I have to earn any money.’ Her eyes began to fill” (300).

Children were the most affected group during the period of war and violence. As most of the schools were either shut down or destroyed, children lost their privilege for education. Innocent children suffered injuries and often died in random rocket attacks during the period. Qais’ cousin Wakeel was a victim of one of such events. Qais reports his death as follows, “Afterward his friends told us how wakeel had been the only one standing when the rockets hit. In warning his friends, he did not cover himself in the few seconds that he had. Now he wavered and could not stand anymore. His slender body dropped to the ground. His eyes were wide open, still staring at the sky, at the half-moon” (241).

The warlords and the Taliban soldiers often used children for their sexual gratification. Qais’ grandfather’s warning and advice stands as a vindication for the plight of children during the tumultuous period,

“I’m old, and they don’t need me. But they will need you for work, for their sexual pleasure,” my grandfather said. / He could see the confusion in my eyes. “I don’t have to tell you what that is, but when the time comes you’ll know it. They may use you for a while, but you must find an

opportunity to escape. I'm sure you can do that. Don't show them that you are smart. Always act stupid." (79)

Afghanistan is a land of ethnic diversity. *Pashtuns* are the dominant ethnic group and *Hazaras* are one of the most oppressed ethnic groups in the nation. The Taliban rule is infamous for inhuman violence against the *Hazaras*. The civil war marks the vigorous fight between *Pashtuns* and non-*Pashtun* groups. Many *Hazaras* were brutally attacked during the period, whereas many others were members of different militant groups to take revenge against the dominant *Pashtuns*. The narrative course of the memoir presents deep-rooted ethnic rivalry in the nation. As one of the *Hazara* militant commanders' comments:

"No it is not true. For centuries we *Hazaras* have been treated like slaves in this country. *Pashtuns* and other tribes always thought of us as outsiders, and treated us like dogs.... everybody in this country looks down on us. What have we done to this country to be treated so badly? Name me one *Hazara* who is working in a high position in this government. I assure you there is none."...

"I think this is a very smart way. Other tribes should count *Hazaras* as *Afghans*, as one of them. If they think they can do all these bad things to us, now they should learn that we can do bad things, too. We tolerated too much for too long, for centuries. Now the bowl of patience is overflowing." (86)

The narrative course of the displacement and migration of Qais' family simultaneously vindicates the illustrious features of Afghan culture and tradition. The memoir presents the exquisite geographical diversity of Afghanistan. The work is inclusive of the narrations about cities, countrysides, foothills, marshlands, alpine central highlands, and the semi desert. The climate of Afghanistan is also significantly presented in the memoir. The scorching heat of the summer and the chilling cold of winter are presented along with other climatic peculiarities of the land.

The memoir skilfully weaves together various aspects that are integral to the Afghan culture. Religion is the most prominent element that is associated with the Afghan way of living. The narrative is inclusive of the depiction of the real religious practitioners who lead their lives for the betterment of others. Unlike the warlords and the Taliban, who torture and kill others in the name of God, these common people extend their hands for the betterment of others. The narrative is inclusive of many such acts from Qais' family, Haji Noor Sher and Hamza's father who heartfully provides shelter for the family in their houses, relatives who lend their hands to the family during their journey, to name a few. Hamza's father's words stand as vindication for their approach towards fellow beings:

The old man continued. "You are welcome to stay in my house for as long as you want. Those rooms over there are for guests." He pointed to those along the south wall of the garden. "You have water, electricity, TV, and

radio. I will send you some blankets. There are mattresses and pillows in the rooms already. If you want to eat with us, you're most welcome.”...

“This garden is not mine, it is God’s,” the old man replied. “He gave it to me for use by those who need it for as long as they want. In fact, He is the owner of everything, and whatever He gives us, it is with us for only a few days.” (140)

Afghanistan is a land of diverse ethnic groups. The work is inclusive of narrations about various ethnic groups dwell in Afghanistan. Qais’ own family is of Pashtun lineage and they strictly follow the *Pashtunwali* (traditional lifestyle of Pashtuns). However, Qais realistically presents the atrocities committed by the mujahedin warlords and Taliban towards others based on ethnicity. Hazaras are one of the most oppressed ethnic groups in the nation. They are different from other groups based on their Shia orientation and distinct Asiatic features. The memoir empathetically presents the plight of Hazaras during the period of war and violence in Afghanistan. Various ethnic groups in Afghanistan such as Tajiks, Turkmen, Uzbeks, and Kuchis helps the family’s survival through their acts of kindness amid ethnic based violence by the warlords and Taliban. Qais vivaciously narrates a scene, where his parents appeared in accordance with the Kuchi nomad tradition when they were travelling with a group of Kuchis, “My mother started wearing Kuchi clothes and jewelry. Sometimes I could not pick her out of a group of women, milking the sheep and the goats as well as the cows, and shearing the sheep’s wool. My father learned how to wash wool in the river and slaughter animals and cut them into pieces for cooking or for sale to the villagers” (208).

The memoir skilfully presents language as a representation of the diverse aspects of the nation. Apart from language’s primary function as a tool for communication, it serves as the representation of various complex features such as geography, ethnicity, identity, and survival. *Dari* and *Pashto* are the two official languages of Afghanistan. Qais’ family, despite of their Pashtun ethnicity uses *Dari* as their native tongue. *Dari* is also considered as the language of the urban middle class and high literature in Kabul whereas *Pashto* is associated with administration and tribal regions. Along with *Dari* the family members were affluent in other languages as well, “Grandfather had taught himself how to read and write both *Dari* and *Pashto*, and even Arabic” (185).

The family’s use of *Dari* stands as the vindication of their interest in literary and socio-cultural aspects of the land. Qais narrates one of the pre-war routines of his grandfather, “In winter, he studies the poets Rumi, Shams Tabrizi, Hafiz, Sa’adi, and Omar-e-Khayyam. Sometimes he invited his friends to discuss the political affairs of Afghanistan and the world, but before long, the talk would turn to poetry” (19). The family’s journey through different parts of the nation often opened up encounter with people who use various dialects that vindicate the rich linguistic diversity of the nation. As Qais comments about one of his interactions

with his Kuchi cousin, “He spoke to me in Pashto, and I replied in Dari, but we could understand each other” (200). In another instance with the Turkmen family, “They spoke softly in Turkmeni, and I did not know what they were saying” (181). Along with this, references to Persian poets and works shows the family’s affinity to the literary and cultural heritage. In this manner, the memoir stands as the rich linguistic tradition of Afghanistan.

Carpet weaving is the most important aspect associated with the memoir. Qais’ family engaged in the carpet business during the pre-war period. Qais was introduced to the carpet loom by a Turkmen neighbour when they were in Mazar-e-Sherif. During his stay at Mazar, the art of carpet weaving helped him as a shield against the trauma created by displacement and migration. The newly learned mastery in carpet weaving helped him rebuild his family’s financial stability during the notorious Taliban rule by establishing a carpet weaving unit in his household. Apart from rebuilding Qais’ family’s financial stability, carpet weaving enabled him to empower several others during the time of Taliban rule. The major beneficiaries of Qais’ carpet weaving unit were women and Hazaras. Qais, along with the help of his family members enabled many unfortunate women to earn a job and gain education during the where women forced to remain within the walls of their own household:

The neighbor’s girls came to me and asked me to hire them for no salary. They just wanted to learn how to make carpets. We were Pashtuns. They were Hazaras. Weaving carpets was something that Turkmen did. But we all worked at together. ...

From for o’clock until six o’clock, we had classes. My father taught them basic mathematics, my mother showed them how to do accounting, and my older sister taught Dari grammar and literature....

A year after I started the factory, I graduated the first group of girls. They started making their own carpets in their own homes, hiring their relatives and neighbors. Some of them asked me for looms and wool. (354-57)

Thus, the memoir is a powerful narrative about one of the eventful periods in the history of Afghanistan. The narrative course of the memoir marks the beginning of Mujahedin rule and subsequent civil war. The work is inclusive of various reasons behind the emergence of civil war, atrocious events that took place during the period, trauma and sufferings of the common people, Qais’ family’s displacement and migration. The memoir poignantly presents the trauma of the Afghan populace through the experience of the family in the process of displacement and migration. The memoir also portrays the notorious events that took place in the nation during the Taliban rule. The work splendidly presents the multifarious impacts of Taliban rule that made life in Afghanistan almost impossible. However, the narrative course of the memoir portrays the past glory of Afghanistan, its cultural and religious legacy, and the inimitable story of

Afghan community's resistance and resilience during the tumultuous phase of its history.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/o8**“A SKELETON WITHOUT A SHAPE OR A NAME”: VIOLENCE,
IDENTITY, AND FRAGILE HUMANITY IN PINJAR****ABDUL MAJEED**Assistant Professor, Department of English, Raja Balwant Singh College
Dr. Bhimrao University Agra. UP. India**Abstract**

This paper examines the themes of violence, identity, and humanity in Amrita Pritam's novella *Pinjar* (1950). It attempts to find out how violence not only destroyed the home, family, and neighbourhood, but also fractured the identity to such an extent that people, particularly women, became “a skeleton without a shape or a name” (Pritam 20) during the Partition of India. The paper also aims to explore those short acts of humanity, fragile yet powerful ethical responses, moments of compassion and sympathy that reduce the dehumanising effects of violence in the novella, as it stands out for its nuanced portrayal of ethical ambiguity, emotional breakdown, unprecedented violence, fracture of the fabric of society and self. The study employs a qualitative, text-based analytical approach rooted in feminist and trauma theories to examine the interrelated themes of violence, identity and humanity in Amrita Pritam's novella *Pinjar* translated by Khushwant Singh. The study is interpretive and hermeneutic in nature. The analysis of the text is informed by three interconnected theoretical frames. Feminist poststructuralism—Taking insights from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, this study considers gender as a socially constructed classification rather than a biological given. This framework enables us to examine how patriarchal and communal structures in *Pinjar* control women's bodies, suppress their voices, and restrict their identity to purity and honour. Trauma theory – The study analyses how *Pinjar* depicts psychological wounds, informed by Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* and Dominick LaCapra's *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Trauma theory helps explain the fragmentation of identity and all kinds of violence people were going through, particularly women. Identity theory – Using the work of Stuart Hall entitled “Who Needs ‘Identity’?” and Francis Fukuyama's work *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*, the research attempts to understand identity as fluid, socially mediated, and dependent on external recognition. This lens is particularly useful for analysing Pooro's transformation into Hamida and her liminal existence between two names, religions, and communities. Thus, this study reveals how violence operates at myriad levels-physical, psychological, and structural- and how it destroys and reconstructs

identity and how moments of compassion and ethical response emerge during the violence.

Keywords: Partition Literature, Violence, Trauma Theory, Identity Crisis, Feminist Poststructuralism, Subaltern Voice, Fragile Humanity.

Introduction

The Partition of India (1947) is a defining and unforgettable moment in the history of South Asia. It is marked not only by physical violence against people and land, but it is marked by psychological trauma of loss, not only physical home and neighbourhood, but also the individual self, identity, beloved, and family. The literary representation of Partition and its impact on the human psyche goes beyond mere historical documentation. Rather, it offers a site of memory and witness to capture the emotional and psychological aspects of this Partition.

Partition literature became a significant medium through which the lived experiences of trauma, migration and loss of all kinds are articulated. It foregrounds voices that are historically unheard in communities. Among these, women's narratives hold a central place as these narratives expose how women's bodies were transformed into symbolic territories of honour, revenge, resulting in abduction, forced conversion and social ostracism. Within this broader framework, *Pinjar* by Amrita Pritam emerges as a remarkable literary breakthrough that centres on women's experiences during Partition. The novella stands out for its nuanced portrayal of ethical ambiguity, emotional breakdown, unprecedented violence, fracture of the fabric of society and self. In the novella, violence not only inflicts physical harm, but it also dismantles the very foundations of identity, especially for women whose identity is socially established through familial, cultural and religious affiliations.

Simultaneously, the novella presents moments of compassion and ethical acts that reduce the dehumanising effects of violence. This intersectionality informs that identity, and humanity cannot be understood independently of the structures of violence that shape them. The study argues that in *Pinjar*, violence often dehumanises people, particularly women, and it fractures identity and reconstructs it within the context of gendered experience. A fragile yet powerful ethical response emerges as a response that resists dehumanisation through acts of empathy, compassion, and recognition. Violence pervades throughout the novella *Pinjar*. As any book on the history of the Partition of India is brimming with descriptions of violence, so too is the novella, in different forms.

Literature Review

The existing scholarship on *Pinjar* has largely developed within the broader field of partition studies and trauma theory. Many scholars have engaged with violence against women, the crisis of identity, and the repercussions of Partition in the novel. However, while these themes have been extensively studied, they are often dealt with as distinct categories rather than as interconnected dimensions of a

larger human experience. Studies such as “Partition and Womanhood: Amrita Pritam’s *Pinjar*” seek to understand the “dreadful nature of female assaults through Jolle Demmers’ theory of structural violence, positioning the traumatised minds of female victims inside the shame-fear-dishonour syndrome articulated in Urvashi Butalia’s *Borders and Boundaries* (Srinivasan and Jacob).

“Toward a cognitive poetics of history: *Pinjar*, the Ramayana, and Partition” By Patrick Hogan links Pakistan with Ravana and India with Rama. At the same time, however, it engages in both types of ideological critique. First, it challenges the historical adequacy of this mythological employment of history. One possible difficulty with such a challenge is that it may produce a sort of inverted oversimplification – perhaps a reductive story that celebrates Pakistan over India to counter a prior reductive celebration of India over Pakistan. *Pinjar* does not present us with such a “reactive reduction.” Rather, it explores the background to violence and the humanity of the people who engage in it – including their own combination of benevolent and malevolent impulses, admirable and objectionable traits (Mehta and Mookerjee-Leonard).

The paper entitled “Representing Partition: poetics of emotion in *Pinjar* by Lalita Pandit Hogan investigates how *Pinjar* employs poetics of emotion to depict trauma and displacement during Partition through Bakhtin’s concept of the artistic chronotope. Hogan analyses how cinematic techniques such as montage, symbolism, and song anaesthetise feelings of fear, hate, and anger and facilitate collective mourning without overwhelming viewers. Drawing on David Novitz’s idea of emotional anaesthetisation, the study highlights how media evoke empathy by touching emotional chords rather than explicit rational persuasion.

Scholarly discussions on the novella *Pinjar* majorly include the representation of violence, trauma and suffering of women during the Partition of India. Feminist historians such as Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin highlight that women’s bodies became symbolic sites of communal revenge, honour, and patriarchal control during Partition. Despite a body of scholarly criticism on *Pinjar* and related works, there remains a noticeable gap in the integrated, interconnected study of violence, identity, and humanity. Most studies tend to examine these themes separately, focusing either on gendered violence, identity crisis, or trauma, without fully examining how these elements interact within the narrative framework. This partial study of the novella limits a comprehensive understanding of a novel’s thematic depth. Therefore, the present study seeks to bridge this gap by analysing how violence in *Pinjar* not only disrupts identity but also gives new forms of humanity, thereby offering a more holistic interpretation of the text.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative, text-based analytical approach rooted in feminist and trauma theories to examine the interrelated themes of violence, identity and humanity in Amrita Pritam’s novella *Pinjar*. The study is interpretive and hermeneutic in nature. The analysis of the text is informed by three interconnected

theoretical frames. Feminist poststructuralism—Taking insights from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?", this study considers gender as a socially constructed classification rather than a biological given. This framework enables us to examine how patriarchal and communal structures in *Pinjar* control women's bodies, suppress their voices, and restrict their identity to purity and honour. Trauma theory – The study analyses how *Pinjar* depicts psychological wounds, informed by Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* and Dominick LaCapra's *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Trauma theory helps explain the fragmentation of identity and all kinds of violence people were going through, particularly women. Identity theory – Using the work of Stuart Hall entitled "Who Needs 'Identity'?" and Francis Fukuyama's work *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*, the researcher attempts to understand identity as fluid, socially mediated, and dependent on external recognition. This lens is particularly useful for analysing Pooro's transformation into Hamida and her liminal existence between two names, religions, and communities.

Analysis of the Text *Pinjar*

Violence

At the beginning of the novella, when Pooro encounters Rashida for the first time, "Pooro screamed and ran past Rashida." (Pritam 11). After a couple of days, she "heard a sound and looked up. Rashid was standing by the trunk of a tree staring at her. Pooro felt the blood drain from her legs" (12). Here arises a question: why did she scream and run? Why did she feel that the blood is draining from her legs? What sort of fear was she experiencing? The fear seems to stem from various causes. One of them is the internalisation of patriarchal violence already present in society. She fears because she is a female. In the context of the Partition of India, women's bodies became sites of communal violence. So, one can conclude that the fear is a result of social conditioning. So Pooro's fear was not merely an emotional response during her encounter with Rashida, but a manifestation of pervasive violence embedded in patriarchal and communal structures where the female body becomes a site of power, control, and honour.

One afternoon, she went to her field to get a handful of okra beans. "Before she could get off the footpath, she felt something hit her violently on her right shoulder. She reeled under the blow; she felt a human arm entwine about her waist and lift her into the air. She found herself lying across the horse's saddle." (13-14). It is the moment when she experienced physical violence, along with psychological violence. She was abducted and locked in a room. When she came to know that Rashida had abducted her, she fell back unconscious on the charpoy, believing that a bear had brought her into a cave, and she would be desecrated in every way possible. "She dreamed she was in a cave. A Black bear was combing

her hair with its claws. She shrank, while the bear grew bigger and bigger. The bear took her in its shaggy embrace..." (14).

Later, she was forced to marry Rashida. This enforcement reflects the patriarchal control over women's bodies and their agency, as Simon de Beauvoir aptly said, "one is not born but rather becomes a woman." (de Beauvoir 283). She was forced into a role that is constructed by society. Moreover, Kate Millet says that the patriarchal chief institution is the family. She has been forcefully thrown into a relationship that is not only consensual, but it is also forceful. Moreover, as Spivak puts it, here she has been silenced: she, the subaltern, cannot speak. Moreover, when she escaped from the hand of Rashida and reached her parents' home, she was refused entry, and she was asked to leave. Why was she rejected? "Who will marry you now? You have lost your religion and birthright. If we dare to help you, we will be wiped out without a trace of blood left behind to tell of our fate" (Pritam19). It seems the family is working under socio-political norms; she was forced to suffer social violence. The family that was supposed to protect becomes a site of violence. It also highlights how communal fear and patriarchal honour have erased her identity, dignity, and humanity. It also illustrates that she has been rejected because she has lost purity. Because her value is tied to honour and purity, not to her agency and individuality. Here, she does not fit the proper role of women set by patriarchy. In other words, patriarchy turns the victim of myriad violence into the outcast.

There is a force of silence imposed upon the different characters from Pooro to Taro. The latter became secondary in the house after her husband married another woman. Her skin colour changed; she was going through internal violence. "She had been getting fainting fits" (29). When Pooro met her tried a lot to know her silent sufferings. She refuses time and again. This suffocating silence was not bearable for her; however, she was bearing it because of the social and religious norms, as she burst out: "When parents give away a daughter in marriage, they put a noose around her neck and hand the other end of the rope to the man of their choice." (30). Here, the metaphor is powerful: marriage has been compared to a noose around the neck. It is similar to putting a noose around the neck to execute and suffocate a criminal or to control a pet. It aligns with the feminist notion that marriage is institutional violence against women in the guise of tradition and social norms. In this long conversation, she also states: "What can I tell you?" When a girl is given in marriage, God deprives her of her tongue, so that she may not complain" (30). Here, the statement symbolises the internalised violence of patriarchy that has been naturalised in a way that silence appears virtue, and this oppression has been normalised as divine will.

Structural violence is also reflected in her statement, "For two years I have had to sell my body for a mess of pottage and a few rags." (31). The economic and patriarchal structure has forced her into forced prostitution. Women at the time of Partition were considered both an honour and a burden on their parents. Taro

further exploded, “Only my lips are sealed and my feet put in fetters”. (31). It indicates that women, particularly wives, were not allowed to speak up and express their desires. They were systematically trained in a way that they cannot dare speak. “The subaltern cannot speak in Spivak’s phrase. Through the character of the unnamed madwoman, Pritam exposes the worst condition of women. Women at that time suffered unimaginable pain and pangs inflicted upon them due to the Partition. It resulted in their succumbing to madness. They were targeted with multilayered violence: sexual, social and structural.

When Hamida visited the field outside of the village where a mad woman was thrown, going through the pains of labour, “she asked herself. Did she consent to the act, or was she raped? Did the man realise what he was perpetrating on a lunatic woman? Did he know what would happen to the seed he had planted in the vagrant’s womb?” (35). Thus, the mad woman becomes the symbol of those voiceless victims of the Partition whose suffering remains unrecorded in history. During Partition, violence was not limited to physical harm to the individuals, but it was extended beyond that. It was so horrific that “it was said that men were being slaughtered in hundreds; rows of houses were being burnt down; neighbours were slitting each other’s throats. No one’s life or property was safe.” (49).

Identity

Identity played a significant role throughout the novella. It emerges as a fragmented and contested construct shaped by patriarchy, communal politics and violence. Pooro’s transformation into Hamida reflects how an identity fractured and reconstructed. Earlier, her identity was shaped by her association with her name, parents, family, village, and Hindu community. However, when a Muslim man abducted her, she was compelled to disassociate herself with her family, her religion and her community. She was forced to leave her home, her family, and even her village and community. What forced her to change her identity? Her parents refused to accept her on the grounds of lost honour and religion. “Who will marry you now? You have lost your religion and birthright.” (19). It unfolds that identity is not an innate, inherent quality but rather socially constructed and dependent on recognition. Pooro is alive, but she is socially erased. The unfortunate thing is that parents are not concerned with the suffering of Pooro, but they are more worried about her marriageability and family honour. This reveals that Pooro’s identity is tied to the purity of body and social reputation. The line “you lost your religion” reflects that community identity overrode human relationships. From the lens of feminism, she was reduced to body and family honour. Once honour is erased, her existence has no meaning.

After forced marriage, she was transformed into a new identity, Hamida. The man tattooed the new name she had been given during her marriage to Rashida. From that day, “Hamida” was not only inscribed on her skin in dark green letters, but everyone began to call her by that name.” (20). After that, she was swinging between two names, “Hamida by day, Pooro by night”. Between her past Hindu

identity and her current Muslim identity, and between two worlds. It reflects her liminal existence; here, it aligns with Stuart Hall's idea of identity as fluid and constructed. ("Who Needs Identity?"). Additionally, it reflects her lack of agency over her identity; however, later, in her final decision to stay with Rashida, she shows partial agency. "In reality, she was neither one nor the other; she was just a skeleton without a shape or a name." (Pritam 20). The metaphor of the skeleton in this statement illustrates the complete erasure of her identity, reducing her to a nameless, shapeless woman. It symbolises the emptiness and loss of identity. As per Francis Fukuyama, identity depends on recognition by the external world. (*Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*). She was not fully accepted anywhere; in her dreams, she was recognised as Pooro. "In her dreams...everyone still called her Pooro" (Pritam 20). In the latter half of the novella, Pooro reconstructs her identity, adapts to a new name and culture, and gains emotional strength, agency, and ethical choice.

Another very powerful character presented in the novella is the madwoman. She has no name, no social recognition, no memory. She remains in permanent loss. She actually represents the extreme erasure of identity caused by violence and Partition. She also symbolises the countless voiceless women whose identities were obliterated by violence and trauma.

Humanity

In the context of extreme violence and chaos during the Partition, humanity emerges as both fragile and resilient. During this period, human dignity, ethical values and inhumane behaviour were prevalent. However, the hidden ray of hope of humanity, compassion, and empathy were also exhibited. Humanity in the character of Rashida emerges in a very complex sociopolitical condition. In the initial stage, he appears as a criminal and becomes a kidnapper as he abducts Pooro, a Hindu girl. However, he did it because of family revenge and patriarchal assertion. This act reflects dehumanisation. However, after he abducts Pooro, he does not harm her. Rather, he restrains and keeps quiet. "I promise that no harm will come to you for the rest of your life." (16). In another moment, he stated, "Pooro, I will put the world at your feet." (17). He showed love and emotion on multiple occasions. When Pooro was in labour pain, he was also restless. "He wished he could take some if not all of the pain from his wife's body in to his.... He wanted to make up to her. So far, he had brought her nothing but tears" (24). It seems he feels remorse and guilt for making her shed tears. He has now transformed himself and shows sympathy and empathy.

Kammo, another significant character in the novella, was abandoned by her father. For her, her father became stepfather after her mother died, and he married another woman who treats her very badly and forces her to work, although she was still young. Hamida always wants to sympathise with those who are suffering. She always wants to talk to Kammo and help her as she said "she wanted to take the heavy pither from the shoulders of the frail, twelve year old girl, but hesitated to

make the move.” (26). Hesitation was because of the incompatibility, as Kammo believes that Hamida will pollute, as she is a Muslim and Kammo is a Hindu girl. “You will pollute my pitcher” (26). Despite this, Hamida always wants to help her break pieces of bread and feed her with her own hand.

Pooro showed her empathic behaviour with other characters also. She tried to understand the suffering; Taro was going through to ease her burden of sorrow. She convinced her to speak up and share her sorrows with her, as she was suffocating herself. She was so empathetic and soothing that she not only gave solace with her words but also helped physically, pressing the girl’s limbs and massaging the soles of her feet. Helping Taro was not easy for her, as the social and cultural circumstances were unfavourable; society sees Taro as fallen and impure. However, she saw Taro as a human being in pain. She helped her going beyond the barriers of community and religion.

At another point in time, when she went out of her home as a habit, she found the mad woman “dead as a block of stone and between her legs was a newborn baby” (35). She rushed back home to fetch her husband and help with the dead baby’s body. Later, she brought the baby with her and began feeding and caring for her. Other women widely lauded this act of humanity and compassion. After a few days, a lot of chaos started buzzing in the society related to the religion of the boy, as people started buzzing that the mad woman was a Hindu. However, she courageously went beyond religion to save the life of the child. She said, “Allah out of his infinite mercy picked me to save the life of a child”. (39)

The episode of Lajo’s rescue in the novella also reflects humanity’s assertion amid violence and chaos. However, despite belonging to different religions, Pooro and Rashida collaborated to help Lajo escape and reunite with her husband. Pooro recognised her own suffering in Lajo’s life. Therefore, motivated by empathy and moral courage, she went beyond all sorts of barriers. Moreover, Rashida’s participation in this support reflects his metamorphosis from an agent of violence to one of compassion. Their actions demonstrate that humanity survives not in social structures, but in individual acts of ethical responsibility and recognition.

Discussion

The analysis section of the study indicates that gendered violence in *Pinjar* operates at multiple levels, including physical, psychological, structural, and social. It also reveals that violence not only destroys the body but effectively fractures and reconstructs identity. Moreover, it establishes that ethical responses also emerge in the circumstances of violence and dehumanisation. This discussion interprets these findings in relation to existing international scholarship and outlines broader implications for Partition literature and trauma studies.

Violence, trauma and callousness against women have been examined in the previous studies on *Pinjar* (1950). For instance, on one hand, Srinivasan and Jacob focus on structural violence through Demmers’ theory. On the other hand, Chakraborty emphasises the lack of representation of women’s suffering in

official documentation, and Pandit Hogan's examination of emotional anaesthetisation through Bakhtin's chronotope. Each of these studies makes valuable contributions, yet they largely treat violence, identity, and ethical response as separate analytical compartments. The present study's integrated analysis reveals that these dimensions are mutually constitutive rather than distinct categories. Pooro's abduction, a form of physical violence, is inseparable from her social erasure by her parents, which is structural violence.

Furthermore, it in turn produces her liminal identity crisis. That is why she was called "Hamida by day, Pooro by night". Her final decision to remain with Rashida is not a passive acceptance of violence. Rather, it is an ethical act of partial agency. This proves a fragile reconstruction of humanity within constraints.

These findings challenge portrayals of Pooro as solely a victim. Instead, it aligns with Veena Das's work on *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, in which she argues that survivors of collective violence remake their lives through small, everyday acts of agency rather than grand, heroic gestures. Cathy Caruth, in her work *Unclaimed Experience*, argues that traumatic events are not fully experienced at the time of occurrence but return as fragmented memories, nightmares, and bodily symptoms. Pooro's dream of the black bear "She shrank, while the bear grew bigger and bigger" (14) perfectly illustrates this unclaimed experience. The bear is not a literal memory but a traumatic screen memory that condenses the terror of abduction, forced marriage, and loss of self.

Furthermore, Dominick LaCapra, a prominent American scholar known for intellectual history and trauma studies. He offered concepts of "acting out" (repetitive reliving of trauma) and "working through" (narrative integration of trauma) in his work, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. (LaCapra). Pooro's oscillation between two names represents a prolonged state of acting out as she remains trapped between identities. Nevertheless, her final choice to stay with Rashida and her ethical recognition of the madwoman's suffering suggest the beginnings of working through. This finding complicates LaCapra's binary by showing that working through can be partial and incomplete, and that it can coexist with ongoing fragmentation.

The nameless madwoman occupies a very significant place in the novella. Contrary to Pooro/Hamida, who ultimately obtains partial agency and recognition, the madwoman has neither a name, a family, nor memory, and no voice. She perfectly represents what Spivak calls the "subaltern". The one who can speak not because she lacks language but because of the structures of recognition that would have been broken.

This finding extends the arguments of Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, who argue that women's bodies became symbolic territories during Partition. The body of the madwoman has been treated not only as a territory but a wasteland – abandoned, pregnant through rape, and left to give birth alone in a field. Hamida's questions – "Did she consent to the act or was she raped? Did the man realise what he was

perpetrating on a lunatic woman?" (Pritam 35) – perform an ethical witnessing that official historiography refuses. In this sense, *Pinjar* does what Hayden White argues historical documentation cannot: it provides a narrative space for the unrepresentable. (Flores and White)

This study primarily focuses on *Pinjar*; however, its findings and results resonate with other artefacts of Partition. In Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, originally published as *Ice-Candy Man*, the character Lenny, a Parsee girl, witnesses the abduction and forced conversion of women. "She was exposed to the language of violence that called for war between children of one land, which called for division—of land, and faith, and hearts" (Khan). Moreover, the protagonist, Ayah, is similarly reduced to a body defined by communal identity. However, unlike Pooro, Ayah is eventually rescued and sent to a women's camp. This difference of portrayal indicates that *Pinjar* offers a more ambiguous and ethically complex resolution: Pooro is not rescued but chooses to remain, rejecting both her natal family's rejection and a simplistic return to "original" identity. In *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh, the impact of Partition on society is primarily shown through the male experiences.

The sufferings of women have been largely represented as secondary, and their suffering is often recorded as a mere detail (Qasim and Qasim). *Pinjar*, by contrast, centres female subjectivity throughout, even when that subjectivity is fractured or silenced. This contrast underscores the novella's distinctive contribution to Partition literature: it refuses to make women's trauma a subplot or a metaphor for national tragedy.

Conclusion

The present study has explored the portrayal of violence, identity, and humanity in the novella *Pinjar*. The study has established that the Partition of India deeply affected people's memories. It reveals through the characters of Pooro/Hamida, Taro and the madwoman that the violence was not only confined to physical brutality, but it extended into the realm of human psychology, social institutions and gendered dimensions. Women in particular became the vulnerable victims of the Partition, patriarchy and communal strife in which their bodies symbolised honour, purity and revenge.

Furthermore, the study establishes that external forces such as patriarchy, communal strife, and violence change identity. Pooro's transformation into Hamida mirrors the traumatic reconstruction of identity. Her rejection by her parents illustrates how patriarchal structures preferred honour to humanity, thereby erasing women's individuality and agency. Simultaneously, the novella does not portray its female characters as merely passive figures. Rather, it showcases the gradual emergence of ethical awakening and partial agency through acts of compassion, empathy and ethical responses. Pooro's final decision shows a fragile but powerful assertion of humanity, though it is shaped by trauma and displacement.

Moreover, bringing various literary theories into discussion, the study has established that violence, identity, and humanity in the text are deeply interlinked. Therefore, it contributes to Partition Studies by offering a more integrated understanding. Additionally, it underscores the significance of art in portraying experiences that official historical documents mostly fail to capture.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/09**THE AFRICAN LABOR COMMUNITY IN TAY HO, HANOI:
MIGRATION EXPECTATIONS AND PRACTICES****NGO DIEU ANH**

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Abstract

African migration has been widely studied in relation to developed countries, yet movements toward Global South destinations, particularly Southeast Asia, remain relatively underexplored. In recent years, Vietnam has become both a destination and transit point with a growing number of African labor migrants; however, this migration pattern remains insufficiently examined in academic literature. This study investigates the key drivers of African migration to Vietnam and then assesses the extent to which migrants lived experiences align with their pre-migration expectations. Adopting a qualitative approach, it focuses on African migrants in Tay Ho, Hanoi, using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling methods. The responses are analyzed using discourse analysis, utilizing the Push-Pull Theory of Migration. Findings indicate that migration decisions are primarily driven by economic “pull” factors, particularly affordable living costs and perceived occupational opportunities, alongside “push” factors including unemployment and economic hardship in countries of origin. However, the study also argues that migrants encounter a mismatch between expectations and reality, arising from both economic factors (mainly in the form of unstable employment) and social factors (discrimination in racialized hiring practices and legal constraints). These discrepancies carry important implications, informing policy recommendations for both origin and host countries. By centering migrant voices, this study expands current research on African migration and highlights Vietnam’s emerging role within South-South migration patterns. The results also show the gap between migrants’ pre-migration expectations and their lived experiences, contributing to a better understanding of the challenges of African labor migration in Vietnam.

Keywords: South-South migration, African labor, migration expectations and practices, push-pull factors, qualitative research, Vietnam

1. Introduction

Migration is an inherent aspect of human life, deeply rooted in history and present across all societies, periods and cultures. While it cannot be eliminated, it can be effectively managed to support and accelerate development (Atong et al.). African migration is frequently described as a mass migration out of the continent, but the reality is more complicated. Most African migration occurred within the continent, with 80% of African migrants having no interest in leaving the continent. Africa accounts for only 14% of the global migrant population, compared to 41% from Asia and 24% from Europe (The Africa Center for Strategic Studies). In addition, the number of Africans living in another African country reached 15 millions by 2024, reflecting a 25% growth over the preceding decade (Williams, "African Migration Trends to Watch in 2025").

Among those who do move beyond Africa, the destination picture is shifting. While Europe remains the most popular destination outside the continent, Africans constitute only 8,2% of all migrants in Europe in 2024 (Williams, "African Migration Trends to Watch in 2024"). In contrast, Asia has emerged as a growing alternative, accommodating nearly 5 million African migrants, or about 12% of the total (African Development Bank). Countries such as India, China and Turkey were among the fastest-growing in the early 21st century, with the African migrant population in these locations increasing at an average annual rate of 4.2% between 2000 and 2015 (Taddele Maru). Beyond that, non-traditional Asian destinations, such as Southeast Asia, have gradually entered the African migratory landscape, due to expanding trade networks, educational opportunities, and deepening bilateral economic ties. Researchers and international observers have highlighted the bigger role of non-traditional Asian destinations in African migration, describing the shift as an "interesting emerging trend" in global mobility (Morangi).

Vietnam, as an emerging economy in Asia has now been recorded as a new destination for African labor migrants. Vietnamese media reported Tay Ho as a hub for a growing African migrant population that came to Vietnam in search of work and better living conditions (Huong Quynh). Even though this community is receiving more media attention, there is still a lack of academic literature and government reporting on what motivates African labor migration to Vietnam, how migrants' actual experiences differ from their prior expectations, and the role of employers, communities, and institutions in influencing those outcomes. This study seeks to address that gap.

This study aims to explore the Push-Pull factors driving labor migration decisions and the lived experiences of African migrants residing in Tay Ho, Hanoi to analyze

the gap between their expectations and post-arrival realities. To achieve this, the study pursues three specific objectives:

1. to examine the Push-Pull factors that influence African labor migrants' decisions to move to Vietnam;
2. to investigate the lived experiences of these migrants in terms of working conditions and daily life;
3. to analyze the gap between pre-migration expectations and life in realities, and explore the underlying factors that contribute to this disparity.

Guided by the objectives outlined above, this research seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What is the socio-demographic profile of the African migrant labor community residing in Tay Ho, Hanoi?
2. What are the primary push and pull factors driving African nationals to choose Vietnam, specifically Tay Ho, as a labor migration destination? Are those factors linked to their pre-immigration expectations?
3. What are the expectations and actual experiences of African migrants in Tay Ho?
4. How do African migrants' expectations differ from the realities they encounter?
5. What are the potential explanations for those gaps and what could these discrepancies result in?

1. Literature review

1.1. Theory on Push and Pull factors of Migration

Push-pull theory originated from Everett Lee in 1966. Lee highlights that migration is the result of connection among certain factors, including factors associated with the place of origin, factors associated with destination area, intervening obstacles and personal factors (Urbański). It explains migration through the interplay of negative factors (push) that drive people from their origin and positive factors (pull) that attract them to a destination.

Push factors refer to unfavorable conditions that force people to leave their home country. Push factors include poverty, low livelihood opportunities, natural disasters, conflicts, lack of educational opportunities, lack of religious tolerance, unfair legal systems, poor healthcare, bad governance, fear of political persecution, etc (Adaoma and Ezeonu, 66). In contrast, pull factors induce people to move into new locations. There can be more job opportunities, better living conditions, better healthcare system, superior education, political and religious freedom, security, etc. Both push and pull factors can be economical, social, political, cultural and environmental.

While push factors are the ones that exist in the place of origin and act as motivators for people to leave, pull factors are present at the destination, attracting people to come. Migrants weigh both push and pull drivers before a final decision is taken. In other words, migration can only occur if the reasons for emigrating

(the push) appear to have a solution in the pull destination (Adaoma and Ezenuo, 67). For instance, in the context of labor migration, the lack of job opportunities in the areas of origin characterize the push factors and the pull factors are the availability of economic opportunities in the receiving country. Then migration might take place after considering the cost-benefit of these two factors. However, migrants have better and more realistic knowledge about their home country while their knowledge about the destination one is superficial.

1.2. Literature on African migration

1.2.1. African migration through the traditional approach: Push - pull factors

Much of the current literature remains geographically biased, focusing on major migration corridors: 40 million Africans emigrate to North America, Europe, and other African countries (IOM). The AfDB and IOM report also indicated over 18 million African laborers relocated domestically on the continent. The top destinations are South Africa (2.9 million), Côte d'Ivoire (2.5 million), and Uganda (1.7 million) (AfDB and IOM). Studies often explain migration from Africa as a consequence of negative factors in the country of origin, particularly poverty, unemployment, and political instability (IOM). Flahaux and de Haas provided crucial historical baseline context and agreed with push factors including poverty, demographic pressure, violent conflict or environmental degradation. Additionally, according to Trends in African Migration to Europe: Drivers beyond Economic Motivations, African migrants seek refugee status in Europe due to political unrest, fear of ethnic persecution, or political beliefs (Giménez-Gómez et al. 20). It can be seen that the diaspora engagement, climate-induced migrations, and skills mobility are major driving forces for African migration, both intra-Africa and worldwide. Meanwhile, emerging destinations such as Asia have not been adequately studied. This highlights the need to broaden the scope of research to less-noticed contexts.

2.2.2. African migration beyond traditional destinations and traditional approach Research by Flahaux and Hein de Haas indicated that migration was not simply a passive response to poverty but was linked to the so-called “development paradox,” in which average levels of development could increase the likelihood and desire to migrate. This suggests that migration is a proactive livelihood strategy, rather than merely a consequence of economic pressure.

China

Current studies on African migration in Asia focus primarily on China, particularly the Guangzhou region. Bodomo stated that the presence of Africans in China represents a new and powerful form of South - South migration, as well as the development of migrant communities (Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Inequalities and Well-Being of Africans in China). According to Kohnert, African migrants rarely choose China as their initial destination (Kohnert 7). Because restrictive immigration laws hindered migrants' attempts to enter the

EU or the USA, it instead provided a second-best option (Haugen). African migrant entrepreneurs were able to take advantage of new opportunities presented by China's economic opening in the early 2000s, changing social and commercial ties and rearranging urban areas (Lyons et al.; Kohnert). Notably, for African migrants, South China emerged as the new Promised Land (Lan; Marfaing et al.; Giese et al.). Their level of perceived security in their new nation is highly predicted by their happiness with their better economic circumstances in China, family support, and past mistreatment in their home country. Their security evaluation also contributed to their confidence in other Chinese business owners (Song et al.; Kohnert).

Thailand

Previous research on Thailand's inward immigration is well-known in both sociology and economics. Three primary pull factors were identified by Hiroaki Sakurai and Kenji Nozaki's study: growing income disparities, lower unemployment & poverty, and reducing FDI & per capita GDP as a result of low-skilled workers coming to Thailand and earning lower salaries (Sakurai and Kenji. 6). Furthermore, according to the 2019 Thailand Migration Report, African entrepreneurs who have access to regional markets find cities like Bangkok appealing since they have developed into hubs for African traders selling textiles, used products, and other commodities (Harkins).

Studies on diaspora communities have shown that the presence of Africans in Asia, while not new, is undervalued in academic research. Much of the current research is fragmented and geographically focused, mainly revolving around China, while other contexts such as Thailand, though explored, lack sufficient depth and generalization, and Vietnam remains largely unexplored.

1.2.2. Expectation-Reality discrepancies among migrants

While Push-Pull theory has mainly been used to explain why migrants choose to migrate, more contemporary migration studies have increasingly highlighted the importance of expectations in the form of aspirations, migrant imaginaries, and informational asymmetry in anticipating migration and impacting post-migration adaptation.

A key approach in modern migration research is analyzing the gap between migrants' expectations and reality. According to Hein de Haas, migration decisions are influenced not only by structural factors but also by individual aspirations and capabilities.

Migrants' expectations are often formed within a context of informational asymmetry, where informal sources such as social networks or labor brokers may provide incomplete or idealized images of the destination. Therefore, pre-migration expectations are often more optimistic than reality.

Furthermore, studies in the International Migration Review show that the discrepancy between expectations and reality can lead to disappointment, adjustments to livelihood strategies, or even decisions to return home. However,

most current studies still approach these factors separately, failing to fully integrate migration motivations, expectation formation processes, and real-world experiences within a single analytical framework.

1.3. Research gaps

Research into African labor migration has traditionally focused on movements towards the West or the Gulf, leaving a significant gap in research on African migration to Vietnam. Vietnamese studies, by contrast, typically prioritize internal and external migration patterns or intra-Asia mobility. African flows to Vietnam receive little attention despite the country's growing status as a destination for foreign labor (Le and Tran). Therefore, there is an absence in academic literature on African workers selecting Vietnam as a destination. Moreover, studies on Vietnam's foreign labor lean toward formal and regulated sectors, leaving the informal ones in the shadows.

Notably, available sources on African workers in Hanoi - primarily journalistic accounts of recent influxes (mainly from Nigeria, Ghana and Somalia) into Tu Lien Ward - describe their informal labor in roles like dishwashing and manual loading (Ngọc Anh; Pham Nga & Quynh; Nguyễn Ngoan). None of these meet the criteria of peer-reviewed analysis or empirical research on the topic. Consequently, there remains a significant gap in studies either approaching African communities in Vietnam or Hanoi or migrant-centered analyses of expectations and practices. This study addresses this void by centering emic perspectives directly from the migrants themselves.

1.4. Contribution of this study

This study enhances migration research in two principal dimensions: research context and practical significance.

In terms of research context, by focusing on Vietnam, which represents an emerging destination within this South - South migration trend, this study expands the geographic scope of African labor migration research. By surveying the African labor community in Tay Ho, Hanoi, this study provides evidence to a relatively underexplored context, thereby facilitating a deeper comprehension of the diversity of African migration flows in Asia.

In terms of practical significance, this study examines two different groups: legal migrants and legal migrants who have overstayed. This inclusion highlights the differences between expectations and actual experiences, particularly illustrating the perilous conditions migrants face in unstable or unlawful legal and employment circumstances, as well as the challenges they encounter in accessing essential services such as healthcare and achieving social integration. These findings not only bridge the disparity between migrants' expectations and their actual experiences but also inform the implications for this demographic of foreign workers.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

A qualitative case study approach is chosen for this research. This design can offer a more objective viewpoint and help the group research gain a thorough understanding of a particular group of individuals in a particular setting. This inductive approach also guarantees a deeper understanding of the examined group, the African migrant workers in Hanoi, which is a minority cohort with unique social and cultural characteristics. The main technique used in this study is semi-structured interview, which keeps the research process open to new information, while still maintaining a deeper understanding.

2.2. Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process was conducted in two phases using purposive and snowball sampling techniques, with the same interview guide structure to maintain consistency.

The first phase (April to May 2025) focused on establishing foundational findings, using the purposive sampling method. Only African migrants in Tay Ho, Hanoi, were contacted and included for the interview process. Besides, the participants must be able to communicate in Vietnamese or English, as the interviews are conducted in one of these two languages. The research team also aims to include both regular (with work permits/visas) and irregular (undocumented) migrants when discussing legal status to ensure the generality of the answer.

The second phase (February to April 2026) expanded the sample size and further explored policy implications by applying the snowball sampling method. The research team successfully contacted five more African laborers and conducted interviews with them in three weeks with the assistance of the seed participants. Overall, 17 interviews were performed using these sample techniques.

2.3. Data Analysis Procedures

Interviews were conducted following participants' consent and transcribed into written documents for analysis. The interview transcripts were repeatedly reviewed to identify common threads, experiences, migration stories, and migration motives and expectations in the post-migration experiences. Instead of using a strict coding system, the analysis was an interpretive process that emphasized patterns of meaning across participants' accounts to draw interpretations of larger patterns and themes from the interviews.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

A consent form was shared with the participants to explain the purpose of the study, data collection and rights of the participants including the recording of audio, video and the participant's right to stop at any time. The study included only those who signed up to have their names written down and filmed. In addition, anonymity was ensured and all recordings were erased after transcribing. The information along with the consent form was verbally presented to the participants prior to the interview. The consent form is attached as an appendix of the paper.

The group research also ensures that there is no research misconduct or plagiarism at our work.

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1. Demographic information

The table below summarizes the general demographic profiles of the participants, including nationality, gender and age. The sample mainly consists of male migrants, with Nigerians representing the largest group. Most of the migrants were also within the working age groups, suggesting active labor migration patterns.

Variable(s)	Majority category	Description
National origin	Nigeria (58,8%)	Diverse African countries, with Nigerians representing the largest group.
Gender and race	Male (88.2%) Black Africans	Males are predominant - traditional gendered migration patterns in South-South corridors, where men often act as "pioneers." Moreover, all interviewees identified as Black Africans.
Age	17-30 years old (47.1%) 31 to 40 years old (52.9%)	Diversity in life stages and migration motivations.

Figure 1: Summary of Key Findings and Analytical significance

Besides these characteristics above, figure 2 further illustrates the relationship between participants' educational levels and employment status. The findings reflect that most respondents held bachelor's degrees or higher qualifications and were employed in full-time jobs. African migrants generally entered Vietnam with considerable educational capital and professional competencies.

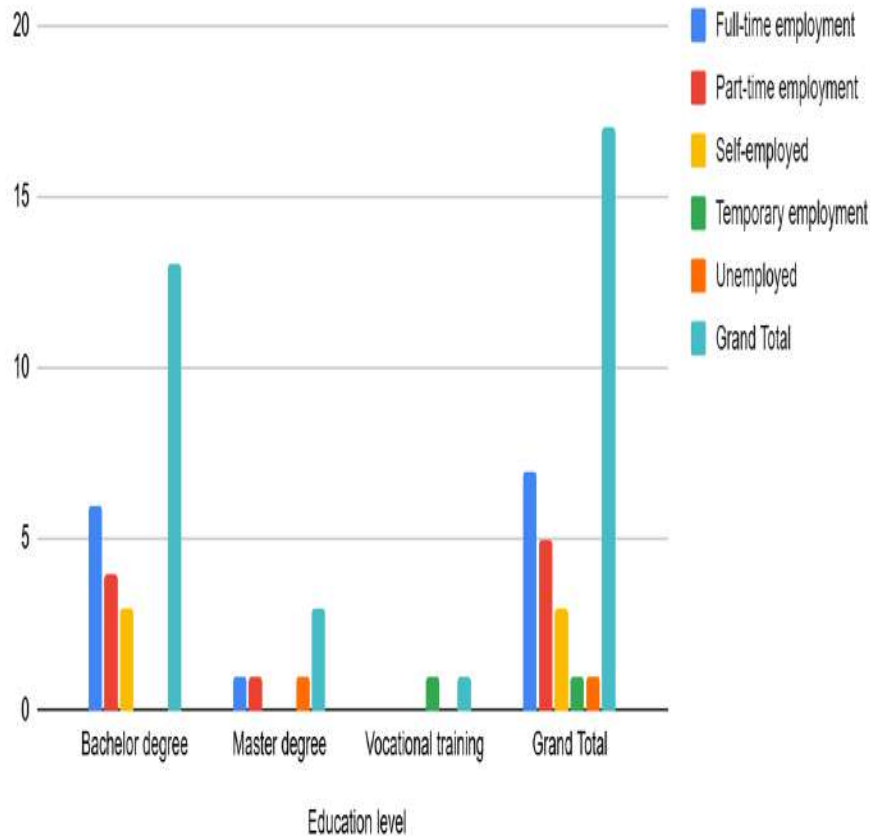


Figure 2: Educational background and employment status of participants

In addition, figure 3 demonstrates the connection between visa type and legal status. The pattern shows that many migrants entered Vietnam through business visa, while several cases of unclear or flexible legal status revealed the adaptive nature of migrants' residency and employment strategies in Tay Ho, Hanoi.

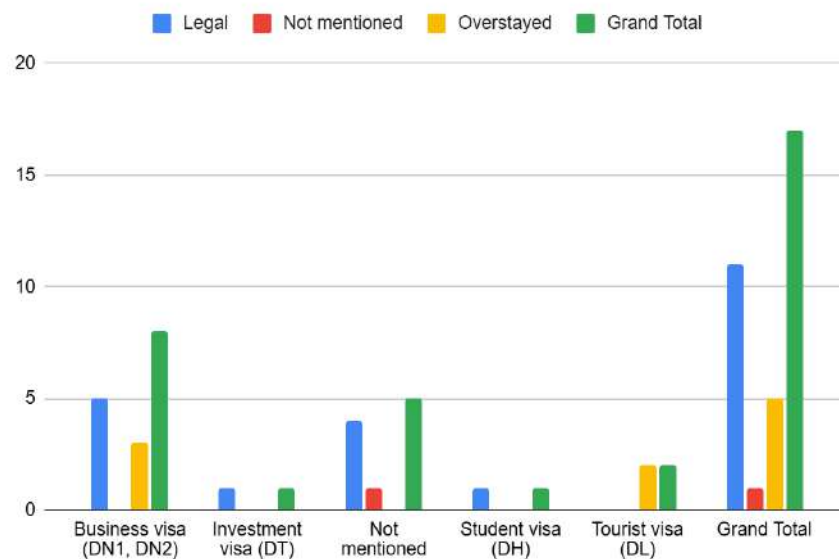


Figure 3: Visa type and legal status of participants

3.2. Migration motivations & pre-migration expectations formation

The motivations driving African migration to Vietnam for work are focused on economic and social factors, which is consistent with African migration flows to other countries.

Economic factors are the most prominent drivers of African migration, with both push and pull factors. Most participants indicate that the economic situation at home is likely inactive due to limited employment prospects and unstable living standards. Their homelands are described as “developing countries” or “poor” which show little long-term financial security. Meanwhile, Vietnam was characterized as an emerging economy with various job opportunities, better income, and low cost of living. Job opportunities were frequently mentioned, with the majority focusing on English language teaching or positions at foreign language centers. Respondents also expressed the hope for saving more money and assisting their family back home, making it “pull factors” for emigration. Cost of living was also frequently mentioned, with the majority expecting Vietnam to be more affordable than their home countries. Some expected costs to be moderate but manageable and considered migration as an opportunity for economic advancement, and one even noted affordable living as a primary reason for returning to Vietnam after traveling to multiple countries. These expectations are broadly consistent with Vietnam's pull factor as an emerging South - South migration destination, one perceived as offering economic opportunity at a lower cost of entry than traditional Western destinations (Flahaux & de Haas).

Social factors, however, were not mentioned as triggers for departure, but the prospects of a destination as a safe environment, amiable local people, social networks, and support. Social expectations were reported at a significantly lower frequency than economic ones, illustrating a pattern in which the pull factors shaping migrants' decisions were predominantly economic while social dimensions of the destination remained comparatively underexplored in pre-migration thought. Still, this aspect plays an important role in the decision-making process for migration. Data also shows the particularly important role of social aspects, especially social networks, in the decision-making process for migration. Many participants learned about Vietnam through friends, relatives, or the African community who had previously lived there. These networks served as a source of information, initial support, and a sense of security when making the decision to move. In many cases, participants indicated they decided to move to Vietnam after being "invited," "recommended," or having friends share about job opportunities and the standard of living there.

Overall, push factors that force African individuals away from their countries are unfavorable economic conditions (e.g., poverty, unemployment, long-term financial insecurity), whereas social-related factors, such as network and support, were mentioned only marginally. Pull factors that attract them to Vietnam include promising greater financial prosperity, social networks and peer support, as well as better life experiences. However, crisis or compulsion, which were indicated in other studies on African migration, have not been proven as a driving force of the African labor community in Tay Ho, Hanoi.

3.3. Actual experiences and the expectation-reality gap

3.3.1. *Economic experiences: Employment insecurity and Economic precarity*

While English language teaching was the primary aspiration for most participants, their experiences as Black African migrants often influenced their access to Vietnam's recruitment market. Many language teaching centers showed a preference for white Western teachers, and this situation requires them to do more hard work than their Western counterparts to get a stable job. However, respondent O found that an Anglophone African background could provide an advantage due to the recognized status of English as an official language. The stories highlight the fact that although African migrants are often the target of negative discrimination from white Europeans and Americans, at the same time, some migrants from Anglophone African countries may have a strategic advantage, based on their native-speaker status.

Job instability extended beyond recruitment discrimination. Participants engaged in informal or temporary employment described working conditions as highly unstable and unpredictable, which included wage reductions and dismissal without prior notice and irregular working arrangements. Several participants also noted that this situation was relatively common in the informal labor market,

particularly in short-term teaching and casual labor positions. To cope with this instability, some participants tried to work multiple jobs simultaneously or move to another field, such as digital marketing or affiliate marketing.

Legal status also affected employment opportunities. Participants who had overstayed their visas are being limited to informal work, since those jobs require official work permits, which are no longer accessible to them. This group expressed a desire to extend their legal status in order to obtain more stable and better-paid employment, particularly in English teaching.

The actual cost of living in Tay Ho, Hanoi diverged significantly from pre-migration expectations. While food costs were often considered lower than in their home countries, high rental expenses created a persistent financial burden (Respondents K, M, and J). Some participants also reported being charged higher prices (sometimes double the local rate) in markets and in daily transactions simply because they were foreigners. As Dunn argues, this pattern of overcharging is not only an economic issue but also a social mechanism, as it can create a sense of exclusion by constantly reminding migrants that they are viewed as outsiders in everyday social interactions.

Overall, the economic experiences of African migrant workers in Tay Ho reflect a contrast between the expectation of accessible and rewarding economic advancement opportunities and the reality of a labor market characterized by insecurity, informality, and unequal access to opportunities.

3.3.2. Social experiences: Integration and Social Belonging

The majority of participants viewed Vietnamese people as friendly, welcoming, and willing to help. Positive interactions with local residents, such as getting assistance in translation or administration, were reported by many participants. On the other hand, certain cultural differences, including questions about personal matters such as income or marriage, can sometimes create discomfort. Some of the participants said that they were treated differently due to their skin colour, and others mentioned small aspects of prejudice or stereotyping in daily communication. While not always a negative experience, these experiences did influence participants' perspectives on social inclusion and sense of belonging. Perceived racism, even if minimal, can have a large impact on migrants' overall quality of life assessment, and can lead to social withdrawal or psychological distress over time, as Szaflarski and Bauldry pointed out. In response to these difficulties, several participants relied on their co-ethnic or migrant community networks for both social and practical support. The African community in Tay Ho was frequently described as an important source of connection, information, and mutual assistance, particularly in terms of employment, housing, social activities, and navigating administrative procedures.

Participants generally described interactions with Vietnamese authorities as calm and non-confrontational, particularly during the documentation check procedure. However, migrants with irregular or overstayed visa status often experienced

greater stress due to concerns about legal penalties and administrative uncertainty. Some also reported difficulties navigating official procedures, including unclear requirements, outdated information, and the risks of scams related to visa or employment services.

While language had been anticipated as a barrier by many participants, its actual impact in daily life varied considerably. For some participants, translation software and simple phrases in communication were adequate for everyday communication. Some of the long-term residents also gradually improved their proficiency in the Vietnamese language over time, which helped them to establish stronger social relationships, engage in business activities, and live their daily lives more independently. Language, however, remained a significant barrier to social integration and employment opportunities, as some participants expressed concern that their limited Vietnamese language proficiency limited their ability to develop more meaningful relationships with local people.

Experiences with Vietnam's healthcare system were generally positive among participants who had used it. They found medical services in Tay Ho accessible, professional, and relatively convenient, particularly for minor treatments and routine healthcare needs. They also appreciated the simplicity of procedures and the availability of treatment even without health insurance. Migrants who had formal employment contracts or a stable business reported receiving benefits in the form of health or social security, which reduced their financial concerns regarding medical treatment. However, migrants without formal employment contracts or insurance coverage described greater financial vulnerability when facing medical emergencies or private healthcare costs. Besides, healthcare coverage was not always included in labor contracts, even for employed migrants. These contrasting experiences show that access to affordable healthcare in Tay Ho depends heavily on whether a migrant has a formal employment contract that includes health insurance coverage. Those with formal contracts were largely protected, while others faced significantly higher costs.

Overall, the social dimension reflects a complex relationship between expectations and reality. Many migrants experienced more warmth, hospitality, and support than they had expected before coming to Vietnam. At the same time, these positive experiences coexisted with ongoing challenges related to racial perceptions, language barriers, and feelings of social exclusion. This shows that social integration for African migrants in Tay Ho was neither completely positive nor completely negative, but shaped by both inclusion and difficulty at the same time.

3.4. Influence and implications

3.4.1. *Impacts for the destination country: Vietnam*

The expectation-reality gap impacts on Vietnam in the area of labour markets, governance, and social cohesion. One important consequence is the expansion of the informal labor market. Migrants face challenges with getting jobs that offer

them formal employment contracts, which pushes them into informal work arrangements that are not regulated. This undermines the state's capacity to monitor working conditions, enforce labor standards, and collect taxes. This informal employment arrangement thus can reduce the impact of labour market regulation.

Moreover, the gap also exerts growing pressure on the governance system of Vietnam. If migrants are not informed about the procedures, they may unwittingly be in an illegalized status. This creates additional challenges for local authorities in monitoring, documentation, and enforcement, particularly when dealing with populations that are difficult to regulate through formal channels.

Finally, the mismatch of expectations could affect Vietnam's reputation as an international migration destination. If migrants share negative experiences related to employment barriers, legal difficulties, or social challenges upon returning to their home countries and online platforms, or when they have trouble online, it can affect others' attitudes toward the country. Thus, it may also discourage the influx of migrants in the future and reduce the country's appeal to foreign workers, thereby affecting Vietnam's international image and the attraction of skilled people in the long run.

3.4.2. Implications from migrant perspectives

Based on the experience of the African migrants in Tay Ho, some concerns have been identified as gaps that need to be addressed. The stories gathered in this research indicate 3 main areas of discussion. Firstly, a profound expectation-reality gap persists, often exacerbated by brokerage organizations that can ensure visas and paperwork but fail to deliver the promised jobs. In other cases, when migrants do everything by themselves, much of what they learn about potential destinations, including job opportunities, environment, living conditions, ... is collected before migration and can be inaccurate. Therefore, migrants may form incorrect or overly generalized information.

Moreover, lack of official information in English and African languages, combined with the complexity of the Vietnamese administrative systems, makes migrants rely on information from informal social networks and social media. This dependence on unreliable sources contribute to "procedural confusion and may unintentionally place migrants into irregular legal status due to information asymmetry. To address this, there is an urgent need for English-accessible government information platforms, digital administrative procedures, and support services such as guidances for migrants before coming to Vietnam.

Thirdly, the lack of sustained legal recognition remains a source of precariousness for long-term residents contributing to Vietnam's economy. Current residency policies offer restrictive pathways to permanent residence and tie temporary residency to frequent renewals. Longer-term options remain gated behind financial thresholds of 100 billion VND to achieve five-to-ten-year Temporary Residence Cards (TRC). Transitioning to three or five-year visa extensions or

TRC (Temporary Residence Card) would honor the commitment of long-term residents and foster a more inclusive and stable migrant community.

4. Conclusion

This study explored the factors driving labor migration decisions, their linkage to pre-migration expectations, and gaps compared to their experience. Findings indicate that the decision-making process for African migrants in Tay Ho, Hanoi, is not as motivated by crisis displacement as by factors like perceived economic opportunities, migrant networks, and destination perceptions associated with Vietnam as an emerging South-South migration destination. Yet, the post-migration experiences of African migrants revealed significant mismatches between their expectations and realities in relation to labor market instability, racially discriminatory recruitment practices, and the difficulties associated with legal uncertainty. Nonetheless, social experiences seem more complicated than anticipated, namely, either the coexistence of inclusion and exclusion or hospitality and racialization. These findings suggest that migrant integration is shaped largely by tolerance, adaptation, and uncertainty.

This research contributes to the field of migration studies by geographical expansion on the established pattern of researching African migrations only in Western countries and focusing on South-South migrations to Vietnam. Specifically, this study emphasizes the significance of opportunities-driven mobility, migrant social networks, and destination imaginaries in decision-making related to migration. Furthermore, this study also highlights the overlooked role of informal information systems and labor market inequalities, leading to the gap between expectations and reality after migration.

However, this research also has limitations. First, the number of participants was limited not only by time constraints but also by accessibility issues. Furthermore, the sample lacked diversity in several aspects, including occupation, gender, and family status. Second, this study primarily applies the Push-Pull Theory of Migration as its main analytical framework to explain the motivations and decision-making processes of migration. However, this theoretical framework still has certain limitations in explaining the complexity of post-migration adaptation, legal precarity, and social incorporation. These limitations may affect the representativeness of the findings and, consequently, restrict the generalizability of the study, particularly in relation to gendered experiences and social life perspectives.

Future research could expand in geographic scopes to other provinces, cities with high rates of migrant workers and expand in the characteristics of the research participants would diversify the study. Moreover, future studies can integrate the perspective from local authorities on migration policy and governance. Besides, integrating particular theories and frameworks can also be considered as human rights frameworks would enrich understanding of migrants' legal vulnerabilities

and access to basic services, broadening the focus from economic drivers to overall well-being and social inclusion.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/10**NO FIXED ABODE: HOME, PRECARIITY, AND THE GRAMMAR OF
UNGRIEVABILITY IN *TEMPORARY PEOPLE*****DR. NISHA GANGAN**Assistant Professor, Department of English
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Telang Nagar, Khorlim, Mapusa, Goa, India**Abstract**

This paper examines how Deepak Unnikrishnan's *Temporary People* reconfigure "home" in Gulf migration as an unstable, unattainable condition marked by temporariness, absence, and structural displacement, diverging from a stable site of return. Through close readings, the paper argues that Unnikrishnan's experimental narrative strategies of fragmentation, surreal transformation, and linguistic disruption represent migrant precarity, challenging dominant South Asian diaspora studies frameworks that privilege hybridity or eventual belonging. Instead, it foregrounds an existence of legal non-existence, bodily vulnerability, and impermanence under the kafala system. At the same time, its multilingual texture of Malayalam, Arabic, and English simultaneously reflects cultural continuity and linguistic dispossession, thus complicating identity and voice. Utilising trauma theory, necropolitics, and precarious life, the paper argues that Unnikrishnan develops a distinct literary grammar of migration that renders structurally erased lives visible. By reframing diaspora as ongoing instability, *Temporary People* redefine "home" as rupture and absence, contributing to debates on migration, memory, and literary form.

Keywords: Gulf Migration; South Asian Diaspora; Home and Memory; Precarity; Narrative Form; Temporariness

Introduction: The Grammar of the Ungrievable

There is a scene early in Deepak Unnikrishnan's *Temporary People* that crystallises the novel's central and most disturbing preoccupation: a migrant worker's body dissolves, disperses, and is absorbed into the very structure of the building he helped construct. The image is shocking yet disturbingly consistent with the novel's logic: the city ultimately consumes the same bodies that construct it. Unnikrishnan subverts conventional metaphor, employing a visceral, often grotesque literalisation of violence that blurs the lines between the symbolic and the material realities of migrant experience.

Unnikrishnan's debut collection of linked fictions, *Temporary People*, published by Restless Books in 2017, draws from the experiential terrain he represents: the world of South Asian migrant workers in the United Arab Emirates. This vast yet largely invisible labour force has constructed one of the wealthiest built

environments in modern history while remaining excluded from structures of belonging. Legal frameworks deny migrant workers permanent residence, offer no pathway to citizenship, and tether identity to labour contracts. The title itself signals both a juridical and existential condition.

This paper situates *Temporary People* within key critical frameworks, drawing on the work of Cathy Caruth, Achille Mbembe, and Judith Butler. Through Caruth, it argues that Unnikrishnan's fragmented, non-linear, and surrealist prose formally enacts trauma, resisting sequential narration because trauma exceeds linear representation. It mobilises Mbembe's concept of necropolitics to read the Gulf migrant system as a regime that renders certain populations effectively living-dead, sustained only while economically productive and expelled once their utility is exhausted. Engaging Butler's theorisation of precarious life and grievability, the paper interrogates how bodies denied recognition are represented - bodies excluded from national narratives, repatriated without ceremony, and leaving behind neither monument nor publicly acknowledged grief.

Against this backdrop, the paper analyses the novel's formal architecture, arguing that its surrealism operates as a politically charged aesthetic. It examines bodily fragmentation through trauma theory and necropolitics, reads the multilingual register as a site of dispossession and resistance, and considers the treatment of memory and home within South Asian diaspora studies. Ultimately, it contends that *Temporary People* articulate a distinct literary grammar of migrant experience, attuned to the specific violences and temporalities of the contemporary Gulf.

The Politics of Form: Surrealism as Testimony

To read *Temporary People* is to experience an immediate, almost violent disorientation. The novel's "Chapters" resist arrangement into a conventional narrative arc. There is no central protagonist, no singular storyline unfolding toward resolution. Instead, the reader encounters a shifting mosaic of voices, species, registers, and temporalities. Workers sprout wings and attempt to fly home; buildings retain memory within their concrete; a woman stitches broken bodies back together; an airport devours those who pass through it. Generic boundaries do not separate the realist and the fantastical but interpenetrate continuously. A narrative may begin in the hyperrealist idiom of documentary, depicting a labour camp dormitory or the bureaucratic texture of a work permit. However, within a single paragraph, it can dissolve into the hallucinatory. Reading this technique as magical realism is limiting. The surreal elements in *Temporary People* do not stem from a stable cultural ontology but rather express trauma. The text aligns more closely with what may be termed traumatic surrealism, where the impossible registers not wonder but disruption and distress.

Cathy Caruth's work offers a framework for understanding this formal logic, defining trauma as an event that is not fully processed or integrated into a person's awareness at the moment of its occurrence, but that returns belatedly in

fragmented and intrusive forms: “the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (Caruth 4). The formal fragmentation of *Temporary People* in its non-linear structure, its refusal of closure, and its recursive imagery enacts precisely this traumatic temporality. The novel does not simply recount the experience of Gulf migration; it formally performs the psychic condition of living within it. This persistence is reflected in the admission that “there is no way [he] can ever forget this experience, or his guilt” (Unnikrishnan 3), emphasising trauma’s recursive and unresolved nature.

For this reason, the novel’s formal strategies are inseparable from its ethical commitments. When Unnikrishnan offers a narrative from within the body of a building, or from the perspective of a worker literally incorporated into architecture, he is not engaging in aesthetic excess or ornamental surrealism. Rather, he is articulating through the only available formal vocabulary the condition of workers rendered invisible, treated as human material rather than human beings, and systematically excluded from official narratives of Gulf modernity. Surrealism, in this context, functions as testimony: a mode of bearing witness to experiences that exceed the representational capacities of realism.

This testimonial dimension becomes particularly evident in moments where the narrative draws attention to its own instability. Storytelling appears fractured, unable to stabilise meaning or produce a coherent representation. This is exemplified in the novel’s “Pravasis” section, where identity dissolves into a series of disconnected labels — “foreigner,” “outsider,” “visitor,” “illegal” (Unnikrishnan 137–39)—that resist consolidation into a unified subject. What emerges instead is a mode of testimonial fragmentation, in which the text does not claim full representation but gestures, repeats, and fractures.

While drawing on oral storytelling traditions, the novel eschews narrative coherence, thereby reinforcing the fragmented, unresolved nature of traumatic experience. These stories accumulate, producing a composite portrait of a world in which the fundamental coordinates of human life, like belonging, continuity, bodily integrity, and the right to mourn, have been systematically dismantled by migrant labour. The precision with which form mirrors content is one of the novel’s most striking achievements.

Necropolitics and the Fragmented Body

The body constitutes the primary site of Unnikrishnan’s political analysis. In *Temporary People*, bodies do not simply inhabit the world; the world acts upon them, reshaping, dismembering, and ultimately absorbing them. The novel’s most viscerally disturbing sequences revolve around literal bodily fragmentation: workers who arrive in the Gulf in pieces and are assembled for labour, workers whose bodies are destroyed in industrial accidents and must be reconstructed, and workers who dissolve into the buildings they have constructed. These images are

not instances of surrealist excess. Rather, they function as the novel's most precise theoretical articulation of the Gulf migrant system.

The conceptual framework of necropolitics, developed by Achille Mbembe in his landmark 2003 essay and later expanded upon in *Necropolitics* (2019), provides the critical vocabulary for understanding these representations. Extending Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics — the modern state's administration of life — Mbembe argues that sovereign power is most fully expressed not in the capacity to make live, but in the capacity to “let die,” or to produce what he terms “death-worlds”: “new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead” (Mbembe, “Necropolitics” 40).

The text describes workers as ‘immune to death by free fall’ (Unnikrishnan 2), a formulation that underscores the normalisation of bodily damage within the labour system. Their bodies are “taped up” and returned to labour (Unnikrishnan 2), reinforcing their treatment as repairable instruments rather than human subjects. The Gulf migrant worker inhabits precisely such a death-world. Sustained only insofar as labour is required, denied the rights that would render that life fully human, and expelled often in a coffin once that labour is exhausted, the migrant worker emerges as the paradigmatic figure of the living dead.

The kafala system, the sponsorship regime governing migrant labour across the Gulf, constitutes the legal architecture of this necropolitical order. Under kafala, a migrant worker's legal status is directly tied to an employer-sponsor; the worker cannot change employment, exit the country, or access legal protection without the sponsor's consent. This produces conditions of near-total dependency, widely documented as enabling wage theft, confinement, coercion, and forced labour. Significantly, *Temporary People* does not render kafala through direct exposition or didactic explanation. Instead, the novel inscribes its logic onto the body itself. The novel's most disturbing articulation of this condition occurs in scenes in which the body ceases to be self-contained and is dispersed into the material environment. Mukundan's surreal account of imprisonment culminates in a grotesque transformation in which part of his body is extracted and repurposed: “The jailers turned that part—what I gave—into paste, smeared most of it on the walls... diluted the rest in water and mopped the floors” (Unnikrishnan 231). The violence here is neither metaphorical nor symbolic. It is resolutely material, as the physical body is literally dismantled and integrated into the state's infrastructure. The migrant subject becomes inseparable from the built environment, existing simultaneously as labour and residue. The image of bodies absorbed into buildings thus emerges as the novel's most sustained and resonant figure for the relationship between migrant labour and Gulf capital. At its core, this figure resists metaphorical abstraction. The skyscrapers of Dubai and Abu Dhabi have been constructed by South Asian and Southeast Asian workers whose labour and often their health and lives have been consumed in the process. The dissolving bodies

in *Temporary People* thus function as the literary equivalent of this documented reality, transforming statistical abstraction into visceral immediacy.

Judith Butler's theorisation of grievability in *Precarious Life* (2004) and *Frames of War* (2009) further sharpens this analysis. For Butler, grievability is unevenly distributed and politically structured, determining which lives are recognised as worthy of mourning: "Some lives are more precarious than others, and some lives are not quite—or, indeed, never—grievable" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 31). The migrant workers of *Temporary People* occupy precisely this position of structural ungrievability. They are not citizens; they leave no permanent trace; their deaths are processed administratively rather than mourned collectively; their bodies are repatriated without public acknowledgement.

Unnikrishnan's formal strategy, however, is to compel grievability. By granting migrant workers narrative presence, names, voices, desires, and interiorities, the novel disrupts the dehumanising logic of kafala through the humanising potential of literary representation. Yet it does not stop at humanisation. By rendering bodily destruction in visceral, often grotesque detail, the text actively resists the euphemistic language of "natural causes" and "workplace accidents" that official discourse deploys to sanitise migrant death. The fragmented body, in this sense, becomes not only an object of representation but an accusation.

This logic of fragmentation is further elaborated through the novel's recurring imagery of transformation and dissolution. In the opening sequences, migrants attempt escape through radical metamorphosis: men "eat passports" and become passports, collapsing identity into documentation (Unnikrishnan 3). Elsewhere, bodies disintegrate under pressure, refusing coherence or stability. These transformations literalise the reduction of the migrant to an administrative entity. The passport replaces the person; documentation supersedes embodiment. Such imagery exposes the bureaucratic violence of the kafala system, wherein existence is contingent not on personhood but on authorisation.

The violence inflicted upon migrant bodies is also rendered through scenes of physical injury that verge on the surreal. In "Birds," workers who fall from construction sites survive only to be crudely repaired and returned to labour, their broken bodies "taped up" and reassembled (Unnikrishnan 10). The normalisation of such injury underscores the systemic disposability of these lives. Death is not exceptional; it is anticipated, managed, and absorbed into the labour regime. The body becomes a site of continuous damage, sustained only insofar as it remains economically productive.

It is also necessary to attend to the recurring figure of the airport, which functions in *Temporary People* as a site of concentrated violence. Unnikrishnan's airport is a zone of sovereign control, a threshold where migrant bodies are processed, sorted, admitted, or expelled. The airport scenes deploy a form of bureaucratic surrealism and are among the most chilling in the novel. The language of immigration forms and visa categories is applied to bodies that are literally

disintegrating. At the same time, administrative vocabulary is imposed on subjects who are coming apart at the seams. This collision between bureaucratic register and surrealist imagery constitutes one of Unnikrishnan's most effective formal strategies, estranging the language of administration and exposing its underlying violence.

Language, Loss, and the Politics of Malayalam

If the body constitutes the primary site of dispossession in *Temporary People*, language emerges as its most intimate companion. The novel is written in English, yet it remains deeply saturated with Malayalam, Arabic, and a hybrid vernacular that reflects the lived linguistic realities of the South Asian Gulf diaspora. This multilingualism is not merely decorative or stylistic; rather, it functions as a political and epistemological intervention, raising fundamental questions about what can be articulated, in which language, and at what cost.

The workers in *Temporary People* carry Malayalam with them into the Gulf as the irreducible residue of a home left behind and never fully recoverable. Malayalam marks the domain of interiority, the private self, the emotional register, the cultural memory that the kafala system cannot fully regulate or erase. At the same time, however, it is also a language of loss. The children of migrants who grow up in the Gulf increasingly speak Arabic and English. At the same time, Malayalam recedes with each generation, becoming the language of parents and grandparents, a tongue associated with distance, absence, and departure. Unnikrishnan renders this process of linguistic erosion with considerable subtlety, foregrounding the quiet grief embedded within the gradual disappearance of the mother tongue.

The instability of language is rendered most forcefully through moments of bodily-linguistic rupture. In one of the text's most striking images, tongues detach themselves from their owners, abandoning the body altogether (Unnikrishnan 5). This surreal gesture literalises the condition of voicelessness that structures migrant existence. Speech is not merely constrained; it is violently severed. The migrant loses not only the capacity to communicate but the very organ through which communication is made possible. Language, in this formulation, is both possessed and dispossessed, reflecting the broader instability of identity under conditions of displacement.

The theorisation of language loss within diaspora studies provides a useful framework for situating these dynamics. Vijay Mishra's distinction between the "old diaspora," formed through indenture and colonial displacement, and the "new diaspora," produced through forms of voluntary yet economically coerced migration under late capitalism, maps productively onto the Gulf migrant experience (Mishra 421–22). The workers in *Temporary People* belong, in Mishra's terms, to this new diaspora, though the structural compulsions of economic necessity consistently undermine the supposed voluntariness of their migration. What they share with older diasporic formations is the experience of linguistic and cultural dislocation: the gradual erosion of the mother tongue, the

fragmentation of identity across generations, and the persistent inability to belong fully to either the place of origin or the place of settlement.

Arabic occupies a markedly different position within this linguistic landscape. It is the language of authority: the state, the employer, the landlord, and the police. It is the language through which migrant workers are addressed, commanded, regulated, and, when necessary, expelled. The workers' relationship to Arabic is therefore one of compelled acquisition. They must learn enough to function within the economic system, yet full linguistic mastery would imply a belonging that remains structurally and legally foreclosed. Unnikrishnan captures this condition of linguistic liminality with precision: his characters speak a functional Arabic, sufficient for survival, but never enough to claim ownership or inclusion.

English, meanwhile, occupies an ambivalent and deeply fraught position. It is the language of the novel itself, the medium through which Unnikrishnan addresses a largely international, English-speaking audience, and it carries the layered complexities of colonial history and contemporary global power. Writing in English about Malayalam-speaking migrant workers involves an act of translation that is never neutral. The workers' experiences are mediated through a language associated with both colonial domination and contemporary global capital. Unnikrishnan remains acutely aware of this tension, and he responds by refusing the transparency typically associated with literary English. Instead, he disrupts it, interrupting its flow with Malayalam, destabilising it through surrealist imagery, and resisting the smooth readability that would allow an Anglophone audience to consume the narrative without discomfort.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "third space" of cultural hybridity offers a productive, if ultimately limited, framework for interpreting this linguistic condition. While Bhabha understands hybridity as a site of creative negotiation, in *Temporary People* it registers not possibility but dispossession. Linguistic hybridity here is not generative but symptomatic of structural violence: it marks fractured belonging, the erosion of the mother tongue, and the inaccessibility of the host language. The hybrid speech of Unnikrishnan's characters does not signify liberation but reflects an ongoing condition of displacement.

Memory, Home, and the Impossible Return

The question of home emerges as perhaps the most persistent and most affectively charged concern in *Temporary People*. The workers in the novel are suspended between two irreconcilable impossibilities: they cannot fully return to Kerala, and they will never be permitted to remain in the Gulf. Home, for them, does not function as a stable geographic location but as a temporal condition, something that existed prior to migration, something that is gradually undone by time and distance, and something that cannot be recovered even when return becomes materially possible. Unnikrishnan's representation of this condition draws upon a long tradition of diaspora writing, yet inflects it with a distinctive bitterness that reflects the structural violence specific to the Gulf migrant system.

Stuart Hall's formulation that diasporic identity is constituted "not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference and hybridity" (Hall 235) captures an important dimension of diasporic subjectivity. However, it is a formulation that presumes a degree of agency in negotiating difference. The workers in *Temporary People* possess no such agency. Their heterogeneity is not chosen but imposed. They are marked as foreign, temporary, and disposable, and this marking is enforced through legal frameworks and material conditions of violence.

The memory of home persists in the text not as a stable or recuperable reference point but as a fragmentary and often painful reconstruction. Migrants recall Kerala through sensory traces of voices, landscapes, and familial gestures, but these recollections are invariably distorted by distance and temporal dislocation. This distortion is encapsulated in the understated yet devastating observation that what was intended as a temporary departure has stretched into permanence: "only for a short time... the shortness has grown longer, many years" (Unnikrishnan 194). Time, in this formulation, does not move linearly; it accumulates, thickens, and estranges, transforming the temporary into an enduring condition of suspension. Significantly, the novel's representation of Kerala remains resolutely ambivalent. Kerala is not romanticised as a lost paradise awaiting return. The workers depart because of structural economic necessity. Remittances sustain families that are themselves organised around absence, and the social conditions that produce migration, caste hierarchies, gendered expectations, and class inequalities persist within the imagined space of home. When workers do return, they return altered, marked by the Gulf both physically and psychologically, often unable to re-integrate into a social world that has continued without them. The notion of return as restoration is thus consistently undermined, if not entirely dismantled.

It is at this juncture that Unnikrishnan's work intersects most productively with postcolonial trauma theory. Michael Rothberg's concept of "multidirectional memory", i.e., the proposition that memories of trauma do not exist in isolation but intersect and illuminate one another, offers a productive framework for understanding this layering of temporalities (Rothberg 3). The migrant workers in *Temporary People* carry not only the immediate trauma of labour exploitation and displacement but also the longer historical memory of colonial extraction. The economic structures that once organised the movement of indentured labour under the empire persist, in altered form, within the contemporary Gulf. The bodies in *Temporary People* are therefore not solely contemporary; they are historical bodies, bearing within them the sedimented traces of earlier regimes of dispossession. Rather than presenting history as a linear narrative, the novel embeds it within the body itself. The migrant subject becomes the site at which past and present converge, producing a condition of temporal dislocation that resists resolution. The self is dispersed across geographies and temporalities,

unable to reconcile its fragmented parts. Memory, in this sense, is not restorative but destabilising. It does not recover a coherent past; it reveals the impossibility of coherence.

The children of migrants occupy an especially precarious position within this structure of displacement. Born in the Gulf and often having no lived experience of Kerala, they nevertheless remain excluded from citizenship and denied any claim to permanent belonging. When their parents' contracts expire, or when they reach adulthood, they are compelled to "return" to a homeland that is, in every meaningful sense, unfamiliar. This condition produces one of the novel's most devastating critiques of the Gulf migrant system: that temporariness is not merely an individual condition but a generational one. The children of temporary workers are themselves rendered temporary, inheriting a displacement that precedes them. Unnikrishnan renders this generational dimension with notable sensitivity, and it is here that the novel's engagement with the question of "remembered homes" becomes most acute. What does it mean to remember a home one has never inhabited? What does it mean to be told that one belongs to a place that exists only as narrative, memory, or obligation? In *Temporary People*, home is neither origin nor destination; it is an absence that structures experience, a condition that cannot be resolved but only endured.

The Ethics of the Surrealist Witness

The question of ethics is one that any sustained engagement with *Temporary People* must ultimately confront. The novel's formal experimentalism—its surrealism, its deployment of dark humour, and its reliance on grotesque imagery—raises a critical question: whether such techniques are adequate to, or potentially complicit in, the suffering they represent. More specifically, do these formal strategies risk aestheticizing violence in ways that privilege the reader's experience over the dignity of the subjects depicted? This tension is neither incidental nor easily resolved, and Unnikrishnan's text demonstrates a sustained awareness of its implications.

Susan Sontag's warning in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) that representations of suffering may generate not empathy but voyeurism, not political engagement but aesthetic consumption remains particularly instructive in this context (Sontag 91). The danger inherent in a surrealist mode lies in its capacity to aestheticize what ought to disturb, to render visually compelling what should resist aesthetic pleasure, and to allow the reader to maintain a degree of critical distance from the violence being represented. There are moments in *Temporary People* where this tension becomes especially pronounced, where the imagery is so striking, so formally inventive, that it risks being apprehended as spectacle.

However, it is precisely at this point that Unnikrishnan's formal strategy demands closer scrutiny. While the novel's surrealism raises the ethical question of whether it risks aestheticising suffering, it ultimately works against this danger. As Susan Sontag argues, representations of violence can produce distance rather than

engagement; however, Unnikrishnan's imagery is unsettling and often grotesque, compelling confrontation rather than detachment. Surrealism thus emerges as the only adequate form for representing a condition that exceeds the limits of realism. Realism, with its commitment to legibility and coherence, proves insufficient to capture a life structured by kafala marked by legal non-existence, bodily precarity, and the constant threat of expulsion. What exceeds realist representation must therefore be articulated through forms that they exceed realism.

The ethical tension of surrealism is perhaps most acutely visible in the novel's use of grotesque humour, where absurdity and violence coexist in unsettling proximity. This dynamic is evident in the cockroach narrative, in which insects begin to imitate human behaviour like learning to walk upright, to speak, only to be systematically exterminated (Unnikrishnan 238). The scene oscillates between comedy and horror, destabilising the reader's interpretive position. The absurd does not mitigate the violence; rather, it intensifies it. By rendering migrant figures within the logic of extermination, the text exposes the dehumanising metaphors that structure migrant discourse, in which workers are implicitly likened to pests or infestations. The grotesque thus becomes a mode of ethical confrontation, denying the reader the possibility of distance or detachment.

This dynamic returns us to Cathy Caruth and the concept of testimonial narrative. For Caruth, the literary text is uniquely capable of bearing witness to traumatic experience because it can accommodate what she terms the "wound"—that point at which experience has failed to be fully integrated, leaving a gap that resists direct representation (Caruth 7). The surrealist passages in *Temporary People* may be understood precisely in these terms: as formal ruptures in the narrative surface through which the violence of the Gulf migrant system emerges. The irrational, the impossible, and the grotesque are not ornamental deviations from realism; they are the forms through which trauma becomes legible. In this sense, the novel's form does not merely represent trauma; it enacts it.

There remains, however, the question of audience and complicity. *Temporary People* is addressed, in the first instance, to an international, English-language readership. This audience may possess a general awareness of Gulf migrant labour conditions, but is unlikely to have direct experiential knowledge of them. Unnikrishnan's deployment of surrealism can thus be read, in part, as a strategy of estrangement directed toward this audience. By disrupting narrative coherence, refusing readability, and destabilising interpretive comfort, the text resists the easy consumption of migrant suffering that more conventional realist modes might enable. The difficulty of the text, its refusal of narrative consolation, and its insistence on disorientation function as a form of political demand. It requires that the reader labour, remain unsettled, and confront the ethical implications of witnessing without the possibility of resolution.

Conclusion: New Grammar, New Witness

In her study of Holocaust literature, Shoshana Felman argues that certain historical experiences demand new forms of witnessing capable of addressing the scale and intensity of violence that exceed the representational limits of existing literary modes. When violence reaches such magnitude, it cannot be contained within inherited narrative structures; rather, it necessitates formal innovation, a break from established conventions, in order to render itself legible (Felman and Laub 5). *Temporary People* advance an analogous claim for Gulf migrant literature. The experience of the South Asian worker in the contemporary Gulf, defined by legal non-existence, bodily precarity, systemic dispossession, and enforced temporariness, cannot be adequately represented through conventional realist frameworks. It requires, instead, a new grammar.

That grammar, in Unnikrishnan's work, takes the form of what may be understood as traumatic surrealism: a mode that mobilises the irrational, the grotesque, and the impossible in the service of a rigorously political project. The fragmented bodies that populate *Temporary People* are not surrealist for the sake of aesthetic strangeness; they are surrealist because the experience of life under the kafala system is, in its fullest sense, dismembering. It is an experience that disassembles the subject, reducing the human being to a unit of labour and denying the conditions of bodily integrity, temporal continuity, and social recognition that constitute full personhood. The formal strategies of the novel do not merely represent this condition; they enact it. Form and content converge in a sustained articulation of structural violence.

This paper has argued that *Temporary People* is most productively read through the intersecting frameworks of trauma theory, necropolitics, and precarious life, not because these frameworks exhaust the novel's meanings, but because they illuminate its central formal and political wager. Drawing on Cathy Caruth, Achille Mbembe, and Judith Butler, the analysis has demonstrated how Unnikrishnan's formal experimentation produces a literary mode capable of articulating what documentary and political discourse often cannot: the transformation of the ungrievable into the grievable, the rendering visible of what has been structurally obscured, and the partial restoration of interiority and dignity to bodies systematically stripped of both.

Unnikrishnan's work emerges at the intersection of multiple literary traditions—South Asian diasporic fiction, American experimental prose, and the Malayalam corpus of Gulf literature—and draws productively from each. However, *Temporary People* ultimately exceed these frameworks. It belongs less to a tradition than to the lives it represents: the Malayali construction workers, domestic workers, and labourers who have built the material landscape of the UAE and who are expelled from it once their labour is no longer required. The novel thus functions as a monument, though not in the conventional sense of a memorial that stabilises and concludes. Rather, it operates as an open wound—a form that

refuses closure and insists upon the ongoing presence of the violence it records. *Temporary People* demand a rethinking of South Asian migration studies by foregrounding the Gulf as a central site of contemporary diaspora. Its formal experimentation and political urgency establish a new framework for representing migrant precarity and structural erasure.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/11**REWRITING DIASPORA: MUSLIM IDENTITY AND FEMALE
AGENCY IN LEILA ABOULELA'S MINARET****DR NADEEM JAHANGIR BHAT**

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Abstract

“Muslim Diaspora Writing” remains a contested and dynamic field within contemporary literary studies, shaped by diverse critical frameworks such as postcolonial theory, transnationalism and cultural translation. This paper examines how Muslim women writers in the diaspora negotiate questions of identity, belonging and subjectivity within the socio-political context of the post-9/11 world, marked by intensified Islamophobia and cultural othering. Taking Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2006) as a primary text, the study explores how diasporic Muslim subjectivity is constructed at the intersection of faith, gender and displacement. It argues that Aboulela's narrative challenges Orientalist stereotypes and dominant secular paradigms by foregrounding religious consciousness as a source of agency rather than oppression. Through the protagonist Najwa, the novel presents an alternative model of Muslim identity that resists both assimilationist and reductive liberationist frameworks. Drawing on the works of Said, Mahmood, Hassan and others, the paper highlights the plurality and heterogeneity of Muslim experiences, positioning Muslim diasporic writing as a critical site of epistemic intervention that redefines notions of belonging and selfhood in contemporary global contexts.

Keywords: Diaspora; Muslim Women, Representation; Agency, Orientalism

Introduction

The term “Muslim diaspora” has gained significant currency in both academic and public discourse, often serving as a framework for examining the construction and negotiation of Muslim identity in transnational contexts. However, the category of “Muslim writing” that emerges from this diasporic condition remains deeply contested. It raises critical questions not only about representation and authenticity but also about authority: who has the epistemic and cultural legitimacy to speak for Muslim experiences? As Wail S. Hassan (2011) argues, diasporic narratives are embedded within processes of cultural translation, where identities are mediated through unequal power relations between the West and the Muslim world. Consequently, “Muslim writing” cannot be treated as a homogeneous or self-evident category.

Broadly construed, contemporary discourses tend to subsume under “Muslim writing” a wide and often conflicting range of texts: writings grounded within

Islamic ethical and cultural frameworks; representations produced by non-Muslim authors that claim to depict Muslim lives; and neo-Orientalist narratives that reproduce reductive images of Islam and Muslims. Edward Said's (1978) critique of Orientalism remains central here, highlighting how Western representations have historically constructed Islam as the civilizational "Other." In the post-9/11 context, this representational logic has been reinvigorated, producing what Mahmood Mamdani (2004) identifies as the binary of the "good Muslim" versus the "bad Muslim," thereby flattening the diversity of Muslim identities into simplistic moral categories.

The problem, therefore, is not merely one of representation but of discursive power. Deepa Kumar (2012) demonstrates that contemporary Islamophobia operates through a network of media, political and cultural narratives that frame Muslims as objects of suspicion and surveillance. Within this context, literary representations- particularly those produced outside Muslim communities- often risk reinforcing hegemonic understandings rather than offering nuanced accounts of Muslim subjectivity. This has led to the emergence of what critics describe as neo-Orientalist writing, where Muslim societies are depicted through lenses of backwardness, gender oppression and violence, often divorced from their historical and socio-political complexities.

At the same time, diaspora itself must be understood as a heterogeneous and contested space rather than a singular condition of displacement. As Avtar Brah (1996) conceptualises, diaspora is not merely about geographical dispersal but about the intersection of multiple subjectivities shaped by class, gender, race and religion within specific socio-political contexts. Muslim diasporic identities, therefore, are not fixed but are continuously negotiated within host societies that are often marked by exclusionary practices and cultural anxieties.

In the wake of the events of September 11, 2001, these dynamics have intensified significantly. The global "war on terror" has not only reshaped geopolitical relations but has also profoundly affected the everyday lives of Muslim migrants, who are subjected to heightened scrutiny, securitisation and cultural othering across Europe and North America (Kumar 2012; Mamdani 2004). In such a climate, Muslim diasporic writing assumes a critical function as a site of resistance and self-articulation, challenging dominant narratives while reimagining Muslim identity beyond reductive stereotypes.

Thus, rather than viewing "Muslim writing" as a fixed or unified category, it is more productive to approach it as a contested discursive field shaped by competing narratives, power structures and ideological investments. Such an approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of how Muslim identities are constructed, represented and negotiated within the complex terrain of diaspora.

The category of "Muslim diaspora" has been both invoked and problematized within contemporary scholarship, particularly in relation to questions of identity, representation and epistemic authority. While it has been described as "an ontic

category of self-description” and accompanied by “the existence of a scholarly consensus on the appropriateness of its use” (Sarah Albrecht et al. 1–2), such claims have not gone uncontested. Critics argue that the term itself risks reifying Muslim identity into a singular, essentialized category, thereby overlooking the internal heterogeneity and contextual specificity of Muslim experiences across different geographies (Brah 1996; Hassan 2011). Rather than offering a neutral descriptive framework, “Muslim diaspora” often operates as a discursive construct shaped by power relations and ideological investments.

This problem becomes particularly visible in mass media and literary discourses, where Muslims are frequently represented “within the confines of an ethno-religious framework that highlights Muslim identity as an anomaly, a perpetual marker of otherness that needs to be erased for full integration” (Neriman 6). Such representations resonate strongly with Said’s (1978) formulation of Orientalism, wherein the Muslim subject is constructed as the irreducible “Other” against which Western modernity defines itself. In the post-9/11 context, this othering has intensified, producing what Mamdani (2004) terms the reductive binary of the “good Muslim” and the “bad Muslim.” Consequently, the discourse on Muslim diaspora is marked by a persistent semantic ambiguity- an ambiguity that not only destabilises the category itself but also profoundly shapes contemporary Muslim writing.

This ambiguity is further exacerbated by the interchangeable use of the terms “Islamic” and “Muslim,” often without adequate attention to their distinct theological, cultural and literary implications. While “Islamic” typically denotes alignment with religious doctrine and ethical frameworks, “Muslim” may refer more broadly to cultural, social, or identity-based affiliations. The conflation of these terms obscures important distinctions and contributes to a homogenising discourse that fails to account for the plurality of Muslim experiences and expressions.

Theoretical engagements with Muslim diaspora often “foreground the dialectic of movement and dwelling, location and dislocation, and difference and sameness as a crucible for the formation of Muslim subjectivity” (22). However, even this formulation presupposes a coherent notion of “Muslim subjectivity,” which itself remains contested. As Hassan (2011) suggests, diasporic narratives are embedded within processes of cultural translation, where identities are negotiated across asymmetrical power structures. Thus, Muslim subjectivity in diaspora cannot be understood as fixed or unified but must be seen as continuously reconstituted through interaction with shifting social, political and cultural contexts.

Within this already contested terrain, the discourse on Muslim narratives has increasingly been shaped by what is termed “Islamic fiction,” a genre characterised by a “commitment to theological tradition” (11). The Islamic Writers’ Association defines this category as “creative, imaginative, non-preachy fiction books written by Muslims and marketed primarily to Muslim” (Islamic

Writers' Association). Such fiction is often didactic in orientation, foregrounding moral instruction and the ethical dimensions of Islamic life. Closely related to this is the notion of "halal fiction," which, as Ghazoul suggests, refers to literary works that adhere to Islamic ethical and moral principles, avoiding content deemed impermissible (*haram*) while promoting values such as modesty, justice, faith and social responsibility.

However, the categorisation of literature as "Islamic" or "halal" is not without its own limitations. While such labels foreground ethical intentionality, they also risk reducing literary production to normative frameworks that prioritise moral correctness over aesthetic and ideological complexity. In this regard, Wail S. Hassan's (2011) analysis is instructive. Although he does not explicitly define "halal fiction," his conceptualisation of Arab and Muslim narratives as sites of cultural negotiation suggests that such writing operates within overlapping ethical, cultural and political frameworks. Rather than being confined to doctrinal boundaries, these texts engage in a dynamic process of representing Muslim identities in ways that are both rooted in Islamic values and responsive to transnational contexts.

Leila Aboulela's fiction is frequently situated within this category, particularly due to its sustained engagement with faith as a central organising principle of narrative and character formation. Her novels, including *Minaret* (2006), depict protagonists whose actions and choices are deeply informed by religious consciousness, especially in moments of crisis and displacement. Yet to read Aboulela solely through the lens of "halal fiction" would be reductive. Her work not only affirms Islamic ethical frameworks but also interrogates the complexities of diasporic existence, thereby complicating simplistic binaries between religious commitment and modern subjectivity.

Thus, the discourse on Muslim diaspora writing must be approached as a contested and multi-layered field, where categories such as "Islamic," "Muslim," and "halal" are not fixed descriptors but sites of ongoing negotiation. These terms both enable and constrain literary interpretation, shaping how Muslim identities are produced, circulated and understood within global literary and cultural economies. Contrary to these internally grounded narratives, a significant body of writing produced by non-Muslim authors has also claimed to represent Muslim experiences, often through frameworks shaped by external perceptions rather than lived realities. Such representations have frequently been critiqued for reproducing reductive and stereotypical images of Islam and Muslim identities, particularly in the post-9/11 literary landscape. Scholars have argued that many of these texts are embedded within what Edward Said conceptualizes as *Orientalism*—a discourse that constructs the "Muslim Other" as backward, irrational, and inherently violent (Said, 1978).

Writers such as Don DeLillo, Martin Amis, and Ian McEwan, while not exclusively focused on Muslim characters, engage with themes of terrorism,

religious extremism and global conflict in ways that often situate Muslim identities within narratives of suspicion and threat. For instance, DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) explores the psychological aftermath of 9/11 but has been read as framing Muslim figures largely through the lens of violence and alienation. Similarly, Martin Amis's essays and fiction, particularly in *The Second Plane* (2008), have been criticised for generalisations about Islam that blur distinctions between extremist violence and the religion as a whole. Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005), while more indirect, it reflects broader anxieties about terrorism that contribute to a cultural climate in which Muslim identities are implicitly associated with danger.

Amin Malak's intervention in *Muslim Narratives* constitutes a crucial attempt to delimit the field of "Muslim writing" by foregrounding authorial identity and cultural affiliation as primary criteria. Malak explicitly excludes representations of Muslims produced by non-Muslim writers, arguing instead for a corpus defined by writers who identify as Muslim and whose work is shaped by Islam as a central axis of experience. For Malak, Islam functions as a dominant marker of identity, "superseding class, gender, race, or ethnic affiliation" (Malak 3). This position, while offering a corrective to Orientalist misrepresentations (Said 1978), simultaneously risks essentialising Muslim identity by privileging religious belonging over other intersecting determinants of subjectivity. As critics of identity-based frameworks have argued, such an approach may inadvertently reproduce a homogenising logic that overlooks internal differences and the plurality of Muslim lived experiences (Brah 1996; Hall 1990).

Critics such as Wail S. Hassan (2011) and Claire Chambers (2011) note that such representations often function within a paradigm of cultural translation that is asymmetrical, where Muslim subjects are narrated through dominant Western perspectives, thereby limiting the complexity and plurality of Muslim voices. These narratives risk reinforcing what Mahmood Mamdani (2004) terms the binary of "good Muslim/bad Muslim," reducing a diverse global community into simplistic moral categories.

Thus, while these authors contribute to important conversations about global conflict and modernity, their portrayals of Muslims often remain entangled in broader discursive structures that privilege external observation over internal articulation, raising critical questions about authority, authenticity and representation in contemporary literature.

Another significant and contentious category within contemporary Muslim-related writing comprises authors such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Irshad Manji, Taslima Nasreen, Azar Nafisi and Khaled Hosseini, whose works, while often drawing upon Muslim contexts or identities, have been critically examined for aligning with dominant Western discourses on Islam and Muslim societies. These writers frequently foreground themes of gender oppression, religious authoritarianism and cultural backwardness, which, although grounded in particular experiences, are

often generalised in ways that risk reinforcing reductive and homogenising representations of Islam.

Postcolonial critics have interrogated this tendency through the concept of the “native informant,” a term popularised by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999), referring to figures who, intentionally or otherwise, mediate the representation of their own cultures in ways that are legible and consumable within Western epistemological frameworks. Within this paradigm, such writers are seen as occupying a complex positionality: they claim insider authority while simultaneously addressing and often affirming the expectations of a predominantly Western readership. Hamid Dabashi (2011) extends this critique by arguing that figures like Ayaan Hirsi Ali function as “comprador intellectuals,” whose narratives are mobilised within broader imperial and neo-colonial projects that seek to construct Islam as inherently regressive and in need of reform through Western intervention.

This dynamic is closely tied to what has been described as neo-Orientalism- a contemporary reconfiguration of Orientalist discourse that continues to depict Muslim societies through lenses of violence, patriarchy and irrationality, albeit now often articulated by voices originating from within those societies (Said 1978; Kumar 2012). These neo-orientalist Muslim writers are called “belligeteri” by Tariq Ali and are held responsible for serving the orientalist tropes and reinforcing Western stereotypes about Islam and fellow Muslims.

The global publishing industry and media networks play a crucial role in amplifying such narratives, as they align with pre-existing ideological frameworks and market demands in the West. As Deepa Kumar (2012) argues, Islamophobia is not merely a set of prejudiced attitudes but a structured discourse sustained by political, economic and cultural institutions, within which certain kinds of “insider critique” gain disproportionate visibility.

However, it is important to note that the categorisation of these writers as “native informants” is not without controversy. Some scholars caution against dismissing their work outright, arguing that it may also reflect genuine dissent and internal critique within Muslim societies (Mahmood 2005). Nevertheless, the disproportionate circulation and reception of such narratives in Western contexts raise critical questions about representational authority, selective visibility and the politics of literary production.

Thus, this body of writing must be situated within a broader field of power relations, where questions of authenticity, audience and ideological alignment intersect. Rather than simply offering neutral or objective accounts, these texts participate in a complex economy of representation that often privileges narratives of Muslim dysfunction while marginalising more nuanced, internally grounded articulations of Muslim identity and experience.

A significant contemporary trend within Muslim writing marks a shift away from Islam as a strictly theological or doctrinal framework toward an engagement with

Islam as culture, memory and lived heritage. This mode of writing foregrounds what Mohja Kahf terms “literary Muslimness,” a concept that captures the ways in which Muslim identity is articulated through narrative, affect and cultural experience rather than through explicit religious instruction or doctrinal commitment (Kahf 2000). Such a reorientation challenges the binary that often structures discussions of Muslim literature- namely, the opposition between “Islamic” (faith-based, didactic) and “secular” (detached from religion)- by occupying an intermediate and fluid space that resists both categorizations. Writers such as Fadia Faqir, a Jordanian-British Muslim writer, exemplify this trend, as their works engage with themes of displacement, gender, memory and cultural belonging without being confined to overtly theological frameworks. Faqir in her novels like *Pillars of Salt* (1996) and *My Name is Salma* (2007), foregrounds the lived experiences of Muslim women negotiating identity across geographies, thereby illustrating how “Muslimness” can function as a cultural and affective marker rather than a purely religious one.

This notion of “literary Muslimness” is particularly significant because it complicates reductive expectations placed upon Muslim writers to either defend Islam or critique it in explicitly ideological terms. Instead, it enables what Wail S. Hassan (2011) identifies as a form of cultural translation, wherein writers negotiate multiple audiences and discursive contexts while articulating internally nuanced perspectives. In doing so, such writing resists both Orientalist representations that homogenise Muslim identities (Said 1978) and narrowly defined “Islamic fiction” that prioritises moral didacticism.

Moreover, this trend reflects the heterogeneity of Muslim diasporic experience, aligning with Avtar Brah’s (1996) conceptualisation of diaspora as a space of intersecting subjectivities shaped by history, culture and power relations. By foregrounding plurality, “literary Muslimness” allows for the emergence of diverse narrative voices that articulate belonging, alienation and identity in ways that are context-specific and often contradictory. It thereby repositions Muslim writing as a dynamic and contested field rather than a fixed category.

Importantly, this body of work also challenges the demand for authenticity that often burdens minority writers. As Saba Mahmood (2005) suggests, subjectivity within Islamic contexts cannot be reduced to a singular mode of expression or resistance. In this sense, “literary Muslimness” offers an alternative framework that acknowledges multiple ways of being Muslim- religious, cultural, hybrid and even ambivalent- without privileging one over the other.

Claire Chambers advances a more culturally inflected and less doctrinally restrictive framework for understanding Muslim writing. In *British Muslim Fictions*, she deliberately shifts the focus away from religiosity toward cultural inheritance, employing the term “writers of Muslim heritage.” As she clarifies, this category is “not concerned with the religiosity of the writers” but rather with “the ways in which writers of Muslim heritage are to an extent influenced by

‘Islamicate civilizations’” (Chambers, *British Muslim Fictions* 11). Drawing on Marshall Hodgson’s influential concept of the “Islamicate” (Hodgson 1974), Chambers emphasises the broader civilizational, historical and cultural formations associated with Islam, rather than adherence to religious doctrine per se. Drawing on Marshall Hodgson’s influential concept of the “Islamicate” (Hodgson 1974), Chambers emphasises the broader civilizational, historical and cultural formations associated with Islam, rather than adherence to religious doctrine per se. Chambers emphasises engagement with Islamic cultural backgrounds while simultaneously addressing broader questions of migration, hybridity and identity.

This reconceptualization is significant in that it seeks to move beyond “stereotypical representations of ‘Muslimness’ as a unitary, unchanging identity, and to eschew problematic judgments about whether or not writers are sufficiently religious” (Chambers 10). By doing so, Chambers resists the impulse to authenticate Muslim writers based on degrees of piety or doctrinal correctness- a tendency that has often structured both Western critical reception and intra-community debates. Instead, her framework allows for a more expansive understanding of Muslim identity as fluid, negotiated, and context-dependent.

Thus, writing grounded in cultural heritage rather than doctrinal allegiance expands the scope of Muslim narratives, enabling a more complex understanding of identity that moves beyond rigid binaries. It affirms that Muslim writing is not a monolithic tradition but a plural and evolving discourse shaped by diverse historical, cultural and individual experiences.

Within this paradigm, the emphasis shifts from Islam as a fixed ideological system to the ways in which individual writers engage with, reinterpret, or even distance themselves from their Muslim cultural inheritance. Such an approach aligns with Stuart Hall’s (1990) conception of identity as a process of “becoming” rather than “being,” as well as with Wail S. Hassan’s (2011) notion of diasporic writing as a site of cultural translation. It also resonates with Saba Mahmood’s (2005) critique of liberal frameworks that seek to categorise Muslim subjectivity through rigid binaries of religiosity and secularism.

Consequently, the discursive focus in Chambers’ formulation rests on the writer as a situated subject, negotiating multiple affiliations and producing meaning through complex engagements with heritage, memory and socio-political context. Rather than treating Islam solely as a political ideology or theological system, this approach foregrounds the multiplicity of ways in which “Muslimness” is lived, imagined and narrated. It opens up the field to a diverse range of voices whose relationships to Islam may be cultural, ethical, aesthetic, or even ambivalent, thereby challenging reductive categorizations and enabling a more nuanced understanding of contemporary Muslim writing.

Geoffrey Nash’s formulation of Muslim writing, although a methodologically unsettled, offers an expansive framework for understanding the field. He suggests that Muslim writing “takes Islam or Islamic religious belief and cultures as its

focus” (Nash 5), thereby shifting attention from authorial identity to thematic and representational concerns. At one level, this definition is productive: it resists essentialising Muslim writing as the exclusive domain of Muslim authors and instead foregrounds Islam as a discursive and cultural object. However, such an approach also raises critical questions about epistemic authority and representational legitimacy. If Muslim writing is defined primarily by its subject matter, then texts produced by non-Muslim writers- often embedded within Orientalist or neo-Orientalist frameworks- risk being granted equal status within the category, thereby blurring the distinction between self-representation and external representation (Said 1978; Hassan 2011).

Nash’s historical approach attempts to address this complexity by situating Muslim writing within a broader global trajectory, particularly emphasising how, in contemporary diasporic contexts, Islam is frequently positioned as the constitutive “Other” of the West. This argument aligns with postcolonial critiques that identify the persistence of Orientalist binaries in modern cultural production (Said 1978; Kumar 2012). Yet, despite mapping this trajectory, Nash refrains from offering a precise or stable definition of Muslim writing. Instead, he assembles a heterogeneous corpus that includes non-Muslim writers such as John Updike and Don DeLillo, alongside figures often described as neo-Orientalist, including Irshad Manji and Taslima Nasreen, as well as writers like Naguib Mahfouz and Mohsin Hamid who identify as Muslims. While this inclusivity enables a comparative understanding of how “Muslimness” is constructed across different positionalities, it also risks collapsing crucial distinctions between insider and outsider perspectives, thereby diluting the specificity of Muslim self-representation.

In contrast to Nash’s broadly inclusive framework, Rehana Ahmed, Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin adopt a more discursively oriented approach that shifts the focus away from authorial identity altogether. They propose to “investigate the discursive power of texts rather than authorship” (Neriman 15), thereby foregrounding the ways in which meanings are produced, circulated and contested within specific socio-political contexts. This move is theoretically significant, as it resonates with Foucauldian notions of discourse and power, where texts are understood not merely as reflections of identity but as active participants in the construction of knowledge and subjectivity (Foucault 1972).

Ahmed, Morey and Yaqin further complicate the field by highlighting the internal diversity among writers commonly grouped under the label of Muslim writing. Secular or culturally inflected Muslim writers such as Salman Rushdie and Fadia Faqir, they argue, articulate a wide spectrum of positions, often combining seemingly oppositional elements- faith and doubt, materialism and spirituality, individualism and community- within their narratives. This observation underscores the inadequacy of rigid classificatory frameworks that attempt to stabilise Muslim identity or literary production within singular ideological

categories. Instead, these writers exemplify what Stuart Hall (1990) describes as the fluid and contingent nature of identity, constantly negotiated across multiple axes of experience.

Perhaps most significantly, Ahmed, Morey and Yaqin challenge the very possibility of isolating Muslim writing as a discrete and autonomous category. They contend that Muslim and non-Muslim texts about Muslim representation are “mutually shaping and cannot be sealed off from one another” (15). This assertion has far-reaching implications. It suggests that representations of Muslims- whether produced from within or outside the community- exist within an interconnected discursive field where meanings are relational and co-constitutive. Such a perspective complicates attempts, like Malak’s, to demarcate clear boundaries around Muslim writing based solely on authorial identity. At the same time, it also demands a critical vigilance toward the asymmetries of power that shape this mutuality, particularly in contexts where Western narratives about Islam enjoy greater institutional visibility and circulation (Kumar 2012; Dabashi 2011).

Taken together, these positions reveal that Muslim writing cannot be reduced to a single definitional framework. Nash’s thematic inclusivity, while illuminating, risks erasing distinctions of perspective and power; Ahmed, Morey and Yaqin’s discursive model, while theoretically robust, raises questions about the limits of relativism in the face of unequal representational authority. What emerges instead is a deeply contested field in which Muslim writing must be understood as a site of ongoing negotiation- between self and other, faith and culture, authorship and discourse, and, crucially, between competing regimes of representation.

Despite the acknowledged importance of both Muslim and non-Muslim narratives in shaping representations of Islam and Muslims, a critical problem emerges when interpretive authority is disproportionately vested in texts that “ascribe any power and agency to the narratives about Muslims written by non-Muslims that essentially work to reduce Muslim identity into a fixed object” (15). Such representations, while often claiming universality, frequently operate within pre-existing epistemological frameworks that lack the cultural and hermeneutic depth necessary for nuanced understanding. As Geoffrey Nash argues, these writings cannot claim authentic representation because they do not possess “the semantic tools to penetrate the mysteries of Muslim identity” (Nash 108). This limitation is not merely methodological but ideological, as many of these texts are embedded within broader structures of Western hegemonic discourse.

Writers such as John Updike and Ian McEwan, for instance, have been critiqued for producing narratives that are not ideologically neutral but rather shaped by deeply ingrained assumptions about Islam and the Muslim world. As noted, “the separatist ideologies that underpin such texts are pervasive and already entrenched in the hegemonic discourse” (Neriman 15). These representations often construct Muslims as a monolithic category, frequently associated with threat, irrationality,

or cultural incompatibility with the West- a tendency that has intensified in the post-9/11 geopolitical climate (Said 1978; Kumar 2012). In this context, even ostensibly sympathetic portrayals can be complicit in what Rehana Ahmed, Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin describe as a discursive pattern wherein “whether sympathetic or hostile” such works “serve to fix and establish a way of seeing- one might almost call it a structure of feeling- Muslims in the West” (Ahmed et al. 5). This “structure of feeling” (Williams 1977) underscores how literary texts contribute to the normalization of particular affective and ideological responses toward Muslims, thereby reinforcing rather than destabilizing dominant narratives.

In response to this persistent Orientalization, Muslim writers have increasingly sought to reclaim representational authority by articulating alternative narratives that foreground internal perspectives and lived experiences. These counter-narratives challenge reductive constructions of Muslim identity, particularly in diasporic contexts across Europe and North America. However, this field is itself marked by internal contestations. Certain Muslim-background writers, often described as neo-Orientalist, have been critiqued for reinforcing Western stereotypes about Islam and Muslim societies. Tariq Ali’s term “belligeteri” captures this phenomenon, referring to figures who, as Chambers notes, “merely capitalize on anti-Muslim stereotypes” (qtd. in Chambers 45–46). These writers frequently attribute social issues such as gender inequality or authoritarianism primarily to Islam as a religion, thereby overlooking the complex interplay of historical, political, and socio-economic factors (Dabashi 2011).

The prominence of such narratives in Western literary markets is not incidental. As Claire Chambers observes, these “native informants” often succeed because they are “saying things about Islam that the mainstream wants to hear” (“Multi-Culti” 3891). Their works gain traction precisely because they resonate with pre-existing ideological expectations, thus feeding into a broader Islamophobic discourse that constructs Muslims as a civilizational “problem” or “threat” (Kumar 2012). This selective visibility marginalizes alternative narratives that present more nuanced, internally grounded understandings of Muslim identity. Consequently, the question of representation becomes inseparable from the politics of reception and circulation.

It is in this context that Amin Malak’s call to privilege narratives that “project the culture and civilization of Islam from within” (Malak 2) acquires renewed significance. Such an approach seeks to foreground insider perspectives without necessarily collapsing them into a singular or homogeneous voice. Similarly, Mohja Kahf advocates for a critical engagement with what she terms “literary Muslimness,” urging scholars to attend to the diversity of narrative strategies and subject positions that characterize Muslim writing. She identifies a shift toward a “notion of Muslim authorship” grounded in individual experience and interpretive agency (Kahf, “Teaching Diaspora” 167), and calls for “a comprehensive study

that explores the interplay of Muslimness, literature, and diaspora is one of many” (Neriman 21). Kahf’s framework thus opens up space for understanding Muslim writing as a plural and evolving discourse rather than a fixed category.

At the same time, contemporary debates on Muslim identity are shaped by two dominant and reductive paradigms. On the one hand, a Eurocentric discourse positions Islam as antithetical to liberalism and modernity; on the other, certain internal or reformist discourses frame Islam as a rigid, prescriptive system that constrains individual freedom. Both perspectives tend to produce binary oppositions- such as “good Muslim” versus “bad Muslim” (Mamdani 2004), or devout versus secular- thereby reinforcing the notion of Islam as a monolithic entity. As Anissa Hélie cautions, such frameworks construct Muslim identity “as unified and (of) Islam as monolithic in order to establish a set of totalizing ‘truths’” (Hélie 4). The consequence is the erasure of alternative modes of being Muslim, including hybrid, cultural and ambivalent identities that do not conform to these binaries. Moreover, a strictly theological definition of Muslimness risks delegitimizing diverse forms of identification. As Hélie notes, “alternative visions of what it may mean to be a Muslim ... (are rendered) culturally irrelevant; they may even be denounced as blasphemous” (4). This not only marginalizes non-practicing or culturally affiliated Muslims but also narrows the scope of literary representation. Conversely, Western hegemonic discourse continues to frame Muslim identity through the lens of crisis and threat, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11, thereby reinforcing a reductive and securitized understanding of Islam (Kumar 2012; Said 1978).

Within this polarized landscape, Muslim women have often been instrumentalized as symbolic figures, frequently depicted as passive, oppressed and in need of rescue. Such representations serve to legitimize broader political and ideological agendas while obscuring the agency and diversity of Muslim women’s lived experiences (Mahmood 2005; Abu-Lughod 2013). In response, Arab Anglophone and other Muslim diaspora writers have increasingly produced revisionist narratives that challenge these stereotypes. By foregrounding complex subjectivities and alternative epistemologies, these writers seek to reconfigure dominant paradigms of representation and articulate new ways of understanding Muslim identity.

Ultimately, the contest over Muslim representation is not merely a literary issue but a deeply political one, shaped by asymmetries of power, authority and visibility. To move toward more nuanced and ethically responsible representations, it is imperative to critically interrogate both external and internal narratives, while remaining attentive to the plurality of voices that constitute contemporary Muslim writing.

Leila Aboulela, a Sudanese-born British writer, occupies a distinctive position within contemporary diasporic literature through her sustained engagement with questions of identity, migration and Islamic spirituality. Her fiction advances what

may be described as an Islamic feminist ethos, wherein female protagonists navigate precarious diasporic contexts and turn to faith not as a marker of subjugation but as a resource for ethical self-fashioning, stability and agency. In doing so, Aboulela challenges the dominant secular-liberal paradigm that equates emancipation with detachment from religion and instead foregrounds Islam as a viable framework for empowerment and subject formation (Mahmood 2005; Chambers 2011).

Aboulela's work directly contests the "normativity of secularism" that underpins much postcolonial and feminist criticism (Asad 2003; Mahmood 2005). Her protagonists resist assimilationist pressures and the epistemic authority of Western modernity by re-centering faith in their lives. This narrative strategy disrupts long-standing Orientalist assumptions that portray Islam as inherently oppressive to women (Said 1978; Ahmed 1992). Instead, Aboulela presents religious commitment as a conscious, agential choice that enables her characters to negotiate crises of displacement, Islamophobia and racialization in diasporic spaces. As Tina Steiner observes, Aboulela's fiction "portrays her characters' spirituality as a liberating force, which affords them the room to construct transnational identities as Muslim women" (Steiner 13).

The broader context within which Aboulela writes is marked by persistent Orientalist and neo-Orientalist representations of Muslim societies. Western discourses have historically constructed Islam as monolithic, backward and patriarchal, often reducing Muslim women to passive victims in need of rescue (Said 1978; Ahmed 1992; Kumar 2012). This representational logic intensified after 9/11 and 7/7, when Muslim identities became hyper-visible within global media and political narratives (Mamdani 2004). Muslim women, in particular, were positioned at the centre of these discourses, frequently mobilized to justify imperial and neo-colonial interventions. Laura Bush's assertion that "the fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women" exemplifies how gendered narratives were instrumentalized to legitimize the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan (Bush 2001). Such rhetoric frames Muslim women as victims of their own culture and religion, thereby reinforcing the need for Western intervention. Aboulela's fiction resists these reductive frameworks by foregrounding the plurality and fluidity of Muslim identities. Her narratives emphasize how Muslim women's subjectivities "transmute under the effect of new spaces," highlighting the dynamic interplay between faith, migration and cultural negotiation. Rather than depicting religion as an obstacle, Aboulela portrays Islam as a source of ethical coherence and belonging within the fragmented realities of diaspora. This positions her work within a broader postsecular literary turn that reintroduces religion as a legitimate category of analysis in understanding contemporary subjectivities (McClure 2007).

Her novel *Minaret* (2006) exemplifies this intervention through the journey of its protagonist, Najwa. The narrative traces Najwa's transformation from a

Westernized, affluent Sudanese woman to a practicing Muslim navigating the challenges of life in London. Critics such as Sadia Abbas note that the novel foregrounds “the issues of Islamic faith in the life and choices of its central protagonists” (Abbas 87), thereby situating spirituality at the core of diasporic identity formation.

Najwa’s trajectory complicates dominant narratives of liberation. In Khartoum, she inhabits a privileged, secularized lifestyle characterized by Western cultural practices, yet this apparent freedom lacks existential depth. Following political upheaval and personal loss, her migration to London exposes her to acute experiences of alienation, unhomeliness and moral disorientation. Her relationship with Anwar- an atheist and a self-proclaimed progressive- further underscores the limitations of secular modernity. Despite his ideological commitments, Anwar embodies a form of patriarchal dominance that manifests through emotional manipulation and disregard for Najwa’s autonomy. His dismissal of her moral concerns- “Like every other Arab girl... you’ve been brainwashed about the importance of virginity” (157) - reveals the persistence of gendered power even within ostensibly liberal frameworks.

Although Najwa is physically free to do whatever she wishes to do, she is disillusioned with this kind of freedom she calls void and nothing. “This empty space was called freedom” (Aboulela, *Minaret* 156). This unchecked freedom, instead of liberating her, suppresses her further. Najwa begins to seek alternative forms of meaning and belonging. Invoking Saba Mahmood, Aboulela regards this absence of restraints and direction and the freedom to act as one like as “negative freedom”. Paradoxically, this “negative freedom”, seen as “positive freedom” in the Western discourses about gender, and “pregnant with possibility of women’s fulfilment and self-realization” (Mahmood 12), is viewed as a shortcoming towards the goal of self-realization and fulfillment by the author. Saba Mahmood’s critique of liberal feminism is instructive here: what is often celebrated as freedom within Western discourse may, in fact, produce new forms of subjugation when detached from ethical and spiritual grounding (Mahmood 2005). Najwa’s eventual turn to Islam represents not regression but a reorientation towards what she perceives as a more meaningful and disciplined mode of existence. Her desire for “a wash, a purge, a restoration of innocence” (*Minaret* 213) signals a process of ethical self-renewal rather than passive submission.

Amidst a sense of displacement and alienation, the mosque emerges as a crucial space of belonging and transformation. As Claire Chambers notes, it provides “a sense of security, well-being and locatedness” (Chambers 184), countering the dislocation of diasporic life. Within this space, Najwa reconstructs her identity through practices such as prayer, veiling and recitation of the *Qur’an*. These acts are not imposed but chosen, thereby challenging dominant representations of Muslim women as coerced subjects.

The question of the hijab is particularly significant in this regard. Western discourse often interprets veiling as a symbol of oppression and invisibility (Young 2003), yet Aboulela reconfigures it as a site of agency and self-definition. Najwa's decision to wear the hijab in London- rather than in Sudan- subverts the assumption that veiling is culturally enforced. Instead, it becomes a deliberate assertion of identity within a secular, and often hostile, environment. As Leila Ahmed argues, colonial narratives historically framed veiling as emblematic of Muslim women's degradation in order to justify imperial intervention (Ahmed 1992). Aboulela's narrative dismantles this logic by presenting veiling as a conscious ethical and spiritual choice.

Moreover, the hijab functions as a form of resistance against the objectifying male gaze. Najwa's reflection that "the builders who had leered down at me... couldn't see me any more" (217) illustrates how veiling enables her to reclaim control over her body and visibility. Cariello interprets this as a "liberating gesture" through which Najwa rejects "the intruding, sexualising gaze of male, Western hegemony" (Cariello 341). However, at the same time, the hijab exposes her to racial and Islamophobic violence, as evidenced in the bus attack where she is labelled "Muslim scum" (101). This duality underscores the complex intersection of gender, religion and race in diasporic contexts.

Aboulela's critique extends beyond Western representations to engage with internal debates within Muslim communities. Through characters like Tamer and Ali, she contrasts ethical, faith-centered masculinity with the exploitative behaviour of Anwar, thereby challenging both secular and patriarchal paradigms. Importantly, Najwa's renunciation of romantic fulfilment in favour of religious commitment exemplifies what Mahmood describes as piety as a form of agency- "performative, behavioural, and yet creative of subjectivity" (Mahmood 303). This challenges the binary opposition between submission and resistance that often structures feminist discourse.

In positioning faith as central to identity, Aboulela contributes to a reconfiguration of Muslim women's subjectivity that resists both Orientalist misrepresentation and neo-Orientalist internal critique. As Al-Khayyat and Abu Amrieh observe, her characters "are not ones that are submissive or voiceless... but are ones who choose to be devout Muslims so as to find solace and stability" (3). This emphasis on choice and agency is crucial in dismantling the stereotype of the oppressed Muslim woman.

Furthermore, Aboulela's own reflections reinforce this interpretive framework. In an interview with Claire Chambers, she asserts that "Islam isn't just part of the culture of my fiction... it's to do with the individual and their faith and their own belief and what they want to do" (Chambers 97). This insistence on individual religiosity situates her work within a postsecular paradigm that recognizes the continued relevance of faith in shaping modern identities.

Finally, Aboulela's narratives must be situated within broader debates on transnational identity and resistance. As Miriam Cooke argues, in postcolonial contexts "religion was the key element in indigenous identity... Islam served as a kind of spiritual, cultural nation" (Cooke xx). For diasporic subjects like Najwa, Islam becomes not merely a religious affiliation but a transnational anchor that enables resistance to both cultural erasure and ideological domination. Aboulela's fiction offers a powerful counter-narrative to dominant representations of Muslim women by foregrounding faith as a source of agency, belonging and ethical self-formation. Through her nuanced portrayal of diasporic subjectivity, she challenges the binaries of secular/religious, oppressed/liberated and tradition/modernity that continue to structure both academic and popular discourse. Her work ultimately calls for a more complex understanding of Muslim women's lives- one that acknowledges the multiplicity of their experiences and the centrality of faith in shaping their identities.

Conclusion

Minaret offers a compelling reconfiguration of Muslim women's diasporic subjectivity by centering faith as a site of agency rather than subjugation. Through Najwa's trajectory- from an elite, westernized life in Sudan to economic precarity and spiritual reorientation in Britain- Aboulela unsettles dominant narratives that equate modernity with secularization. The novel's inversion is crucial: Najwa becomes more religious not in a conservative homeland but within a liberal Western context, thereby exposing the limits of secular-liberal frameworks in accounting for Muslim women's lived experiences.

Aboulela's intervention lies in demonstrating that religion can function as an ethical and stabilizing force in conditions of displacement, where "faith and rituals become moving modes of living" (Ghazoul). As Chambers notes, for diasporic subjects "Islam is far less an ideology than a code of ethical behaviour and a central marker of identity" (Chambers 88). This challenges the homogenizing tendency of Western discourse to portray Muslim women as uniformly oppressed and in need of rescue.

Ultimately, the novel reframes the debate from prescriptive judgments about practices such as veiling to the more fundamental question of autonomy and choice. By foregrounding women who consciously embrace religious practices, Aboulela contests both Orientalist misrepresentations and reductive feminist binaries. *Minaret* thus insists that Muslim women's identities are neither fixed nor monolithic but are actively negotiated, where faith becomes a deliberate, empowering articulation of selfhood rather than a sign of constraint.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/12**THE GASTRO-POLITICS OF IDENTITY: A SPECULATION ON FOOD
AS A REPRESENTATIVE APPARATUS OF CULTURAL MEMORY
AND RESISTANCE IN THE TRANSNATIONAL BILDUNGSROMAN IN
ANITA DESAI'S *FASTING, FEASTING*****DR. PRASANTA GHOSHAL**Faculty, Sir Gurudas Mahavidyalaya, University of Calcutta
Visiting Faculty, Sister Nivedita University and DCON**Abstract**

This study analyzes culinary crossovers and food heritage in Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) using postcolonial and cultural memory theory to examine how Desai uses food narratives as sites of cultural assimilation and resistance that unpack the hybrid nature of authenticity in emerging Indian identity formation. The research discusses three main dimensions: cultural memory inscribed in customary food preparation practices, postcolonial hybridization among indigenous and Western dietary traditions, and gendered food spaces as arenas of feminine agency in patriarchal society, using a theoretical framework integrating Homi Bhabha's cultural hybridity, Jan Assmann's collective memory transmission, Arjun Appadurai's culinary nationalism, and feminist critique of domestic space. Textual analysis centres on particular chapters discussing Uma's life with kitchen hierarchy (Chapter 3), wedding feast politics (Chapter 7), recipe adaptation between homes (Chapter 12), and fasting as religious discipline and protest (Chapter 15), and the American portion analyzes Arun's cultural displacement through breakfast encounters (Chapter 18), relations with processed foods (Chapter 20), efforts at cultural appropriation (Chapter 22), and barbecue misunderstandings (Chapter 24). The research classifies evidence into four domains: food as cultural memory through ritualistic food preparation and recipe sharing; culinary resistance through refusal of food and recipe alteration; cross-cultural encounters contrasting Indian joint family practices with American individualistic habits; and authenticity performance through food selections communicating class and cultural legitimacy. Research questions target how food narratives represent the unattainability of "pure" cultural authenticity, conventional cooking as resistance to patriarchal and assimilationist forces, opposing food cultures that expose constructed national identities, and gendered food labor's role in power dynamics. This study adds to postcolonial food studies by showing culinary representations as rich negotiation spaces instead of unidimensional tradition-modernity markers, illustrating how Desai's representation subverts binary authenticity understandings and emphasizes cultural heritage's continued relevance in globalized settings and furthering

feminist scholarship by analyzing domestic food spaces as alternative spaces of agency for marginal women characters.

Keywords: Recipe, representation, colonial, binary, culinary etc.

Introduction

Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* holds a significant place among works in contemporary Indian English literature because it uses routine domestic events to create powerful symbols with cultural and political implications. Published in 1999, the novel talks about the psychology and emotions of the lives of members of middle-class Indian families through the parallel stories of Uma from India and Arun who migrates to America. Eating, cooking, fasting, dishes, kitchens, and meals become symbolic for cultural memory, gender oppression, resistance, migration, feelings of loneliness, and identity construction. For the author, food is a symbol that reflects social inequality, patriarchal oppression, emotional deprivation, and cultural anxiety. This novel by Desai uncovers how culinary habits can influence the construction of personal and collective identity in both Indian and American cultural contexts.

The notion of “culinary nationalism” by Arjun Appadurai acquires the utmost relevance here since he describes how traditions of food contribute to preserving identity. In his article “How to Make a National Cuisine,” Appadurai states that food habits and recipes allow people to create an idea of their culture. In *Fasting, Feasting*, Indian food customs like making pickles, fasting, vegetarianism, wedding feasts, and ceremonies of food preparation are the customs reflecting inherited values of families and the community. Moreover, Desai also refers to the theory of Homi K. Bhabha about hybridity. Bhabha claims that the idea of the Third Space allows people to understand that colonized and post-colonial identities appear due to the process of cultural exchange and not purity. Thus, food in the book becomes a space of mixing Indian and Western habits that sometimes conflict but imitate each other. Finally, the theory of cultural memory by Jan Assmann should be mentioned since the novel shows that the tradition of preparing food plays the role of keeping inter-generational memory. The kitchens in the novel acquire the character of gendered spaces which has a feminist angle of vision per se.

The depiction of food in the work is also a product of broader historical and postcolonial contexts. The experience of colonialism between India and the West introduced new cultural aspects into Indian society through processes such as globalization, urbanization, and the growth of consumerism. Traditional Indian customs related to food were thus juxtaposed against the cultural notions of consumption and modernity associated with Western civilization. Desai represents these shifts delicately. Indian families from the novel maintain their adherence to the traditional customs associated with food while seeking to achieve respectability as part of the Western middle class. The very act of fasting versus

feasting represents the dichotomy that was present in Indian society during modern times. While fasting is associated with spirituality and self-control, feasting stands for indulgence and enjoyment.

Life of Uma in India shows that food is an instrument in the creation of patriarchal power in the household. Mama Papa governs the household with the help of strict systems of the house connected with food preparation and consumption. The kitchen is turned into a workplace for women. The mother of Uma manages the whole household, organizing meals, shopping, and ceremonies, and at the same time imposing oppressive norms for her daughters. There are constant connections between food and rules to be followed. While Uma's wants are neglected, she must cater to the needs of males. It can be clearly seen from their approach to meals that there is a hierarchy within the family, where Arun is favored due to his masculinity. The clearest example of gender politics of food can be seen in the description of cooking and preparing meals for guests and family members. While women toil endlessly in the kitchen, men take up the roles of leisure and power. Domestic labor is rendered invisible by the patriarchal nature of the society, which views women's work as a mere obligation. Feminist theory explains how kitchens may serve as spaces of restriction for women due to the expectations of domestication. The confinement of women within domestic repetition as argued by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* can explain Uma's plight.

Food preparation, as depicted by Desai, is full of symbolism and rich imagery. Preparation of pickles, sweets, chapatis, and traditional meals reflects emotion and culture. According to Jan Assmann's model of cultural memory, repetition of rituals maintains collective memory through generations. Rituals of food in the case of *Fasting, Feasting* help maintain this memory. The religious fasting, familial eating, and ritualistic cookery help characters maintain connection to the customs of their heritage. But at the same time, such rituals can be oppressive since one has to control his/her own impulses in order to conform socially.

Fasting in the novel has spiritual, psychological, and political meanings. Fasting has been considered a symbolic gesture of purity and devotion in Indian tradition, particularly among women. Women's fasting rituals have been known for making sacrifices for the benefit of husband, household, and religion. Desai brings out the gendered nature of these fasting traditions. The discipline required from the female gender regarding their appetite and bodies contrasts the benefits that accrue to the male gender in the same domestic setting. Uma's inner emotional hunger is reflected in her outward fasting practices. Her life becomes one of denial all her days. She is deprived of learning, love, freedom, and expression. Fasting in the novel can be seen as an act of defiance. Feminists tend to see the refusal to eat as a way of taking control over oneself in oppressive settings. Uma's incapability to meet domestic expectations becomes a subtle act of defiance. Her detachment is because of her dissatisfaction with being imprisoned in her household. In this case, Desai uses quiet acts of defiance in the context of food and appetite.

Another aspect of culinary politics can be seen in the wedding feast episodes. In the Indian community, weddings require much effort to display wealth and status in terms of culinary traditions. Weddings become a feast that is used to demonstrate family prestige. According to Desai, the author presents rituals of marriage as performatives and emphasizes their role in reflecting class aspiration and the desire for cultural respectability. The importance of maintaining social image through excessive food usage is a result of the middle-class obsession with honor and dignity.

This example makes Appadurai's theory of culinary nationalism highly applicable. In particular, weddings become a part of group identity performativity as they demonstrate collective experience, which is based on food traditions. Despite this fact, social stratification is reproduced through this ritualistic act since women work hard to fulfill the ritual requirements, while personal desires fade away under collective needs. The concept of authenticity becomes performative as families do everything possible to preserve traditional food customs even if these practices are already modernized.

The transnational element in the novel also comes out clearly in Arun's experience in America. Arun leaves for the US to pursue advanced education and finds himself amidst a different food culture consisting of processed foods, snacking, barbecue, frozen foods, and large amounts of meat. It is clear that in the novel, food emerges as the main medium of cultural alienation in Arun's life.

In contrast to Indian meals characterized by family rituals and collective dining, the food culture portrayed in America in the novel is fragmented and individualized. Desai makes a very clear comparison between the Indian food culture and consumer culture in America. Whereas preparing Indian food requires hard work, rituals, and communal effort, preparing American food requires none of this and seems to have no connection with emotions. The Patton family's fondness for meat and grilling irritates Arun as he associates meat-eating and grilling with gluttony and extravagance. Breakfasts of Arun represent cultural dislocation. The act of daily eating turns into a crisis of identity, since the consumption of simple food like cereal, toast, hamburgers, or barbecue makes Arun aware of his alienation from mainstream society. The explanation for this can be found in Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity. Arun belongs to neither culture, and he is caught in-between. Arun no longer feels at home in a culturally traditional environment, but life in America seems foreign and fragmented as well. The description of American eating habits in the book also reflects the critique of modern capitalism. Desai contrasts the excessive number of different food products available with the emotional voidness of modern suburbia. While Mrs. Patton keeps on eating because she is lonely and dissatisfied, Melanie's bulimia represents her personal psychological crisis against the backdrop of American prosperity. Desai's juxtaposition of starvation and gluttony reveals the

contradictions behind modern capitalism. Both starvation and gluttony lead to suffering.

This aspect is even more meaningful because food plays another important role in relation to bodily resistance. Melanie's refusal to consume anything can be seen as a form of protest against suburban life, which is often perceived by feminists as an outlet for social anxieties about discipline and image in cultures where such concerns exist. Melanie's body serves as a means of resistance towards America's values related to beauty, femininity, housework, and patriarchal domination over family. The same way Uma keeps silent, Melanie resists patriarchal society and oppression by refusing to consume. In her work, Desai demonstrates that patriarchal structures function across different societies, creating similarities between women's fates in India and America. Barbecue scenes demonstrate that not only does Arun fail to adapt culturally, but also the process takes place because of a misperception in the first place. Barbecues in American culture stand for communal gatherings, masculinity, and leisure. Arun is uncomfortable at those parties because of the obsession with meat-eating that appears unusual to him.

Throughout the novel, authenticity continues to be challenged in many different ways. Cultural identity cannot remain authentic because cultures are always undergoing change due to migration, colonialism, globalization, and social evolution. According to Bhabha's concept of hybridity, identities are constructed through negotiations rather than rooted in anything original or pure. Desai's representation of cuisine rejects binaries of east-west, past-present, authenticity, and hybridity. Indian food, in particular, has been the product of centuries of cross-cultural encounters with Mughals, Persians, Britishers, and others.

Recipe modification in the novel is another example of this elusive authenticity. Recipes pass from house to house, from one generation to another, and from one culture to another, adapting themselves as needed. Women retain their culinary tradition while at the same time reinventing it. It is possible to maintain food tradition only by adapting it, not by preserving it. This reflects the experience of immigrants and postcolonial individuals in creating their identity. The characters are always negotiating their sense of belongingness by selecting some aspects of their culture and reinventing it. Desai's use of sensory imagery further enhances the political nature of food. All smells, textures, tastes, and even sounds involved in cooking add to the emotional atmosphere of the novel.

While critical discourse about *Fasting, Feasting* often stresses the oppositional symbolism of India versus America, Desai challenges this binary by demonstrating that there is unhappiness in both worlds. The Indian home is oppressive and hierarchical, whereas the American suburb is emotionally barren and spiritually devoid. Food reveals underlying fears within both cultures. Indian traditions foster community bonding but repress individuality. American abundance fosters independence but generates isolation and alienation.

The story takes the form of a Bildungsroman due to the fact that both Uma and Arun experience forms of psychological development as a result of the cultural and social restrictions imposed upon them. While traditional Bildungsromans deal with self-realization within society, Desai has changed the format of this form and presented us with an incomplete version of development. Uma fails to liberate herself completely from the oppressive patriarchal structure she has grown up under. Arun remains culturally and emotionally dislocated. They both fail to complete their identities and find themselves in a constant state of flux. Food plays a key role in the process of their development since cooking creates emotional memories associated with the sense of belonging to society. This is because Uma is deprived of adequate education due to the restrictions of patriarchal culture. In this regard, the role of feminist theories of domesticity can help to understand the complex nature of relationships between family members in the novel. According to authors like Bell Hooks and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, domestic work within postcolonial communities is not just a form of passive subordination because women also build supportive social structures inside their homes. In the novel *Fasting, Feasting*, recipe exchange and group cooking ensure the continuity of female memory from one generation to another.

Fasting among the religious traditions in the novel also shows the meeting point between religion and patriarchy. It is a custom that women undertake for their families and families' sake. The author asks the question about whether this form of sacrifice is a form of religious devotion or socialization. In other words, women's starvation can be viewed as deprivation on an emotional level under patriarchal rule. The body itself turns out to be a political narrative. Arun's experience of living in another country also proves the psychological impact of globalization. The issue of national identity becomes unstable during migration. Eating customs become a powerful tool of differentiation due to the daily experience of the body. The title of this book reflects all these paradoxes. The terms "fasting" and "feasting" are not just opposite acts; they are connected states in the power hierarchy that exists in society. While some people overeat, others starve emotionally. The patriarchal system requires sacrifice from women. Modern consumerism creates wealth along with loneliness. The concept of culture itself moves from preservation to change. The descriptive language used by Desai in the story makes the readers slow down to focus on the everyday details of life at home. Such a description elevates common acts into a symbolical act.

Postcolonial food scholars maintain that food culture holds within itself stories of oppression, displacement, and cultural accommodation. Food will always have politics, since food is laden with political meaning based on class, caste, gender, religion, and national identity. These ideas are reflected in Desai's book. Eating food takes on an identity performance. Refusing to eat turns into resistance. Preserving recipes transforms into preserving memories. Cooking food becomes a matter of survival. The issues of class and food recur many times in the story.

The middle class is obsessed with maintaining propriety within the confines of its domestic setting. Mama is preoccupied with her concern for propriety within her household.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory on taste and social distinction can also offer a valuable approach to the subject matter. Bourdieu posits that food preferences are determined by class systems and cultural capital. In *Fasting, Feasting*, dietary choices symbolize education, virtue, sophistication, and social ambition. Vegetarian discipline, fasting rituals, and ceremonial hospitality operate as signs of respectability in middle-class society. Desai also condemns the commercialization of food in global capitalism. American consumerism devalues food into processed convenience and plentiful supply. Sentiment is stripped away by mechanical consumption. Arun comes across such alienation many times. Food processing in America stands in stark contrast to the traditional art of Indian cooking. However, Desai does not idealize Indian domesticity due to the patriarchal division of labor in India.

The portrayal of bodily appetite within the novel is also psychologically significant. In the book, the act of hunger may symbolize the desire for emotional satisfaction rather than just being an indication of physical needs. Some individuals desire to gain freedom, acknowledgement, intimate relations, autonomy, and identity. Food serves as a symbol representing unsatisfied emotions. For instance, Uma desires independence while Arun desires cultural consistency. Also, Melanie longs for the freedom to get away from suburban norms. There are other psychological aspects that play a part in the representation of the novel. This includes the literary style in which Desai writes. The constant swapping of scenes depicting either the Indian or American community promotes the idea that all societies have some form of social control, even if it is not the same. Modernity does not eradicate oppression but alters its nature. Some literary scholars have pointed out that there are instances when characters do not speak about their emotional frustrations.

One of the most striking instances of symbolic representation happens when food preparation continues mechanically amid emotional pain. Even if individuals feel suffocated or estranged, domestic traditions remain constant. The repetition serves to demonstrate how social constructs endure over time. Recipes and sacrifices are part of the inheritance that women receive from their ancestors.

There is also a transcultural aspect of the book that is also evident in other postcolonial narratives. Other authors who have focused on food include Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, and Salman Rushdie. In contrast to those other writers, Desai focuses specifically on emotional voids rather than multicultural celebration. Cross-cultural encounters depicted in the book rarely result in peaceful assimilation.

The theme of "home" is still strongly associated with food in the novel. Home-cooked food evokes memories and nostalgia, but it also evokes the feeling of

restriction and obligation. Arun yearns for Indian cuisine while living outside India; however, he also recalls the suffocating environment of his childhood home. Thus, food becomes a source of comfort and confinement at once. The feminist aspect of the novel is particularly compelling since Desai shows how the labor performed by women within households allows for the covert perpetuation of patriarchal structures. Women prepare food, serve food, clean up after meals, and manage family celebrations, all the while remaining unnoticed.

Hybridity is usually viewed as an effective state by postcolonial scholars. Hybridity for Desai, on the other hand, takes on an ambivalent meaning. Cross-cultural interaction leads to innovation but can also result in confusion and dislocation. Complete fulfillment is not found in either the Indian tradition or American modernity. Food serves as a representation of this dilemma. The difference between the ritual fasting of Indians and excessive eating in America represents the challenges facing the world in relation to modernity. While Indian culture upholds discipline and sacrifice, American culture promotes individualism and abundance.

Desai herself holds a significant place in the context of Indian English Literature. Born to a German mother and a Bengali father in the year 1937, Anita Desai often deals with themes like cultural identity, alienation, gender, and psychological complexities in her writing. Her most famous novels are 'Cry, the Peacock', 'Clear Light of Day', 'In Custody', and 'Baumgartner's Bombay'. Her talent in portraying the emotions of her characters through subtle and lyrical prose is highly appreciated by critics. *Fasting, Feasting* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and continues to be her most analyzed novel due to its complicated representation of issues like globalization, domestic life, and transnational identity. While dealing with political aspects, Desai uses the literary device of symbolism and not political discourse in her writing. Food as a motif in the novel '*Fasting, Feasting*' symbolizes love, power, memory, gender training, nationalism, migration, resistance, and emotional deprivation among other things.

The novel also belongs to other literary traditions, such as food writing. Food has been used as a tool to examine the theme of social interactions and identity in literature. In the realm of postcolonial literature, in particular, food writing becomes an important vehicle for expressing cultural negotiation following colonization. This is because the colonizers, in the process of colonizing, also introduced certain eating habits along with colonization. Thus, postcolonial writers tend to reclaim their traditional food rituals as acts of rebellion against the colonizers. Desai steers clear of any kind of glorification of Indian culture. She understands that conventional familial norms could also oppress individuals.

In many cases, the emotive quality connected to food is based on what is absent as opposed to what is abundant. Emotional nourishment continues to be absent even when there is food. There is eating but not emotional fulfillment. This makes the tragedy more intense. It is important to note that Desai's use of cuisine to

portray female experience is especially noteworthy. The bodies of women are controlled by means of starvation, cooking, serving, and sacrifice. Under patriarchal culture, women are expected to feed other people and deny themselves. Women also safeguard memory through culinary practices.

The ending of the novel fails to provide closure. Uma remains confined to her role in life and Arun suffers from cultural homelessness. Their identities continue to remain incomplete. This is indicative of reality in general. Authenticity cannot be achieved because identity changes over time due to many factors.

Consequently, Food in *Fasting, Feasting* goes beyond the level of domesticity in order to show how the politics of gender, power, memory, migration, class, and cultural transformation can be explored through a symbolic language of culinary practices. Food in the novel is used as a means to convey the idea that there are profound emotional and ideological implications behind cooking, eating, serving, and fasting. Desai does not present a binary approach to tradition versus modernity, East versus West, and authenticity versus hybridity but rather shows how the cultural identity of characters changes depending on historical circumstances.

The symbolic value attributed to food in the novel should lead readers to reflect on their everyday domestic experiences from a political perspective. There is nothing innocent about cooking, eating, fasting, and serving because these actions structure social relations and hierarchies within society. The enduring significance of the novel can be attributed to its examination of the themes of globalization and transnational identity. The world today is characterized by cultural fusion, migration, and hybridity. The depiction of the encounters through food in Desai's novel foreshadows many contemporary discussions on issues like authenticity, multiculturalism, and belonging. Indeed, food is one of the most potent ties that bind people to their cultural past.

Fasting, Feasting is an exquisite portrayal of this paradox. Culture does not preserve itself through purity; rather, it preserves itself by constantly reinventing itself. Culinary culture ties one generation with another and, at the same time, transforms according to new circumstances. In this way, the book by Desai becomes a significant contribution to postcolonial cuisine criticism, to feminist criticism, and to transnational literary studies. What gives the novel its deep emotional and political resonance is its concern with the seemingly mundane and private sphere of home-life. The author illustrates that, everyday practices like cooking, refusing to eat, swapping recipes, or enjoying a barbecue can be full of historical and political meanings. The author succeeds in demonstrating that food is a means of creating cultural identity and a reflection of global processes.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/13**DIGITAL ROUTES, VIRTUAL HOMELANDS: SOUTH ASIAN
DIASPORA IDENTITY FORMATION IN ONLINE****RAVI PRAKASH**Assistant Professor, Shri Bhagwan Mahavir PG College, Pawanagar, Kushinagar
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IMS Law College, Noida, India**Abstract**

The rapid proliferation of digital platforms — social media networks, streaming services, community forums, and messaging applications — has created unprecedented virtual spaces where members of the South Asian diaspora negotiate, perform, and transmit cultural identity across geopolitical borders. This paper examines how first-generation and second-generation South Asian migrants in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries utilise online spaces to construct hybrid identities that simultaneously engage with the culture of origin and the culture of settlement. Drawing on diaspora theory, postcolonial frameworks, and digital humanities scholarship, the paper argues that virtual homelands function not as nostalgic retreats from the complexities of diasporic life but as dynamic sites of identity contestation where caste, religion, language, gender, and generational memory intersect with the affordances of digital technology. The study traces how platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and diaspora-specific forums mediate cultural belonging, enable transnational community formation, and facilitate both assimilation and resistance. The paper concludes that digital routes are not peripheral supplements to the "real" routes of South Asian migration but constitutive of the diasporic condition itself in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: South Asian diaspora, digital identity, virtual homelands, transnationalism, online communities, cultural memory, hybrid identity

1. INTRODUCTION

The story of South Asian migration is one of the defining narratives of modern world history. From the indentured labourers transported to Fiji, Trinidad, and Mauritius in the nineteenth century, to the post-Partition refugees who crossed the newly drawn borders of India and Pakistan, to the IT professionals and nurses who settled in Silicon Valley and the National Health Service — South Asian movement across the globe has produced communities of extraordinary cultural

richness and political complexity. These communities, collectively referred to as the South Asian diaspora, constitute one of the world's largest and most diverse transnational populations: the Indian diaspora alone numbers over thirty-two million persons across more than two hundred countries, making it the largest diaspora globally (Ministry of External Affairs, India, 2023).

The scholarly study of diaspora — from William Safran's foundational typology (1991) through Stuart Hall's theorisation of diasporic identity as processual and non-essential (1990), to Paul Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" as a counter-cultural formation (1993) — has consistently engaged with the question of how dispersed communities maintain, transform, and contest cultural identity across the distances of migration. But the dominant frameworks of diaspora studies were developed before the digital revolution transformed the conditions of transnational life. When Avtar Brah wrote of the "politics of home" and the "mythic place of desire" in diaspora consciousness (1996), the internet was nascent; when Homi Bhabha developed his concept of the "third space" of cultural hybridity (1994), social media did not exist. The challenge for contemporary diaspora studies is to understand how digital technology has transformed — rather than merely supplemented — the conditions under which diasporic identity is formed and contested.

This paper takes up that challenge by examining the ways in which South Asian diaspora communities use online spaces as what the paper terms "virtual homelands" — digital environments that perform some of the cultural, affective, and identity functions that physical homeland connection once served exclusively. The paper argues that these virtual homelands are not simply simulacra of the physical homeland, nor are they mere communication tools for maintaining pre-existing social networks. They are generative spaces in which new forms of South Asian diasporic identity are actively constructed, negotiated, and sometimes disputed, across intersections of generation, class, caste, religion, gender, and language.

The paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 reviews the theoretical frameworks that inform the analysis. Section 3 examines the specific digital practices through which South Asian diaspora communities construct virtual homelands. Section 4 analyses the identity dynamics — particularly the tensions between cultural retention and transformation, and between communal solidarity and internal differentiation — that characterise these virtual spaces. Section 5 considers the political and ethical dimensions of digital diaspora formation. The paper concludes with reflections on the implications of virtual homelands for our understanding of the diasporic condition more broadly.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DIASPORA, IDENTITY, AND THE DIGITAL TURN

The concept of diaspora has evolved significantly since its original application to the Jewish experience of dispersal and longing for return. Contemporary scholars

follow Robin Cohen's expanded typology (1997), which distinguishes victim diasporas (African, Armenian), imperial diasporas (British), labour diasporas (Indian, Chinese), trade diasporas (Chinese, Lebanese), and cultural diasporas (Caribbean). South Asian communities fit imperfectly across these categories: the forced migration of indentured labour resonates with the victim/labour categories; the post-colonial professional migration to the UK and North America reflects trade and cultural diaspora features; and the Gulf migration of contract workers represents yet another distinct modality. This heterogeneity — what Pnina Werbner calls the "complex spatiality" of South Asian diaspora (2002, p. 17) — is essential context for understanding how online spaces are differentially inhabited by different South Asian communities.

Stuart Hall's influential argument that Caribbean (and by extension South Asian) diasporic identity is constituted by "the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference" (1990, p. 235) provides a foundational theoretical resource. Hall's formulation refuses the essentialism that would treat diaspora identity as the preservation of a pure, original cultural identity corrupted by contact with the host society. Instead, he understands diaspora identity as produced at the intersection of cultural memory, displacement, and the encounter with difference — a continuous process of production rather than a fixed essence. This processual understanding of identity is essential to analysing digital diaspora spaces, where identity is continuously performed, contested, and renegotiated in public view.

The concept of "banal nationalism" — Billig's (1995) analysis of how national identity is reproduced through mundane everyday practices rather than dramatic nationalist moments — has been adapted by digital scholars to understand "banal transnationalism" (Leurs and Ponzanesi, 2011): the everyday digital practices through which diaspora communities maintain transnational connections without the consciousness of deliberate identity work. The WhatsApp family group that shares wedding photographs from Lahore; the YouTube channel that teaches Carnatic music to Tamil children in Toronto; the Instagram account that documents Eid celebrations in Birmingham — these mundane digital practices are the primary sites of banal transnational identity reproduction for the South Asian diaspora, rather than formal cultural organisations or deliberate heritage preservation projects.

The concept of "digital diaspora" — developed by scholars including Alonso and Oiarzabal (2010), Kissau and Hunger (2010), and Diminescu (2008) — captures the specific ways in which migrant communities inhabit digital spaces. Diminescu's concept of the "connected migrant" (2008) is particularly important: against the older figure of the uprooted migrant who breaks with the homeland, Diminescu describes the contemporary migrant as perpetually connected, maintaining real-time relationships with family, community, and cultural environments across geographies. The smartphone and broadband internet have

made perpetual transnational connection the default condition of contemporary migration, fundamentally transforming the phenomenology of diaspora life.

This paper integrates these theoretical frameworks to understand South Asian digital diaspora formation as simultaneously: a practice of cultural memory and homeland connection (banal transnationalism); a site of identity negotiation and hybridity (Hall, Bhabha); a form of community formation that operates across the boundaries of physical locality (virtual communities); and a field of power in which inequalities of class, caste, gender, and generation are reproduced, contested, and sometimes transformed (intersectionality). The digital space is not a neutral medium that transparently enables pre-existing identities to express themselves; it is a constitutive environment that shapes the identities that emerge within it.

3. DIGITAL PRACTICES AND VIRTUAL HOMELANDS: ETHNOGRAPHIC LANDSCAPES

The range of digital practices through which South Asian diaspora communities construct virtual homelands is vast, spanning platforms, genres, and communities of practice. This section identifies and analyses the primary modalities: social media performance, streaming cultural production, messaging community formation, and diaspora-specific platform development.

3.1 Social Media and the Performance of South Asian Identity

Instagram and TikTok have become primary stages for the performance of South Asian diasporic identity, particularly among second-generation communities. The hyphenated identity — "British-Indian," "Pakistani-American," "Canadian-Sri Lankan" — which earlier generations negotiated privately and often painfully, is now performed publicly, creatively, and often celebratorily on social media platforms. Creators such as Lilly Singh (Canadian-Indian) and Hasan Minhaj (American-Indian) have built global audiences through content that explicitly explores the tensions and comedies of South Asian diasporic life, normalising the hyphenated identity for millions of younger viewers.

The practice of "tagging" geographic locations, hashtagging community identifiers (#browngirlmagic, #desipride, #southasian), and engaging in challenges and trends that circulate within South Asian digital communities constitutes what Nakamura (2002) calls "identity tourism" — the digital performance of identity through recognized cultural markers. But for diaspora communities, this performance is not tourism in the pejorative sense of shallow appropriation; it is a serious practice of identity affirmation in environments that routinely render South Asian identity invisible or exotic.

WhatsApp's group messaging function has arguably been the most significant technology for South Asian diaspora community formation. Unlike public social media platforms, WhatsApp groups operate in semi-private spaces that combine intimacy with network reach: the family group that includes relatives across three continents; the local temple committee group that coordinates festival

preparations; the alumni group that maintains connections across borders for decades after graduation. Studies of South Asian WhatsApp use (Dhir et al., 2017; Madianou and Miller, 2012) consistently find that these groups function as primary carriers of cultural information, community news, and affective connection — the digital infrastructure of transnational kinship and community.

3.2 YouTube, Streaming, and the Transnational Cultural Economy

YouTube has become the primary medium through which South Asian cultural production travels transnationally in forms accessible to diaspora communities. Bollywood music videos receive hundreds of millions of views from diaspora communities in the UK, USA, and Gulf; Tamil Nadu film industry (Kollywood) productions reach Tamil communities from Sri Lanka through Canada and Singapore; Pakistani dramas stream to audiences in India, the Gulf, and across the Pakistani diaspora without the mediation of national broadcast systems.

The cultural economy of South Asian streaming content is not merely one of passive consumption: it generates active community formation around shared taste, commentary, and critique. YouTube comment sections, fan communities, and dedicated platforms such as Eros Now and ZEE5 create spaces where diaspora viewers not only consume South Asian cultural production but discuss it, argue about it, and use it as a resource for articulating their own hybrid identities. The heated debates in YouTube comments about whether a Bollywood film "accurately represents" Indian culture, or whether a BBC drama series about British Pakistanis "gets it right," are sites of serious identity work — the negotiation of what it means to be South Asian in diaspora.

The rise of diaspora-produced content — South Asian creators making content specifically for and about the diaspora experience — represents a significant development in the virtual homeland ecology. Channels such as "Brown History," "Desi Rascals," and numerous South Asian cooking, fashion, and family life vlogs create what might be called a "diasporic public sphere" (Naficy, 2003): a media space constituted by and for diaspora communities that neither fully replicates the cultural production of the homeland nor simply assimilates to the mainstream culture of the settlement country.

3.3 Online Forums, Reddit and Community Knowledge Production

Platforms such as Reddit (r/SouthAsian, r/ABCDesis, r/IndianDiaspora), dedicated forums (Brown Girl Magazine, The Juggernaut, Desi Connect), and Facebook groups have created spaces for more substantive, text-based community discussion than the image and video-dominated social media platforms. These forums serve several functions in the virtual homeland ecology: knowledge sharing (advice about visa procedures, settlement resources, cultural adaptation); community support (discussions of racism, identity confusion, family conflict across cultures); cultural debate (arguments about caste, religion, gender roles, and social change within South Asian communities); and political mobilisation

(organising responses to hate crimes, advocacy for homeland political issues, community solidarity campaigns).

The community moderation practices of these forums — the rules about acceptable content, the mechanisms for excluding members who post casteist or religiously bigoted content, the debates about whether Hindu nationalism or Pakistani sectarianism have a place in diaspora discussion spaces — are themselves sites of identity politics. The decision of several South Asian diaspora forums to explicitly prohibit casteist content represents a significant political and cultural statement: that the virtual homeland need not reproduce all the inequalities of the physical homeland, and that diaspora community formation can be an occasion for social as well as geographical migration.

4. IDENTITY DYNAMICS IN SOUTH ASIAN VIRTUAL HOMELANDS

The identity dynamics of South Asian virtual homelands are characterised by several intersecting tensions: between cultural retention and transformation; between generational perspectives on what constitutes authentic South Asian identity; between the solidarities of pan-South Asian identification and the internal differentiations of caste, religion, language, and national origin; and between the progressive possibilities of digital community and the reproduction of existing hierarchies in digital form.

4.1 The Generational Dimension: First and Second Generation

The generational divide in South Asian diaspora communities — between first-generation migrants whose primary frame of cultural reference is the homeland and second-generation individuals who have never lived in the "homeland" they are expected to claim — is among the most extensively studied dimensions of diaspora life (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Modood, 1997). Digital spaces both reflect and transform this generational dynamic in distinctive ways. First-generation communities use digital platforms primarily to maintain connections with the homeland — WhatsApp groups with relatives, streaming of homeland news and entertainment, participation in expatriate community organisations whose agendas are shaped by homeland political concerns.

Second-generation South Asians use digital platforms differently: less to maintain connections with a homeland they may never have visited than to construct peer communities with others who share the hyphenated identity experience. The Reddit threads and Instagram accounts of British-South-Asian, American-South-Asian, and Canadian-South-Asian communities are populated primarily by second-generation voices negotiating the tensions of belonging to two cultures fully while fitting entirely in neither — what Mary Waters (1990) calls the "ethnic options" of second-generation identity, and what Sunaina Maira (2002) analyses as the "desi" youth culture of South Asian American communities.

4.2 Caste, Religion, and the Reproduction of Hierarchy

One of the most significant and contested dynamics in South Asian virtual homelands is the extent to which they reproduce — or challenge — the hierarchies

of caste and religious sectarianism that structure social life in the region of origin. The persistence of caste discrimination in South Asian diaspora communities has been documented by scholars including Virinder Kalra (2000) and Meena Dhanda (2012); the question of how digital platforms mediate caste in diaspora settings is a more recent but rapidly developing area of inquiry.

Caste-based matrimonial sites — Shaadi.com, JeevanSathi, and community-specific platforms that explicitly filter by caste category — represent the most explicit digital reproduction of caste hierarchy in diaspora contexts. The normalisation of caste filtering in marriage markets, and its digital codification in algorithms that match users by caste category alongside religion, language, and education, illustrates how digital technology can embed social hierarchies in its architecture. At the same time, diaspora forums that explicitly prohibit casteist content, and advocacy organisations such as Equality Labs (USA) that campaign against caste discrimination in Silicon Valley, use the same digital infrastructure to challenge caste hierarchy.

4.3 Gender, Patriarchy and Digital Resistance

The gender dynamics of South Asian virtual homelands are complex and contested. On one hand, digital platforms reproduce patriarchal structures: WhatsApp family groups often exhibit the gendered authority structures of the extended family, with male elders' pronouncements accorded greater weight; online South Asian cultural content frequently reproduces stereotypical representations of South Asian femininity; and harassment of South Asian women who express views inconsistent with community norms is documented across platforms.

On the other hand, digital spaces have been significant sites of feminist organising and consciousness-raising in South Asian diaspora communities. The #MeToo movement found specific South Asian diaspora expression in the "List of Sexual Harassers in Academia" and the "South Asian Sexual Assault Resources" networks; the campaign against honour violence used social media to connect survivors across diaspora communities globally; and feminist South Asian voices — from Riz Ahmed's critique of racial typecasting to Priya Agarwal's analyses of South Asian women in corporate life — have found audiences on digital platforms that would have been inaccessible in earlier media environments. The virtual homeland is a contested patriarchal and feminist space simultaneously.

5. POLITICAL DIMENSIONS: DIGITAL ROUTES AND TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS

The political dimensions of South Asian virtual homelands encompass both the reproduction of homeland political contestations in diaspora digital spaces and the development of specifically diasporic political concerns that have no direct equivalent in either homeland or settlement country politics. Both dimensions have become significantly more intense in the era of social media, as the global

reach of political communication has enabled homeland political formations to mobilise diaspora communities in real time.

The Indian diaspora's engagement with BJP politics and Hindutva ideology through diaspora-facing organisations and digital networks — documented by Subramanian (2014) and Vaishnav (2019) — illustrates the capacity of homeland political forces to colonise virtual homeland spaces for political mobilisation. The phenomenon of "NRI nationalism" — a particularly intense form of Hindu nationalist sentiment among non-resident Indians who maintain ideological connection with the homeland without living with the daily complexities of Indian pluralism — has been significantly enabled by digital platforms that allow real-time engagement with homeland political media and community.

The Pakistani diaspora's digital politics has exhibited similar dynamics: the mobilisation of diaspora PTI supporters for Imran Khan's political campaigns; the reproduction of sectarian conflicts between Sunni and Shia communities in British Pakistani digital spaces; and the emergence of specifically British-Pakistani political voices — from the Bradford selection controversies to the Rotherham child exploitation discussions — that engage both homeland and settlement political agendas.

Against these reproductions of homeland nationalism in diaspora digital spaces, there are also political formations that are specifically diasporic in character. The South Asian diaspora's responses to anti-Asian hate crimes in the United States and United Kingdom; the campaigns by Dalit diaspora organisations against caste discrimination in Silicon Valley tech companies; and the advocacy of diaspora feminist and queer organisations for LGBTQ+ rights in South Asian homeland contexts — these are political mobilisations that use virtual homeland spaces for goals that go beyond homeland or settlement country politics in isolation, constituting a specifically transnational political formation.

The intersection of digital media and religious identity in South Asian diaspora communities adds further complexity to the virtual homeland landscape. Online spaces have become significant sites for the reproduction of religious practice, community, and identity for Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, and Christian South Asians in diaspora. Virtual temples and mosques that stream devotional content; WhatsApp groups for Quranic study circles in diaspora cities; YouTube channels for Sikh kirtan performed by diaspora musicians for global audiences; and Facebook groups for Hindu diaspora families seeking guidance on ritual practice — all of these constitute what scholars call "digital religion" (Campbell, 2012), the migration of religious community and practice into digital environments. For South Asian diaspora communities, digital religion is simultaneously a practice of cultural retention (maintaining forms of religious observance that connect to the homeland tradition) and transformation (adapting those forms to the diasporic context, sometimes in ways that challenge traditional religious authority).

The economic dimension of South Asian digital diaspora communities — often under analysed in cultural studies frameworks — deserves attention. The South Asian diaspora is a significant economic actor in global digital markets: as consumers of South Asian digital content (generating the revenues that fund Bollywood, the OTT streaming boom, and diaspora-focused digital media); as producers of digital products and services (the disproportionate South Asian presence in Silicon Valley and the technology industry globally reflects both human capital migration and the community networks that facilitate it); and as remittance senders whose digital financial transfers (through platforms such as Wise, Remitly, and Google Pay) constitute a crucial economic lifeline for families in South Asia. The digital infrastructure of the South Asian diaspora economy is itself a form of virtual homeland — a network of financial and commercial connections that maintains the economic integration of diaspora and origin communities across geographies.

The mental health dimensions of virtual homeland formation are an emerging area of concern in diaspora studies and clinical psychology. The idealised representations of South Asian homeland culture circulating in digital spaces — celebrations of wedding traditions, religious festivals, family values, and culinary heritage — create a form of "digital nostalgia" (Boym, 2001) that may simultaneously provide affective resources for coping with the stresses of migration and contribute to a sense of inadequacy or inauthenticity in diaspora-born individuals who feel they cannot live up to the cultural ideal represented online. The comparative social judgement enabled by social media — where diaspora individuals see their "back home" cousins presenting curated images of a culture-rich life — may exacerbate the sense of cultural loss or inadequacy that is a recognised dimension of second-generation diasporic experience. Future research at the intersection of digital diaspora studies and clinical psychology is needed to understand these mental health dimensions.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that digital platforms function as virtual homelands for South Asian diaspora communities — not nostalgic simulations of the physical homeland, but dynamic, contested, and generative spaces where diasporic identity is continuously produced, negotiated, and sometimes transformed. The digital routes of the twenty-first century are not separate from or supplementary to the material routes of South Asian migration; they are constitutive of the diasporic condition in ways that earlier theorists of diaspora could not have anticipated.

The virtual homelands of the South Asian diaspora are characterised by genuine complexity: they reproduce some of the hierarchies and exclusions of the physical homeland while also creating new possibilities for solidarity, resistance, and hybrid identity formation. The generational dynamic — first-generation connection to homeland, second-generation construction of hyphenated identity — is refracted through digital platforms in ways that transform it without resolving

it. The intersections of caste, religion, gender, and language that structure South Asian social life are reproduced in digital form but also contested by communities who refuse to simply migrate their hierarchies into new media environments. The theoretical implications of this analysis are significant for diaspora studies. The "politics of home" that Avtar Brah (1996) analysed must now be understood as also a politics of virtual home — of the digital spaces where belonging, memory, and identity are negotiated daily by millions of South Asians in diaspora. The "third space" of Bhabha's cultural hybridity is increasingly a digital space, where the hybrid identities of diaspora are formed in encounters not only with the settlement country but with the global circulation of South Asian cultural production and community. Future research must attend more systematically to the specific affordances of different digital platforms, the demographic differentials in digital diaspora participation, and the political economy of the digital infrastructure on which virtual homelands depend.

The digital homeland is always already incomplete — it cannot replicate the sensory richness, the social complexity, or the unmediated human connection of physical community. But for the South Asian diaspora, spread across hundreds of countries and navigating the perpetual tension between roots and routes, between home and homeland, between origin and adaptation, the virtual homeland is not a consolation prize for an impossible return. It is a genuine, if partial, home — a site of cultural life, community formation, and identity making that is as real as any other dimension of diasporic experience.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/14**WORK, MOBILITY, AND HEALTH RISKS: A STUDY ON THE
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Migration stands as a significant social factor that influences women's health outcomes, with reproductive health being a crucial aspect of their overall well-being. There exists a clear interrelationship between the women who migrate from rural to urban areas in search of better livelihood opportunities and their reproductive health. These women are more vulnerable to health conditions due to poor hygiene and lack of awareness, which in turn affects their overall well-being. Within this context, their perceptions and decisions for themselves play a key role in shaping their reproductive health. The present paper aims to understand the socio-economic conditions of, challenges faced by, and the reproductive health outcomes of migrant women workers engaged in the informal sector in Cachar district of Assam. It also tries to explore the difficulties faced by these women in accessing healthcare facilities. Making use of both primary and secondary data sources, this paper also explores the cultural influence on migrant women's health outcomes. The primary data will be collected using in-depth interviews and case studies to understand the intersecting realities of reproductive health of these migrant women. The research paper, therefore, seeks to comprehend the lived experiences of migrant women through an important lens of 'reproduction'.

Keywords: Migrant women, Reproductive health, Cultural influence, Livelihood**Introduction**

Migration is a multi-dimensional issue that significantly impacts the development of regions and countries. It affects factors such as population size, age structure, and the labour market (Behera 5). Migration is no longer confined to national or regional boundaries; it has become a global phenomenon deeply connected with economic development, social change, and political policy (Castles, de Haas & Miller 45). The movement of people, often within the same country, known as

internal migration, is particularly common in countries like India, where individuals often move from rural areas to cities in search of better employment, education, or better healthcare (International Organization for Migration 109). Women face unique challenges during migration, often marked by gender-based discrimination and unequal access to resources. Migrant women may come across legal, cultural, and linguistic barriers that further marginalise their access to employment, healthcare, and social protection (International Organisation for Migration). Women's health is an important component of public health and includes a broad spectrum of reproductive and maternal health, nutrition, mental well-being, and equitable access to healthcare services. Social factors such as income, education, employment, social support, and access to quality health care services significantly affect women's health outcomes. Additionally, societal norms, gender-based discrimination, and unequal access to resources can create profound disparities in health for women and girls (Sen & Östlin 36). Reproductive health is a concern that intersects with women's social status, autonomy, and rights. Inadequate availability of reproductive health services can have major consequences on women's well-being and on overall public health outcomes (World Health Organisation). Women, particularly those from marginalized groups such as migrants, frequently face systemic and cultural barriers that impact their access to reproductive healthcare services. Migrant women may face more challenges, such as legal restrictions, language barriers, discrimination, and limited availability of culturally sensitive care (Pérez-Sánchez et al.). These barriers increase their vulnerability to poor health outcomes and highlight the need for gender-responsive and inclusive health policies.

Women migrant workers are those individuals who leave their native place to seek employment opportunities in other cities, often in low-skilled and low-paid sectors (Hennebry et al.). These women are frequently marginalized due to societal norms and gender perceptions, which undervalue their work, particularly in roles such as care and domestic services. Despite their education and skills, they are often concentrated in informal sectors where their contributions are insufficiently recognized. The reproductive health challenges faced by migrant women workers are closely connected to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). Therefore, to ensure equitable healthcare access and reduce gender-based health inequalities, it becomes essential to address these issues.

Women make up nearly half of all migrant workers globally, often employed in domestic and care sectors due to gendered labour demands. However, they continue to face low wages, limited labour rights, precarious employment, and social isolation, making them vulnerable to exploitation and gender-based violence.

Studies on healthcare access among migrant women labourers reveal severe difficulties in accessing reproductive healthcare and social protection. The study

by the Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, which explores the role of undocumented migrant women, known as *bharias*, in Darjeeling, India, highlights the increasing participation of women in labour migration. Siddaiah et al. 6 assessed maternal healthcare utilisation among the women working in brick kilns in the Faridabad district of Haryana, and found major gaps in awareness regarding local healthcare services. The study highlighted that most women belonged to marginalised and uneducated backgrounds and faced challenges such as insufficient information regarding pregnancy and healthcare services. Similarly, Shinde & Rakshase 6 also explore the reproductive health challenges faced by pregnant and lactating women working as sugarcane cutters in Maharashtra and found that many women were unable to complete antenatal care visits due to lack of awareness, time constraints, and prevailing community practices.

The study conducted by Jaiswal and Singh in the Baalu Adda slum of Lucknow further highlights poor reproductive health conditions among migrant women. The findings revealed early marriage, poor menstrual hygiene practices, low awareness regarding contraceptive methods and family planning, inadequate nutrition during pregnancy, and limited institutional healthcare access. Many women reported gynaecological health problems such as infections, irregular menstruation, and urinary complications due to poor hygiene and lack of medical care. These studies thus collectively indicate that migrant women workers often face barriers such as a lack of knowledge, inadequate healthcare awareness, poor living conditions, and limited accessibility to reproductive healthcare services, which increases their vulnerability to adverse reproductive health outcomes.

Research Gaps

1. Existing studies on migration often focus on employment and economic conditions, while the reproductive health experiences of migrant women workers remain less explored, especially in the informal sector
2. There are limited studies that show how work mobility, living conditions, and informal labour affect the reproductive health of migrant women in Assam

Objectives

1. To examine the socio-economic conditions of migrant women workers.
2. To understand migrant women's access to and use of reproductive healthcare services.
3. To explore the reproductive health challenges associated with work-related mobility.

Methodology

The study takes a mixed-method approach which combines both qualitative and quantitative aspects to have a deeper understanding of the reproductive health experiences of migrant women workers and their health risks associated with work mobility. The target respondents included 60 women who have migrated from rural areas to urban or semi-urban areas in search of livelihood opportunities

and are involved in occupations such as domestic work, construction work, street vending, small-scale service work, and daily wage labour. Primary data was collected through structured survey questionnaires to gather information on socio-economic background, migration history, working conditions, reproductive health concerns, awareness levels, and access to health facilities. In addition, in-depth interviews and case studies were conducted to understand the lived experiences, personal challenges, and decision-making processes related to reproductive health. These qualitative methods help in capturing the social and cultural dimensions influencing women's health outcomes.

The study used a purposive sampling approach to identify migrant women workers relevant to the research objectives.

Findings and Discussion:

The study aimed at understanding the reproductive health experiences of migrant women workers in the context of work mobility and informal labour. Therefore, to analyse the findings systematically, the data have been organised into four major themes:

1. Socio-economic Profile,
2. Work mobility and reproductive health,
3. Awareness and Reproductive Healthcare Practices,
4. Social and Cultural Influences on Health.

Themes and Interpretations:

1. Socio-economic Profile:

This theme talks about the social and economic background of migrant women workers, including their age group, housing, occupation, income, education, and living conditions. It helps in understanding their everyday realities and their livelihood struggles. Table 1 contains all the socio-economic factors that affect the lives of migrant women in Silchar.

Table 1: Table Showing Descriptive Statistics of the socio-economic conditions of migrant women in Silchar

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	N (Total Number of respondents)	Variance
Age Group	1.67	0.705	60	0.497
Marital Age	2.57	0.927	60	0.859
Housing	1.65	0.481	60	0.231
Family Income	3.77	0.465	60	0.216
Personal Income	2.50	0.983	60	0.966
Education	1.65	0.659	60	0.434

Occupation	3.47	0.700	60	0.49
Clean Drinking Water	1.35	0.481	60	0.231
Sanitation Facilities	1.57	0.500	60	0.25
Kitchen Facilities	1.52	0.504	60	0.254
Habituation period before migration	3.18	0.833	60	0.693

The descriptive analysis presented above provides an overview of all the socio-economic conditions that influence the reproductive health, mobility, and work-related vulnerabilities among 60 migrant women included in the study. The various findings suggest that the reproductive health of migrant women is shaped by the different socioeconomic factors, such as education level, type of employment, unpredictable living conditions, personal income, etc. All these factors contribute to the increase in health hazards and the depletion of health care facilities among them.

The findings on 'age group' (Mean = 1.67, SD = 0.705) reveal that most respondents belonged to the younger and economically productive age categories (21-30 years), reflecting that migration largely takes place during active working and childbearing years of women's lives. Variations in 'marital age' (Mean = 2.57, SD = 0.927) further talk about the differences in family responsibilities and reproductive experiences among the respondents. The data on 'housing conditions' (Mean = 1.65, SD = 0.481), access to basic amenities such as 'clean drinking water' (Mean = 1.57, SD = 0.500), and 'kitchen facilities' (Mean = 1.52, SD = 0.504) reveal that many women lived in modest or inadequate environments, which may negatively affect hygiene, nutrition, menstrual health, and overall reproductive well-being. Similarly, the relatively low 'educational levels' among the respondents (Mean = 1.65, SD = 0.659) suggest limited awareness regarding reproductive healthcare, contraception, and government welfare schemes. In terms of economic condition, 'family income' (Mean = 3.77, SD = 0.465) and 'personal income' (Mean = 2.50, SD = 0.983) indicate that while income levels appear somewhat consistent, personal income varies considerably among respondents. This suggests unequal economic independence among migrant women, which may affect their ability to access healthcare services, nutrition, sanitary products, and medical treatment. 'Occupational patterns' (Mean = 3.47, SD = 0.700) indicate that many women were engaged in different forms of work, likely within the informal sector. Informal and physically demanding occupations often expose migrant women to unsafe working conditions, a lack of

maternity protection, long working hours, and limited healthcare access, all of which can adversely affect reproductive health.

Lastly, the 'habituation period before migration' (Mean = 3.18, SD = 0.833) suggests moderate variation in migration experiences and adjustment periods among the respondents. Frequent mobility and unstable living conditions may disrupt continuity in healthcare access, including antenatal care, reproductive services, and regular medical check-ups.

Overall, the findings reveal that the migrant women experience numerous socio-economic and occupational vulnerabilities that may directly or indirectly affect their reproductive health.

2. Work mobility and reproductive health:

In order to understand the relationship between work mobility and reproductive health experiences of migrant women workers, it is essential to first understand the 'push factors' for migration. The reasons behind migration often influence their living conditions, work environment, and access to healthcare after migration. In this context, a chi-square goodness-of-fit test was conducted to understand the various reasons for migration among the female respondents. The categories included better employment opportunities, family migration, and financial hardships. The findings reveal a statistically significant difference in the distribution of migration reasons among the female respondents ($\chi^2 = 17.200$, $df=2$, $p=0.000$). Since the value of p is less than the standard significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that the responses were not equally distributed across the different reasons for migration.

The outcome of the test further indicates that women's migration is strongly shaped by social and familial structures. The majority of family-related migration indicates the existence of patriarchal family systems, where the women often migrate because of family obligation, marriage, or decisions taken by the male members of the family rather than their individual choice. Therefore, migration of women is shaped by gender roles, family relationships, and social expectations. This interpretation is significant in terms of policy making because the migrant women require support not only in case of employment but also in family structure, reproductive health concerns, and their autonomous decision-making power.

3. Awareness and Reproductive Healthcare Practices:

Awareness and access to reproductive healthcare are the important aspects of women's overall wellbeing, particularly among migrant women workers who are engaged in the informal sector. In this context, it is essential to understand the

levels of awareness and barriers to healthcare access among the women migrant workers.

The cross-tabulation analysis between the Push Factors of Migration and Awareness of Family Planning is represented below using bar graphs:

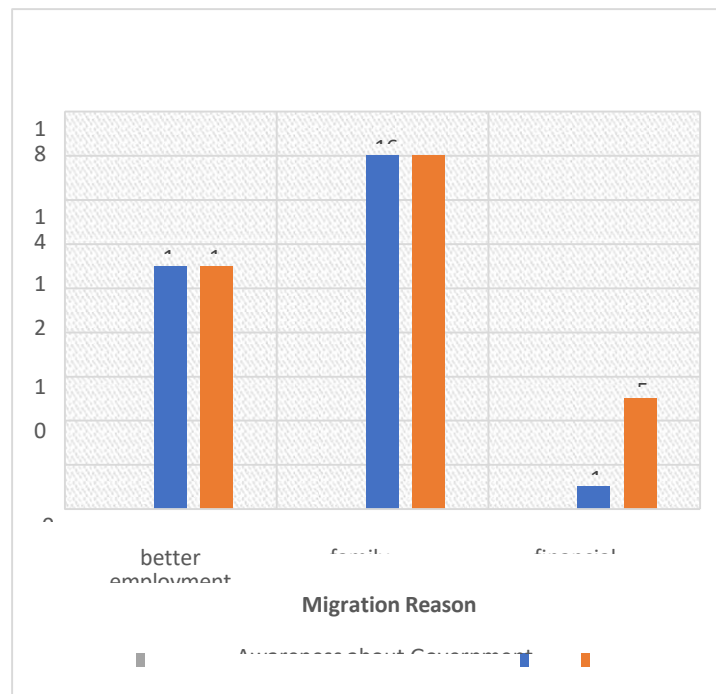


Figure 1: Cross Tabulation of Push Factors of Migration and Awareness of Family Planning

The above analysis indicates that awareness about family planning is generally low among all the migration divisions. The results suggest that reasons for migrating do not, as a matter of course, enhance women's access to family planning information. Responses with family migration have comparatively less awareness in family planning, migrant women are socially dependent, and lack time for self-health care. Overall, the data represents a gap between the migration of women and awareness of family planning. Even in the case of migrant women, the responsibility of the family is given priority, which shows the existing customs where the women of a household are seen as caregivers and not as someone with aspirations.

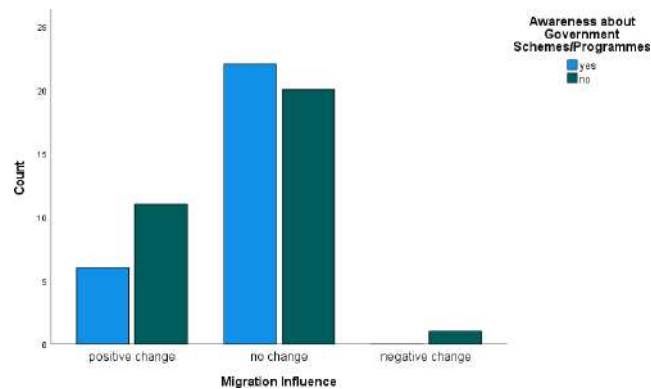


Figure 2: Changes in perception regarding Government schemes and programmes with respect to migration

Similarly, the analysis of income level and awareness about health services reveals that awareness remains measurably low among most income level groups. Although there is a slight hike among the middle-income respondents who show awareness, the majority still lack sufficient knowledge of reproductive health services. This suggests that economic conditions are not solely responsible for the betterment of reproductive healthcare services, but education, family support, exposure, and accessibility are equally important. It highlights the importance of inclusivity and awareness of reproductive healthcare services among the migrant women, since they shift to new places and mostly work in the informal sector of jobs, they are vulnerable to health hazards. It becomes an important initiative to raise awareness among them about the healthcare services.

To further understand the relationship, a hypothesis test was conducted between the 'use of contraceptives' and 'awareness about government schemes and programs' related to reproductive health.

Variables	Pearson Correlation [®]	Significance (p)	Outcome
Use of Contraceptives and Awareness about Government Schemes	0.280	0.030	Weak Positive Relationship

Table 2: Pearson Correlation between Use of Contraceptives and Awareness about Government Schemes

The hypothesis results suggest a positive correlation between the use of contraceptives and awareness about government schemes and programmes, which

indicates that respondents who are aware of government initiatives are also more likely to use contraceptives. This reflects a gradual increase in awareness regarding women's reproductive health rights and family planning practices. Although there is a positive correlation, the association is weak, suggesting that significant efforts are still needed to improve awareness and accessibility among migrant women. The following study was conducted in Silchar, Assam, where migrant women still struggle to meet their reproductive health needs.

The findings further suggest that government awareness programmes and health camps can influence and encourage migrant women to take good care of their reproductive health. An increase in awareness will help to demolish the social stigma regarding oral contraceptive pills and a better understanding of family planning, and maintain a gap between the births of their children.

4. Social and Cultural Influences on Health:

The reproductive health of migrant women is closely connected to their social and cultural surroundings. Various factors, such as domestic violence, lack of family support, gender discrimination, and financial struggles, often negatively influence their health and access to health care services. For many migrant women, getting settled and being comfortable in a new place without receiving proper support makes these challenges even more difficult. The following case study talks about how these experiences shape the everyday health realities of these migrant women.

Case study: Meera's Struggle through Migration and Reproductive Health Challenges:

Meera is a 40 years old women who is now residing in Silchar. After her marriage, a few years ago, she moved to Silchar with her husband to start a stable life. But soon after the migration, she had to struggle with numerous hardships. Her husband, who worked in a private firm, struggled with alcohol addiction and often physically abused her. Living in poor condition with a limited income, she often found herself feeling emotionally exhausted and isolated. During her pregnancy, she also suffered severe violence, and due to a lack of immediate medical care, she lost her unborn child. Throughout this period, she had struggled with improper antenatal care, nutritious food, and family support. As a migrant woman unfamiliar with the city and its healthcare system, Meera struggled to seek help. She had little support from her in-laws. Her mother and sister were her only source of care and support during this difficult time. After her husband's death due to alcohol consumption, she became the sole caregiver and breadwinner for her two children, and later she started working as a hospital caregiver. Despite her efforts, financial struggles continued, especially after her son was diagnosed with tuberculosis (TB). Meera continued to support her family. She shared that migration and hardships had made her stronger and more independent. Meera's story reflects how poverty, domestic violence, social isolation, and limited

healthcare access continue to shape the reproductive experiences of migrant women.

Suggestions and Recommendations:

Based on the findings of this study, a few important policy recommendations along with their purpose have been listed below in Table 3, which would further improve migrant women's health, safety, and overall well-being.

Table 3: Policy recommendations and their purpose

Sl. No.	Policy Recommendation	Purpose
1	Improve access to reproductive healthcare services through health camps and mobile clinics.	This will help migrant women receive timely and affordable healthcare support.
2	Create more awareness about contraception, menstrual hygiene, and government health schemes.	This will further improve reproductive health knowledge and ensure informed decision-making.
3	Ensure migrant women can access healthcare benefits and government schemes wherever they migrate.	It will reduce difficulties in accessing healthcare services after migration.
4	Improve basic living and working conditions, such as sanitation, clean drinking water, and safe workplaces.	This will reduce health risks and improve overall well-being.
5	Develop women-friendly labour and migration policies	This will protect migrant women from exploitation, discrimination, and unsafe working conditions

Conclusion

Migrant women workers continue to face a lot of reproductive health challenges shaped by poverty, limited awareness, unstable working conditions, and lack of healthcare access. Social factors such as gender roles, domestic responsibilities, and social stigma further affect their well-being and healthcare decisions. Although awareness about the government schemes has positively encouraged contraceptive use to some extent, the findings of this study suggest the need for stronger healthcare awareness, accessible services, and better support systems for migrant women. The study finally talks about both the vulnerabilities and strengths of migrant women in terms of their health, work, and survival.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/15**REIMAGINING HOME ONLINE: VIRTUAL HOMELANDS AND
INDIAN DIGITAL DIASPORA****DR. SANDEEP KAUR**

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Abstract

The study of diaspora has mainly revolved around notions of displacement, nostalgia, identity crisis and the urge to return home. The digital world has played a vital role to provide a platform for such voices and concerns. This digital world has witnessed a great amount of content shared by the diasporic communities. The Indians have also tried to maintain their touch with their motherland, culture and identity through this medium. The various platforms have contributed significantly to raise political awareness, economic participation and views on cultural and social concerns. This paper will try to shed light on this diasporic consciousness. The online visibility and connectivity have not only bounded the communities but also strengthened them. It has merged as a great tool to sustain the cultural identity across borders. This study will discuss the diasporic identity curated by social media and how do digital platforms help Indians abroad maintain “home”? The digital world is not static or neutral; it is constantly in formation. This study will analyse how the identities remain in a fluid state. This will also try to explore how the identities and lives of people remain under the influence of the physical relocation. The digital routes have emerged as a great site to comprehend the migration, population dispersal and the ongoing experiences of dislocation. This study will employ the digital platforms, data from various sites and the online community websites. By employing these platforms for the study, the paper will explore the network of memory, digital connection and imaginative return.

Keywords: Indian Diaspora, Digital routes, cyberspace communities, Displacement, Migration

Introduction

The concept of diasporic consciousness refers to those individuals’ awareness and lived experiences who are settled in other nations but are unable to cut ties with their ethnic identity and traditions. It denotes the loss of homeland, memories, nostalgia, identity (crisis) etc. The diasporic consciousness plays a vital role in forming solidarity among people who endure the same conditions hence reinforces the connections. Initially the term diaspora was used for the Greeks who were dispersed from their homeland and further it was used for the Africans during the slavery period. Many scholars have contributed for the expansion of the term, in

1988 Walker Conner's definition allowed the term to encompass beyond the Jews and Africans. Conner defines diaspora as, "that segment of a people living outside the homeland" (Connor 1988 cited in "*Definitions, Concepts and Theoretical Debates*"). However, in the present times individuals are leaving their homelands voluntarily, the efforts of settling in abroad are conscious and deliberate. There are numerous evidences of migration due to commerce, trade, study etc. Though the diaspora consciousness is related to the boundaries of a nation but there are many diversities replete with various dimensions within the borders of a nation.

The internal diversities of a nation often mirror the conditions that give rise to the diasporic sensibilities, the differences of culture, language and place remain intact within the motherland too. Hence the notion of identity comes close to the opinions of Stuart Hall that, "not an essence but a positioning," constantly in flux and shaped through difference and rupture (Hall, 1990). The first generation of migrants feel more nostalgic about their homeland. They experience the inescapable pull towards their native homes while on the other hand they remain sceptical about their acceptance in the host nation. This struggle takes a different turn with the second generation which is born and raised in the host nation experience the crisis of hyphenated identities. This hyphenated generation exists without fully collapsing into any identification. Hence the identity remains always in negotiation. The diasporic consciousness is not outcome of transnational dispersal, it exists within the motherland too and this blurs the boundaries of home and exile. Thus, diasporic consciousness may be read as a layered and dynamic condition that reflects both external displacement and internal fragmentation within the nation-state and outside its boundaries.

Hall's understanding of diasporic consciousness radically differs from the static, singular, culturally pure notions of identity. For him the heterogeneity and hybridity are an inseparable trait of diaspora. He argues that there are two ways of defining the identity. The first one is in which people related to particular culture consider themselves as one. He opines that the oneness imposed on cultural identity works in re-telling of the past and production of identity in a new land, which involves "imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas" (394) and leads to the restoration of an "imaginary fullness or plenitude, to set against the broken rubric of our past" (394). The second way which Hall favours acknowledges the deeply rooted significant differences. According to him identities are not fixed in fact "they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (394). This ever-changing nature of cultural identity ensures that there no fixed point of return to reclaim the origin. So, Hall's ideas about diasporic consciousness are based on the idea that identity is constituted within the representation.

For the Indian diasporic consciousness this ongoing production of identity is staged on the various digital platforms. The digital platforms have gained currency in the cotemporary arenas where the migrants create the continuity between their

lives and their homelands. The Indians have also tried to maintain their touch with their motherland, culture and identity through this medium. Many have observed that these platforms have contributed to strengthen the transnational contacts, raised political awareness and even allowed the migrants to support the movements, follow elections and take part in debates. Yet, as Hall opines that the identities are in the continuous play and deeply affected by the elements of caste, class, language, religion etc., in the same vein the digital platform also expose these differences and biases. This is also called the connected migrants who define their identity with their digital web of connections on daily basis. The digital world has given a new agency to the participation, resistance and solidarity of the diasporic consciousness.

Madhavi Mallapragada's *Virtual Homelands: Indian Immigrants and Online Cultures in the United States* (2014) established the intellectual foundations for studying the Indian digital diaspora. Mallapragada demonstrates how ideologies of family, citizenship, and belonging were reconfigured within transnational online environments, showing that these were not mere reflections of offline life but active sites of cultural production. Her study defines the "Indian-American web" and traces the evolution of diasporic online communities from simple personal homepages in the late 1990s to early social-media platforms arguing that these formations significantly reshaped concepts of home, homeland, and belonging for Indian migrants in the United States. Importantly, her framework moves beyond technological determinism to examine the cultural, emotional, and political dimensions of mediated diasporic life.

A central contribution of Mallapragada's analysis is its attention to how dominant NRI (Non-Resident Indian) and PIO (Person of Indian Origin) identities are contested and renegotiated through online participation. She maps tensions between "old" and "new" identity formations and shows how domestic ideology, citizenship claims, and practices of belonging are awkwardly reworked—and sometimes innovatively reimagined—within digital contexts. The analytical heuristic of the "three Hs" (household, homeland, homepage) proves particularly useful for understanding the entanglements of private life, national attachment, and online representation. Finally, Mallapragada situates early-2000s platforms as infrastructural sites for cultural maintenance and political engagement, a perspective that highlights the heterogeneity of Indian diasporic web cultures. Complementary work, such as Natasha Raheja's study of the Sindhi Hindu diaspora, further underscores how community-specific digital practices developed alongside broader transnational patterns, pointing to the varied and plural nature of the Indian digital diaspora.

Since 2019, Indian diasporic consciousness has undergone a significant transformation, largely shaped by the rapid expansion of social media platforms and the increasing integration of digital technologies into the everyday lives of diasporic communities. In the last five years, diasporic activity has moved from

static websites to interactive platforms like Facebook groups, WhatsApp chats, Instagram reels, and YouTube channels a city-specific Indian community app, and a pan-Indian OTT platform etc. These platforms let people create and share content in real time, so diasporic communities now connect in ways that are local, national, and global at once. These have emerged as visible platforms where the problems are posted, discussed, heard, circulated and a live community is formed. With this diasporic engagement shift from static homepages to interactive platforms, the notion of generation has become an increasingly important axis of variation in how those platforms are used and experienced. First-generation immigrants often use digital spaces to keep traditions and memories alive, while second- and third-generation members tend to use the same platforms to build hybrid identities that mix Indian heritage with life in their home countries through which the diaspora actively shapes and disseminates its own stories of home, belonging, and identity. The members of the diaspora are now making their own media—vlogs, podcasts, livestreamed rituals, cooking tutorials, and mini-documentaries—that tell their stories directly. They have become active content creators rather than passive consumers. These creations can be treated as both *data* (what people say and show) and *practice* (how they build community, make money, or gain status).

WhatsApp remains the primary connective tissue of Indian transnational families. India is the biggest market and it powers everything from family chats to business, religious, and political networking. Diaspora related WhatsApp groups and channels cluster by geography (e.g., "Indians in Canada" or "Indians in UAE") and interest (alumni groups, professional networks, religious groups). Thanks to the sheer size of WhatsApp's user base, these groups signal attempts at indigenising the language of communication that forms the foundation of diaspora-home connection. IndianDiaspora.org hosts country and region-specific WhatsApp groups for Indians in North America, the Gulf, Europe, and East Asia. The apps for keeping up-to-date with news and current affairs of the Indian diaspora and staying connected to India. These WhatsApp groups transform the smartphone into a river of homeland messages, prayers, jokes in local languages, gossip from neighbours, and emergency updates in moments of crises.

Since its launch in 2010 and subsequent incorporation into Meta, Instagram's audiovisual orientation, foregrounding photographs, image sequences, and short-form videos (reels) has become the dominant modes of expression. Instagram is not only documenting diaspora; it is rather assisting the users to build a home in motion. On Instagram, diaspora pages make culture feel alive and accessible by turning everyday things—like food, art, and history—into shared experiences. These pages offer the migrants the opportunities to represent themselves and their everyday Indian side of life. These activities where familiar frame and the culture marks are shared play a vital role in what Hall refers as the "production" of identity. The identity is not inherited but continuously narrated by the users. This

visually repetitive content becomes symbolic to claim the origin and the culture. There are many independent news and media platform working to connect the Indians across the globe such as @SouthAsianNation, @networkingnowindia, @SAJA, @diasporaindiaconnect etc. These pages share the information about the successful migrant personalities, trailblazers, movies, conferences, government programs through feeds, reels and podcasts. It concentrates on all aspects of life keeping it focused on the migrants. The page named “South Asian Women’s Collective- Westchester” brings the Asian women together to network and celebrate. The pages like @weee.indian, @thechutneylife, @honeywhatscooking, @the_foodiediaris, @south_cookery, @the_diaspora_spice_co, @burntroti etc imagine a virtual home through food and cuisine with a step-by-step tutorial, cultural storytelling and some practical tips that specifically cater to the diasporic community where recipes, rhythms, and stories are preserved but constantly reworked. Whereas @artforumsf talks about South Asian Arts, @brownhistory reflects the interest of showing Indian history and the modern contexts in detail. Facebook functions as an infrastructural platform organised around groups, events, and threaded discussions. Much of the diaspora thrives here. It hosts thousands of groups organised around geography, professions, caste and religious affiliations, alumni networks, and regional or linguistic identities. Within these spaces, users circulate news from both Indian and host-country media, organise festivals and events, crowdsource information on immigration and education, and provide mutual aid during times of need—forming dense, interconnected support networks. In contrast to Instagram’s visual display and affective stage Facebook groups are based on posts, comments, and threaded discussions which contributes to redefining the diasporic consciousness strengthening one’s emotional ties to India, as well as spreading political awareness and cultural understanding across borders. Facebook’s event and page infrastructure also allows community organisations, temples, gurdwaras, cultural associations, and students to announce events and encourage participation from the diaspora. In this way, Facebook not only mirrors offline communities but also helps to constitute them. At the same time, administrative rules and Facebook policies decide what kind of content is allowed for discussion. Many political debates are discouraged or limited to maintain the harmony. This means that political ideas are not shared evenly but are filtered, highlighted, or restricted depending on both group norms and platform dynamics. Some prominent Facebook pages are Indiaspora (6.3 followers) NRI Community (@nricommunityapp) (529 followers), Indian Diaspora – Friends around the Globe (129 followers), NRI page (120 K) etc. it is notable that the active diaspora lives in community groups such as NRI Community (6.6 members) Indians in USA – NRI & Desi Community (27.8 K members), Non-resident Indian (NRI) (10.8 K members) etc. These pages provide transnational communication, cultural exchange, identity performance and political engagement.

YouTube has become one of the most powerful platforms for shaping diasporic consciousness. YouTube channels provide not only entertainment but also cultural continuity, memory work, and a sense of belonging. Cooking channels such as “Kabita’s Kitchen” (1.46 crore subscribers) or “Hebbars Kitchen” (80.4 lakh subscribers) allow diasporic audiences to reinvent familiar tastes in unfamiliar kitchens, turning food into a medium of emotional connection with home. Cultural channels like RoshniAyur Talks (66.9 K subscribers) featuring dialogues on Indian Ayurveda and Health care), Priya Krishna's "Indian-ish" (a book which explores Indian-American culinary adaptations), RuchikRandhap (46.2 subscribers regional Indian recipes with cultural context) contribute significantly to the virtual connectedness. India TV/DW News India (50.6M subscribers, current affairs connecting to homeland politics) create an environment where physical absence is blurred through digital proximity. In addition to this, Channels like “Brown History” and “The Desi Crime Podcast” engage diasporic viewers with narratives that blend heritage, identity, and contemporary issues. Lifestyle and diaspora-specific channels such as “Desi Videsi Vlogs” or “Indian Mom in Canada” document everyday migrant experiences, offering relatable stories that normalize the challenges of relocation while reinforcing community ties. These digital spaces foster what Stuart Hall calls a “heterogeneous identity,” where migrants negotiate hybrid subjectivities that are neither fixed nor purely nostalgic. The Ministry of External Affairs launched the Global Pravasi Rishta portal and app in 2020 to connect roughly 30–31 million overseas Indians through a three-way communication channel between the MEA, Indian diplomatic missions, and diaspora users. This app is strengthened by the “4Cs” – care, connect, celebrate, and contribute. The registered members of the portal are entitled to receive emergency alerts and advisories, access consular information, and share opinions on policy issues. This app/portal has connected the scattered population at one place that can be collectively communicated especially in contexts of crisis management, cultural diplomacy, and economic outreach. It embeds a particular imagination of home that is national and statist, foregrounding security, development, and formal participation over everyday intimacy.

Global OTT providers such as Netflix and Prime Video now commission and host substantial Indian original content, while also licensing films and series across multiple Indian languages. Industry reports indicated that 25 percent Indian OTT and digital programming viewership comes from overseas. This surge marks the turning point in Indian entertainment economy that has provided a way to participate in national conversations around hit series, films, and celebrity cultures, thereby reinforcing a sense of synchronous cultural time with India. Subtitling and dubbing into multiple languages also allow second-generation children and non-Indian spouses to access Indian narratives, potentially re-configuring what counts as “home content”. The regional OTT platforms also

constitute a major chunk of consumption by capitalising on the emotional and cultural pull of mother-tongue narratives abroad.

Services like ZEE5 provide unapparelled convenience in showcasing the rich cinematic brilliance as connectors of the global Indian diaspora, aggregating multiple South Asian streaming platforms (Simply South, OHO Gujarati, Chaupal, NammaFlix, iStream, and others) into a single app for users in the United States and, progressively, other international regions. This app is trying to bridge the dislocation gaps and foster the cultural connections by preserving the rich tapestry of Indian root. It has succeeded in transforming the screen into a portable cultural homeland.

Social media platforms allow diasporic communities to connect across borders, producing new cultural forms that cut across national and ethnic boundaries. These connections destabilize essentialist claims by showing that identity is relational, forged in the interplay of multiple influences. Memory is not static; it is reworked through digital media, blending nostalgia with new forms of belonging. Digital Diasporas are about how migrants weave together past, present, and future through affect, connectivity, and imagination, creating new maps of identity and community. Imaginative return in digital Diasporas exemplifies how migrants create virtual homelands, not to reclaim a singular origin but to reimagine belonging in the present. Far from being spaces of uncomplicated cultural comfort and nostalgia, virtual homelands are profoundly contested terrains where political conflicts, generational tensions, and state power collide with the everyday practices of diasporic belonging. Understanding this contestation is essential to any serious analysis of the Indian digital diaspora.

Although scholarship on the Indian digital diaspora has advanced considerably, the field continues to grapple with enduring and newly emerging challenges that remain insufficiently theorized and empirically examined. These unresolved tensions are not marginal concerns; rather, they strike at the core of how diasporic subjects negotiate belonging and enact participation within the imagined space of a virtual homeland. Virtual homelands are complex and contested environments where political conflicts, generational differences, and state influence intersect with the everyday ways diasporic communities create a sense of belonging. Recognizing these tensions is crucial for any meaningful analysis of the Indian digital diaspora.

It is undoubtedly true that the narratives of Indian diaspora revolve around the connectivity and empowerment, but there are internal inequalities too. The digital divide poses a great threat to reliable internet infrastructure, device ownership, digital literacy, and technological fluency persist across lines of class, age, gender, and geographic location. The elderly members of diasporic communities, residents of poor connectivity area feel excluded from these virtual homelands. This exclusion strengthens the risks of reproducing and amplifying existing social

hierarchies within the diaspora, creating a two-tiered community in which full participation in virtual life is a privilege rather than a universal right.

Another key issue in this field is the gap between online ideas of “home” and the diverse, lived experiences of diaspora communities. In many cases, dominant voices especially upper-caste, upper-class, English-speaking, and Hindu members of the diaspora shape how these online communities represent “home.” This can marginalise other groups, including Dalit, Muslim, Christian, Adivasi, and LGBTQ+ members, whose experiences are less visible and their virtual homelands may look radically different from dominant narratives. Questions about whose “home” is being imagined and reproduced online, and whose experiences are systematically erased or minimized, represent some of the most politically urgent unresolved questions in the field.

Social media platforms shape diaspora conversations in powerful but often unseen ways. Their algorithms can spread misinformation, including conspiracy theories about Indian politics, anti-Muslim stories, and false claims about COVID-19. This harms both community trust and democratic discussion. Content moderation adds another layer of difficulty. Many moderators lack the cultural or language knowledge needed to judge what is harmful in Indian contexts, allowing problematic material to circulate unchecked. At the same time, platforms are driven by profit, which clashes with the needs of vulnerable diaspora communities. This tension remains unresolved and calls for careful study and policy action.

The next frontier for virtual homeland research lies at the intersection of diasporic experience and rapidly evolving technological infrastructure. Artificial intelligence tools are already reshaping the texture of virtual homelands in ways that remain almost entirely untheorized. Even more speculatively, the development of immersive metaverse environments raises profound questions about what it might mean to “visit” a digitally reconstructed ancestral village, attend a virtual Diwali celebration with photorealistic avatars, or participate in religious rituals in three-dimensional digital sacred spaces. Research into how emerging technologies is being adopted, adapted, and contested within Indian diasporic communities could produce important insights both for diaspora studies specifically and for the broader understanding of technology, culture, and belonging.

The reimagining of “home” in digital spaces reveals how Indian diasporic communities have transformed cyberspace into a dynamic arena of cultural continuity, solidarity, and identity negotiation. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and OTT services have become more than communication tools; they function as virtual homelands where migrants sustain traditions, preserve memory, and nurture emotional ties with India. These spaces democratize voice, enabling diasporic subjects to participate in cultural conversations, celebrate festivals, and engage in political debates, thereby

reinforcing belonging across borders. At the same time, they serve as archives of collective memory, producing hybrid identities that reflect both nostalgia and innovation. Yet, these virtual homelands are not without limitations. They reproduce offline hierarchies of caste, class, religion, and gender, risk amplifying misinformation, and sometimes foster symbolic longing without offering practical solutions to homeland challenges. The digital divide further excludes elderly members and those with limited access, creating uneven participation within the diaspora. Moreover, dominant voices often overshadow marginalized groups, raising urgent questions about whose “home” is being imagined online.

Looking ahead, the challenge lies in cultivating platforms that are more inclusive, participatory, and critically literate. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and immersive metaverse environments will reshape diasporic engagement, offering new possibilities for virtual rituals, cultural storytelling, and community building. However, they also demand careful scrutiny to ensure that these innovations do not reinforce existing inequalities or commercialize diasporic longing. Ultimately, the virtual “home” is neither a perfect substitute nor a mere illusion; it is a contested yet creative space where heritage is preserved, solidarities are forged, and futures are imagined. Digital platforms have turned longing into lived connection, making “home” a shared, evolving experience across borders. The challenge ahead is to transform this virtual homeland into a space of critical engagement, cultural continuity, and future possibility.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/16**ROUTES OF PRECARITY: REVISITING INDIA'S CODE ON SOCIAL SECURITY, 2020 AND MIGRANT WORKERS' RIGHTS****DR. HARIS UMAR**Assistant Professor, Department of Law, Shibli National College
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Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India**Abstract**

The Code on Social Security, 2020 was a great step in the direction of unifying the different laws related to labour welfare in India. Nevertheless, the everyday lives of migrant workers shed light on persistent gaps between the intention of the law and its implementation as social protection. This article critically assesses the scope and scope of the Code to focus on the vulnerabilities and migrant labourer's rights, including internal migrant workers and inter-state migrant labourers in India. The pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of migrant workers, such as the non-portability of welfare benefits, precarious employment arrangements, limited access to healthcare services, lack of income security, and absence of institutional social security mechanisms. The article examines provisions of the Code from a socio-legal and rights perspective, focusing on issues of registration, welfare schemes, gig/worker platform and implementation of the central and state government. It also reviews if the legislative framework is sufficient to ensure that the dignity, equality and social justice guaranteed under the Indian Constitution and the international labour standards set by the International Labour Organization are upheld. Although, the Code is progressive in its intent, structural issues of digital exclusion, limited enforcement mechanisms and the lack of universal and portable benefits remain in the way of migrant workers accessing social security, the study argues. The article concludes that the federally poor coordination, lack of universal registration, lack of portability of entitlements, and rights-based policy interventions should be strengthened with a view to achieving substantive social protection to migrant labour in India.

Keywords: Migrant Workers, Social Security, Labour Rights, Informal Employment, Code on Social Security, 2020

Introduction

Labour migration has been integral to India's socio-economic fabric since its inception, especially rural to urban migration, which helps industrialisation, urbanisation and informal sector. Many migrant workers are in the construction, manufacturing, transportation, hospitality, domestic work, mining and farming sectors. They have played a role in the economic productivity of society, but they also belong to the most vulnerable groups because they earn low wages, work in the informal sector, have limited access to welfare benefits, lack job security, and have limited access to social protection (Bremar 18). These structural inequalities have been brought to a sharp focus by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the nationwide lockdown in March 2020, millions of migrant workers were left without a source of income, accommodation, transportation and health assistance. The influx of labourers back into the villages exposed the weakness of the labour governance system and the failure of the labour welfare system in India to protect the informal labour (Rajan et al. 42). The Government of India amalgamated twenty-nine labour laws into four labour codes as part of labour law reforms, one of which is the Social Security Code. This Code seeks to make social security inclusive and cover a range of issues related to provident funds, gratuity, maternity benefits, employee compensation, and welfare for unorganized, gig, and platform workers. It also aims to streamline administration and to provide welfare coverage to those who were previously excluded. However, there are significant questions on the capacity of the Code to deal with the migrant workers' key vulnerabilities. It recognises unorganised and gig workers but challenges around implementation, registration, portability of benefits, digital exclusion and interstate coordination persist in limiting benefits. This article critically analyses the Social Security Code, 2020 with a view to the migrant worker's right. It also assesses the equality, dignity and social justice values in the law, and it examines the law's adherence to international labour standards and norms from a socio-legal and rights-based perspective.

Conceptualizing Migrant Labour and Social Security

Economic disparities, caste divisions, unemployment, environmental stress, the region, etc. are all factors that influence the migration in India. These migrations tend to take place from the countryside to the cities where job opportunities are more plentiful. The term migrant workers refer to seasonal workers, circular workers, temporary workers, inter-state workers and informal urban labourers. Social security is "the institutionalized arrangements to safeguard individuals in the event of economic and social risks, including the unemployment, disability, sickness, maternity, old age and loss of livelihood. According to the International Labour Organization it is the protection afforded by public policies to prevent social and economic suffering. Social security is now seen more and more as a human right, related to dignity and social justice. The Indian labour market is entirely informal and over 90% of the workers are engaged in unregulated and

undocumented work. A large proportion of this workforce are migrant workers, who are more vulnerable because of the lack of formal contracts, fixed wages, occupational safety and legal awareness (Kesar et al. 5).

In India, social security laws have favoured individuals employed in the formal economy. The majority of laws, including the Maternity Benefit Act of 1961, the Employees' State Insurance Act of 1948, and the Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act of 1952, concentrated on formal employment contracts and mainly disregarded migrant and informal labour (NCEUS 63).

The Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008 tried to provide welfare to the informal sector of the population, but was poorly implemented, poorly coordinated and had non-enforceable rights. This underscored the need for a more comprehensive system of social security. The Social Security Code emerged within this broader context of labour reform and demands for universal welfare protection, making it essential to examine its implications for migrant workers in India.

Historical Evolution of Labour Welfare and Migrant Protection in India

In this larger framework of labour reforms and calls for universal welfare protection, it is imperative to consider the implications of the Social Security Code, on the migrant workers of India. Labour welfare and migrant protection in India have evolved over the years. The history of labour welfare legislation in India is connected with the process of industrialization and the development of constitutional governance and socio-economic policy. In the colonial times, the focus of labour law was mainly on the protection of industrial productivity, and not on the rights of the workers. Legislations like the Factories Act and the Workmen's Compensation Act were enacted earlier and were limited in their scope, and omitted many of the informal workers. Post-independence, the Constitution of India declared social justice as an integral part of the process of governance. Humane working condition, living wage, equitable distribution of resources, provision of public assistance in unemployment and sickness were highlighted in the Directive Principles of State Policy (Jain 87). As a result, the concept of labour welfare took roots in the framework of the welfare-state in India. With the passage of several post-independence labour legislation, such as the Employees Provident Fund Act, Payment of Gratuity Act, Minimum Wages Act, and Employees State Insurance Act, social security coverage also increased, but mostly for individuals employed in the formal sector. To provide migrant workers with particular legal status, the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979 was passed. The Act sought to regulate hiring practices, guarantee equal pay, and offer compensation for travel and displacement. However, due to lax enforcement, non-compliance, and absence of registration, its execution was ineffective. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed significant flaws in India's labour welfare system. Lack of access to reliable labour databases, poorly coordinated inter-state welfare schemes and poor

inter-state coordination were the root causes of the hardship that faced migrant workers. The Social Security Code was brought in the context of consolidating the existing labour laws and providing social security for the unorganized, gig and platform workers. However, it is the success of the legislative consolidation that will ultimately determine whether protection of migrant labour is achieved or not.

Key Features of the Code on Social Security, 2020

The Code brings together nine key labour legislations regarding social security and welfare. It aims to establish a common standard for social protection, ease compliance requirements and increase coverage (Ministry of Labour and Employment 15). The Code's recognition of gig workers, platform workers, and unorganised workers is one of its main features. This addendum acknowledges how the employment market has changed and how insecure occupations have grown. The bill grants the federal and state governments the authority to create welfare programs for housing, health care, old age protection, education, and life and disability. Unorganized workers can be registered with Aadhaar identification and have a national database established under the provisions of the Code. The process of registration aims to enable targeted welfare delivery and portability of benefits. An additional key aspect is the inclusion of gig and platform workers who work through digital labour platforms in social security coverage. Aggregators must pay into funds for social security for such workers. This is an important change in the understanding of non-traditional labour arrangements in labour governance (Prassl 163). The Code also covers employee state insurance, employee provident fund, gratuity, maternity benefits and employee compensation. The government is aiming for 'legal fusion' and effectiveness in administration multiple legislations are being integrated. The Code, as seen from the migrant workers, provides for inter-state migrant workers, such as access to public distribution systems and welfare schemes in destination states. The bill also permits self-registration via electronic means (Agarwala 201). However, there are some ambiguities. There are no clear universal entitlements or enforceable rights for migrant workers in the Code. There are statutory and non-statutory welfare provisions but a great deal relies on executive discretion. Moreover, mechanisms for implementation are still underdeveloped, especially in terms of portability, inspections of labour conditions, and inter-state coordination.

Crisis of Informality for Migrant Workers

Informality and its structural nature are an inseparable element to grasp the condition of migrant workers in India. Informationally employed workers lack written contracts and receive irregular wages, their employment relationships are insecure, and they are not covered by social security protection. Migrant workers may be recruited by contractors and intermediaries who are not subject to the same regulations as others (Bremar 145). Migrant labour is one of the largest sectors to employ migrants. The working environment is often very dangerous for workers, and they are not always paid on time, and sometimes they even suffer from work

accidents. Often workers are in dangerous working conditions, and they are not paid in time; also, some of them experience occupational injuries and do not even have accommodation facilities. Likewise, the weak enforcement of the law leads to severe exploitation for migrant workers in domestic work, sanitation work, brick kilns and agriculture. Precarity of migrants is further exacerbated by castes and classes. Many of the migrant workers are from the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the economically weaker sections of the society. Social discrimination overlaps with labour exploitation, leaving the victims of such exploitation out of access to welfare services and legal remedies (Thakur and Kumar 94). While the new Code aims to mitigate some of these concerns, the digital registration and implementation at the state level can uphold the sense of exclusion. A lot of migrant workers are not digitally literate, have no internet connections, or the proper documentation needed to register. Thus, the lack of formal recognition becomes an obstacle to accessing welfare.

Constitutional Dimensions of Migrant Workers' Rights

Labour rights and social justice are given a constitutional base in the Constitution of India. The protection of the migrant workers comes from Fundamental Rights and DPSPs. Article 14 protects equality before the law; migrant workers are not included in welfare schemes, making the equality before the law weaker (Deva 189). Article 15 also prohibits discrimination on the basis of caste, birthplace, religion, sex and race. Article 19(1)(d) and 19(1)(e) provide freedom of movement and residence throughout India. The exercise of these rights by migrant workers should not be denied due to territorial restrictions and they should not lose welfare benefits as a consequence of their movement (Khosla 221). Amidst the many interpretations of the constitution, the right to life and personal liberty in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution has been interpreted to encompass livelihood, dignity, shelter, health and humane working conditions. The pandemic revealed the inadequacies in the protection of migrant workers under Article 21 obligations (Baxi 112). The Directive Principles strengthen the right to labour welfare. Article 41 offers support in the event of unemployment, illness, disability, and old age, whereas Article 39 guarantees a reasonable livelihood and prohibits the concentration of wealth. While Article 43 demands living earnings and a respectable level of living, Article 42 emphasises fair working conditions and maternity relief (Jain 947). Judicial rulings have also expanded labour rights. The Supreme Court emphasised the government's need to protect disadvantaged workers in *Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India* (Sathe 163). In *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation*, livelihood was linked to the right to life (Bhagwati 58). However, constitutional guarantees are frequently not implemented due to weak administration and weak implementation. The Social Security Code is thus a step to move social justice and welfare constitutionalism, and it needs to be evaluated accordingly.

International Standard of Labour and Human Rights Perspectives

The protection of migrant workers is also covered by international labour and human rights legislation. Conventions pertaining to social security, labour standards, workplace safety, and migratory worker protection have been developed by the international labour Organization. The rights to a sufficient standard of life, employment, equitable compensation, and social security are all included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Alston 368). The work of ILO Convention No. 102 contains minimum standards on healthcare, unemployed protection, old-age benefit, employment injury compensation, and maternity protection (International Labour Organization 27). Even though India has not ratified all conventions concerning migrant labour, they continue to shape the domestic labour jurisprudence. Inclusive social protection systems are also highlighted in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals particularly in Goal 8 on decent work, Goal 1 on poverty reduction and Goal 10 on inequality (Fukuda-Parr 84). The Code follows the global trend of expanding welfare to informal and gig workers. But there are significant and deep limitations to health care access, portability of benefits, occupational safety and the rights to enforce labour. Portability is particularly significant due to the fact that welfare plans in India are typically based on the basis of the citizen's home state, excluding interstate migrant workers (Kesar, et al. 14). A rights-based approach therefore demands that social security be considered as a legal entitlement, and not an element of 'discretionary welfare' that can be turned off when it is convenient, compromised by bureaucratic inefficiencies, and left to political whim. The rights approach therefore demands that social security is not looked on as a form of 'discretionary welfare' that can be switched off when it suits the government, subject to bureaucratic delays and the vagaries of political fashion. (Standing 102).

Challenges in Implementing the New Code

While the Social Security Code contains several forward-looking provisions, its effectiveness is in urgent need of enhancement due to implementation issues. Legislation alone is not sufficient to ensure effective social security, but also institutional capacity, political commitment and administrative coordination is required (Rajan 88). The worker registration is a major concern. The Code mandates that unorganized workers should register on Aadhaar-enabled digital platforms, but a large proportion of migrant workers do not have mobile phones, Internet connectivity, literacy or identity documents. This means that the poorest, the most vulnerable, are at risk of exclusion. Portability of benefits is another challenge. Often migrants cross over states and employers, causing the welfare systems to be ineffective. While schemes like One Nation One Ration Card strive to make their services more portable, the larger social security benefits are poorly integrated (Drèze and Khera 119). There is also a lack of accountability due to weak labour inspection mechanisms. A lack of staff, insufficient resources, and technological obstacles at many state labour departments allow employers and

contractors to avoid compliance (Bhattacharjea 341). Federal coordination is also a challenge because of varying capacity and welfare priorities between states that result in inconsistencies in access to entitlement for migrants between states (Agarwala 227). Implementing in a gender-sensitive manner is also lacking. Current systems are inadequate in providing support for childcare, maternity protection, reproductive care and workplace harassment of female migrant workers in the informal economy (Chant and Sweetman 525). Further, many of the provisions rely on delegated legislation and executive discretion, which leaves room for uncertainty on who's eligible, when and how it's enforced. Many promises made in legislation might be empty – if there are not more effective means of accountability. If not, many promises made in legislation may prove symbolic (Tiwari 411).

Emergence of Gig Economy, Platform Labour & New Manifestations of Precarity

The recognition of gig and platform workers is one of the major highlights of the social security reforms in India as per the Social Security Code. Digital labour platforms have revolutionized the nature of work in other industries, including transportation, food delivery and logistics. Typically, platform businesses consider employees as an independent contractor, rather than employees, to steer clear of duties of wages, social security, and labour protection (Aloisi 654). This means that gig work can in many ways, despite its technological sophistication, create the conditions of insecurity, surveillance, and algorithmic control.

Migrant workers are a important proportion of the gig workforce in India. Many of the workers who were displaced after the pandemic began took up work on platforms because of poor prospects for alternative livelihoods. However, this type of work comes with inconsistent income, working long hours, no insurance, and no collective bargaining rights (Bhowmik 112).

The Code brings in provisions on welfare for gig and platform workers (India, Code on Social Security 2020). This is a crucial step, but there are still many issues to be addressed. First, the Code does not make clear what its classification of gig workers as employees or as independent contractors means for labour rights and remedies (Cherry 582). Second, it is not sufficiently clear about minimum benefits or contribution requirements. Third, it is still unclear whether welfare will be implemented as registration, data collection, and monitoring are needed. Platform companies may also be opposed to being subject to regulation on the grounds of technological flexibility (De Stefano 476). Gig labour is a sign of the precarious nature of the employment networks of the modern era of capitalism. Social security systems need to adapt to promoting dignity, equity, and substantive equality in a transforming labour market (Standing 14).

Comparative Perspectives on Migrant Welfare and Social Protection

An analysis of comparative examples provides valuable lessons in migrant labour welfare. Different countries have developed mobile social security systems and

universal health care policies that minimise the risk of labour mobility exclusion (Ortiz et al. 41). Healthcare, unemployment, and pension benefits are covered through centralized social insurance in Germany, even when people move to different regions. (Greve 203) The implementation of direct welfare payments and databases in Brazil in what is known as the Bolsa Família program is an example of how these can help to lift people out of poverty and extend social assistance (Lindert et al. 9). Likewise, Scandinavian welfare systems emphasize universal coverage of health care, education, and unemployment protection as the state's responsibility, rather than the employer's (Esping-Andersen 27). In Asia, Thailand has adopted universal schemes to cover informal workers in the labor market, and South Korea has extended protections to non-standard workers in the changing labor market (Tangcharoensathien et al. 2238, Kim 76). While the Indian labour market is characterized by informality and federal complexity, there are common principles that emerge from comparative experiences, such as universal registration, portability of benefits and integrated labour databases, and enforceable legal entitlements (ILO 55). But India is still stuck with piecemeal and mutually reinforcing welfare measures. Migration workers are frequently left behind because benefits are based on their residence, their employer's registration or sector-specific welfare boards (Kesar et al. 14). Comparative experiences emphasize the importance of universal and rights-based welfare systems that can include labour mobility and informal work.

Towards a Rights-Based Social Security Framework

Existing labour governance mechanisms are found to be limited, suggesting the need for a rights-based approach to migrant welfare. Social security needs to shift from a set of uncoordinated schemes to universal and obligatory entitlements (Sen 5). First, procedures for registering should be streamlined and deconcentrated. Digital literacy or Aadhaar-based verification often leaves behind vulnerable workers. Accessibility can be enhanced through community registration centres and through multilingual outreach approach. Next, eligibility for welfare benefits must be portable to other States. Access to health services, food security, pensions and insurance should not be denied to migrant workers, no matter where they are. This entails the linkage of the central and state databases (Drèze and Khera 44). Finally, labour inspections and accountability mechanisms should be strengthened by providing adequate funding, technological modernization and independent monitoring institutions. Participation of trade unions and civil society organisations in monitoring violations of workers' rights is also important (Bhattacharjea 39). Fourth, social security financing must be shifted towards public investment instead of only relying on the contributions of informal workers, who may not have stable income. Finally, policies need to be gender sensitive to tackle the vulnerabilities of women migrant workers. Developing policy measures like childcare provision, maternity benefits, secure housing, grievance redressal, etc. is a key component of inclusive protection. Sixth, migrant workers should be

given a voice in urban policy-making by providing them with affordable housing, healthcare, transport and sanitation facilities which foster dignity and inclusion (Roy et al. 119). Lastly, laws should be improved to take into account the social security as a constitutional right of dignity and equality. Public Interest Litigation and judicial oversight can enhance the accountability of the state (Muralidhar 92). Whether social protection is regarded as a welfare concession or constitutional requirement is the deciding factor for the future of labour governance in India.

Conclusion

The Social Security Code, 2020 is a significant initiative towards the reform of the disjointed Indian labour welfare regime and to cover the previously unprotected workers. It is a recognition of unorganized workers, gig workers, and platform workers, which marks a significant change in governance of workers. However, the plight of migrant labour still highlights the deficiencies in India's social security system. The COVID 19 pandemic revealed the fragilities of informal work, fragile mobility and the absence of social protection. Despite being an essential part of the economic development process, the migrant workers faced unemployment, hunger, homelessness and institutional neglect. These realities demonstrated that inclusive social protection is vital to economic growth without it, but without systemic precarity. Registration, welfare schemes, and portability are provided for in the Code but there are significant implementation issues in these areas. Access to social security remains limited by digital exclusion, limited labour inspections, poor federal coordination and poor funding. Moreover, the lack of enforceable rights-based protections reduces the potential for the law to be transformative. Migrant workers' rights are intertwined with equality, dignity, livelihood and social justice from a constitutional perspective. International labour standards also reinforce the responsibility of States to provide universal and inclusive social protection. For this reason, it is necessary to evaluate labour reforms using not only the criterion of administrative efficiency, but also the democratic and human rights viewpoint.

The paper calls for a transition from disorganized welfare programs to universal and transferable social security systems that are based on social citizenship and constitutional morality rather than protection for migrant workers. For welfare delivery, there is a need for more federal coordination, public investment, integration of labour data, and community-based methods of implementation to achieve effectiveness. In conclusion, the future of labour justice in India hinges on the recognition of migrant workers as citizens, not as labourers, possessing rights and deserving dignity, protection, and social inclusion. Legislative consolidation is not the challenge, but instead, crafting a decent and fair labour market system that can serve today's migration and precarity.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/17**INHERITANCE ON A PLATE: FOOD AS ARCHIVE IN SHAHNAZ
AHSAN'S MEMOIR, *THE JACKFRUIT CHRONICLES***

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Abstract

Culinary narratives have played a vital role in understanding the idea of migration and diaspora in South Asian literature. In the background of food memories and recipes, the genre of culinary narratives has often dealt with several important issues such as exile, displacement, war and discrimination. Shahnaz Ahsan's food memoir, *The Jackfruit Chronicles* (2025) is a recent addition to this growing literary genre. The aim of this paper is to examine how food often unfolds the discourse for other socio-cultural and political issues. This diasporic memoir which deals with memories and recipes from a British- Bangladeshi kitchen also makes an attempt to preserve the cultural heritage of Bangladesh in Britain by documenting several recipes from erstwhile homeland. In the process, it also familiarizes the nuances of Bangladeshi culture to a wider audience and creates space for this lesser-known heritage in the dominant narratives. The importance of culinary narratives from South Asia or other postcolonial regions also lies in the fact that even though it makes the narrative comparatively palatable for the Western perception, it also subverts the existing prejudices and stereotypes by the power of stories and lesser-known histories. This is also seen in Ahsan's memoir where she deals with several issues such as famine, war, the creation of Bangladesh, and migration, among others. Through close textual reading and culinary theories, these themes have been further discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Food, Memoir, Migration, Home, British- Bangladeshi

Introduction

Anita Mannur in *Culinary Fictions* writes:

Food, as a central part of the cultural imagination of diasporic populations, becomes one of the most viable and valuable sites from which to inquire into the richly layered texture of how race is imagined and reinterpreted within the cultural arena, both to affirm and resist notions of home and belonging (9).

Along with one's individual identity, the act of cooking and eating extends itself to one's socio-political identity as well. This is extensively seen in migrant narratives, where food becomes a portal to the ancestral homeland or the lost world. Often, food becomes a cultural marker of a community. It has been said that, "The consumption of food has always been culturally constructed" (Diner 3), and because of this, "[w]hat we eat and don't eat is largely a result of what group

we belong to" (Leonard and Saliba 172). Heller and Moran add that culinary traditions and eating identities act as cultural harbingers, connecting themselves and the families for whom they prepare food to the cultures of their descent; thus, their kitchens also become spaces for "the preservation of ethnic and religious identities" (3). The kitchen becomes an intimate space where the migrants do not need to pretend or attempt to assimilate: they can be who they are. In the process, it becomes a space of carrying their heritage and stories. (Ahmed 113)

Mankekar pointed out that food "acquires a distinctive valence ... in diasporic and migrant communities" as food habits become markers of "cultural continuity, difference, hybridity, and/or assimilation," with the ability to express both "oneness" and "otherness," food is a particularly apt medium for the negotiation of new identities (qtd. in Oyangen 8). In South Asian literature, food often unpacks several themes such as: gender, family, religion, diaspora, politics and grief. As observed by Xu in the case of Asian Americans food and eating do not simply fulfil necessities; rather, they serve as an index to a material history of survival, adaptation, ingenuity, and hybridization—a triumphant history of overcoming adversities. (19) (Ahmed 114)

This idea is further disseminated by Anita Mannur as well:

For South Asian diasporic cultural texts, the "culinary" most typically occupies a seemingly paradoxical space—at once a site of affirmation and resistance. Affirmation, because food often serves to mark defining moments in marking ethnicity for communities that live through and against the vagaries of diasporized realities, marred by racism and xenophobia. Resistance, insofar as the evocation of a culinary register can deliberately and strategically disrupt the notion that cultural identity is always readily available for consumption and commodification and always already conjoined to culinary practices (8).

Shahnaz Ahsan's memoir is a textbook in understanding this layered space of diaspora, acceptance and resistance, through food practices. In doing so, the vibrant flavours of Bengali food and East Bengal at large, has been centered in the discussion. The story of their diaspora begins with the arrival of her maternal grandfather, Habib, in Manchester in the 1950s. Through Ahsan's memoir, the readers are not only introduced to the migration story of one family but also of the Bangladeshi diaspora community in England. It aligns with what most diaspora memoirs are: they are not only personal but an extension of the community as well.

By weaving family recipes into the narrative, Ahsan also weaves a story of food, family and hope. It familiarises the readers with the quintessential British-Bangladeshi experience and what it means to belong. Recipes and stories, both personal and historical, of several heritage dishes such as jackfruit kofta curry, *alu bharta*, *daler bora*, and so on, have been integrated in the memoir which provides an insight into the Bangladeshi culture. At the same time, the incorporation of

hybrid recipes such as pineapple fritters, Ahsan's "English brunch", and so on shows the changing palette due to change in the geographical location and cultural assimilation. Food here becomes the essence of diaspora as well as identity, which is constantly evolving.

In tracing her family history of migration to England, in the first chapter, Ahsan also traces the history of colonialism in India. Among other historical events, she also mentions the Bengal famine of 1943 which caused the death of three million people. This tumultuous period also led to the migration of many people from India, in search of livelihood and better opportunities. She writes:

It ought to have been obvious that people from these ransacked colonies would eventually seek opportunity elsewhere – namely, in Britain- ... but instead, the imperialists recoiled in horror as their former colonial subjects – my grandfather among them- began arriving on Britain's shores (4).

She further unpacks the complexities of migration:

Instead of recognising immigration as being a reasonable, even predictable, response to centuries' worth of theft and exploitation, the issue continues to be cynically exploited by the media and political parties across the spectrum. As a result, the language, policies, and general attitude towards immigrants and their descendants is often negative- even hateful- in British popular discourse (4).

This can be seen in many western countries in fact, where migrants are often considered inferior and "the others". But often, it is only by understanding the migrant experiences that one can comprehend the changing social fabric of a society, especially in the contemporary times. The stories that Ahsan narrate are also an attempt at bridging that gap. She writes:

I wanted to chronicle our tale for the sake of my own children. Not to justify our existence to the wider British society but to record and celebrate, recognize and validate, ourselves and those who came before us (5).

And in doing so, Ahsan applies the lens of culinary narratives as that felt the most natural to her:

Food... is the most tangible connection to our past; what we cook and how we eat is the thread we hold on to even when all other forms of cultural identity- language, dress, art- may fade with time (5).

This statement carries the argument of the paper. While the people in diaspora are expected to assimilate in the host country, and there is an inevitable change in the language they speak or the way they dress: the food they eat provides comfort and keeps them linked to their erstwhile homeland. It is both a language of love and resistance.

In the chapter titled, "About Bengali Food: Flavours and Ingredients", Ahsan introduces the readers to Bangladeshi cooking and hospitality. She starts the chapter with the line, "Eat with hands, eat with others, eat with joy", which is an

attempt to foreground the culture and eating habits of the Bangladeshis. She puts a description of how a traditional Bengali full meal would seem. It typically consists of rice with several other dishes such as lightly sauteed vegetables, dal, fish, a meat item like chicken, lamb or beef, a palate cleansing hot and sour dish, and fresh fruit or sugary, milky desserts. Here, Ahsan also iterates the popular phrase: “*mach-e-bhat- e Bangali*”, which translates to “fish and rice makes a Bengali”. (11). This phrase highlights how often food is directly associated with the identity of a community.

Along with Bengali dishes, Ahsan mentions certain kitchen equipment such as *korai*, *kolshi*, *sheel bata*, and *da* or *boti* that pertain to Bengali as well as other South Asian households. She also describes certain store cupboard supplies as well as ingredients necessary to Bengali cuisine in an elaborate manner. This includes ghee, lentils, mustard oil, rice, salt, spices such as *panch puron*, chillies, coriander; fish such as *mokha*, *puti*, *kechki*, *ilish*, *rohu* and *katla*; greens or *shak* such as *nali shak* and *lai shak*; vegetable dishes such as *shobji*, *bazi* or *bhaja*, *niramish* and *jhol*; and so on. An elaborate description of these kitchen items harbours a desire to create space for the Bangladeshi kitchen or a minority culture into the dominant or prevalent culture.

In the chapter “Home and the World: *Ghore Baire*”, which is a juxtaposition between the familiar and the unknown (24), Ahsan narrates her family history as well as the landscape and household structure in Bangladesh, providing a glimpse into a lesser-known world. Along with these, Ahsan recalls how her maternal grandfather, Habib Ullah (Nana Bhai), loved feeding others. He had experienced many difficulties in his life – from famine, war, disease to witnessing multiple deaths and migration. Ahsan wonders if the scarcity and precarity of his life made food his chosen expression of love:

Habib showed his affection by remembering what food everyone in the family enjoyed and by making sure that the house was well stocked with these treats whenever we came to visit (23)

This tendency to show one’s love through food is seen in most South Asian households as well. In a section titled “The Ceremony of Cut Fruit”, Ahsan mentions how in recent years, it has been widely addressed and acknowledged that cutting fruit is a love language in itself in the South and East Asian cultures, especially by parents. Ahsan too attests to this belief, “My parents and grandparents showed their love most tangibly in the way they sourced, prepared, and served fruit.” (179) It is her parents and grandfather that introduced her to seasonal fruits such as lychees and jackfruit. For Ahsan, jackfruit is synonymous to community (180). She writes:

It is such a ludicrously large fruit that it is only ever purchased with the express intention to share it... The preparation of the fruit is time consuming and undertaking the laborious task is an absolute act of love... (180)

Notably, jackfruit is also the national fruit of Bangladesh. Ahsan mentions that getting hold of jackfruit is a full-time hobby of most diaspora Bangladeshis (x), since it is a rare prospect of obtaining this tropical fruit in colder countries. It becomes a moment of celebration induced with nostalgia and the taste of home. Ahsan naming her memoir *The Jackfruit Chronicles* is perhaps an attempt to assert her ancestral nationality and pay homage to where she comes from.

For Ahsan, a quintessential deshi meal consists of four dishes: red lentils (*Bagar dal*); wilted greens (*shak*), spiced fried fish (*Maach Bhaja*); and fried aubergine (*begun bhaja*), served with steaming hot white rice. This chapter, in fact, includes detailed recipe of these four dishes about which Ahsan writes:

This is the meal I most look forward to when visiting my parents. And wherever I am in the world, cooking these dishes makes me feel as though I am home (26).

While Ahsan was born and brought up in England, Ahsan's grandfather, Habib, migrated to England in the winter of 1956. Amidst the growing resistance towards migrant workers, Habib started working in a clothes printing factory. For Habib and other migrant workers from the land, food was a challenge. Most of the deshi ingredients were not available in those days, hence they would innovate and substitute ingredients to create a new form of British- Bangladeshi cuisine. For instance, ghee was replaced by butter, mustard oil was replaced by Yellow English mustard, baby formula milk powder was used to make *gulab jamun* and *rosogolla*, *chittoi pitha* was replaced by crumpets, and Rice Krispies were used as a substitute of muri for *jhal muri*.

This chapter includes recipes of hybridized version of *jhal muri*, *cha*, Cheat's *chittoi pitha*, *maach bharta* and *maach bora*; since ingredients in these dishes are often substituted with the English items available in English supermarkets. The use of Rice Krispies and other alternate ingredients to prepare *jhal muri* is also seen in the opening chapter of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*, where Ashima prepares *jhal muri* in her tiny American kitchen to cure her homesickness. This also signifies the sustenance and evolving nature of the migrants along with their cuisine: adaptation becoming the nature of the migrants.

Habib's decision to get married brought Fatima to Manchester from Bangladesh. After years of working in a factory, Habib was able to buy a grocery shop. However, the atmosphere in England turned increasingly hostile, as narrated by Fatima to Ahsan:

Everything changed after 1969... The year that Enoch Powell warned of rivers foaming with much blood. The racists felt brave. They could do or say as they wanted, knowing that plenty of other people agreed with them (57).

Due to such distressing circumstances, Fatima decided that she did not want to raise her children in England, which led to the return migration of Fatima and Habib along with their three children to Dhaka. However, a few months later, war

broke out. East Pakistan declared itself independent in March 1971 and named itself Bangladesh. But the following nine months turned into a brutal warfare between different groups in the region. After a year of staying in Bangladesh, Habib and Fatima accepted the fact that home was no longer home, and they decided to re-emigrate to England.

The impact of the changing dynamics between Pakistan and Bangladesh was also felt in the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in England. Previously, the Bangladeshi community shared spaces with the Pakistani community but after the declaration of the war of Independence, the Bangladeshi community was left with no dedicated space for discussion and organization. Ultimately, restaurants such as the Shalimar restaurant and the Manzil restaurant became organizing hubs for the community. This reflects how kitchen and dining spaces often transform into public or political spaces.

After returning to England, Habib and Fatima too established two popular and long-running restaurants in Greater Manchester, namely; The Selina Indian Restaurant and The New Selina Indian Restaurant; both named after their first-born child, Selina. Differentiating the Pakistani-owned restaurants from the Bangladeshi-owned ones, Ahsan says that the Pakistani eateries catered to the local Pakistani community. Whereas the Bangladeshi restaurants catered to English diners, making the food more palatable for their consumption.

South Asian restaurants have been popular in England since decades now and it often seems to be a tangent of acceptance, however it is still a complicated venture:

Although the restaurant trade was now firmly woven into the fabric of British society, these symbols of immigrant success were not always met with positivity. As Bangladeshi and other migrant communities started to establish businesses- not just restaurants, but shops, market stalls, and other trades- the increased visibility of these communities also came with heightened hostility (80).

The British- Bangladeshi community experienced this dread firsthand when 24-year-old Altab Ali, a textile worker, was stabbed and murdered by three teenagers in a racially motivated attack in 1978. Habib and Fatima's family too suffered a similar tragic loss within the decade. In September 1986, Habib and Fatima's middle son, Ahmed, was stabbed and murdered in the school playground. He was trying to protect another younger Asian boy from being bullied by a white boy when this incident occurred. Ahmed was only thirteen when he died. Such hate crimes and subsequent loss highlight the volatile space in which most people in diaspora co-habit. Ahsan's experiences in the aftermath of 9/11 also reflect the same turmoil of survival and acceptance.

Children of diaspora are often caught in between two cultures and two value systems. Notably, school canteen was Ahsan's introduction to the English cuisine. She writes:

We marvelled at dishes such as cheese whirl, mashed potato, sponge pudding and custard. We would then recreate these dishes at home, with a little deshi spin of course (98).

Some items that Ahsan has included under this segment are keema shepherd's pie, cheese and pickle pinwheels, the Selina Special sandwich which was made with leftover tandoori chicken, and so on. These dishes that are a fusion of the items that were introduced to her in the school canteen and her home, reflect the fusion that her identity eventually becomes.

In the section titled "A Big wedding", Ahsan while describing the wedding of her maternal uncle also describes the *shagorana*. *Shagorana* is a reception or welcome dinner hosted in the UK by the couple after returning from Bangladesh post marriage. Ahsan experienced this for the first time when her maternal uncle, that is, mama, got married:

Shagorana refers to both the occasion and the hugely elaborate main dish itself. A shagorana platter is enormous and is eaten communally with the hands. It comprises of roasted lamb, chicken, or a whole fish, buried under mounds of aromatic pilau rice, and is decorated with all manner of delicate, tasty treats such as fried aubergine, fried potatoes, minced meat or fish cutlets, whole hardboiled eggs, and intricately carved vegetables. Creating it is a two-day affair (151).

Soon enough, Ahsan's aunt or mamee became an expert chef and *daawat* became her specialty. The literal meaning of *daawat* is invitation where guests are invited formally for a meal with elaborate menu. Along with the traditional deshi cuisine, mamee's life in England also motivated her to expand her horizon and experiment with British or European cuisine. She would watch TV shows of chefs like Gary Rhodes, Nigella Lawson and Jamie Oliver with Ahsan and nanu and learn new techniques to use unfamiliar ingredients.

Every week, nanu would also buy stacks of women's magazines such as Women's Weekly, Woman's Realm, Bella, Best, and so on. Mamee would often tear out the sections with food recipes and try to cook the recipes. Ahsan believes she learnt to cook from and alongside her mamee, resulting in the tradition of conversing and learning in the kitchen; something that was passed down through the generations. She further writes:

With our family's food habits evolving over several decades and between two countries, we- like so many other immigrant families- have developed a unique cuisine by fusing the different elements from multiple food traditions. I view this as being symbolic of an increasing confidence in our identities- a beautiful sentiment in itself, but even better in its tangible, tasteable form (165).

This cultural fusion was also seen in how the Ahsan family held on to their religious and cultural celebrations but at the same time celebrated hallmark holidays with equal fervour. Every Valentine's Day, Abbu would take the family

out for dinner at an Asian restaurant. Their favourite restaurant was Mumtaz on Great Horton Road, where they would usually order masala fried fish, chana chaat, lamb karahi, chicken karahi, buttered naan, basmati rice and mango lassi. Ahsan felt that “there was a sweet reconciliation of Asian and Western values with celebrating Valentine’s Day”, a day for romantic love embedded in familial bonds for the Asian family.

Unlike cake in the western countries, Bengali households have the tradition of *mishti* or sweets. Several recipes of different varieties of sweet dishes have been incorporated by Ahsan in the text. These include *gulab jamun*, *suji halwa*, and *shemai*. Besides these, Ahsan mentions the *pitha* which she considers the most unique food from the region of Bengal:

Pronounced ‘pee-ta’ (or ‘fee-ta in the Sylheti dialect), it is a collective term for different types of pastries made from Bengal’s staple crop- rice. Pitha is not just a food; it is the embodiment of an identity (180).

She mentions several types of *pitha* such as *patishapta pitha*, *puli pitha*, *nakshi pitha*, *nuner bora*, *mera pitha* and so on. Different types of *pithas* were made on different occasions and to celebrate different festivals:

The making of pitha is a communal effort. It is labour intensive, and as the saying goes, ‘many hands make light work’. It is also a ritual. Traditionally, and still today, families gather with the express intention to make pitha: an afternoon or evening of chatter, laughter, and storytelling accompanies the rolling, folding, shaping, and frying before ending, of course, with the eating (181).

She also writes that, “Making pitha is an art form, and a beautiful demonstration of Bengali folk craft.” (181) For Ahsan, making pithas with her ancestral family on a return visit to Bangladesh became a foundational memory of her roots.

A child of diaspora, Ahsan’s childhood was filled with stories of their “home”, told by her father. She too longed to see this world where one could climb trees, steal mangoes, fish with rods, wade through paddy fields, and so on. However, this idyllic life or *desh* of Abbu’s stories had faded long back, and that home did not exist anymore. It only existed in memories and yearning. Ahsan and her sister, with their parents made multiple visits to their ancestral homeland for a taste of that home. Ahsan writes that, “What I remember the most from that first visit to Bangladesh is the scent of cooking” (193). Some recipes that became a part of her trips to Bangladesh include- *chotomaach bhaja*, *keski maach aar komla torkarisawler ruti*, *bindi bhaja*, and *bhorta* (*begun*, tomato or *aloo*).

Bhorta is considered a “quintessentially Bengali food” (196). Ahsan also mentions British- Bangladeshi food writer, Dina Begum, who describes *bhorta* as “the food of remembrance when nostalgia hits” (197). It is both economical and emotive (197).

Every visit to Bangladesh was a lesson in history and culture for Ahsan and her sister. But Ahsan could also see the colonial remnants in daily Bangladesh – from

the bureaucracy style to the Bengali love for picnics. In contrast to the usual array of picnic food found in England, such as, sandwiches, cheese, fruit and crisps; the food in the picnic Ahsan enjoyed with her relatives had heaps of hot rice and the spiciest curry.

But Ahsan admits that even though she loved deshi food, she would also crave for British food after a couple of weeks in Bangladesh. She would especially miss fish fingers and baked beans, even though she did not have those often when in England. While these items were not available in Bangladesh, her cousin would attempt to make loaf (*luf*), or pasta (*macaruni*) with fried onions, salt, and turmeric, for them: “Her kind efforts to make these dishes so that we would feel more at home has stayed with me all these years.” (215)

Growing up with the emotional weight of being a ‘probashi’ (expat or the one who lives away from home), she writes:

It is the fate of children of the diaspora to be viewed always as an addendum to their country ‘of origin’, as though we somehow collectively cash in our Bangladeshi-identification rights because we are birthed on foreign soil. But it isn’t foreign, not to us... But we are also made to feel guilty if we are not fully ‘at home’ in Bangladesh. There is a sense that we are never quite enough. Our Bangla isn’t fluent enough; our accents are strange (217).

It was only in her adulthood that Ahsan realised the unique position she was in, and that her British- Bangladeshi identity was a legitimate identity she did not have to apologise for. Bangladesh is her home. So is England. And this diasporic identity gives her the lens to look through every aspect of life; be it nation, politics, family, food or grief.

An important episode that Ahsan narrates in her memoir is the death of her grandfather. She writes:

It may sound strange but given that I tend to chart some of the most meaningful events and phases of my life through food, it is perhaps less surprising that one of the things I remember most clearly about that time is the food (227).

She remembers that even though they were mourning, the food was similar to that of wedding festivities. This is often seen in the South Asian culture. Grief, perhaps, often finds its solace in food.

In the chapter “Coming of Age”, Ahsan narrates her journey of stepping out in the world and her life in Oxford. She enjoyed cooking for herself and she came up with a few easy recipes to sustain, such as the student prawn curry and the one-pan cheesy masala chips. One’s dietary habits are often influenced by their religious beliefs. For Ahsan, since it was difficult to find halal meat in the supermarkets of Oxford, she would often end up cooking prawns.

When she moved to London, Ahsan shared her flat and food with Natalie. They would cook from their respective heritages often, for example, Natalie would

prepare Japanese miso aubergine and sticky rice, and Ahsan would prepare dal and sardines. She writes:

One of my favourite things about cooking is the stories that are embedded within the recipes we follow. Each one has its own history, whether we are aware of it or not, having passed through hands and kitchens over time. There is something humbling in the realisation that nothing is truly original; we borrow and tweak, adjust and adapt its path in the world, with our own innovations being just one part of each recipe's trajectory (242).

This is similar to how humankind adapts. Migration is an age-old phenomenon and almost every ancestor had crossed that threshold of movement at some point. People settle, adapt, stay or leave. Sometimes they return. And in the process, they carry with them the traditions they have learnt. For Ahsan, the most viable path of this remembrance is food as "It is the thread that binds us to our histories and our futures—a testament to where we come from, and the hope of where we are going." (xii) This is what they inherit from their ancestors. Food becomes the language of the migrant community, their method of assimilation as well as resistance. Along with the recipes, Ahsan's memoir chronicles the historical background and politics of places and the people. It becomes a living and practicing archive of what was, and what is becoming; like the fluid identity of the people of diaspora itself.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/18**CURRY AS CODE: TASTE, RACE, AND THE POETICS OF
DIASPORIC FORM****PIYUSH NARNOLI**Independent Research Scholar
Department of English, University of Delhi, India**Abstract**

This paper offers a theoretically inflected literary reading of Nabeh Ruthnum's *Curry: Eating, Reading, and Race* (2017) to examine how "curry" functions as a racialized and overdetermined signifier within diasporic narrative. While food immigration literature is often mobilized as a stabilizing trope of nostalgia and cultural continuity, Ruthnum's text resists such recuperative logic by foregrounding the instability and constructedness of culinary identity. The paper argues that "curry" emerges not as an authentic marker of South Asian belonging but as a discursive formation produced through colonial epistemologies and sustained within contemporary economies of multicultural consumption. Through close attention to Ruthnum's fragmentary structure, ironic tonal registers, and self-reflexive narrative voice, the analysis demonstrates how the text dismantles the homogenizing category of "curry", exposing its function as a racial shorthand that collapses heterogeneous culinary practices into a consumable sign of difference. Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's theorization of hybridity and mimicry, and Stuart Hall's conception of identity as contingent and processual, the paper reads these formal strategies as enacting a critique of fixed authenticity and essentialist cultural claims. Taste, in this context, operates as a semiotic and affective register through which histories of colonial encounter and racial othering are both inscribed and unsettled. Engaging with affect theory, the paper further traces how culinary memory in the text is mediated by ambivalence, oscillating between intimacy and estrangement, thereby unsettling the notion of food as a stable archive of the homeland. Ruthnum's prose refuses linear narratives of diasporic belonging and instead situates food within a field of tension between memory and market, authenticity and performance. Ultimately, the paper contends that *Curry* reconfigures the culinary as a critical language through which the entanglements of race, empire, and diasporic subjectivity are rendered legible and contestable.

Keywords: Diaspora, Culinary Studies, Race and Representation, Postcolonial Theory, Memory and Affect, Food Semiotics

Introduction

The idea of food has congregated a significantly privileged position within the South Asian discourses on diaspora and migration. Within diasporic literature, food serves as a mnemonic instrument through which the displaced subjects

attempt to recuperate their fractured identities and forge a sense of intimacy with their remembered pasts and homelands. Kitchens, utensils, spices, ingredients, and recipes often serve as carriers of cultural affinity and a potpourri of lived memories from the homeland, counteracting the melancholy of dislocation. Such literary delineations frequently assume that culinary memories and practices from the homeland encompass a notion of authenticity capable of resisting displacement, fragmentation and cultural loss. However, this tendency to position food as a locus of nostalgia and reminiscence obscures and marginalises the distinct ideological practices and histories embedded within the culinary discourses themselves. A monolithic idea of authenticity often produces an ideologically homogenising category; wherein culturally diverse forms of recipes and ingredients get concealed behind the coalescent trope of nostalgia and memory. In contemporary multicultural societies, food does not merely represent loss, memory and inheritance; it also circulates as a commodity, stereotype and a racial signifier. Naben Ruthnum's *Curry: Eating, Reading and Race* (2017) intervenes precisely at this critical juncture wherein he attempts to interrogate the idea of "curry" as a stable marker of South Asian identity and destabilize the idea of defined authenticity. Ruthnum critiques the discrepant and flawed interpretations of the idea of authentic curry by exposing the colonial and capitalist structures that thrive on the cultures of consumerism and globalisation. Within the global consumerist economy, brown identities tend to occupy a negotiated position, often becoming tradeable and consumable at the expense of nostalgia and longing for the homeland. Ruthnum notes, "Curry's just as fake and as real as a great novel, as a sense of identity." (Ruthnum 7)

This paper argues that Ruthnum fundamentally reorients the politics of food within the diasporic discourse by deconstructing the notion of "curry" from a nostalgic stimulator into a contested semiotic domain where issues of empire, race, literary production and the global cultures of consumerism intersect. Much of the diasporic and culinary writing emphasises sensory intimacy as a register to stabilise the fragmented identity and convalesce a rupture of self. On the contrary, Ruthnum brilliantly decentres the assumption that olfactory and gustatory memories associated with food and an affinity with the ingredients and recipes offer a transparent window to reclaim the origins. Ruthnum's *Curry* (2017) establishes that the idea of authentic curry itself is a colonial fiction synthesised through orientalist simplification and sustained through multicultural neoliberalism. Metropolitan capitalist cultures of consumption have catalysed an epistemic category of fixed recipes that resist flexibility and produce narratives of universalising accounts, which Ruthnum brilliantly unleashes as he narrates "precision measurement of spices is genuinely foreign" (Ruthnum 14). The fragmented narrative style, ironic tone of the meta-fictional commentary and self-reflexive temperament of the narrator further mirror the authentic essence of a

South Asian identity that thrives on heterogeneity and varied experiences in the face of the commercialisation of recipes, ingredients and familial nostalgia.

The paper attempts to contextualise Curry (2017) within broader debates concerning postcolonial representations and foster a meaningful conversation with the works of Edward Said, Stuart Hall and Homi K. Bhabha. However, the paper does not merely apply these theories to the text; rather argue that Ruthnum's meta-fictional account actively critiques and complicates the dominant paradigms of diaspora studies itself. Curry (2017) emerges not as a conventional diasporic memoir but as a formally disruptive critique of the literary and cultural ecosystem that thrives on the repeated performativity of the brown memory of authenticity. Moreover, Ruthnum challenges the dominant discourses of diaspora studies and food-memory-based epistemology by critiquing their particularising accounts and vociferously celebrating the rhetoric of visibility and hybridity through his self-reflexive embodiment of first-generation Mauritian-Indian identity.

Inventing Curry: Colonial Taxonomy and Culinary Orientalism

Edward Said's groundbreaking work *Orientalism* (1978) offers a compelling framework to engage with Ruthnum's idea of "curry" as a colonial fiction that necessitates a fixed account of culinary recipes and, by extension, culinary memories. Said argues that colonial discourses produced the Orient as a knowable and inferior object, capable of being vanquished through colonial regimes of knowledge and power. The colonial matrix of power unleashed an epistemic rupture on the Orient by vilifying it as an absolutely apprehensible and tangible domain that could be imperialised and governed. The notion of knowledge as a totally graspable category itself becomes problematic and an ideologically restrictive territory, which Said notes, "To have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it. And authority here means for "us" to deny autonomy to "it"" (Said 32). The idea of "curry" occupies precisely this representational terrain, wherein it signifies more than a cuisine; an ideology that the West has constructed to represent the East and commodify the diasporic sentiments of nostalgia and loss through branding and packaging of authentic curry powders and recipes for the migrated subjects. Culinary discourse, hence, becomes inextricably inseparable from the racial identities. Consumption of curries gets entangled with the racial discourses, colonial meiosis and oversimplification of South Asian subjectivities. South Asian alterity, such as that of Ruthnum, a diasporic second-generation subject in his text, gets systematically marginalised and simplified in the wake of multicultural consumption and the ambitious project of globalisation.

Ruthnum's account lambently exposes the historical violence through which British colonial discourse has attempted to erase and collapse the heterogeneous South Asian culinary cultures by mollifying them as singular and manageable signifiers. The term "curry" emerges less from indigenous descriptive categories than from the colonial system of classification that thrives on meiosis and

abatement of indigenous South Asian cultures and discourses. Ruthnum's *Curry* (2017), therefore, becomes a striking intervention within postcolonial studies as it augments the rigid precincts of diaspora studies that often envision food as an authentic, transparent and historically undiluted marker of homelands and cultural identities. Curry functions not as an authentic essence of diasporic identity but as a colonial taxonomy that thrives on systemic erasure through reinforcement of repeated performativity and semiotics of forced re-productions. Ruthnum argues that the Western construct of "curry" is largely rooted in the romanticisation and exoticisation of the South Asian alterity, whereby an affinity with the remembered past and culinary memories "are bagged with the symbolic weight of a motherland" (Ruthnum 12).

Ruthnum's text repeatedly demonstrates how colonial inheritance is sustained and replicated within multicultural societies. The text exposes how a brown identity becomes legible through food even before it becomes legible through history. This argument highlights the political logic of global consumer cultures; wherein ethnic cuisines often become the primary signifiers of immigrant cultures and are rendered visible and legitimate within neo-liberal democracies. However, such visibility remains fundamentally confining and restrictive, as it is contingent upon consumerist economies and multicultural politics that translate the complex histories of empires, migrations and race into mere sensory pleasures and gustatory artefacts.

Bell Hooks' influential work *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992) offers a brilliant exegesis on the concept of sabotaging the other, wherein he makes a notable intervention: "The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture." (Hooks 21). Hooks exposes the political logic of mass commodification that transforms racial difference into a commodity by offering consumers pleasurable encounters with the alterity stripped of any political context. Ruthnum extends this critique by foregrounding how "curry" produces precisely such depoliticised intimacy. The multicultural subject may enthusiastically consume the "authentic" Indian food while remaining epistemically and structurally estranged from the ruthless histories of colonial expansion and exploitation that significantly influence South Asian diasporic identity and subjectivity. Ruthnum himself embodies a displaced precarity, whereby, as a second-generation diasporic subject, he grapples with the contested idea of "authentic curry". Born in the small city of Kelowna in Mauritius, Ruthnum becomes a distant foreigner to the cultural lineage of his parents and extended Indian family and constantly negotiates his own hybrid identity through the trope of curry and authentic flavours.

The text resists the temptation to offer a simplistic critique of the colonial oversimplification of Indian culinary practices by problematising the trope of

“authentic curry”. Ruthnum extends his critique by emphasising that such gestures of authenticity synthesise an essentialist fantasy that undermines the prevalence of pluralistic practices. Curry (2017) radically departs from such strictly defined cultural norms towards celebratory and inclusive notions of hybridity, circulation and improvisation. The South Asian conception of “curry” has historically defied determinate ideas of recipes and has existed as a hybrid site of associations, ruptures and reconstitutions across temporalities and geographies. Ruthnum’s invigorating claim: “curry’s reassuring power isn’t a resurrection of a stable past, but a reminder that the past, and our former countries, are as fractious and adaptable as the present.” (Ruthnum 28) offers a critical scope for a meaningful engagement with entanglements of past, present and future, which are in a state of perpetual flux and continue to influence each other through an interconnected mesh of past affiliations, current predications and impending precarities. Dishes mutate across borders, and recipes adapt to the availability of ingredients in the new homelands. The text brilliantly demonstrates how dishes like chicken tikka masala, an undistinguished marker of Indian identity, itself emerges through a diasporic metamorphosis in Britain. The disputed origins of chicken tikka masala point towards the mutability of historical recipes. Dishes across new geographies transform and assume a new identity that unsettles the temporal continuities and essentialising fantasy of diasporic food writings. Authenticity here emerges not as a fixed and non-volatile entity but as a performative effect that circulates as an evolving social reality, continually assuming new and distinct implications. Much of the food writing projects that cuisines preserve stable cultural memories across migration and displacement, while Ruthnum attempts to destabilise the construct of nostalgia within diasporic discourses. He argues that culinary identity is already mediated by colonial history and the market economies of production and circulation. Curry, henceforth, does not operate as a recuperative logic of homeland authenticity; it becomes symptomatic of imperial encounter itself.

The Literary Marketplace and the Performance of Brownness

Curry (2017) attempts to critique the entire ecosystem of literary cosmology that pedestals repeated and recognisable performances of ethnicity and its attribute of authenticity. Ruthnum’s fiction is a compelling account of the colonial “curry narrative” in which immigrant experience is rendered aesthetically legible through the familiar tropes of remembered kitchens, aroma of rich spices, sensory memories, and intergenerational tales of displacement. The text displaces the agency of essentialist performance of nostalgia within diaspora studies by unleashing the normative conditions through which certain forms of brown storytelling acquire cultural legitimacy and institutional sovereignty while obscuring the liminal ones. Such aestheticisation and selective bias produce a stereotype that threatens the distinctive and heterogeneous forms of culinary traditions, which remain largely invisible beneath the weight of dominant and vogueish literary representations. Said argues, “The Orient was almost a European

invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings and haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (Said 1). An excessive romanticisation of literary nostalgia mediated through diasporic writings threatens the essence of distinguished subjectivities of immigrants who grapple with the loss of dislocation under distinct circumstances. Diasporic representations, therefore, become a constricted category in the dominant literary marketplace, which *Curry* attempts to expose through a fragmented narrative style that resists stability and sustains on the interstices of past remembrances of the former homeland and the present embodiment as a hybrid immigrant subject in the new homeland.

The currents of Ruthnum’s critique of the dominant diasporic paradigms resonate strongly with Graham Huggan’s concept of “postcolonial exotic” (121). In his foundational text *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001), Huggan argues, “Exoticism describes a political as much as an aesthetic practice. But this politics is often concealed, hidden beneath layers of mystification.” (Huggan 14). “For this reason, among others, exoticism has proved over time to be a highly effective instrument of imperial power.” (Huggan 14). “The exoticist rhetoric of fetishised otherness and sympathetic identification masks the inequality of the power relations without which the discourse could not function.” (Huggan 14). Graham’s central premise suggests why postcolonial academic theories and literatures circulate within the global marketplace and are mediated as mere commodities in multicultural economies through systematic fetishisation and exoticisation of cultural alterity and racial otherness. Ethnicity becomes a signifier of aesthetic cultural capital and is routinely packaged as what Ruthnum calls “authentic curry”. Ruthnum repeatedly foregrounds how the capitalist regimes of power permeate literary scholarship and sustains through an emotional replication and redundant performance of immigrants’ loss of homeland. Dominant publishing cultures are often guided by Western literary trends, which therefore generate a profound pressure on the brown writer to narrate the subject of diaspora through familiar sensory signifiers and reinforcing scripts.

Ruthnum’s ironic treatment of the subject of food memoirs and immigrant writings mocks the expectation that South Asian narratives must perform intimacy through the familiar trope of kitchens and recipes. The ironic undercurrents of the text expose how the diasporic predicament is tactfully reduced and compartmentalised as an emotional shorthand for a consumerist marketplace. He satirically notes, “precision measurement of spices is genuinely foreign.” (Ruthnum 14). The text draws a sardonic critique of multicultural literary expectations that reduce mothers, spices and grief to mere signifiers of “curry genre” and characterise them as cultural repositories of authenticity. “Mothers are an important and authentic part of the curry genre, both cooked and written: not only a source of accessible, cross-cultural nostalgia, but a reminder that there are domestic, comforting aspects to exoticism” (Ruthnum 12). Contrary to the dominant literary assumptions that

relegate specific performative roles to South Asian mothers by aestheticizing their culinary methods, Ruthnum conceives a relatively subverted idea of motherhood, wherein mothers embody a counter-narrative to the discourse of reckless commodification and fixed cultural norms. He insists, “mothers sometimes aren’t given much room of their own to be intact characters themselves. Mothers are permitted to be mysterious and generous in this system of symbolism” (Ruthnum 12). The entanglements of motherhood and food-based memory, hence, become an emancipatory discourse that thrives on the sentimental registers of comfort and individual experiences. Indian culinary tradition has historically resisted the idea of fixity and precision, maintaining its identity by celebrating diverse forms, each equally valid and authentic. Recipes travel across geographies, adjust according to local ingredients and preferences and assume new forms that are unequivocally as authentic as the original. In this context, mothers in South Asian migration writings often become cultural signifiers of generosity, heterogeneity, and free spirit that counter the political logic of global commodification and fetishisation. Stuart Hall’s conception of “cultural identity” as contingent and processual adds a significant depth to Ruthnum’s critique of fixed identities. Hall makes a notable intervention in his work, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, wherein he comments: “Cultural identity is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture.” (Hall 225). “Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.” (Hall 225). Hall attempts to deconstruct the notion of fixed identities by problematising the undue emphasis on origins, which itself becomes a contested space and emerges as an elusive subject, in a state of constant becoming and unbecoming. The text formally enacts this instability by resisting coherence in its narrative texture and oscillating among memoir, criticism, cultural theories and culinary epistemologies without swearing complete allegiance to any of these arenas. Textual fragmentation mirrors the instability of diasporic identity itself, which is continuously mediated by representation and consumption.

While Ruthnum attempts to expose the limitations of the global consumerist culture, he inhabits contradiction. He neither outrightly rejects nor comfortably embraces the facets of multicultural representation, thereby adding intellectual sophistication to his text. The narrative maintains an ambivalent tone to sustain the politics of survival within literary capitalism, which often demands tactical negotiation. Ruthnum’s self-reflexivity transforms the text into a critique of literary spectatorship itself. Readers are compelled to confront their own desires for cultural authenticity and ethnic intimacy. The text interrogates the ideologies

that produce a market of sensory spectatorship rooted in brown suffering and forays deep into the questions about the essentialist understanding of diasporic discourses mediated through recipes and food narratives. *Curry* foregrounds the politics of visibility in diasporic studies by asserting that representation does not necessarily dismantle racial hierarchies. Representation itself becomes a site through which difference acquires an exchange value. The text, therefore, challenges the celebratory accounts of multicultural inclusion by strategically unleashing the economic structures that govern the visibility of minority identities. The representation of such identities is often mediated by the rhetoric of desirability in the marketplace that trades nostalgia for exoticism.

Affect, Nostalgia and the Violence of Culinary Memory

Diasporic food writings use sensory associations as a tool to reconstruct fond memories of the past. Smell and taste emerge as media capable of evoking nostalgia and belongingness that can mitigate the agony of temporal distance by offering an intimate access to familial and cultural histories. Yet Ruthnum departs from this tradition of romanticising culinary nostalgia and refrains from forging the same coordinates of remembrances. His text treats food with a distinguished ambivalence; it does not appear as a transparent archive of homeland and authenticity but as a fragmented, performative and historically mediated memory. To address such tension, Sara Ahmed's work *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects and Others* (2006) provides an excellent opportunity to engage with affect theory and understand how performative associations produce a certain kind of orientation that circulates across dominant narratives. Ahmed writes, "We might speak then of collective direction: of ways in which nations or other imagined communities might be "going in a certain direction," or facing the same way, such that only some things "get our attention." Becoming a member of such a community, then, might also mean following this direction, which could be described as the political requirement that we turn some ways and not others. We follow the line that is followed by others: the repetition of the act of following makes the line disappear from view as the point from which "we" emerge." (Ahmed 15).

Ahmed's argument that emotions orient objects toward particular objects and histories complements Ruthnum's reading of curry as an affective space that produces a specific kind of expectations. Within diaspora, food becomes affectively charged because it organises relationships to home, kinship and identity. However, Ruthnum's reading of curry resists the affective currents of nostalgia and oscillates between comfort and estrangement. On one hand, curry signifies familial inheritance, while on the other, it becomes symptomatic of racial reduction and cultural stereotyping. Immigrant subjects, therefore, encounter curry not only as an emotional signifier but as an ambivalent disposition. *Curry* effectuates a radical departure from the conventional diasporic narratives that thrive on the idea of stability to a fluid understanding of recipes and culinary

practices that are repeatedly reimagined and reinvented across geographies and temporalities. Ingredients disappear across borders, tastes mutate through adaptation, and recipes survive only through alteration. Migration itself transforms what is remembered, and culinary practices survive only through ruptures and adaptation.

Ruthnum's ironic commentary and argumentative interpretation further intensify the critique of institutionally produced affect and the normative orientation it necessitates. Ruthnum skilfully disrupts the sentimental moments in his text by returning to a self-conscious commentary. He destabilises his own nostalgic moments before they solidify as fixed memories. Emotional transparency takes a back seat in Ruthnum's worldview, where he views affective euphoria as a site that commodifies nostalgia into a pleasurable spectacle. In this vein, Svetlana Boym's (2001) distinction between "reflective nostalgia" and "restorative nostalgia" offers an insightful occasion to discuss Ruthnum's ambivalent logic. "Restoration signifies a return to the original stasis, to the prelapsarian moment. The past for the restorative nostalgic is a value for the present; the past is not a duration but a perfect snapshot. Moreover, the past is not supposed to reveal any signs of decay; it has to be freshly painted in its "original image" and remain eternally young. Reflective nostalgia is more concerned with historical and individual time, with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude. *Re-flexion* suggests new flexibility, not the reestablishment of stasis. The focus here is not on recovery of what is perceived to be an absolute truth but on the meditation on history and passage of time." (Boym 49). *Curry* exemplifies the reflective mode in which nostalgia functions through an interplay of contradictions and fragments rather than an absolute restoration of the lost homeland. Within South Asian diaspora studies, the past cannot be recuperated vis-à-vis the logic of restorative nostalgia as it is repeatedly informed by the evolving dynamics of cultures and histories across the generations. The text does not attempt to recover pure homeland authenticity; instead, it interrogates the desire for authenticity itself. Culinary memory becomes less a mode of return than a site of critical uncertainty. Intimacies with the restorative logic of nostalgia erase histories of colonial violence and the precarities of immigrant subject. Ruthnum extends his critique beyond the literary marketplace toward political economy, which packages memory into a consumable affect.

However, the text does not reject the affective registers of nostalgia mediated by food in its entirety. Rather, it gravitates the notion that culinary memory remains historically and politically overdetermined. The idea of taste is arguably inseparable from the issues of class, race, displacement, migration and power regimes. Remembrance of food from the former homeland itself becomes an act that invokes memories of colonial encounters and global commodification. The idea of curry, therefore, functions in the text as an ideological critique rather than a restorative sentimental memory.

Hybridity and Its Discontents: Beyond Celebratory Multiculturalism

Postcolonial understandings of displacement, migration and fragmentation have largely been shaped by Homi K. Bhabha's theorisation of hybridity. Bhabha argues that colonial encounters produce liminal cultural spaces where identities emerge through negotiation, mutation and mimicry rather than from essential origins. Bhabha writes, "It is in this overlapping space between the fading of identity and its faint inscription that I take my stand on the subject, amidst a celebrated gathering of poststructuralist thinkers." (Bhabha 56). Ruthnum's reading of curry stands as a literary testament to the idea that colonial subjects subvert the power of the oppressor by inventing a hybrid identity that resists fixity, control and absolutism. As a second-generation diasporic subject, Ruthnum situates himself as a hybrid subject whose upbringing in Mauritius has been considerably influenced by the cultural memories of his Indian parents, as well as by his present homeland, where he was born. Ruthnum's identity emerges as a potpourri of varied cultural experiences: he has been exposed to his parents' culture, which is completely foreign to him, while on the other hand, he embodies the native sensibilities of Mauritius. He inhabits a liminal space that resists fixed definitions and mocks the expectations of neoliberal cultures.

Curry resists stability and emerges as an acknowledgement of hybrid gustatory faculties, all of which are equally authentic and acceptable. However, the text complicates the celebratory versions of hybridity by drawing an insistence upon the persistence of racial hierarchies within liberal multiculturalism. The text exposes the politics of hybridity within neoliberal regimes, wherein immigrants' nostalgia is exoticised and packaged as commodities at the outset of multicultural representations. However, an immigrant subject grapples with the process of assimilation central to the cultural expectations of the foreign homeland. Bhabha (1994) notes, "the ambivalence of mimicry (almost the same but not *quite*) does not merely 'rupture' the discourse but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence. By 'partial' I mean both 'incomplete' and 'virtual'. It is as if the very emergence of the 'colonial' is dependent for its representation upon some strategic limitation or prohibition *within* the authoritative discourse itself." (Bhabha 86). This tension becomes particularly evident in Ruthnum's treatment of fusion cuisine and contemporary cosmopolitanism which celebrates culinary hybridity as successful markers of tolerance, diversity and cultural openness. However, such popular consumerist cultures do not necessarily signify political equality and acceptance for the racialised communities; instead, they reveal the tactful politics that selectively accept the immigrant cultures while sustaining the discriminatory politics on the grounds of ethnicity. The text often performs recognisable "brownness" only to expose the superficiality of such performances. In this line of argument, Ruthnum's text echoes Lisa Lowe's critique of liberal multiculturalism, which she discusses in her work *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*

(1996). Lowe argues that multicultural discourses frequently incorporate diversity into national identity while disavowing ongoing histories of racial exploitation and economic exclusion. Ruthnum similarly expose how multicultural societies commodify immigrant cultures while maintaining unequal social relations. While curry remains an exotic construct and a marker of nostalgia, brown bodies remain stereotyped, excluded and surveilled.

Curry exposes the multicultural politics of representation wherein visibility is often celebrated as an inclusive and celebratory achievement. The text repeatedly questions whether visibility alone constitutes meaningful resistance. Ruthnum recollects how brown identities become most visible precisely when it is marketable. Brownness acquires a cultural value once it transforms into pleasurable manifestations of food, spices, kitchens, mothers and nostalgia. Such visibility reinforces and reinscribes the structures of commodity cultures rather than dismantling them. Curry does not reconcile the loss of displacement and the ensuing nostalgia; instead, it rejects the reductionist fantasy of global multiculturalism to unleash the colonial histories of violence and domination. Moreover, the text emphasises that diaspora cannot be understood outside the intersecting structures of race, empire, capitalism and representation. Food writings, even though they remain emotionally resonant becomes the primary site where politics of multiculturalism and consumerism is naturalised and registered.

Conclusion

Curry: Eating, Reading and Race (2017) represents one of the most intellectually rigorous interventions into contemporary diasporic food writings because it resists the sentimental oversimplification of the culinary discourse. Curry does not function in the text as a comforting and stable archive; it becomes a marker of continuing colonial encounters through the cultures of commodification and neoliberalism. Ruthnum remarkably transforms culinary discourse into a critical analytic through which the operations of empire, race, affect, and neoliberal globalisation are rendered ostensible. Food remains deeply entwined with the histories and institutions governing it. Taste is never purely sensory; it is structured through market desires, consumer demands, racial representations and cultural performances. By juxtaposing the literary marketplace alongside culinary discourse, Ruthnum further reveals how the construct of diaspora itself mediates as a commodity through recognisable narratives of dislocation and nostalgia. The political agency of the narrative lies in its refusal to stabilise the identity of curry. The text neither mitigates the lost origins nor celebrates hybridity as a liberating tool. Instead, it thrives upon ambivalence as the very condition that defines diasporic subjectivity. Ambivalence becomes a form of critique as it effaces the comforting and digestible narratives through which multicultural societies consume ethnic differences. Ruthnum's readers are compelled to deliberate that even the most intimate acts of eating and remembering remain inseparable from the dark histories of empires and race. The text challenges both readers and critics

to reimagine the politics of representation itself. By resisting the idea of easy consumption both in the literary marketplace and culinary discourse, Ruthnum attempts to expand the horizons of diasporic discourse beyond the ideas of authenticity and nostalgia towards an unsettling and politically incisive understanding of food, race and empire.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/19**VIRTUALLY DESI: DIGITAL DIASPORA, PLATFORM CULTURES,
AND THE REIMAGINATION OF INDIAN BELONGING****MUSKAAN KHANNA**Research Scholar, Department of African Studies
University of Delhi, India**Abstract**

This paper examines how the Indian diaspora deploys Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter/X as sites of cultural identity construction and the negotiation of diasporic belonging in the digital age. Situating the analysis within Avtar Brah's concept of homing desire and diaspora space (1996), Stuart Hall's theorisation of cultural identity as a continuous process of production rather than a fixed essence (1990), and Arjun Appadurai's framework of mediascapes as imaginative resources for diasporic self-construction (1996), the paper proposes the concept of the "digital diaspora space" to describe the networked environment in which Indians abroad perform, contest, and reimagine Indianness for co-ethnic and host-society audiences simultaneously. Through qualitative discourse analysis of diasporic content practices across the three platforms, the paper identifies three dominant modes of digital identity production: nostalgic curation, wherein food, language, and festive imagery reconstruct an idealised homeland on Instagram; political signalling, wherein Twitter/X becomes a terrain of contested loyalty between the Indian homeland and the host nation; and generational translation, wherein second-generation creators on YouTube negotiate hyphenated identities that belong fully to neither India nor the West. The paper argues that digital platforms do not simply mediate diasporic identity but actively shape its contours, intensifying emotional attachments to a homeland that is increasingly virtual, selective, and multiply imagined. The findings contribute to diaspora studies by introducing a platform-differentiated analytical framework and to South Asian studies by foregrounding the Indian diaspora as a paradigmatic case of digital identity politics with significant implications for transnational community formation, cultural citizenship, and the politics of belonging in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Digital Diaspora; Indian Diaspora; Cultural Identity; Homing Desire; Mediascapes; Instagram; Youtube; Twitter/X; Diasporic Belonging; Transnationalism; Digital Diaspora Space

1. Introduction

The Indian diaspora, numbering approximately 32 million people across more than 200 countries, is the largest diaspora community in the world (Ministry of External Affairs, India, 2023). Historically, scholarship on the Indian diaspora has

examined questions of identity, belonging, and community formation through the lenses of migration, labour, and colonial history (Mishra 2007; Lal 2006). Yet the digital transformation of everyday social life has introduced a fundamentally new set of conditions under which diasporic identity is constructed, circulated, and contested. Indians living abroad no longer inhabit a communication environment characterised by letters, sporadic telephone calls, and occasional visits. They inhabit a dense, always-on digital mediascape in which homeland news, cultural content, political opinion, and community gossip flow continuously across borders in real time (Diminescu 2008).

This transformation has not merely accelerated existing patterns of diasporic communication. It has qualitatively altered the nature of diasporic identity itself. The Indian diaspora does not simply use digital platforms to stay connected to India; it actively constructs a diasporic Indian identity through them, one that is often more curated, emotionally intense, and symbolically loaded than the India any individual member left behind. On Instagram, Indian food becomes a vehicle for homing desire. On YouTube, second-generation creators translate inherited cultural memories into content that speaks to audiences who have never visited India. On Twitter/X, the Indian diaspora engages in fiercely contested political debates about what India is, what it should be, and what it means to claim Indian identity from outside the nation-state.

Despite the scale and visibility of these digital identity practices, the scholarly literature has been slow to theorise them in a systematic and platform-differentiated way. Existing work on digital diasporas, pioneered by scholars such as Diminescu (2008), Leurs and Ponzanesi (2011), and Karim (2003), has established the foundational claim that digital media transforms diasporic life, but has rarely examined how different platform architectures, affordances, and audience dynamics produce qualitatively distinct modes of identity work. This paper addresses that gap by proposing the concept of the "digital diaspora space" and applying it comparatively across three major platforms through which the Indian diaspora constructs and negotiates its identity.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the theoretical literature on diaspora studies and digital media. Section 3 introduces the digital diaspora space framework and methodology. Sections 4, 5, and 6 analyse the three platforms respectively. Section 7 synthesises the findings. Section 8 concludes.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Classical Diaspora Theory

The theoretical foundations of diaspora studies were established in the 1990s through a set of landmark interventions that displaced earlier, more essentialist accounts of diasporic community. Avtar Brah's *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996) is perhaps the most generative of these, introducing the twin concepts of diaspora space and homing desire that this paper draws upon directly. For Brah, diaspora space is not a fixed geographical territory but a lived social relation, a site "where

multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed" (Brah 1996, 208). Crucially, diaspora space is inhabited not only by those who have migrated but also by those who remain in the place of origin, as well as by members of the receiving society, making it an inherently relational and contested terrain. Homing desire, Brah distinguishes from a literal desire to return: it is the desire to reconstruct a sense of home, a mythicised place of origin that is emotionally vivid and culturally central even when it is geographically absent. Stuart Hall's influential essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1990) complemented Brah's spatial framework with a temporal one, arguing that diasporic cultural identity is not a fixed essence transmitted unchanged across generations and geographies but a continuous process of production, shaped by history, representation, and the play of difference. Hall distinguished between two modes of thinking about cultural identity: identity as a shared culture with stable roots, and identity as a matter of "becoming as well as being," constituted through ongoing representation and transformation (Hall 1990, 225). For Hall, diasporic identity is always already hybrid, produced at the intersection of multiple histories and not reducible to any single origin.

Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large* (1996) introduced the concept of mediascapes as one of five global cultural flows that together constitute the conditions of late modernity. Mediascapes are both the electronic capabilities that distribute information and the images of the world created by these media, which provide resources for self-construction and community imagination for people living in diaspora. For Appadurai, media does not passively reflect a pre-existing diasporic community but actively produces the "imagined worlds" through which such communities constitute themselves (Appadurai 1996, 35).

2.2 Digital Diaspora Studies

The emergence of digital media studies as a field has generated a growing body of scholarship on the relationship between digital technologies and diasporic life. Dana Diminescu's concept of the "connected migrant" (2008) challenged the earlier figure of the uprooted, disconnected exile, arguing that contemporary migrants maintain persistent, real-time connections with their places of origin through digital media, producing a new social form characterised by simultaneous presence in multiple places rather than rupture from one and assimilation into another. This shift from disconnection to hyperconnection has fundamental implications for how diasporic identity is formed and sustained.

Leurs and Ponzanesi (2011) extended this framework specifically to young diasporic subjects, examining how second-generation migrants in Europe use digital media to negotiate what they term "connected differences," maintaining connections to parental cultures while simultaneously engaging with the youth cultures of their countries of birth. Their work highlights the generational dimension of digital diaspora that this paper takes seriously, particularly in the analysis of YouTube content in Section 5.

Karim (2003) examined the role of ethnic media more broadly, arguing that diasporic media create transnational public spheres that challenge the nation-state's monopoly on cultural and political community formation. This insight anticipates the Twitter/X analysis in Section 6, where the Indian diaspora is shown to constitute a diasporic counter-public that engages in consequential political discourse about Indian politics from outside the territorial boundaries of the Indian state.

Despite this growing literature, there remains a notable absence of platform-differentiated analysis of diasporic identity practices. Most existing scholarship treats "digital media" or "social media" as a relatively undifferentiated category, eliding the significant differences between platforms in terms of their affordances, algorithmic logics, visual cultures, and audience dynamics. This paper addresses that gap by examining Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter/X as distinct but interrelated sites of diasporic identity work within a single, integrated analytical framework.

3. The Digital Diaspora Space: Framework and Methodology

3.1 Conceptual Framework

This paper proposes the "digital diaspora space" as an analytical concept that extends Brah's diaspora space into the digital realm. The digital diaspora space is defined as the networked ensemble of platforms, affordances, algorithms, and practices through which diasporic subjects construct, perform, contest, and maintain cultural identity across geographic borders in the digital age. The concept differs from existing digital diaspora frameworks in three respects.

First, it insists on the constitutive, rather than merely mediating, role of platform architecture. Different platforms do not simply transmit the same diasporic identity through different channels; their distinct affordances, including Instagram's visual grammar, YouTube's long-form narrative format, and Twitter's compressed, real-time discourse, actively shape the kinds of identity work that are possible and prevalent on each. Second, the digital diaspora space is not coterminous with any single community or platform but describes the totality of networked identity practice across the platform ecosystem, within which any individual diaspora member occupies multiple, sometimes contradictory positions. Third, the concept foregrounds audience as a constitutive element of diasporic identity production, recognising that diasporic content is always addressed to a specific imagined audience whose responses and expectations shape what is produced.

Table 1 presents the three platforms examined in this paper alongside their primary modes of identity work, dominant content types, key audiences, and theoretical frames.

Table 1: Platform Analysis Framework for Digital Diaspora Identity Work

Platform	Primary Mode of Identity Work	Dominant Content Type	Key Audience	Theoretical Frame
Instagram	Nostalgic curation; aesthetic homeland construction	Food photography, festival reels, heritage visuals, "desi aesthetic" posts	Co-ethnic diaspora; host-society peers; second-generation youth	Appadurai's mediascapes; Brah's homing desire
YouTube	Generational translation; hyphenated identity negotiation	Vlogs, comedy sketches, cultural commentary, language content	Second-generation diaspora; NRI students; cross-cultural audiences	Hall's cultural identity as production; Gilroy's Black Atlantic adapted
Twitter / X	Political signalling; contested loyalty; diasporic public discourse	Opinion threads, news commentary, political hashtag campaigns, debate	Politically engaged NRIs; host-country publics; Indian media	Habermas's public sphere adapted; Fraser's counter-publics

Source: Authors' compilation based on platform analysis and theoretical review.

Table 2 situates the key theoretical concepts deployed in this paper, mapping each to its original scholarly context and its specific application within the digital diaspora space framework.

Table 2: Theoretical Concepts and Their Application in the Digital Diaspora Space Framework

Concept	Scholar(s)	Original Context	Application in Digital Diaspora Space
Diaspora Space	Brah (1996)	Conceptualises diaspora as a lived social relation rather than a fixed geographical location	Extended to the digital realm: online platforms become networked sites where diasporic belonging is practised, contested, and reproduced
Homing Desire	Brah (1996)	The desire to reconstruct home as a mythicised place of origin, distinct from a literal wish to return	Manifests as nostalgic curation on Instagram: food, language, and festive content that reconstruct an idealised, emotionally charged homeland
Cultural Identity as Production	Hall (1990)	Identity is not a fixed essence but a continuous process of becoming, shaped by history, representation, and difference	Diasporic Indians on YouTube produce identity through content creation, performing Indianness for audiences while simultaneously

			reshaping what that identity means
Mediascapes	Appadurai (1996)	Globally distributed electronic media that provide resources for imagined worlds and diasporic self-construction	Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter constitute overlapping mediascapes through which the Indian diaspora imagines, performs, and circulates a transnational Indianness
Postmemory	Hirsch (2012)	The relationship of the second generation to the traumatic or cultural memories of their parents, transmitted through stories and images	Second-generation Indian content creators mediate inherited cultural memories they have not personally lived, producing a digital postmemory of homeland
Counter-publics	Fraser (1990)	Subaltern social spaces that parallel the dominant public sphere, where marginalised groups deliberate and form	NRI Twitter communities function as diasporic counter-publics, debating Indian politics from

		oppositional identities	outside the nation-state and challenging both Indian and host-country narratives

Source: Authors' compilation.

3.2 Methodology

The paper employs qualitative discourse analysis as its primary method, examining diasporic content practices across Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter/X. This includes analysis of content formats, visual and linguistic conventions, hashtag ecologies, comment cultures, and the self-representational strategies of prominent diasporic content creators. The analysis draws on secondary literature documenting diasporic digital practices, as well as on illustrative examples drawn from publicly available platform content. The paper does not claim to offer a comprehensive quantitative mapping of Indian diasporic digital content; rather, it offers a theoretically grounded interpretive account of the dominant modes of digital identity work visible across the three platforms.

The selection of Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter/X is purposive. Each platform represents a qualitatively distinct communicative environment with different affordances, temporalities, and audience dynamics. Together, they cover the primary dimensions of diasporic digital life: visual self-presentation, narrative community-building, and political discourse. The analysis is structured around the three modes of digital identity production introduced in the abstract and developed in the following three sections.

4. Instagram and Nostalgic Curation: Homing Desire in the Visual Register

Instagram's defining affordance is the image. As a platform built around visual self-presentation, curated aesthetics, and the display of lifestyle, it has become one of the primary sites on which the Indian diaspora practises what this paper terms "nostalgic curation," the selective construction of a visually idealised homeland through food, festivity, language, and sensory memory. This mode of identity work maps directly onto Brah's concept of homing desire: the longing not for a literal return to India but for a mythicised sense of home that is emotionally vivid and culturally central.

Food is perhaps the most pervasive vehicle of nostalgic curation on Indian diasporic Instagram. The photograph of a home-cooked dal, a Diwali mithai spread, or a carefully plated biryani is not merely a record of a meal; it is a performance of belonging, addressed simultaneously to a co-ethnic audience that recognises the cultural significance of the dish and to a host-society audience for whom Indian food has become a marker of cosmopolitan diversity. Diasporic food content on Instagram thus operates on multiple registers at once: it reconstructs an intimate, sensory connection to the homeland; it communicates cultural pride and

distinctiveness to external audiences; and it participates in the global aestheticisation of Indian cuisine that has made it one of the most recognisable symbols of Indian soft power worldwide (Mankekar 2015).

Festival content constitutes a second major category of nostalgic curation. Diwali, Holi, Eid, Navratri, and Onam all generate enormous volumes of Instagram content from the Indian diaspora, typically involving curated images of traditional dress, home decoration, and ritual food. This festive content performs a dual function. On one hand, it reconstructs a calendrical rhythm of Indianness that reproduces the temporal structure of homeland culture in the diasporic context, marking the passage of the year through Indian cultural landmarks rather than those of the host society. On the other hand, it constitutes a public declaration of identity directed at host-society audiences, an assertion of cultural distinctiveness within the multicultural public sphere of countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia.

A significant dimension of Instagram's nostalgic curation is the selectivity of what is curated. The India that appears on diasporic Instagram is overwhelmingly beautiful, abundant, and culturally rich; it is an India of colour, ceremony, and connection. The India of inequality, pollution, caste discrimination, and political violence is largely absent from this visual repertoire. This selectivity is not merely a product of individual choice but of platform architecture: Instagram's algorithmic reward of aesthetically pleasing, emotionally positive content systematically amplifies the nostalgic and suppresses the critical (Gillespie 2014). The result is a diasporic visual culture that functions, in Appadurai's terms, as a mediascape that produces an imagined homeland more vivid and emotionally satisfying than the complex reality it represents.

The "desi aesthetic" that has emerged as a recognisable visual genre on Instagram represents a further development of nostalgic curation. Characterised by the use of warm colour palettes, South Asian typography, vintage Bollywood references, and the juxtaposition of Indian cultural signifiers with Western urban settings, the desi aesthetic is a distinctly diasporic cultural production: it does not reproduce India as it is but creates a new visual language that is legible both to Indians in India and to diaspora members, while being simultaneously intelligible and appealing to non-Indian audiences (Punathambekar 2013). In Hall's terms, it represents cultural identity as production: not the transmission of a pre-existing Indianness but the active creation of a new diasporic cultural form.

5. YouTube and Generational Translation: Hyphenated Identities in the Digital Long Form

If Instagram is the platform of the image and the moment, YouTube is the platform of narrative and duration. Its long-form video format, subscription model, and comment community architecture create conditions for a qualitatively different kind of diasporic identity work, one that this paper terms "generational translation." This mode of identity production is most visible among second-

generation Indian content creators in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, and Australia: individuals who were born or raised in the diaspora, who have not experienced India as a lived homeland, and who must negotiate an identity that is neither fully Indian nor fully assimilated into the host-society culture.

Second-generation Indian YouTubers occupy a distinctive cultural position that has made them some of the most watched and debated voices in the South Asian digital public sphere. Creators such as Lilly Singh, Nas Daily, and numerous smaller but significant voices have built audiences that span both diaspora communities and non-Indian viewers, producing content that translates Indian cultural experiences into formats accessible to global digital audiences. Their content characteristically involves code-switching, the rapid movement between South Asian and Western cultural references, languages, and social norms, as a performance of what it means to inhabit multiple cultural worlds simultaneously (Leurs and Ponzanesi 2011).

Comedy is a dominant genre of generational translation on YouTube. The "immigrant parent" sketch, in which second-generation creators perform exaggerated versions of their parents' cultural expectations around education, marriage, and social propriety, has become one of the defining genres of the South Asian diasporic internet. These sketches perform a complex cultural operation: they allow second-generation viewers to laugh at and thereby process the tensions of hyphenated identity, they translate South Asian family dynamics into a register legible to non-South Asian audiences, and they simultaneously affirm and gently critique the cultural heritage they perform. In Hall's terms, they represent identity as "a matter of becoming as well as being," shaped by the "play of difference" between the inherited culture of the parental homeland and the lived culture of the host society (Hall 1990, 225).

YouTube also functions as a site of what Hirsch (2012) terms postmemory: the relationship of the second generation to cultural memories they have inherited but not personally experienced. Indian diasporic YouTube channels devoted to cooking ancestral recipes, documenting grandmother's stories, recreating childhood memories from the parental homeland, or revisiting Partition histories represent a form of digital postmemory-making. These creators mediate cultural memories they have received through family narrative and photographic inheritance, translating them into digital content that is simultaneously an act of cultural preservation and a public performance of heritage identity.

A notable tension within generational translation on YouTube is the authenticity problem. Second-generation creators who perform Indian cultural identity for large audiences, particularly non-Indian audiences, are frequently challenged by co-ethnic viewers about the accuracy, depth, or representativeness of their cultural portrayal. These authenticity challenges are themselves a form of diasporic identity politics, revealing the contested nature of who has the authority to represent Indian culture from the diaspora, and whether a diasporic representation

that has been translated for Western palatability can be considered authentically Indian at all (Dudrah 2012). The comment sections of second-generation Indian YouTube channels thus function as diasporic counter-publics where the boundaries and ownership of cultural identity are actively negotiated.

6. Twitter/X and Political Signalling: The Diasporic Counter-Public

Twitter/X is the most explicitly political of the three platforms examined in this paper, and the mode of identity work it hosts is correspondingly distinct. Where Instagram constructs identity through visual aesthetics and YouTube through narrative and performance, Twitter/X constructs diasporic identity through political alignment, the public declaration of where one stands in relation to contested events and issues in both the homeland and the host society. This paper terms this mode of identity work "political signalling," and analyses it through the framework of Nancy Fraser's counter-publics (1990) and Habermas's concept of the public sphere, adapted for the diasporic digital context.

The Indian diaspora on Twitter/X constitutes one of the most politically active and internally divided online communities in South Asian digital culture. Major political events in India, including the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019, the farmer protests of 2020 to 2021, the revocation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, and successive Indian general elections, have consistently generated enormous volumes of diasporic Twitter activity, with hashtag campaigns, trending topics, and organised digital mobilisation campaigns driven in significant part by NRI communities in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada (Udapa 2019).

This diasporic political engagement on Twitter/X reveals a fundamental tension at the heart of diaspora identity: the question of loyalty and authority. When NRIs in the United States mobilise politically around Indian domestic policy, they face challenges from multiple directions simultaneously. Within the Indian state and Indian media, they are sometimes celebrated as patriotic ambassadors of Indian civilisational pride, and sometimes dismissed as outsiders who have forfeited the right to comment on Indian affairs by choosing to live abroad. Within host-country public spheres, their political engagement with Indian affairs can create tensions with the expectation of assimilation and primary loyalty to the host nation, particularly when the political positions they take are seen as incompatible with liberal democratic values (Rajagopal 2011).

Twitter/X thus functions as a diasporic counter-public in Fraser's sense: a subaltern social space parallel to and in tension with the dominant public spheres of both the homeland and the host country, where members of the Indian diaspora "formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser 1990, 67). The diasporic Twitter counter-public is not unified; it is itself deeply divided along lines of political ideology, regional identity, caste, religion, and generational position. These internal divisions are as analytically significant as the external positioning of the diaspora vis-a-vis Indian and host-country

politics, revealing the Indian diaspora on Twitter/X to be not a coherent community with shared interests but a contested discursive field in which multiple and incompatible versions of Indian identity compete for legitimacy.

The 2019 debates around the Citizenship Amendment Act provide a particularly instructive case. The Act, which offered expedited Indian citizenship to non-Muslim religious minorities from neighbouring Muslim-majority countries, was celebrated by sections of the Hindu nationalist diaspora as a corrective to historical injustice and condemned by liberal and Muslim diaspora voices as discriminatory and unconstitutional. The hashtag wars that ensued on Twitter/X, including #CAA_Support and #CAA_Protest, drew in diaspora members from across the world, Indian student unions at Western universities, Indian journalists and academics in the diaspora, and organised digital advocacy groups on both sides. For each participant, the Twitter engagement was not merely a political act but an identity act: a public declaration of what kind of Indian one is, and what India means to one from the vantage point of the diaspora (Khanduri and Rajagopal 2020).

7. Synthesis: The Digital Diaspora Space and its Implications

The comparative analysis of Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter/X reveals that the Indian diaspora does not inhabit a single, unified digital public sphere but a differentiated ecosystem of platforms, each of which hosts a distinct mode of identity work. Nostalgic curation on Instagram constructs a sensory, aestheticised homeland that satisfies homing desire without requiring physical return. Generational translation on YouTube negotiates the tensions of hyphenated identity for audiences that span both the diaspora and the host society. Political signalling on Twitter/X constitutes a diasporic counter-public that challenges the authority of both the Indian state and the host-country political mainstream to define what Indian identity means.

Together, these three modes of digital identity production constitute the digital diaspora space: a networked, platform-differentiated environment in which Indianness is continuously produced, circulated, contested, and reimagined by a geographically dispersed community that shares neither a territory nor a single, coherent cultural identity. The concept of the digital diaspora space extends Brah's original formulation by incorporating the constitutive role of platform architecture, algorithmic mediation, and audience dynamics as variables that shape the forms of identity work that are possible in the digital realm.

Several theoretical implications follow from this analysis. First, diaspora studies must attend more carefully to the differentiated affordances of specific platforms rather than treating digital media as a homogeneous category. The identity work possible on Instagram is structurally different from that possible on YouTube or Twitter/X, and analyses that elide these differences risk producing a flattened account of diasporic digital life. Second, the concept of homing desire must be updated for the digital age: the homeland that the Indian diaspora constructs on

Instagram is not merely imagined, in Anderson's sense, but algorithmically curated, aesthetically optimised, and commercially mediated in ways that Brah's original formulation could not anticipate. Third, the generational dimension of digital diasporic identity is critical: the second generation's digital identity practices are qualitatively distinct from those of first-generation migrants, and their negotiation of hyphenated identity on YouTube represents a new cultural form that is neither traditionally Indian nor simply Western.

From a policy perspective, the digital diaspora space has significant implications for India's engagement with its overseas communities. The Indian government's Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention and the Ministry of External Affairs' diaspora outreach programmes have largely operated through conventional diplomatic channels. The digital diaspora space suggests that the most consequential sites of diasporic Indian identity formation are now platforms governed by American technology corporations whose algorithmic logics, content moderation policies, and data architectures are not subject to Indian state influence. This represents both a challenge and an opportunity for Indian cultural diplomacy.

8. Conclusion

This paper has examined the Indian diaspora's engagement with Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter/X as a differentiated ecosystem of digital identity practices, proposing the concept of the digital diaspora space to describe the networked environment in which diasporic Indianness is produced, contested, and reimagined across geographic borders. Through the analysis of three distinct modes of digital identity work, nostalgic curation, generational translation, and political signalling, the paper has demonstrated that digital platforms do not simply mediate a pre-existing diasporic identity but actively shape its contours, intensifying some forms of belonging while foreclosing others, amplifying certain versions of Indianness while suppressing alternative representations.

The paper contributes to diaspora studies by introducing a platform-differentiated analytical framework that attends to the specific affordances, audiences, and identity logics of individual platforms within the broader digital diaspora space. It contributes to South Asian studies by foregrounding the Indian diaspora as a paradigmatic case of digital identity politics at a moment when India's global significance, and the significance of its diaspora communities, is increasing rapidly. And it contributes to the growing interdisciplinary literature on digital culture, migration, and belonging by demonstrating that the study of diasporic identity in the twenty-first century cannot be conducted without close attention to the platform architectures through which that identity is produced.

The tensions and contradictions identified throughout this analysis are as theoretically generative as the patterns they complicate. The digital diaspora space is not a site of harmonious community formation but of ongoing contest over who has the authority to define Indian identity, what counts as authentic cultural expression, and what obligations of loyalty and solidarity the diaspora owes to the

homeland. These contests are not merely cultural; they are political, in the deepest sense of that term. As the Indian diaspora grows in size, global influence, and digital visibility, understanding the platforms through which it constructs its identity will be essential not only for diaspora scholars but for anyone seeking to understand the future of Indian society, culture, and politics.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/20**ROUTES OF DEPARTURE: BELONGING, NOSTALGIA, AND
DIASPORIC IDENTITY IN SELECTED STORIES FROM
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N. M. S. S. Vellaichamy Nadar College, Nagamalai
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**Abstract**

This research paper scrutinizes that are interconnected in the short stories of Jhumpa Lahiri. The title of the short stories is “Mrs. Sen’s,” “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine,” and the “The Third and Final Continent” originally form Interpreter of Maladies. When these stories are seen through the South Asian mobility lens there comes a different study. Through this research it is revealed how the experiences of displacement, memory and belonging and cultural negotiation are shaped in multiple diasporic frameworks. It is understood through this comparative study that home is not a static or something that is geographically fixed in a place it is rather a fluid construct anchored via language, food and daily rituals. The prominent themes of the stories that are regaled are mainly of the culinary memory, language, histories of partition and the homes that are left. This brings the unstable emotions due to the cultural dislocation of the diasporic. The three chosen stories are unique in their way as one considers home be a longing one, the other upholds personal memory in the context of the political conflict, whereas the third story in contradictory suggests migration to be a slow process that builds the sense of belonging. Based on the diaspora and postcolonial theories the study explores that these stories perform as the archives of migration. In this archive a person’s history overlap with historical trauma and collective memory. Eventually, the paper exhibits that diasporic identity is created through loss and adaptation of the culture and the home of one’s own is constantly remembered and rebuilt.

Keywords: Diaspora, Migration, Memory, Hybridity, Nostalgia, Cultural Identity

In South Asian history and postcolonial experience, migration and displacement have great significance. Migration is a word tied up to not a geographical relocation but also the transformations in terms of emotional, psychological and cultural. The South Asia has always witness infinite number of movements due to partition, war, colonialism, globalization, and labour migration. Hence, in

South Asian diasporic literature, the questions of identity, nostalgia, belonging, memory, etc have a central focus. The diasporic writers focus on the changes that happen due to such migration especially in the family and cultural structure. Alongside, attention is given to the new identity and sense of belonging in a foreign space. The Diasporic literature often covers themes such as rootedness and mobility, memory and adaptation, continuity and rupture. The immigrants do not break from their own culture completely. After landing in a new land their past memories are carried in fragments and is kept alive through the family talks, relationships, rituals, food and language. This way they are connected to their native land in one way. Migration also forces the individuals to give a second thought about carrying their own culture at some circumstances. Thus, the individuals are placed in a position to negotiate their own culture with the present nation they live in. At this juncture emerges the diasporic identity. It is said that the diasporic identity is the intersection of longing, alienation, transformation and negotiation.

Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the inevitable figures in the diasporic literature. Her contribution to the Diasporic Literature is huge because her works were deep and subtle. She portrayed the experience of immigrants so intensely. The stories of Lahiri, focuses on the South Asian immigrants especially Bengali immigrants who live in the United States of America. Along with exploring the political narratives, she focuses of the buried struggles, of those immigrants in their everyday life. They face communication barriers. They are culturally disoriented. Their domestic routines are mundane. They suffer from generational differences. They are also emotionally isolated. Her stories vividly depict the effect of displacement in ordinary individuals. The chosen text *Interpreter of Maladies*, was published in the year 1999. Lahiri received Pulitzer Prize for this Fiction in the corresponding year 2000. The cross-cultural lives, difficulty in existing as an immigrant were all given focus. Lahiri's works were known for her simple narrating style, yet emotionally restraining, and deep psychological meaning. Her specialty is even from an ordinary situation she depicted complexities in the formation of identity. She also penned down the emotional consequences of migration.

The selected stories for the research paper are "Mrs. Sen's," "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," and the final story is "The Third and Final Continent." The stories' circumstances and the setting of each story might differ but they unite in the South Asian mobility, and belonging. The stories ponder around themes such as homes at their native place, memory of departure, longing, nostalgia, emotional exile, adaptation of new culture. These themes provide a broader view of how the immigrants thrive in a new place where their identity is questioned and fluid.

The story "Mrs. Sen's" is about an immigrant woman who is unable to get adapted to the American life, and is emotionally isolated because of it. The pain of cultural displacement and the longing for her own communal space is witnessed through

her attachment towards food, memories of her home country (India), and the rituals. The memory is identified to function via sensory experiences. The food and familial habits symbolically links to the homeland. The basic crisis of the first-generation immigrants is communication barrier, inability to drive. As a result, they are unable to fit themselves into the American society. All these elements are beautifully penned in the narration of the story. The second story "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" revolves around the theme of political conflict and historical trauma. The milieu of the story is Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971; hence, it covers the rifts in the personal relationships, the quarrel over national borders, and the diasporic consciousness. Through the young girl's perception, the emotional anxieties due to relocation and separation are depicted distinctly. Mr. Pirzada's relationship in the family is vulnerable. His memory about the separation and homeland remains a scar in his mind. The domestic routines they share and the cultural rituals exhibit how migration is entangled to the collective memory (trauma), and political history. The last story "The Third and Final Continent," provides a hopeful migration narrative. The protagonist of the story moves from India to England from there to America. Unlike Mrs. Sen in the story "Mrs. Sen's," the protagonist adapts to the culture of America, this showed the power of resilience and making adjustments to the ambience. Through these minor changes there is a possibility of creating sense of belonging in a novel environment. Through minor interactions, daily rituals, Lahiri has conveyed that migration is not an immediate assimilation rather a gradual process.

These stories when scrutinized together the truth of diaspora is revealed. Diaspora is not about the physical mobility but the transformation of cultural and emotional domains. Hence, according to Lahiri, home is not a rooted geographical entity. It is a fluid entity. It is constantly shaped in accordance with memory, nostalgia, imagination, yearning, and adaptation. The immigrant is engulfed with contradictory thoughts of connection and isolation, change and sustenance, sense of belonging and estrangement. The characters of Lahiri are viewed as those who are could not leave their past and yet adapt the present completely. This paper scrutinizes the diasporic studies under the theoretical lens of theorists such as Stuart Hall, Homi. K. Bhabha, Avtar Brah, Marianne Hirsch. It focusses on the diasporic identity formation and cultural hybridity. Stuart Hall's insights about identity provide a better platform to understand the identity to be fluid and is constantly in the evolving process. Homi Bhabha's concept about hybridity torches the space where in the immigrants are in the intersection of the culture of their own and the adaptation of a new culture. Avtar Brah's concept of "homing desire" provides a comprehension in how the diasporic subjects are always in a search for the emotional belonging. They are comfortable with attaining this especially when they know that the return is impossible. Marianne Hirsch's insights on "postmemory" provide how the consciousness of an individual is shaped across generations. It also explains the impact of the historical trauma and

relocation. The theoretical perspectives applied to the paper reveal the hidden realities of diaspora in Lahiri's stories. The study reveals that Lahiri's fiction are great contribution to the contemporary discourse on migration, cultural belonging, and diasporic identity. The stories remind the reader that diaspora is not a condition of loss but a place of transformation.

Literature Review

In the postcolonial literary criticism, the study of diaspora, migration, loss, identity formation has attained an inevitable position, specifically with regards to the South Asian literature that is written in English. A special attention is given by the scholars on how the diasporic literary texts raise and answer the questions of memory, nostalgia, hybridity, displacement, relocation and yearning. Jhumpa Lahiri's emergence has become an inevitable contemporary writer whose contribution to the literature through her short story collection "Interpreter of Maladies." It has covered up the themes such as cultural negotiation, dual consciousness that results due to diaspora, and isolation. Lahiri's work focuses on the difficulties faced by the first-generation immigrants. The themes cover displacement, identity crisis. Critics said that the Lahiri's portrayal of the migration is not a heroic success, instead a complicated journey filled with loneliness, isolation, cultural hybridity. It is also observed that the characters of Lahiri have a very small space between native land and the migrated land. They strive to reconcile both.

Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity narrates that there is no fixed identity but it is always a floating one. It is under a constant evolution under "historical and cultural processes. This concept aligns with the story "The Third and Final Continent." From this story it is understood that the identity gradually gets its shape through adaptation and the negotiation of the new culture and ambience. The protagonist travels from India to England, from there to America. This proves Stuart Hall's idea of claiming identity to be a floating signifier. The hybridity concept developed by Homi K. Bhabha is also central to comprehend the stories of Lahiri. His idea called "third space" represents the cultural space where the identities intersect and a negotiation takes place. It is an intersection of a person's own culture and the culture of the host land. Through the scrutiny of the stories "Mrs. Sen's," and "The Third and Final Continent" it is understood that through this third space both complete assimilation and total avoidance can never take place. Lahiri has also said that hybridity is not an easy process but a painful one where the subject is horrified with uncertainty, isolation and emotionally distanced.

Food is found to have a strong diasporic connection. Many scholars have provided attention to the same. Critics have also observed that the shared meals in the fiction of Lahiri often stand for an intimate emotional connection. A heavy emphasis is provided to the political displacement and historical trauma present in the works of Lahiri. In the story "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," through the

anxiety of Mr. Pirzada, it is revealed that the war, distance and partition play a main role in shaping the identity of an individual. The backdrop of the novel is Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. The scholars have also applied and researched on the concepts of Marianne Hirsch. His concept of postmemory talks of the transmission of trauma across generations. The child protagonist Lilia, as a result of this transmission of trauma inherits the fragmented version of it without fully understanding the actual crisis. This happens as an indirect one. Due to the domestic confinement the Mrs. Sen on the other side feels left out, and is isolated. This again focuses on the feminist reading. It highlights the isolation of the feminine gender. It strongly argues that the isolation takes place only because of the household seclusion. When taken a closer look story of Mrs. Sen stands as the representation of both alienation and comfort. She doesn't know to drive and is locked in the house for all the days left with nothing else to do, she spends most of her time at doing household chores such as cooking, cleaning etc. these actions provide her comfort and also remind her of her hometown.

The communication and language are used as tools to project the deep struggle underwent by the characters in the fiction by Lahiri. They are alienated due to this. For instance, Sen's inability to drive and her difficulty in communicating confines her inside the house leading to social seclusion. She finds extremely hard to adapt to the American lifestyle. Again, Lahiri provides a multilingual space where there is a mix of so many languages. It results in a messy hybrid reality, in which the migrant is placed in a constant battle between what he is? and what he tries to become? This aligns with the concept of Avtar Brah's "homing desire." They just want to live at peace in the current land they reside in. Critics also highlight the point that Lahiri's characters does not want to return to the homeland instead they construct a home for themselves from the scratch through memories, everyday rituals, and relationships. Eventually, the postcolonial critics add that the journeys taken by the characters are not random. Their relocation from South Asia to the West reminds the colonial and labor patterns in the history, thus it shapes the desires of the individuals.

Lahiri's minimalist style is highly praised by many scholars. She is also praised for giving focus on the ordinary things instead of over dramatic political things. The details such as quiet spaces, silences, daily routines, which are generally overlooked are paid more attention. However, it also has to be noted that the majority studies that exist have only treated these stories in isolation instead of getting a broader picture of the diaspora through them. This research paper connects this gap by scrutinizing the three stories "Mrs. Sen's," "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," and "The Third and Final Continent," as a conversation among them. The past studies of the texts were mainly focused on themes such as identity crises and adaptation. This paper shifts its focus on the factors such as memory, emotional sustainability and sensory experiences it is these factors that make the immigrants tied to the ground. The study has the combination of

linguistic blending, shared trauma of partition, nostalgia, they are all preserved in the affective records of the stories of Jhumpa Lahiri. This way of approach suggests that the feeling of home is not a material rather the power of memory and culture are stronger.

Theoretical Framework

To comprehend the concepts such as migration, identity shifts, displacement, relocation, isolation and emotional instability in *Interpreter of Maladies*, it is essential to look at the text with the diasporic and postcolonial studies lens. The relocation is not treated as a basic address change or one random movement. It is treated as a psychological shift.

Stuart Hall's opinion on identity as a fluid entity, and an ongoing process is a perfect match to apply on Lahiri's stories. In the story "The Third and Final Continent," the protagonist's journey narrate that identity is subjected to evolution. The protagonist travels to across three continents and his identity gets changed accordingly. He does not give up his Indian roots nor could he assimilate the American culture completely. Mrs. Sen faces a painful identity crisis as she was emotionally tied to India. It broke her and left her fragmented. She didn't know how to negotiate in the new space. Hall also said that the impression of "homeland" is just an imagination which is kept alive through the element, nostalgia. This is why the characters of Lahiri seem to be constantly in the process of recreating their home via food, daily rituals, language etc.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "Third space" narrates a messy zone. It is called as messy as there is collision of different culture and there is a birth of a new culture. Most of the character of Lahiri seem to live in the hybrid friction. The narrator's move of making friendship with Mrs. Croft in the story "The Third and Final Continent," shows that it is possible to adapt the new culture without losing one's own. This hybridity is also seen in the story "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," in this story the Muslim man Mr. Pirzada dines with the Hindu Bengali family. Thus, they lead a life that is a blend of South Asian and American. This is a bit different in Mrs. Sen's scenario where in she finds it extremely difficult adapt to the new culture. This was obvious from the way she strived to drive the car. Adapting to a new culture to her was like a paralyzed state.

The crucial difference between the urge to return to home and to feel home at the place where the individual is shown by Avtar Brah. He called this concept as "homing desire." Although, difficult the characters in Lahiri's fiction does not want to return to their homelands, they find a way to substitute the emotional safety by some means. The vegetable hopping sections and the cooking traditional meals, part serve as a bridge to connect her with the communal intimacy she misses. Likewise, the same anxiety is also found in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," during the dinner sessions there was an anxiety about exile. The third story titled as "The Third and Final Continent," provide a positive picture wherein the

protagonist adapts to the environment in a positive way. Together with this partner and his neighbour he built a new adaptive home.

The concept of *postmemory* by Marianne Hirsch explains the generational pass of Trauma to the children. The notable point is these children have never witnessed such trauma at all. They imbibe the effect of it through family atmosphere. This was obvious from the story "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," where in Lila who never know very less details about the war, faces the weight. The setting of the story is 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. The anxiety she experiences was totally a second hand one passed on to her by the adults of the family. The geopolitics remained incomprehensible to her yet she was disturbed by the anxiety in her house. Lila's innocence was used to show that the history has its own impact and results in fragmentations no matter how far they are from their hometown. It affects the psyche of the next generation.

Hence, nostalgia is not viewed as a one random tool, instead it is seen as an active tool for emotional survival. The characters are sustained and grounded by the memory of their food, the domestic routines etc., The postcolonial theory when applied on these texts it reminds the readers of the history of colonialism and the labour markets as it slides along the countries such as South Asia, Britain and America. The migrant may be successful when it comes to earning money but Lahiri makes it a bit complicated by turning the immigrant story a successful one by focusing on the individual's achievement in leading a quiet and emotionally balanced state.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF "MRS. SEN'S"

In the collection of the short stories *Interpreter of Maladies*, the story "Mrs. Sen's" stands aside as it is a very heartbreaking story about migration. It provides a vivid picture of the reality of being isolated in a new country. Immigration might have been a happy business when viewed at present, but Lahiri in this story highlights the struggles of the first-generation immigrant especially woman who trap themselves in their household when they could not adapt to the existing culture. The very thought of moving to America itself shattered the sense of security to Mrs. Sen. Relocation was not easy; she was left in a mid of the state from where she could neither step back nor move forward.

In India, Mrs. Sen led a happy vibrant life with her own community, thus she shared a communal space back in her home town. Here in the new country, all she could feel was loneliness. In India, the neighbourhood was totally different from Americans. Indian household always welcome neighbours and they spent a part of time with them chatting about everything under the sun. To the contrary in America people led a secluded life. This was evident when she shared with Eliot of how it is so strange that Americans don't visit their neighbours. Lack of interactions gave her an impression of being prisoned. This feeling is furthermore intensified, when she finds it hard to drive the car. In American context driving a car meant independency, and freedom. Thus, her inability to drive a car served as

a straight metaphor to fit in the American society. The car is corresponded to the terrifying journey of migration. Every time when she tries to move forward, she is so panic to let go of her home land. She became entirely dependent on her husband even buying fish was a mammoth task. This portrays the life of an immigrant woman who is trapped in a household, thus physically living in America while her heart and mind is entirely in India.

Cooking was a therapy to Mrs. Sen's. It is this act that actually held back the falling part of her. As her new ambience was so alienating, making Indian dishes kept her memory of nostalgia alive and sane. Much attention was paid to the sensory details in the stories of Jhumpa Lahiri, it was evident from the description of Mrs. Sen chopping the vegetables using a traditional curved blade. These differences in act of cutting vegetables contrast with the American way of living. The Food stands as the important factor in keeping her mentally aligned with her home land. The aroma, the texture of the food takes her back to her homeland. Thus, she created a figment of her own homeland at her lonely apartment. Fresh fish has its own space for the emotional connect in the story. The availability of fish ignites a pleasant emotion in her mind, as it takes her back to the familiar taste she had at her home. She is drawn back to her Bengali culture. Lahiri was also careful about not replacing these elements to act as a cure. The food only provides a temporary escape routine. Nothing could match the warmth and the love she received from her communal space. Cooking was not just about dishes, it was more like a get together where in women sit and do a job of their own by sharing gossips and the workload. If one works on the stove the other would be the in charge of cutting vegetables, and the other taking care of the vessels. This lively task lost its charm in America as it was reduced to a solitary one. Hence, she attempted to transform her kitchen into a lively one by cooking.

Language turns out to be the main reason for Mrs. Sen to get locked up in the apartment. It was a biggest barrier as she could not have conversation with any. Even if she had, it was all a fragmented one and she could never express her completely to anyone. In order to bridge the cultural gap, she used silence. She sought temporary comfort from Eliot, but even he could not understand her completely as he doesn't know any of her history. Thus, she completely locked herself from the world outside. Her trap in the basis of linguistic corresponds to her being locked inside the apartment. The other male immigrants survive this phase as they step out for their work, as a house wife she lost that opportunity and turns out to be the preserver of the culture. In other words, she is called as stuck. Being at house she is forced to do the household chores, which serves as both an escape point and a reminder. The arrangements and changes made in the house naturally turns the house into a cultural sanctuary, making the protagonist to strongly remember what she left behind. This isolation is intensified when her husband turns deaf and blind to his wife's emotional drowning.

Nostalgia turned out to be the only survival mechanism to Mrs. Sen. The more isolated she felt, the more she started thinking about India. She viewed India as a paradise, a country that provided her warmth. Yet, as mentioned in the theoretical framework the research paper. This was just an imagination. Mrs. Sen's attempt to recreate her homeland rituals can never recreate the social relationships that she built in her homeland and she can never feel whole. The yearning continues to sustain as it cannot be resolved, the memory can never bring back the past. Mrs. Sen was emotionally falling apart. Hence, an ordinary way of narrating an immigrant's success would misfit the theme. Through this story Lahiri proved that immigration was beyond relocation. It is a psychological fracture. Mrs. Sen was perpetually placed between the worlds of her hometown and her host land. This vividly depicts the emotional toll of a South Asian immigrant.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF "WHEN MR. PIRZADA CAME TO DINE"

The short fiction "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," shifts to the setup of Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. The political displacement and the pain faced by the unsettling situations in the homeland while the family lives there is beautifully depicted in this story. Mr. Pirzada lived in America while his seven daughters and wife were back at Dacca. This resulted in the emergence of tension. Amidst sharing the same language and customs with the Indian parents of Lilia, he felt different from them due to the geopolitical line drawn by the partition. It made him feel as a foreigner with the people who spoke his language. The total absurdity and the artificial postcolonial borders were criticized by the innocence of Lilia who found it hard to comprehend. The distant suffering and the personal anxiety collided when the global violence knocked their doors. Although, they were safe in America, worrying about their family members' plight in their hometown placed a heavy weight on their shoulders.

Lilia, who was ten-year old was the narrator of the story. Marianne Hirsch's concept of *postmemory* is easily applied to this story wherein the children are vulnerable to historical traumas. Their psyche breaks down due to these traumas which they have never witnessed. Though she did not comprehend the things about war, she could sense the anxiety that prevailed in her household. She was totally clueless to the histories of her homeland as her school strictly kept her away from reading the immigrant histories. It was obsessed with the Western History. It also highlights how these schools hide the immigrant histories. Mr. Pirzada expressed his grief in silence, this silence in turn disturbed her greatly. She observed him closely he set the time in his watch to see the time at Dacca, his anxiety when there is a telecast of news about the war etc. Though this kind of narration Lahiri has meticulously conveyed that history is not confined to textbooks instead it is inherited through the family. The inheritance happens through silence and emotional burdens.

The food seems to be a fantastic factor in preserving the cultural identity. The political divisions are actively resisted when it came to shared food. Although, he

at times felt a foreigner the food surpassed the element such as geopolitical borders. The language and food provided a collective identity to them. This is vividly depicted from the way Mr. Pirzada gave chocolates to Lilia all evening. It was beyond a simple treat as Lilia started eating these chocolates ritually after praying for the welfare of Mr. Pirzada's family at the hometown. Lahiri did not channelize it in a comfortable way. The fragility of diasporic belonging and the sense of loss marks its entry when the war starts. The shared family dinner collides with terrifying news from Dacca.

The story focuses on the national identity. As Mr. Pirzada belongs to East Pakistan he is categorized as a Pakistani. Lilia being an innocent girl could not comprehend the difference. She could sense that the history and the culture are real while the political borders drawn is found to divide the communities. Thus, this split announces the divided personality of Mr. Pirzada. Physically he lives in America, while mentally he is anchored to his hometown. With the end of the war Mr. Pirzada moves back to his hometown. Yet Lahiri did not draw a vivid resolution. Lilia is left with loss and grief. She missed MR. Pirzada. This ache demonstrates how there are painful experiences even if they are not declared publicly. Sometimes silence speak louder than words. The Internalized terror of Mr. Pirzada left Lilia an anxiety that she received through the abnormal activities of Mr. Pirzada. Lahiri has projected the beautiful nature of diaspora which operates as an alternate space for the continuation of culture. This is beyond the nationalistic identities. It is carried out by the small acts of love, care and memory. The analysis of the final story "The Third and Final Continent" mark the fluidity of postcolonial migration. The identity is found to be in an eternal evolution process. The narrator's journey across three different continents and his psychic thresholds are seen through this story. India holds his cultural roots, England serves as a training ground, while Boston in America serves as the final destination. This aligns with Stuart Hall's concept of identity as a floating signifier instead of possessing a fixed meaning. The story also corresponds with the reality of the educated ones who migrate to the western countries for the better employment opportunities and economic growth. The focus provided to the story is not on the material gain but on the psychological perseverance shown in shifting from one place to the other that are all unfamiliar. The title itself talks of the dual sense, and the ongoing labour in devising identity. It also depicts the hybridity and transnational identity that permits an individual to belong to one or more worlds without losing their original identity.

The open mindedness of the protagonist of the story is highly contradictory with the story "Mrs. Sens." The protagonist also has struggles such as adapting to the American climate, the isolation and other practices and rules. Yet he is open to the change. The room he rents denotes the floating status of the newcomer. The conversation with Mrs. Croft seems to be cold and fragile as it continues it turns out to be a happy bond. This paves way for the "third space" as Homi Bhabha

called it to be. This is the space where cross-cultural negotiation happens. In this space the cultures don't just exist but they exist in a respectful way without dominating or erasing the other. Their interactions that happen every day, initially the linguistic exchanges were limited and the words such as 'Splendid!' sounded cold later when he had exchanges on the regular basis the word lost its stiffness and the real meaning was understood. Through this it is understood that human beings accept each other despite of their differences. Mrs. Croft validation might seem little but the word she uttered after looking at Mala, the wife of the protagonist had more weightage. She called Mala as a perfect lady. This word made them feel inclusive in a host land. This also proves the possibility of developing true bonds across generations and national backgrounds.

The story is examined further to identify how the idea of home change for the immigrants. The narrator and Mala are tied up in an arranged marriage and they do not have a good relationship in the beginning. As time passes the relationship transforms in a genuine way. This shows that "home" is not a material object instead a place that is built through the bonds of human beings. They lacked emotional attachments in the beginning it gradually transitioned to closeness and warmth. The main reason for the change would be the distance from their hometown. They are free from the expectations of community, societal pressures and extended families, which paves way for the better understanding between them. The narrator and his wife is isolated in an unfamiliar country where they have only each other to rely on. This allows them to build small yet strong emotional bonds via little everyday tasks. They bought groceries together, prepared meals and learnt other new things which made their foundation strong. Their natural development of the bond aligns with Avtar Brah's concept of "homing desire." It is the place where the subject does not want to return to India, but desperately wants to create a comfortable home (from the scratch) in the foreign land they dwell in. Lahiri focuses on the routine household chores that provide stability in building emotions. Keep them rooted. Hence, for the immigrants especially home is something that is constantly reshaped and adjusted based on the ambience. It is also about building it with utmost care and showing resilience after a setback.

In the climax of the story, the American Dream is not blindly accepted instead it is challenged and reimagined. The original version of the Dream measures the economical success, in the American society while this story rejects such materialistic growth. It does not mean that the narrator does not have a stable job he has it yet his success here is the blending of the narrator into the American society. Lahiri provides a different dimension of success where in a person in order to fit in a society has to accustom to the changing circumstances. Alongside he has to keep his identity together without giving a complete erasure. Mrs. Sen is a representation of unhealthy version of someone who lives in the past instead of adapting to the new ambience. This hold of the past prevents her from living

her present. To the contrary, the narrator in the last short story, remains as a beautiful memory alongside his present life in America. The memories of the narrator are compared to an anchor that makes him steady instead of letting him float and add burden to his current life. The end of the story is not a dramatic one (where in the individual sheds of his original identity and transforms into a complete American) rather an assimilation. It is a tranquil state of attaining contentment that demands no boasting. The mixed cultural identity shown by Lahiri is not something chaotic or fragile but it acts a motivational factor and provides strength. This strength help people to withstand their hard times. This story stands different from the routine diasporic stories that have a sorrow setting. There is no mourning over the loss in the story. By providing a happy dimension of immigration Lahiri has successfully rebuilt the sense of home which is possible anywhere as long as the individual is open to change and focuses on living the present.

All the three main characters in the story are rooted to the Indian heritage. They cannot get rid of it totally. They use their memories, past and yearnings of their homeland as tools in different ways. To Mrs. Sen all her past memory is beautiful, when compared to her current life. The life in America was lonely and isolated. She could not endure the emptiness in her life, even the kitchen routines were lifeless. To the contrary Mr. Pirzada's past memory is just a haunting one. The thought about his homeland is all about restlessness, and the uncertain situations about the war. The past reminds only of vulnerability and danger. The final story is more positive than the other two stories. It has a narrator who is mentally stable. He too had his nostalgic feeling but he did not permit those feelings to stop him from leading a peaceful life in the host land. This presented the harmonical combination of nostalgia and adjustments in new country possible.

Even in cooking and eating the three character's perception differs highly. Mrs. Sen treated the food as a cold one as it often reminded of her cooking experiences in India. It was so lively in India where as in America she had to manage things alone. Mr. Pirzada had dinner with a Bengali family every day this allowed him to develop friendship with them. This friendship surpassed the nationality, culture, and many other things. The final story had food as a scaffold to build their relationship. Through cooking they strengthened their bond.

The stories had no detailed description about public spaces, political matters, and city squares. The author has made this choice deliberately so that she can focus on those details that are always overlooked. She concentrated on small, private, spaces inside the homes. The way people live everyday more attention was given to the mundane life routine of the people. She strongly argued that the life of the immigrants who are displaced the reconstruction starts from the household. This experience differs for both men and women. To men who have different social determination, the experience is different. Same is the case for women as well. Mrs. Sen had to gone through the isolation, loneliness, and other hurdles only

because she was a woman. This happens because she as a woman has predetermined social role to take care of the household which confines her inside the apartment like a prison. The intersection of /Indian and American culture puts her in enormous distress. The male characters generally have more advantage than the women character. They have the choice to move out and advance in their career. This way they get an opportunity to enter into the “third space” as said by Bhabha. Despite having the internal grief, Mr. Pirzada moved freely and hid his personal grief. In the third story the narrator was way more casual but he did not hide anything this is called cultural negotiation where the character adapts to the new culture without shedding its own. These elements are applied in domestic spaces by Lahiri to demonstrate that cultural hybridity is subject to evolution. Eventually, the analysis of the research paper emphasizes movement over stillness. It also proved that Lahiri’s stories have given a different dimension to the understanding of home. When the concepts of all the four theorist are combined such as Stuart Hall’s fluid identity, Homi Bhabha’s “Third Space,” Brah’s “homing desire,” and Hirsch’s “postmemory” a better picture emerges. The picture of the homeland is often not treated as a real one instead an objective one, which is actually sustained by people through memory, daily ritual, cooking, eating and other household chores keep it alive. Both Hirsch’s concept of *postmemory*, where in the trauma is passed to the next generation without experiencing the original event, Avtar Brah’s concept of “homing desire,” in which people would like to feel the home wherever they are present, portray an inevitable truth. The immigrants who live in a far away land should not leave their identity and they should not create a new one by holding onto their ancestor’s histories.

The narrative technique used in the story lacked exaggeration, sensational and dramatically emotional storytelling method. The author’s main focus was on the minute, normal details and movements such cutting vegetables, communication barriers, the mundane routine. Through these factors, a heavy truth of how the personal feel of displacement will actually be like is presented. She also criticizes those stories who provide a overly positive picture of success and achievement in a foreign land. She does this by highlighting the obstacles faced by a first-generation immigrant through the story of “Mrs. Sen’s.” She lets the reader know the reality of migration. A smooth narrative can never compromise the hurdles and agonies faced. The readers are once again not left in a hopeless state, the last story provides a hopeful life. This is possible only when the subject adapts the rules and customs of the host land by not compromising his own.

The readers should conceive the notion that in the modern world, migration is a more common thing. People relocate from one place to the other to make their life better. In this process they have to undergo overwhelming nostalgic memories, fractured identity, isolation etc., yet there is always a hope all these entities can be rebuilt if the individual is welcomes change with a smile.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/21**THE OPACITY OF THE WORLD: THE WORLD'S INHERENT COMPLEXITY AND MYSTERY IN "SWING TIME" BY ZADIE SMITH****RUCHIKA RATHORE**Research Scholar, Barkatullah University
Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India**Abstract**

Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* delves into the intricate web of identity, race, class, and friendship, capturing the uncanny nature of the human experience in a globalized world. This paper examines how Smith portrays the opacity of the world—its inherent complexity and mystery—through the lens of the unnamed narrator's journey. The narrative explores the interconnected ideas of personal histories, cultural expectations, and societal structures, highlighting how these influences shape individual's lives in unpredictable and often ambiguous ways. The juxtaposition of the narrator's working-class upbringing in London with her later immersion in the glamorous but ethically fraught world of celebrity philanthropy underscores the tensions between local and global perspectives. Smith's use of music and dance as recurring motifs further encapsulates the interplay of clarity and obscurity, embodying both universal connection and cultural specificity. Through fragmented storytelling and multifaceted characters, *Swing Time* reveals how attempts to make sense of the world often yield partial or contradictory truths. This opacity, rather than a barrier, becomes a lens through which Smith challenges readers to embrace complexity and nuance, recognizing that the world's mysteries are integral to its richness. Ultimately, this study asserts that Smith's narrative style and thematic concerns reflect a broader philosophical meditation on the limitations of understanding in a rapidly changing, interconnected world.

Keywords: Identity, Race, Globalization, Opacity, decentred, interconnected world

Introduction

Postcolonial theory investigates, and develops propositions about, the artistic and political impact of European subjection upon colonised societies, and the nature of those societies' responses. Postcolonial theory addresses the part of literature in immortalizing and challenging artistic imperialism. It disrupts the converse of social power. Postcolonial analysis has always bisected the study of race, gender, class, but these corners have generated an ever-adding range of specific interests, lapping, and lodging within the field. Postcolonial studies aim at stripping down conventional studies and examining what kind of identity emerges in a postcolonial subject. This paper explores identity in a fictional work, Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* (2016), which portrays postcolonial London as a space where

race and race are still important epistemic realities that need to be questioned. A postcolonial identity that's defied but forged on social relations among different individualities, whose culture, race, and gender impact on a new postcolonial identity to varying degrees.

Zadie Smith's narratives explore the relationships of different characters to their roots stressing on either their excessive attachment or their complete disengagement from them. *Swing Time* (2016) departs from Northwest London and moves around different surrounds as its main character, a nameless first-person womanish narrator, tenures around the world with her Australian celebrity employer. Through a set of appearances and goings, the new explores the narrator's construction of identity by establishing connections to her African strain, to the histories of Black women, and to the womanish connections the narrator builds around them. The narrator navigates through histories of suffering and under-representation, and, in this manner, Smith stresses the decolonisation of individual and collaborative individualities and histories, which combine and speak to each other. *Swing Time* (2016) draws attention to forms of oppression, once and present, to Black womanish inequalities, and to the need to look back on global histories of collaborative individualities so that the narrator peregrinations into the construction of her identity.

In postcolonial literature, the concept of identity has been extensively studied and analysed individualities whose origins have 'histories'. And like everything literal, individualities come transformative metamorphoses don't always do in a straightforward fashion, therefore, these individualities 'swing' back and forth in multiple temporary realities. Identity weaves through diaspora characters' experience of their roots. For diaspora womanish characters, "identity" becomes metonymy for sisterhood, fatherhood, and Black womanises. Identity becomes the hunt of who these Black womanish characters are while immersed in the process of getting. In Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* (2016) identity revolves around the narrator's hunt as the "trip back to her mama's womb" to find her true tone. That tropical and nonfictional trip will spark passions of discomfort, query, and craving, what Gabriela Leiton calls postcolonial anxiety. In Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* (2016), the narrator peregrinations into the hunt of her own identity.

This work is an attempt to prove that the narrator in Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* (2016) demanded to trip from the shadow of her sisters to crop into the light of her true tone her own identity. For this purpose, this donation sets out to explore intersectionality as treated in postcolonial literature to see how aspects of gender, race, class, and culture are interwoven in the hunt of identity. For this perusal, the workshop of Kimberlé Crenshaw, Audre Lorde, Bill Ashcroft, and Stuart Hall will be taken as the theoretical frame. Since womanish postcolonial literature is concerned with the casting of a postcolonial identity, which emerges from a womanish postcolonial anxiety. Eventually, Zadie Smith's narrative style in her use of time and point of view to frame multiple temporal realities in *Swing Time*

(2016) will be excavated into as they're naturally related to the construction of identity.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality, a key concept in feminist scholarship, examines how gender intersects with other social identities. African American feminists were among the first to challenge mainstream feminism, arguing that it failed to capture their lived experiences by focusing solely on gender as the primary factor. They emphasized that their realities were more intricate than simple binaries like wealth, location, or education. While they identified as women, their racial identity as Black women significantly shaped their experiences. Many feminist scholars, therefore, rejected the idea of a singular, universal "woman," highlighting that womanhood is diverse and shaped by various intersecting factors.

The term "intersectionality" was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an African American legal scholar associated with critical race studies in the 1980s. This field sought to challenge the supposed neutrality, objectivity, and colour-blindness of the law. Crenshaw advocated for replacing the single-axis framework—commonly used in feminist analysis, which focused primarily on gender—with intersectionality. This approach more effectively illustrates how race and gender interact to shape the diverse experiences of Black women. She argues that their realities extend beyond the conventional categories defined by discrimination discourse. To explain this concept, Crenshaw frequently employs the metaphor of a crossroads.

“Intersectionality is what occurs when a woman from a minority group tries to navigate the main crossing in the city... the main highway is ‘racism road.’ One cross street can be Colonialism, then Patriarchy Street. She has to deal not only with one form of oppression but with all forms, which link together to make a double, a triple, multiple, a many layered blankets of oppression”.

To highlight this issue, Crenshaw discusses the experiences of immigrant women in America, who face multiple layers of marginalization, including those based on class, gender, and ethnicity. Intersectionality moves beyond a gender-focused perspective that overlooks factors like race and social class. It pushes us to consider why a working-class woman's experiences differ from those of a woman from a privileged background. The concept suggests that every aspect of a person's identity is deeply interconnected with others, making it essential to view these elements collectively to fully grasp an individual's lived experience. “Identity is not simply a self-contained unit, it is a relationship between people, between people and history, people and communities, people and institutions.”

Intersectionality provides a framework for examining how social identities intersect and interact with systems of power, shaping both oppression and privilege in individuals' personal and societal experiences.

The intersections of class, race, culture, and gender in *Swing Time* (2016)

Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* (2016) vividly portrays how the narrator's postcolonial identity is shaped by the intersections of race, gender, and culture within her social environment. The novel examines identity in connection to the narrator's lived experiences as a second-generation British individual.

As a member of the Jamaican diaspora in London, the narrator's cultural and racial hybridity positions her in opposition to dominant discourses in contemporary British society. She resides in Northwest London, a neighbourhood where modest low-rise buildings stand just a few blocks from less desirable high-rise apartments. "From my balcony, I could see into her [Tracey's] estate and vice versa," she observes. The narrator quickly recognizes that Northwest London reinforces her ethnic identity, aligning with Susan Bassnett's idea that certain features convey historical and ethnographic significance. However, she struggles to interpret the social codes embedded in her daily life, such as appropriate footwear for modern dance class, the very concept of modern dance, or even the social norms surrounding movie outings for a classmate's birthday—like who was expected to pay for the tickets. "There was no one you could ask," she reflects. Despite being deeply rooted in Northwest London, she finds herself grappling with the unspoken cultural and social cues of her environment.

Tracey, the narrator's childhood friend and alter ego, plays a crucial role in helping her interpret her surroundings and navigate social interactions. Reflecting on their early school years together, the narrator realizes, "It took Tracey moving to my classroom for me to understand what my classroom really was."⁶ Later, when she attends a different school without Tracey, she describes herself as "a body without a distinct outline," emphasizing how Tracey continues to shape her sense of reality, even in her absence.

She feels a deep connection to Tracey, noting, "Our shade of brown was exactly the same—as if one piece of tan material had been cut to make us both." Their shared skin tone reinforces their bond. Melinda Mills observes that individuals on the racial margins identify with a spectrum of shades—such as "vanilla white," "white of colour," "white Latino," or "white chocolate"—as part of an evolving identity framework. Similarly, Bill Ashcroft highlights how the body serves as a key site of representation in early postcolonial analysis, with particular focus on race and colour. Characteristics like skin tone, hair texture, and facial features—including eye and nose shape—are often used to establish commonalities. For the narrator, race plays a vital role in self-identification, fostering a connection to a shared cultural background, kinship, and beliefs. Although she and Tracey are no more genetically related than strangers, the novel suggests that their close friendship fosters a deeper sense of identification—one that, for the narrator, feels even more significant than familial ties.

Race and kinship serve as fundamental anchors for both individual and collective identities, with genetics and notions of "blood" playing a central role in shaping

these connections. Traditionally, individuals related by blood are expected to share physical traits that align with their kinship ties. However, the narrator struggles to feel a strong connection to her white father, disconnect that becomes even more pronounced when she meets her half-siblings.

Her bond with her father is more emotional than physical. “This is your sister,” said my father ... as far as I could see we had no features in common at all.” In contrast, her brother is a near-exact replica of their father, reinforcing her sense of detachment. This realization leaves her questioning her own place within the family, leading her to conclude that she is the one who does not fit. Eventually, she comes to accept her brother’s resemblance to their father as natural, while she feels increasingly like an anomaly.

The expectation of similarity between parent and child extends beyond race. While family resemblance exists independently of racial identity, race becomes significant when it influences how a person’s identity is perceived and valued within society. In such cases, kinship itself can become racialized.

The narrator’s mixed heritage often prompted remarks from strangers, who frequently commented on how little she resembled her father. She recalls these reactions, highlighting how her physical differences from him became a subject of public scrutiny.

“And yet, in our family, we had never wanted to admit this unlikelihood, we always batted away what we considered to be the banal and prurient curiosity of strangers— “But won’t she grow up confused?” “How will she choose between your cultures?”

The narrator never questioned her biracial identity. However, as a child, she felt the need to prove that she was not confused and had no difficulty choosing where she belonged. “Life is confusing!”—her mother’s sharp retort—dismissed any suggestion of uncertainty.

People are often deeply curious about a child’s racial appearance in relation to their parents, operating under the assumption that a child’s racial traits should directly reflect their lineage—an idea known as race-kinship congruity. While race is inherited, racial identity is actively shaped through social interactions and the ways individuals connect to form a shared racial identity.

Racial identity largely shapes an individual’s sense of self through belonging to a specific racial group. “Race is a cultural rather than a biological phenomenon, the product of historical processes, not of genetically determined physical differences.” Since racial categories are socially constructed, racial identifications can shift across different contexts and over time. Derrida argues that “identities are versatile, they change over time and space ... only the process of identification endures.”

When the narrator travels to Africa with Aimee, she attempts to connect with her Gambian sisters, searching for reflections of herself and her mother in the faces she encounters. However, her sense of belonging is unsettled after dancing at a

large village celebration, when Hawa exclaims, “Even though you are a white girl, you dance like you are Black!” In the impoverished Gambian village, she is perceived as white and wealthy, yet in Aimee’s elite New York social circle, she is seen as poor and Black. Smith captures the nuanced interplay of race and class that preoccupies the narrator, illustrating how these distinctions shift across different communities and complicate her postcolonial identity.

In *Swing Time*, gender, class, and race intersect, deeply influencing the narrator’s conflicted relationship with Aimee. Zadie Smith explores the narrator’s evolving sense of identity through the complex and ambivalent dynamics she shares with Aimee.

Aimee embodies what Audre Lorde describes as white women’s tendency to overlook their inherent racial privilege, defining womanhood solely through their own experiences. This exclusion renders women of colour as “other,” outsiders whose perspectives and traditions seem too foreign to understand. Unaware of the advantages her whiteness affords her, Aimee assumes that all women face the same struggles. When the narrator mentions that her mother had to fight for herself, Aimee dismissively responds, “Well, I’m a single mom. And I can assure you that my baby doesn’t stop me doing a damn thing.” She fails to acknowledge the structural differences between their experiences, believing the narrator’s mother simply lacked determination rather than opportunity.

Lorde argues that white women struggle to fully understand Black women because they resist seeing them as both women and as distinctly different from themselves. Aimee’s inability to recognize these differences undermines the narrator’s identity and reinforces her sense of otherness. The narrator is acutely aware of Aimee’s influence and power, which overshadow her own existence. She reflects, “I never had any light of my own. I experienced myself as a kind of shadow.” In essence, she sees herself as the “other” in Aimee’s world, always living in the reflection of someone else’s radiance.

The female relationships in *Swing Time* reflect a dynamic interplay of attraction and repulsion. The narrator’s bond with Aimee is marked by ambivalence—she is never entirely opposed to Aimee, nor fully aligned with her. Their relationship mirrors a colonizer-colonized dynamic.

Bill Ashcroft argues that instead of categorizing colonized individuals as either complicit or resistant, ambivalence suggests that these states coexist and fluctuate within the colonial subject. This duality allows relationships to be both exploitative and nurturing—or at least appear nurturing—at the same time. Similarly, Aimee’s interactions with the narrator are shaped by this ambivalence. The narrator assumes a subordinate role, as Aimee exerts control over those around her, expecting constant availability. When the narrator’s mother observes, “You’re addicted to that phone,” the narrator defends herself, saying, “It’s work, Mum. This is how people work now.” To which her mother sharply responds, “You mean: like slaves?” This exchange underscores the unequal power dynamic,

challenging the narrator's perception of independence. When she insists that she has a life beyond work, her mother's response further questions the extent of her agency. "No, that's not right—you don't have a life. She has a life. She has her men and her children and her career—she has the life. We read about it in the papers. You service her life."

In this conversation between mother and daughter, Smith highlights the issue that Gayatri Spivak raises in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Ashcroft, in his analysis of Spivak's essay, argues that it does not claim the subaltern lacks a voice or agency. Rather, it cautions against viewing the subaltern as entirely separate from the discourses and institutional structures that shape and mediate its voice.

The power dynamic between Aimee and the narrator is entrenched in a rigid hierarchy that resists genuine equality. This imbalance is mirrored in Aimee's African school project, which positions her above the local population. The racial and cultural disparities between Aimee and the indigenous community serve to reinforce and legitimize an inherently unequal relationship. The narrator, despite her awareness of these imbalances, becomes complicit in Aimee's venture, helping her establish the school. However, rather than serving as a noble or altruistic mission centered on education, the school primarily functions as a means for Aimee to expand her influence and enhance her public image. Charity cannot always be discussed independent of the intentions behind acts of generosity. Her engagement in philanthropy comes from her career aspirations but lacks any political substance. As the narrator's mother bluntly states:

"You should advise her that she needs to talk to us, to be in partnership with the government in one way or another . . . Obviously she has the financial means and the public's attention—that's all good—but without understanding the mechanics, it's just a lot of good intention that goes nowhere."

Aimee had no interest in understanding the history of education in the region or forming partnerships with the African government. She showed little concern for the long-term sustainability of her project, leaving the responsibility to her staff while she moved on to her next endeavour. Aimee took what she wanted and what she deemed necessary, leveraging her white privilege to shape her own reality and expecting those around her to comply. Her staff's role was to ensure her life remained uncomplicated—they were paid to do so. "We waded through the tangled weeds so she might float over the surface."

In *Swing Time* (2016), West African spaces serve as a lens through which the novel explores how Diasporas influence identity. Stuart Hall defines diasporic identities as those formed in relation to a symbolic homeland—one that must be reclaimed, even at the expense of others. The narrator arrives in Gambia following Aimee's path. While there, she visits former slave forts where her ancestors were once held, feeling compelled to embark on this journey as a means of reconnection and self-discovery. However, her experience of belonging remains conflicted. At

times, she rejects a shared sense of identity, stating, “I was not, for example, standing at this moment in a field with my extended tribe, with my fellow black women. Here there was no such category. There were only the Sere women, the Wolof, and the Mandika.” Despite this detachment, she constantly recognizes her mother’s features in the faces around her. Though she acknowledges these places as part of her ancestral history, she remains emotionally disconnected from the people who inhabit them, highlighting the complexity of diasporic identity and belonging.

In *Swing Time* (2016), estrangement complicates gender dynamics, making relationships uneven and uncertain. The narrator’s bond with Hawa highlights these disparities—while Hawa represents a cultural space the narrator may never fully reclaim, she also embodies the narrator’s Black heritage and diasporic roots. “Every tribe has their blood-soaked legacy: here was mine.”

Although Hawa belongs to Gambia’s middle class, she lacks access to the material wealth and global consumer culture that shape the narrator’s world. Her relative poverty and adherence to traditional gender roles create a sense of separation between them. These differences—rooted in class, culture, and social structures—illustrate the fractures that define postcolonial identities.

The narrator also struggles to relate to “the small army of women” she encounters in Gambia, both in her compound and across the rural landscape. Their daily labour, which seamlessly blends work and family responsibilities, feels distant from her own experiences. She observes, “Everywhere I looked women were working, mothering, digging, carrying, feeding, cleaning, dragging, scrubbing, building, fixing. I didn’t see a man.” Unlike in her own world, where work and personal life often stand in tension, these women integrate both without apparent conflict.

In West African societies, motherhood is central to women’s familial roles, and they often balance childcare with their contributions to pre-capitalist economies. Work does not diminish their role as mothers (Hill Collins 66). This shared understanding of motherhood fosters a connection between Hawa and the narrator. In an intimate moment, Hawa whispers, “Still no baby?” to which the narrator responds in kind, and they embrace tightly, laughing together. Despite their different lives, the possibility of becoming mothers serves as a link between them, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries.

Regarding women’s experiences, Zadie Smith highlights the significance of biological rhythms, emphasizing that women live by “cycles” and must remain aware of time. Female bodies are seen as seasonal, expected to bear children before their natural cycles render them infertile.

“My brothers did not pay attention to clocks ... I might become a crone. I might be a babe or a MILF or ‘childless’. My brothers, no matter what else might befall them, would remain men ... a man was man was a man (Intimations).”

Nature is often unfair to women, and society is no different. “Still no baby?” became a familiar refrain between the narrator and Hawa, a shared phrase that symbolized their bond. However, upon deeper reflection, the narrator recognized that when she was Hawa’s age, her focus had been on seeking freedom. Yet, despite their different paths, both women were subject to the same societal pressures—expectations that framed motherhood as the defining aspect of a woman’s identity. Women’s bodies are scrutinized worldwide, and Zadie Smith challenges these societal pressures by asserting that if she ever had children, it would be “on my own timeline,” regardless of the relentless ticking of biological clocks promoted by women’s magazines (Intimations 4). However, this statement itself underscores the ongoing need for women to resist imposed expectations regarding motherhood.

In *Swing Time* (2016), Smith skilfully portrays motherhood in its many forms. The narrator’s mother takes pride in being different from other mothers. Despite her aspirations for education and social mobility, she still acknowledges a shared cultural and class background with the women around her. As the narrator observes, her mother’s ambitions do not entirely separate her from the collective experiences of motherhood.

“Channelling” her mother, for many of “our mothers” who had become mothers not long after leaving school, Parents’ Evening was like detention: “It remained a place where they might be shamed. The difference was now they were grown and could not be forced to attend”, or if they did, could “begin shouting at the teacher.”

The weight of failure and shame looms large. The narrator experiences the sting of disappointment, but her mother approaches these emotions differently. “I say ‘our mothers,’ but of course mine was different: she had the anger but not the shame.” Unlike others, her mother resists societal pressures, defying racial and gender norms by pursuing her desires without guilt.

Shame can act as emotional armour, preventing women from truly connecting with themselves. Smith suggests that shame is shaped by circumstance, embedded in our minds, and intertwined with gender (Intimations 3). Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie further argues that the shame surrounding female sexuality is fundamentally about control (53). This control exists to serve men—women are expected to cover up, not for their own sake, but to regulate male desires. This dynamic reduces women to mere instruments for managing male impulses. And it’s not just men who seek control—sometimes, even children participate. Smith explores the role of children extensively.

“What do we want from our mothers when we are children? Complete submission ...all you want from your mother is that she once and for all admit that she is your mother and only your mother, and that her battle with the rest of life is over.”

The narrator's mother, however, found ways to avoid being dominated by either men or her own daughter. She was determined to improve herself, constantly striving for growth. Her pursuit of education and upward mobility earned her respect and set her apart from Tracey's mother. As Smith describes:

"My mother was proud of trying harder than Tracey's mother, than all the mothers, of having got me into a half-decent state school instead of one of the several terrible ones. She was in a competition of caring, and yet her fellow contestants, like Tracey's mother, were so ill-equipped when placed beside her that it was a fatally lopsided battle. I often wondered: is it some kind of a trade-off? Do others have to lose so we can win?"³⁷

The narrator idealizes her mother, almost as if she were a character from a story. "As a child, she had seemed immortal," the narrator reflects. She recognizes how far her mother had come—far beyond what she herself could have envisioned. As a result, when she measures herself against her mother, she feels inadequate, as though living in her shadow. After her mother's passing, the narrator feels that she departed without making a lasting impact on the world. She longs for her mother and is overcome with nostalgia.

Gabriels Leiton's nostos and postcolonial anxiety

Nostalgia, a deep yearning for the past, emerges as the narrator moves through different moments in time, searching for her origins and a true sense of self. Her journey requires a transformation shaped by the complex, love-hate relationships she shares with the women in *Swing Time* (2016). In the end, she confronts all these women in the presence of her mother's passing. Smith describes this encounter as follows:

"She works too hard," her mother says, "and the children don't see her, and now they want to take my children away, but your father was very good, very good, and often I think: was I a good mother? ... But I was just a student, I am studying, because you have to learn to survive, and I was a mother and I have to learn, because you knew that any one of us, they caught reading or writing faced jail or a whipping or worse....and in that way we were taken out of our time and place."

The narrator's mother merges herself, Tracey, and the narrator into a single entity, symbolizing the shared experiences of women. This moment encapsulates the concept of -nostos—the timeless struggles women have faced, continue to face, and will face in their pursuit of identity. Smith deliberately blurs the boundaries between past and present, highlighting battles shaped by inequality, oppression, unrealistic expectations, and frustration. These struggles are further complicated by gender intersections and the weight of postcolonial anxiety.

The narrator's journey toward self-discovery is marked by this anxiety, as it requires her to understand herself more deeply, to become whole, and to find a sense of belonging—even if she had not previously realized she was lost (Leiton 3). She must confront the challenges of being a woman without roots or a clear

identity. "I had never had any light of my own. I experienced myself as a kind of shadow."⁴⁰ Her mother, Tracey, Aimee, and Hawa form an unintentional sisterhood—one that, despite othering her and casting their own shadows, ultimately pushes her toward self-illumination and the realization of her identity. An identity's quest the narrator kicked off when she was a child. When she started to recognise herself in what she was not. She recalls:

"In my dream we were all elegant and none of us knew pain, we had never graced the sad pages of the history books my mother bought for me, never been called ugly or stupid, never entered theatres by the back door, drank from separate water fountains or taken our seats at the back of any bus."⁴¹

The narrator was fully aware that she was trapped in a world defined by inequality, oppression, and suffering. Leiton explains that her awakening to life coincided with her awakening to pain—a life shaped by resistance (4). Her childhood was marked by a sense of exclusion, defined not by who she was, but by what she was not. She was never truly part of the group. "You think you're one of them? Is that what you think?"⁴² She would never belong among the white girls at school or at the birthday party.

She vividly recalls the feeling of being dragged along the pavement, the confusion she felt at seeing tears stream down her mother's face—tears that distorted her strong features and carried with them the collective histories of Black women. The memory of Lily Bingham's tenth birthday remains crystal clear in her mind, while her own childhood celebrations are lost to time. In this deeply personal experience, nostalgia transforms into a reflective state. It envelops her completely, making her "dwell on—on longing and loss, on the flawed nature of remembrance."⁴³ Yearning for a sense of belonging at the center, the narrator instead finds herself adrift on the margins.

The narrator is a marginalized mixed-race girl, yet she resists being defined by that status. Leiton suggests that identity is shaped by what we inherently are (5). To shield herself from the disillusionment of her true identity, the narrator immerses herself in the illusions of her dreams. James Baldwin writes:

"Identity would seem to be the garment with which one covers the nakedness of the self: in which case, it is best that the garment be loose, a little like the robes of the desert, through which one's nakedness can always be felt, and, sometimes, discerned. This trust in one's nakedness is all that gives one the power to change one's robes (537)."

Baldwin compels us to confront the idea that our nakedness symbolizes our fundamental humanity—at our core, we are all the same. However, without the defining layers of identity, we remain exposed. This nakedness represents our vulnerability, leaving us unguarded against life's challenges. The narrator's journey of self-discovery reveals the fragility of existing without a clear sense of identity.

The effects of Zadie Smith's narrative style in *Swing Time* (2016)

Swing Time (2016) explores multiple temporal layers, each overlapping and casting shadows on the others. Time in the novel is not linear; instead, it coils and loops back on itself. Smith structures the narrative in a way that does not progress chronologically but rather revisits and reframes past moments, allowing new details to emerge with each retelling. Similar to how Chaucer used the prologue in "The Canterbury Tales" (1400) as a guide to his work, Smith opens "Swing Time" with a prologue that sets the stage: "It was the first day of my humiliation." This introduction signals that the story has, in a sense, already concluded before it begins. Through a first-person perspective, Smith unravels how the narrator arrived at her current reality, a present shaped by the weight of her past.

Smith's narrative style in *Swing Time* (2016) disrupts linear storytelling with a fragmented chronology and a restrained narrator. While the first-person narrator shares her own thoughts and emotions, she appears to extend beyond her own perspective, giving the illusion of access to the minds of others. Through her passive observations of the women in her life, she seems to step into their consciousness, creating what feels like a 'collective stream of consciousness.' Henry James employed a similar technique to explore psychological states as reflections of cultural and historical norms. Smith uses this approach to immerse the reader in the emotions, thoughts, and responses of her characters, depicting them in an uninterrupted flow where time naturally unfolds. She crafts vivid, dynamic characters with strong, distinctive voices that contrast with the narrator's subdued presence. However, it is the narrator's reluctance to assert herself that allows these other women—her mother, Aimee, Hawa, and Tracey—to dominate the narrative. This deliberate positioning keeps the narrator in their shadow, a role she recognizes and accepts.

"Did all friendships — all relations — involve this discreet and mysterious exchange of qualities, this exchange of power? Did it extend to peoples and nations or was it a thing that happened only between individuals? ... What did I give Tracey? What did Tracey give me?"

At their core, the other women provide the narrator with a sense of purpose, while she, in turn, offers them her presence. Her subdued presence is an intentional omission that highlights the overlapping temporal realities surrounding her.

Swing Time (2016) is structured around a first-person narrator, who also serves as the protagonist. The story unfolds through her perspective, making her the guiding voice of the novel. She functions as an observer, recounting events and character interactions from her own vantage point. By positioning the narrator as a detached witness, Smith enhances the credibility of the story. The narrator is shaped as someone seemingly devoid of personal desires, allowing her to fade into the background while the lives of others take centre stage. As Audre Lorde suggests, this detachment reflects a deeper commentary on identity and agency.

The narrator and Smith are lonely people. Travelling across Diasporas allowed the narrator to discover an identity that is linked but not tied to other women. Being under their shadow allows her to recover her past.

Smith aligns the narrator's journey of self-discovery with the concept of Sankofa. As a child, the narrator's mother introduces her to the Sankofa, a bird that "looks backward at the past to learn from what has come before."⁴⁶ This idea serves as the driving force of the novel. Smith revisits this concept when Aimee adopts a girl from the village and names her Sankofa—an ironic choice for a woman who is always looking ahead and untethered to the past.

Zadie Smith's narrative manipulates time, shaping the narrator's search for identity into a fragmented, nonlinear journey. Living in the shadow of others paradoxically grants her freedom in this quest—one that is only fully realized through disgrace. Her transformation is layered, shaped by history and experience. Her identity is not static; it is continuously melded by the interplay of history, culture, and power. As Stuart Hall explains, identity is not merely a retrieval of the past but a way of positioning oneself within its narratives.

The narrator's identity emerges through the shifting points of reference she gathers along her journey. Leiton suggests that Smith presents a protagonist without a name, surrounded by influential figures who do have names, compelled by societal forces to resist definition, remain global, and move with the rhythm of her era (3). The narrator contemplates the music played for Gambian boys during their rite of passage, observing the kankurang—a dancer who guides them through their transition from childhood to adolescence. She questions: "Who comes for the girls? If not the kankurang, then who? Their mothers? Their grandmothers? A friend?" (48). This thought reflects her uncertainty about who will guide and support her. Later, she hears music and looks up to see Tracey dancing, surrounded by her children, turning and moving with them. In that moment, Tracey becomes the narrator's kankurang—the figure who ushers her through transformation. Meanwhile, her mother, who always reminded her, "You know where you came from and where you are going" (50), embodies her sankofa—the guiding force that connects her to her past and shapes her identity.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the journey of a second-generation British-Jamaican woman, tracing her transition from childhood to young adulthood through her shifting relationships and evolving sense of self. In *Swing Time* (2016), Zadie Smith portrays female relationships as a complex interplay of attraction and repulsion. The narrator, shaped by external forces rather than personal desire, remains elusive and subdued, existing primarily to support the women around her. She navigates life in their shadow, yet it is within this shadow that she ultimately finds the freedom to seek her identity—one that is ultimately unlocked through love.

Swing Time (2016) examines how characters relate to their roots, highlighting moments of both connection and detachment throughout the narrative. Zadie Smith's distinctively reflective and sharp writing style elevates the novel, making it exceptional. She delves into identity formation by exploring how individuals become who they are in relation to their past. To convey this, Smith crafts a narrator who looks back on her experiences, using those reflections to shape her postcolonial identity. The novel itself embodies the concept of time's fluidity, with its fragmented chronology and understated narrator serving as deliberate artistic choices. Swing Time (2016) weaves together multiple temporal realities, demonstrating how they overlap, interact, and cast shadows upon one another. This analysis demonstrates that Swing Time (2016), as a work of female postcolonial literature, is shaped by the intersections of race, gender, and class. Within these intersections, the narrator drifts through multiple temporal realities, reflecting on herself through the perspectives of other female characters, creating a sense of 'collective stream of consciousness.' Through these relationships, she constructs her postcolonial identity by acknowledging the different histories and influences that coexist within her. In her journey, she experiences 'postcolonial anxiety,' leading to an identity that is never fixed but always evolving, continuously shaped within representation rather than outside of it. To piece together her fragmented self, she moves through diasporic experiences, seeking collective identities that fill in the gaps. Her journey is one of decolonization, reclaiming her history to shape her identity. She transitions from shadow to light. This analysis affirms that Swing Time (2016) portrays a postcolonial identity rooted in narratives of the past—an identity shaped by culture, race, and gender, one that is perpetually in flux and defined by its ongoing transformation.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/22**THE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL LEGITIMACY OF BEING
RECOGNISED AND OF BEING DE-RECOGNISED****SHUBHRA MUKHERJEE**

Independent Researcher

Abstract

This paper “*The Academic and Social Legitimacy of Being Recognised and of being De- Recognised*” aims to discuss the political approach towards the idea of giving Recognition and Identity, rooted in casteism, social divisions based on caste, class, and race, and how it is deeply impacting the political strata, in order to establish the high society by demolishing the root of it. Meanwhile how academic sphere is classifying the idea of misrecognition, about the given importance to establish a place in order to be recognised, and how the implications given by scholars giving validations to them, scholarly deliberations identifying them, and raising the concern, as well as de-valuing them. This paper will locate works of some scholars like Dipesh Chakraborty, his idea of Historical Wound, and Truth, as well as academic and professional history. Johana Deeksha, and her article “*The Caste Chair*”, which is a semi- biographical project of a Dalit women. Nancy Fraser, and Charles Taylor, and their notions of recognition/ non-recognition to locate the ideas regarding the given spheres. And lastly the famous film history scholar Tom Gunning, and his notion of how do audience mis-understood the idea of a whole by delving into a short. This paper will also analyse writer’s own research experience with a Santhal community, complications of their daily life, Bolpur being central to Santhal’s how they are being marginalised by their own autonomous space and place, a community embedded with pure artistic and academic knowledge discriminated and marginalised itself from the main city and living in a far distance. This article will explain in details all the points mentioned above.

Keywords: Politics, Identity, Recognition, Social/Academic space, Validation

Introduction

The question of legitimacy in the context of identity or place for the Dalit or lower class, caste community is highly controversial from the very early age when the coloured people or the people from lower caste considered as untouchables and even unseeable, if I am uttering a right term to justify the meaning, even the Chaturvarna allows us with four divisions where socially we have much more. This argument is not only focusing the deprived class section but trying to hold a broader area of discrimination one faces due to several aspects except caste. It is relevant to know that a well-established person is also being discriminated because of an inability to speak in foreign language, and not being dressed properly in a

space full of maintained personas. Hence the question of legitimacy of identity in social and academic spheres and even their existence falls under the urgency of validation, because when it is questioned about how authentic you people are and your stories are then it requires the enquiry and the proper researched validation, both public and private sites.

Dipesh Chakrabarty's article "*History and the Politics of Recognition*" aims to locate the depth of this agenda of recognising in terms of history, identity and to resolve the ties he is using Charles Taylor's ideas which he has described in his work "*The Politics of Recognition*", to analyse the very idea of the politics of recognition in terms of history and identity is presented through some of the first-person experiences of the presenter which can be located as an analytical work as in order to establish the statements, this paper will also be collecting other scholars and their works.

Dipesh Chakrabarty's work "*History and the Politics of Recognition*" primarily talking about two different dimensions of history in order to establish the authenticity of that incident, one is the 'Historical Wound' what explains that it is particularly based upon memory when a group of people or a whole community is going back and explaining their past (a wound or a joy) in a sense of recalling to establish their then identity, their place considered as a wound in the field of academic history say in oral history and this practice is non-verifiable in the field of literature. Another one is the 'Historical Truth' which is based on researched facts, an empirical project conducted by a researcher, which is absolutely verifiable. Chakrabarty exemplified these two spheres by 'Academic History' and 'Professional History', in which this academic history is very limited and structured, non-verifiable and on the other hand professional history is the given truth by the authority (researcher) means something that is verifiable. The very article is expressing the process of picking something up as verified truth that it is totally depends upon the person who is in charge of expressing it means the narrator of academic history or historical wound is the one needs to be trusted upon, the writings are claiming that it is very likely for someone that one can express their past in poetry using poetic metaphors and romantic elements, rather than an academic work, both of them can be true or false, in that scenario it does not really a matter that if the narrator is stating something from their memory as oral history or it is giving a statement by doing some research work done it needs to be accurate from your true personal experiences, only then can be considered as legitimate or can be recognised.

The autobiography of Omprakash Valmiki, titled "*Joothan*", like all the other autobiographies, this one too holds the life struggle and life incidents of the beholder, in what the narrator themselves narrates their words directly to the audience. But there are differences between an autobiographies like this with all the other autobiographies we have in the vast literary canon. Audience may intent to pursue its authenticity, in the respect of narrator's class, caste. In general

autobiographies seeks verification but Dalit autobiographies deal with a second time marginalization to probe into the literary canon, and this state of vulnerability is conveyed by *Valmiki* himself in his work.

The autobiography narrates as child *Omprakash* observed the dilemma of their society of not accepting them as human being or the people of their own, he has faced a lot of problems to continue his education and to establish himself as a human being. And later on, what the autobiography is suggesting that after getting his degree and being well established he was afraid of publishing his words means his autobiography because of the fear that people will misjudge him or people will get angry for how come he is even thinking about publishing these incidents, which can lead higher class people into shame and they can take actions over the Dalit community, and can declare his words as a lie, and most importantly *Valmiki* was afraid that his own people as well can deny his words as true. The fear that *Valmiki* was concerned with is that people from higher caste can claim that *Valmiki* himself is making up the things, whatever he is telling is not true he is doing this in order to get an opportunity to build up something in respect of his space or identity, means he is ornamenting things to get the stage as a writer. Now if *Valmiki* is true to his words or not this autobiography is considered to be a historical wound or academic historical work, but this very research is non-verifiable to process its own legitimacy.

Writer's own attempt while working in an ethnographic project with a Santhal community, exploring their culture by delving into their personal lives, rituals at Bolpur, Birbhum, West Bengal. Bolpur has been a tourism place embedded with emotion and deeply connected to Tagore in each and everyone's heart nationally or internationally. Tagore himself tried to establish the tribal community by his works like *Chandalika* (1933, a dance drama based on a tribal girl named *Chandalika*, an untouchable's story of achieving dignity spiritual awakening by a Buddhist), Tagore himself criticizes the untouchability practices and establishes her tribal identity. Tagore himself was inspired by Baul music, a tribal music form of songs, and later on delves into composing inspired songs like "Amar Praner Manush Ache Prane", "Majhe Majhe Tobo Dekha Pai", and many more. The way Bolpur celebrates this community's cultural practices and their art like *Ramkinkar Baij*'s artistic figures, is unlikely to grasp that these communities could have been deprived by the main city. Recognition in social sphere is being costly for them to achieve, so to establish their Historical wound. In the year 2023, people from Bishnubati were celebrating their museum day, their own museum that they have at the centre of their village. The community arranged a food festival in respect of that auspicious day where they served their cultural dishes, by ensuring their own cooking process, not only that but they arranged a local evening programme where the participants were their own people, where cultural music was played, with their self-made instruments like *Banam*, and flute. My area of study there was their

culture and music that, the pictures are to locate their museum and to establish my experience here: -



The first photo where the local people who was in charge of cooking and arranging food are serving the food to their guests, she is serving a delicacy, a sweet made with coconut and jaggery, the second picture where the students who were interviewing then was investigating in the museum, the third picture is the poster of that festival and the fourth one is me and my team interviewing artists, who were playing 'Banam' which is considered as the traditional instrument of Santhal community. Now coming to the point, after having a decent literacy rate that a community can have a festival like this and notably, they are inviting scholars to interview them, means the community or a whole village have sources, knowledge, and aware of their autonomy but are unable to establish their recognition in the mainstream, their sense of existence has been distanced from the main town of Bolpur. The mentioned village is across 10 -12 Km away from the main town of Sonajhuri, Bolpur and totally isolated from every essential element of their daily life style, like hospital, school, market, etc. They have built up their own primary school near to their village to educate their children's. After visiting their village, I noted that they do not have electricity, a concretised path to walk, water facilities are available within a distance of 3-5km and is unsure of its availability, and majorly minus transportation facilities, roads are so dark at night that it is barely visible if someone is coming in a cycle without any light. The Banam player named Babulal Marvi, playing his self-made Banam, and a school teacher himself, struggling with daily essentials in own village, still trying to establish problems. Being aware of their own existence they are relying upon others from native cities to interview them, to let them know how their old days were and till now daily they are struggling at present to live a healthy. They are

teaching their children to harvest, to animal breeding, at the school they built themselves. It is significant that they have power but it is relevant too that they are being marginalised and being used for industrialization, for upper class social upbringing, they are locating each and individual difficulties to local in-charge but here is the historical wound is not being verified by the authority thus the whole community with their present generation facing a massive discrimination in establishing their existence to the broader society. By visiting sonajhuri market there are many of them earning money by singing their santhali music and dancing with tourists in their santhali dance forms, visitors paying them, and recognizing them as mere entertainer where they have so much to deliver rather than a 10min collaborate performance. The community is being discriminated from their true identity, and they do not know how they are being represented into the broader spectrum of cultural social society, thus is being deprived of a basic human need according to *Charles Taylor*. However, these two implications, one is *Omprakash Valmiki's* autobiography and respondents to my own research experiences are suggesting the non-efficiency of the legitimacy in between tribal people. The first example, *Valmiki* was unable to publish his works due to this fear that his own people will not consider his attempt as legitimate thus it will create a mess in establishing his past as legitimate history, he was stunned by the fear of being mis-recognised within his own space. Secondly people of Bishnubati who were comparably educated academically and culturally but still unable to establish themselves or their history as authentic to the mainstream rather prefers to be in isolation. Now when *Valmiki* is representing his own words in the mode of his autobiography is making a sense of validation and people are considering it as legitimate first-person experience to rely upon, depending upon the already established Dalit files and histories, but in the contradiction the interviewer (me) belongs to the different caste and class as well, and nowhere connected to them, when I will be representing them will be considered as Historical truth, and considerably there will be maximum chances to represent them with a sympathetic tone or from a researcher view (as according to my re- search needs), and thus de-valued or to be de-graded as a nonvalid work, because researcher's experience is not the first person experience, articulations are based on one day field experience and their oral narratives, researcher can mix up things from own biased nature or can manipulate them to sustain into one's own research area, there are multiple possibilities. Hence the historical truth here remains verifiable, and after an authentic verification it can be considered as legitimate or not, depends upon the narrators and to the researcher's reliability. In the case of a second-person experience or third-person experience the data will remain as a non- verifiable collection because the researcher is unable to validate the experiences as legitimate according to the research ethics and academic systems, thus can lead to mis-recognised or de-recognised due to manipulation or inability of establishment. But when it comes in the context of *Valmiki* because he himself had the experiences,

belongs to the community he is talking about thus will be subjected as authentic in a sense of validation or recognition without any sort of verification as the first person is talking about himself considered as historical wound and a non-verifiable data. Now the question is who will determine what is made up and what is not when one project is verifiable and another is not depending to the person who is narrating the history! There can be chances of mis- recognition in both the cases; first person narratives, as well as second person narratives.

Meanwhile what *Charles Taylor* has said about ‘the politics of recognition’ is delving into multiculturalism, and identity from a feminist approach, in the way of how others are seeing us and validating us and if not then it shows lack of self-respect and growth of self- hatred, where this wound grows into a wider range of vulnerability in one’s own self by this mis- recognition or de- recognition. There is this article by the scholar *Johana Deeksha*, called “*The Caste Chair*” in which the protagonist, *Jyotilaksmi* is a Dalit woman who has been elected as chairman of their local government, where *Jyotilakshmi* said that they were given wire chair and other panchayat presidents were given the suthu chair(velvet cushion coated wooden chairs), is a clear indicator of caste discrimination in panchayat body ,not only that but they had to request to vote them by falling at their feet, which is clearly the pattern of acceptance with awkwardness to the victim what leads towards the self-seeking of recognition thus identity crisis occurs. The whole idea of politicization concerned with the betterment of one’s own community and to achieve some sort of hierarchal power, people of their society belongs from higher class or caste than the elected person refuses to accept her as someone respected, they deliberately tried to bully her by not giving her the cushion chair that a respected position holder can get, somewhere by burning her documents and name plate and so on, here the means of adding this particular example is to probe into the manner of the politics of misrecognition even if a person is holding that particular place by their own ability and capability. Thus, this process of misrecognition or the intention of disrespect someone and not giving them their actual identity leads to the question of self -actualization. Explained by *Taylor*, recognition lies in two different political spheres; politics of universal dignity in which everyone tends to have equal respect and expression and another is the politics of difference where every individual according to their culture and social position (class, caste) will be given the recognition and respect. In the respect of Recognition and the value of being recognised what *Nancy Fraser* talked about in her work “*Justice Interruptus and Redistribution or Recognition? A Political Philosophical Exchange*” on ‘Recognition and Redistribution’ that this recognition in cultural sphere, explains statuses as in mis-recognition, disrespect, non- recognition, what directly locates identity politics, and difficulties faced in social identity and cultural spheres. And redistribution in economic sphere, what locates the injustice in the industrial spheres and economic spheres, both are important in order to achieve social justice and moral political achievement. This

very notion of recognition is very depended to others to get its validation as *Taylor* has explained in his idea of politics of difference, as in historical truth, when the second person is being responsible to get you, your identity and will validate your recognition.

In the contradiction, *Axel Honneth* replied that recognition and respect are two things that needs to be complimenting each other because respect comes with recognition and vice-versa, if a person is not getting the recognition according to his/her class or caste is being deprived from the respect, as the other person who is validating finds unfit to give the desired respect or recognition in certain field. In the context of historical truth who will validate the collected data and according to the validation that data will get its recognition and identity in academic history and as same to the transcriptions given by a first- person writer, thus it is still in the dilemma of being recognised by the academic and social history and being de-recognised.

Whatsoever, the analysis of Taylor's idea along with *Honneth* and *Fraser* in the case of "*The Caste Chair*" leading towards the pattern of misrecognition thus to the question of self- actualization (when a person or is getting self- doubt and accomplishes vulnerability) is true to its nature when *Jyotilaksmi* or *Omprakash* or the *Banam* player is having the identity crisis. The way we seek for our identity and recognition to others as in whenever we were somewhere between a high class we seek for their attention for our own self validation. There is this example drawn in the class of "Critical Caste Studies" at Centre for Studies Social Sciences, Calcutta, in 2025, that a mother is institutionalised for having her food at the end of other family members and she does perform this activity without questioning her place or identity that who she actually is, and this is the way of constructing our identity, as in if you are a mother then you are about to eat after everyone, if you are a Dalit you are about to follow the societal rules penned by the dominant class people, and thus gradually it will become your identity, your recognition. In the article above by *Deeksha*, that Dalit lady was afraid of going to her office and to talk about her rights because everyone from her community told her that this is wrong that you chose to be the chairman and that is why people are treating you this way, we cannot defend you or support you in this case, the Dalit community, they accepted their place that somewhere they belongs to the lower caste community that is why they don't have the right to be educated and to stand in a superior position. How is this history is going to make a change in your identity when the community itself unaware of the legitimacy of them, this can be a story that will validate that this is what happened to us and still we consider ourself as an isolated community, this will create a wound in the field of history but when it will be academically investigated what will come forward is that this community themselves refuses to raise voice, either they accepted or they were unaware of their rights, though it is a hypothetical assumption based on the memoirs and autobiographies of some Dalit scholars, like wise in *Valmiki's* autobiography, his

family member accepted their place given by the society and never questioned it, but it was *Omprakash Valmiki* who questioned it and articulated their history to the readers to protect, validate and to reestablish his identity as a scholar. This pattern of subjugation or dominance, could be seen as the socio-political schema to avoid the backlash of academic and economic (industrial) fallacy or say injustice of questioning these sterns. This oppressive nature of a superior community leads the depressed community to self-accusation or to mis-recognition and the fallacy in historical wounds, thus an academic lack.

Hence, *Dipesh Chakraborty's* paper delves into the process of this strategic identity, where some Adivasi/ Dalit activists made up stories without any real reference for their own research area, seeking the Indigenous identity hence generating a new global history. Now this instance can create a new global historical wound that previously explained while giving instances of validation that, who is validating what to its legitimacy, mis-leading could be a reason for a new identity derived from this false historical wound which is non-verifiable.

Meanwhile, in the respect of lack of understanding or the lack of analysis, *Tom Gunning* a film studies critic said that 'films make the past available and vivid in nature of its actualization'. *Tom* emphasized that the famous film based on the historic event of atomic bomb in Hiroshima comes partly in movies, and our general consciousness finds that short part as it is all that happened, and whatever the film is showcasing is the actual event but in real which is not the entire event but a short note of it, there comes another quasi wound, but the audiences are accepting it as a genuine whole event as historical truth, this historical objectivity is also leading towards the mis-recognised identity, the existed data we consider as the whole could be a part or could be biased by its intention or it also could be the whole, but the process of verification is the key to understand what is legitimate and what not. A movie provides us a whole event in three hours and a book in generic four hundred pages, but what exists behind these documentations are a whole decade or a whole life of the represented community, then it is very important to understand the preview and then to analyse, historical wound and historical truth is equally important in the context of verification to settle down with the actual history what will generate an actual identity, but what process signifies the verification of legitimacy matters at peak.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/23**INTROSPECTING RURAL VOICE OF INDIA AND EVERYDAY
FEMINISM IN SUDHA MURTY'S ANTHOLOGY OF STORIES: WISE
AND OTHERWISE****P. N. PARAMAKALYANI**Thiagarajar College, Madurai Kamaraj University
Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India**DR.V.SUBATHRA DEVI**Thiagarajar College, Madurai Kamaraj University
Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India**Abstract**

Indian literature in English frequently emphasizes the challenges and resilience of women as they confront patriarchal and economic constraints. Among modern writers, Sudha Murty is notable for her sincere, compassionate depictions of everyday experiences and ethical dilemmas. Her anthology *Wise and Otherwise* highlights the perspectives of marginalized individuals—particularly rural and subaltern women—whose insights stem not from formal education but from lived experiences, empathy, survival, and community. This article explores everyday feminism in specific stories from *Wise and Otherwise*: “A Bond Betrayed on Rakhi Day,” “A Life with Dignity,” and “Woman with a Mind.” This article argues that Murty's stories challenge urban and patriarchal assumptions by highlighting rural women as possessors of practical knowledge, moral understanding, and quiet emotional strength.

Keywords: Sudha Murty, Feminism, *Wise and Otherwise*, Patriarchy, Indian writing

Introduction

Writing in English from India has become an important means of storytelling of women's experiences, articulating social injustices, and foregrounding the marginalized. Many contemporary writers like Kamala Das, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, etc. have narrated women's emotional and social experiences and have investigated the realities of women in different situations. In this context, Murty is unique in her directness and her focus on ordinary individuals rather than on the extraordinary. Her years of social work and involvement with the Indian rural population endow a social realism and ethical balance to her narratives. Rather than focusing on urban feminism and social/ideological themes, Murty's short stories show women's realities of enduring patriarchal oppression, namely, a replenished fortitude, compassion, quiet courage, and pragmatic wisdom.

Murty's women typically come from rural or low-income backgrounds, where the struggle for daily existence is the reason that transforms into a subtle form of defiance. Wise and otherwise gathers brief, true-life episodes that uncover the nuances of Indian society. In these narratives, rural women are not merely victims; they possess traditional wisdom, profound emotional insight, and a robust moral compass. Their feminism is subtle yet impactful—demonstrated through everyday decisions and consistent bravery instead of overt political demonstrations.

This study examines a few short stories from Wise and Otherwise to better understand how Murty builds "everyday feminism" through rural female characters, and how these women use compassion, dignity, perseverance, and community-centered ethics to challenge hierarchical injustices. Sudha Murty often uses ordinary village women to celebrate a distinctive kind of feminine wisdom that arises from compassion, resilience, and a sense of shared responsibility. In her stories, she contrasts these rural women with urban characters who seek wealth, status, and comfort—traits that Murty sees as signs of moral decay. The women from the countryside stand as active examples: authentic, humble, emotionally connected, and deeply intertwined with their communities. Conversely, the educated urban protagonists often seem emotionally disconnected or ethically compromised, creating a contrast that questions simplistic notions of progress and modernization.

Murty's view on feminism centers around the idea of nurturing. While many feminist theories suggest that caretaking is a duty imposed by patriarchy, Murty offers a different perspective, considering it a moral strength. Despite facing their own challenges, these women support their families and communities through understated acts of assistance. Their emotional investments help sustain interpersonal relationships and promote values such as empathy and forgiveness. Far from being passive or weak, their kindness embodies moral courage—showing that women, through their nurturing abilities, often play a crucial role in their communities.

Murty depicts women as the quiet guardians of both society and family life. Her rural protagonists uphold social harmony through small, ongoing sacrifices made with determination, patience, and a focus on the future. Their capacity to withstand hardship without losing compassion subtly challenges oppressive powers. This resilience reflects a culturally established form of feminine agency centered on social duty and emotional strength.

Moral integrity and sacrifices in A Life with Dignity

"A Life with Dignity" by Sudha Murty depicts the hardships of marginalized people who struggle for self-worth in spite of social injustice and financial hardship. One of the story's most powerful scenes features a poor rural woman who perseveres in maintaining her dignity in the face of extreme adversity. She prioritizes independence and honesty in her profession over dependence or being exploited. She demonstrates practical wisdom by recognizing that integrity and

dignity are more valuable than temporary economic comfort. The woman's life becomes evidence of subaltern feminism based on dignity and tenacity. Despite social exclusion, she refuses to let poverty define who she is.

Murty portrays her as morally upright and emotionally resilient, able to face challenges without compromising her compassion or humanity. Patriarchal ideas that rural women in poverty lack agency and voice are challenged by the women's silent resolve. The narrative also highlights how modern society often uses wealth and social standing as benchmarks for success. While rich and well-educated people occasionally compromise integrity for personal benefit, the woman upholds moral integrity in the face of difficulties. Her knowledge comes from her own experiences and life's obstacles rather than from traditional education.

In Murty's writings, suffering is used to evoke femininity and moral courage. Righteousness and compromise in "A Life with Dignity" illustrate the hardships of poor people's lives as they battle for self-respect in the face of poverty and social oppression. One of the most emotional scenes in the short story features a poor peasant woman who is not willing to give in to indignity even while she is suffering greatly. Rather than seeking assistance or falling to exploitation, she decides to make a living through dignified methods. Her acts show pragmatic knowledge, as she understands that dignity and honor are far more important than brief material happiness. However, the woman's resolution demonstrates that patriarchy retains incorrect notions about the lack of agency and voice of impoverished and rural women. The author's story goes on to criticize how money and social status are used to measure success in today's society. The woman's choice to uphold her dignity instead of opting for easier yet unethical options is a significant thematic occurrence. This instance illustrates the way Murty's works link feminism to moral responsibility. The woman's determination not to allow cultural conditions to dictate her value renders her defiance understated yet impactful. Murty employs this story to highlight the importance of the perspectives of underrepresented women, which are often overlooked in mainstream culture.

Feminine voice and silence in A Bond Betrayed on Rakhi Day

This short story explores the emotional betrayal of fundamental human relationships and demonstrates how greed and selfishness can shatter conventional ethical boundaries. The most major incidence occurs during the Raksha Bandhan festival, which represents protection, devotion, and familial trust among brothers and sisters. A woman who emotionally engages in the sacred connection of Rakhi feels betrayed when her trust is abused for personal benefit. The emotional trauma she experiences demonstrates women's vulnerability inside patriarchal social structures. The woman's response to betrayal is a good example of fortitude and inner strength. She keeps her composure and dignity instead of being overtly disgusting or vindictive. Her silence is a display of emotional fortitude shaped by social reality rather than a sign of weakness. Murty portrays this phenomenon as

typical feminism, in which women combat humiliation by self-respect and moral fortitude rather than conflict. Because of her practical knowledge, the female character can identify the avarice and superficiality that underlie social rituals. Murty highlights how selfishness and modernity have compromised their fundamental nature. The portrayal of the female protagonist brings forth the subaltern female voice that sustains social relations while bearing emotional pain in silence. While she demonstrates mature moral principles and benevolence, the moral bankruptcy of people who pursue materialistic gains is apparent. The narrative has thematic value because it demonstrates how women maintain their human nature despite failed social connections. Betrayal has no effect on the female protagonist's identity; instead, it heightens her emotional sensitivity and moral justice. This story provides insight into how Murty's writings relate feminism and morality. Murty highlights this anecdote to show the relevance of external women's perspectives, which are often neglected in popular discourse.

Breaking Stereotypes in Women with a Mind

Sudha Murty's "Woman with a Mind" depicts a woman who rejects intellectual and emotional oppression in a male-dominated society. One of the most significant moments in the writing occurs when the lady expresses her thoughts in situations where women are expected to be silent and subservient. The woman's act of stating her viewpoint serves as a rebellion against the existing gender conventions. Murty views the feminist position as one of silent rebellion rather than loud disobedience. The woman's ability to maintain her sense of self-esteem despite the limits imposed on her is the source of her strength. The story also addresses the issue of identification.

This woman wanted to be recognized as a woman educated enough to grasp what is right and evil in life, rather than just as someone's wife and daughter. In a society where women are often defined solely by their domestic roles, such a need for identity is critical. She rejects patriarchy, which denies women's independence through actions and decisions. Even in advanced societies, women should follow traditional standards of behavior. Thus, the protagonist's internal conflict reflects the feminist and subaltern perspectives.

The protagonist's independent thinking represents ordinary feminism, which is founded on courage, awareness, and dignity. Also, the protagonist does not compromise her values in order to obtain popularity. It is a demonstration of ethical courage and emotional maturity. Murty defines empowerment as keeping one's originality and moral strength in the face of oppressive social structures, rather than gaining success.

Everyday feminism through Murty's views

A recurring theme in Murty's "everyday feminism" is the refusal to accept humiliation. These women may not protest in the streets, but they will not tolerate total depravity. They make moral choices in tough situations, valuing self-respect

over approval, honesty over convenience, and dignity over money. These decisions show ethical independence and personal sovereignty.

Murty highlights a type of wisdom that grows from personal experiences, interactions with others, and the everyday practice of caregiving. Knowledge in relationships, perseverance, sacrifice, and survival are often overlooked by formal education and city living. Murty argues that traditional measures of progress may be less important, if not equally important, than the insights of marginalized women.

She expands the definition of feminism to include self-respect, compassion, moral courage, resilience, and quiet bravery. Rather than just protesting against marginalization, her women turn adversity into strength and dignity. That moment reflects the wisdom and moral clarity of rural women. These women uphold cultural traditions and compassion, often facing tough challenges while caring for their families. In contrast, Murty examines the more complex relationships of urban modern life, where commerce and individualism frequently reshape identities. The quiet strength of the rural woman to maintain social harmony, even with limited power at home, stands as a powerful example of moral bravery.

Murty's incident demonstrates a different kind of feminism, which is founded on moral obligation, perseverance, and dignity as opposed to overt defiance. Another important aspect of the short story is the villagers' resistance to taking support without contributing to the return. The cultural idea of reciprocity is strongly supported by the women. Their way of thinking is the reflection of centuries-old common sense. Murty admits that these underprivileged groups possess a depth of ethics that is occasionally lacking in modern society. Tribal women become subaltern narrative voices because their actual experiences contradict the widely accepted understanding that education and urban sophistication alone constitute intelligence or advancement.

Conclusion

Sudha Murty's book *Wise and Otherwise* provides an important exploration of rural women's experiences and their subtle forms of resistance in Indian society. Murty emphasizes the voices of underprivileged and subaltern women whose strength arises from compassion, resiliency, ethical duty, and lived experience via straightforward but deep narratives. She portrays feminism as a discipline ingrained in daily life via activities of dignity, emotional fortitude, self-respect, caring, and moral courage rather than as overt revolt or ideological disagreement. selected tales—"A Bond Betrayed on Rakhi Day," "A Life with Dignity," and "Woman with a Mind"—collectively show how rural women manage identity problems, poverty, betrayal, social isolation, and patriarchal constraints while maintaining their humanity and moral principles. By demonstrating that wisdom may arise from experience, community life, and cultural memory rather than from formal education. Through privilege, their acts question current beliefs about empowerment, modernization, and knowledge.

By highlighting social responsibility, emotional intelligence, and practical knowledge, Murty's portrayal of common feminism expands feminist debate in the Indian setting. She brings attention to women whose contributions are sometimes overlooked in popular literary and feminist discourse by using subaltern narratives. In the end, *Wise and Otherwise* affirms the transformative power of common women and their everyday acts of courage by reimagining feminism as a persistent commitment to dignity, compassion, perseverance, and social harmony.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/24**BIRDS WITHOUT A NEST: READING DALIT GIRLHOOD, INTERNAL
DISPLACEMENT, AND UNHOMELY BELONGING IN GOGU
SHYAMALA'S "RAW WOUND"****AYUSHI SHARMA**Doctoral Scholar, School of Letters
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The following article critically analyses Gogu Shyamala's short story "Raw Wound" to challenge the hegemonic frameworks of South Asian Migration and Diaspora Studies, which privilege a stable homeland, transnational displacement, and a nostalgia-riddled myth of return. Through a close textual analysis of the narrative's four movements, the paper argues that caste functions as a spatial regime that reorganizes Dalit girlhood across the body, home, and belonging. The story demonstrates that Dalit habitation is, at its root, precarious, fragile, and conditional on one's compliance with the caste-sexual order. Once the Dalit body refuses to align itself with the caste system, it leads to displacement within the borders of the nation itself. The dispossession renders a return to the homeland impossible even in one's imagination, turning Dalits into "birds without a nest". The displacement also becomes an impetus for the awakening of Dalit consciousness.

Keywords: Caste; internal displacement; Dalit girlhood; differential belonging; Dalit consciousness.

The inquiry of South Asian Migration and Diaspora Studies is broad in its scope. It has critically engaged with the imperial dispersal of indentured labourers across plantations in the Caribbean, Mauritius, and Fiji. Additionally, it has addressed the Partition as both a rupture and a cultural memory in the imagination of people in the subcontinent and the South Asian diaspora. Finally, it has worked extensively on the migration of families, students and workers across Britain, North America, the Gulf, and Southeast Asia. Such a broad history of criticism has led to the consolidation of a recognisable singular figure of a migrant. In this formulation, the migrant disperses from an originating "center" to a "foreign" land by crossing national borders (Safran 83). In the host land, the migrant possesses a double consciousness, or, more precisely, begins to exist in between. On the one hand, they navigate racialisation, cultural translation, and belonging in the host land, which they are unable to do so perfectly. Since "they are not, and perhaps cannot be, fully accepted, by their host society" (Safran 83). Hence, "they feel partly alienated and insulated" in their host country (Safran 83). On the other hand, the migrant "regard(s) their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as

the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return – when conditions are appropriate” (Safran 83). Hence, such a figure creates three hegemonic narratives. Firstly, the homeland the migrant leaves is an idyllic place, which is romanticised through nostalgia. In this case, the displacement is treated as a disruption of one’s stable life at home. Secondly, the movement considered is always transnational. Thirdly, the experience of displacement is coped with, as Safran defines it, the “myth of return” to one’s homeland (83).

However, one must pause and examine the hegemonic framework that the discourse has foregrounded over the years. One must ask: what does such “contemporary invocations” “reject, replace, and marginalise”? (Clifford 302) It does not account for the people whose very existence in their homeland is precarious, conditional, and, by extension, revocable. Moreover, it does not consider internal displacements within the nation-state. Finally, it does not consider the communities whose return to the homeland is even impossible imaginatively.

It is within this critical gap that Gogu Shyamala’s short story “Raw Wound”, included in the short story collection *The Father may be an elephant mother a small basket but* and translated by R. Srivatsan, that demands our attention. The story places a young Madiga girl, Syamma, at its centre. It follows her girlhood, under the shadow of the jogini system, and the violence and displacement that follow when her father refuses to dedicate her to it. The following article will deeply and critically anatomise the four major movements in the story.

The first movement in the story is Syamma’s sensorial journey through the caste-marked fields to deliver her father his lunch. The paper will argue that this journey demonstrates that Dalit habitation is precarious, fragile and conditional at its root. The Dalit belongingness is never secure and is always socially and spatially revocable. The second movement in the story is Syamma’s pre-dawn escape to Tandur, arranged by her parents to delay her fate of becoming a jogini. Here, the article will expound that displacement through escape does not function as a rupture, but as a revelation. It underlines how the violent structures of caste reveal themselves, once a Dalit body defies its authority. Moreover, this particular section will re-examine Bhabha’s post-colonial concept of “unhoming” in the context of caste and internal displacement. Syamma’s third movement is her suspended, liminal existence in the Tandur hostel, which the paper will analyse, culminating in a unique longing for home. It will be read through the lens of Brah’s concept of “homing desire”. And finally, the fourth and the most prominent movement in the story is the excommunication of Syamma’s family from their home, fields and village. The dispossession, as the paper will argue, underlines the impossibility of return, even in one’s imagination. The article will also argue how the ultimate displacement works as an impetus for awakening Syamma’s Dalit consciousness.

I: The opening section of “Raw Wound” could, at a cursory glance, be postulated as a description of an ordinary rural childhood, which is idyllic, sensorial and unspoilt. Syamamma, through her narration, offers herself as an unknowing child who is deeply embedded in the uncomplicated pleasure of the natural world around her:

The breeze wafted lovely smells from different sides. From the field to the left, the mature tuvar branches, deep green and filled with flowers, delivered their fresh aroma. From the right, the growing jowar field with its lush leaves rustling in the wind, sent its new green scent. I went amid the jowar plants. The leaves, running sap, beckoned and I looked. It was different in each place: on some leaves, sweet sugar-like crystals, on others, glistening in the sun like diamonds. . . I began tasting – eating the crystals and licking the sap off the leaf. I went through the rows tasting different leaves. (Shyamala 136)

The overwhelming immediacy of her description, the rich sensoriality of it, might, on the first reading, render itself as a sufficient proof of her belongingness. As if walking on wet mud, smelling the flower, tasting the sap had somehow given her the legitimacy to assume that the world around her belonged to her. Her habitation, within such interpretation, seems to be in a perfect state of prelapsarian innocence, akin to the Edenic garden, against which the subsequent caste violence, displacement and dispossession will be measured. But I argue that Shyamala refuses such a framework. The story does not begin with Syamamma’s pastoral impression. The author begins the story with her journey to her father’s field, which lays bare the subtle ways her world is already organized by her identity as a Dalit girl.

Before Syamamma even embarks on her journey, her mother encodes her movement through the language that Uma Chakravarti defined as “Brahmanical patriarchy”. Before she steps out, Ananthamma marks her daughter with soot. She does it to protect her daughter against “the demons” she might encounter “on her way” (Shyamala 134). She also warns her to be “careful” and to avoid responding to any “old men” who “joke” with her (Shyamala 134). One must not dismiss this moment as a generic expression of parental anxiety about their child going out alone. It is a gynocentric transmission of the pedagogy of vigilance passed from a lower-caste mother to her lower-caste daughter. Uma Chakravarti, in her essay “Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State”, states that the caste system functions on “essential stratification” of women’s sexuality (580). Upper-caste women’s sexuality is rigorously safeguarded, especially from lower-caste men, to maintain the “purity” of women and the caste community they belong to (Chakravarti 579). Conversely, Chakravarti evokes the “Rig Vedic tradition” to state how lower-caste women (“dasis”) are perceived as available, for the upper-caste men, for extraction in the form of “labour” and “sexuality” (580). In fact, it is this very stratification that

legitimizes the jogini system. Misra and Rao, in their essay “Theogamy in Rural India: Socio-Cultural Dimensions of Jogini System in Andhra Pradesh”, state that “most of the girls” that are “dedicated to a local village deity”, and are made sexually available to upper-caste men in the state, are the ones from “Kurva (shepherds)”, “Madiga (SC)” and Chakali (washermen)” communities (10). Hence, in this context, the application of soot takes on new significance. It can essentially be seen as Ananthamma’s self-soothing attempt to extend protection to her Dalit girl child. Since Syamamma is tasked with moving through the fields, which constitute her home, but do not guarantee safety. Syamamma’s encounter with Uncle Anthaiah during her walk to the field highlights the imagery of such vulnerability. Uncle Anthaiah jokingly invites Syamamma to look at the sky, where “an eagle . . . is carrying away a chicken” (Shyamala 137). It is a violent depiction of predation: an eagle, with its larger body, is carrying a smaller, helpless chicken. Even though Uncle Anthaiah is being farcical, the young Madiga girl refuses to lift her gaze and “hurriedly continues on her way” (Shyamala 137). Syamamma, in this moment, displays embodied vigilance. She lacks full awareness of what her mother has warned her against, but she still experiences the fear of it phenomenologically, through “the medium” of her “body” (Merleau-Ponty 95). Additionally, it serves a narrative function. It names the ever-looming sword of the jogini system that swings over Syamamma’s head, ready to fall at any time. Hence, Syamamma lives an unstable life, in which she can at any time be seized and carried away from her home to satisfy the appetites of upper-caste predators. Sangavva, Syamamma’s grandmother, in the second section of the story, iterates the genealogical pervasiveness of the system:

They have been keeping an eye on us. It seems someone in the past laid a rule for our family, and we have to follow it like a rule of god. Curse the god! Does he not have children? A lineage? What sin have we committed? They have come like Yama himself to spoil our child’s life (Shyamala 138)

Here, Sangavva’s speech states that the caste system, and, by extension, the jogini system, did not arrive yesterday. Hence, there is no surprise or suddenness to the violence it metes out. Additionally, it is declared to be divinely ordained as the “rule of god,” making it even more perpetual and inescapable (Shyamala 138). In fact, landlord Anantha Reddy, who is also the sarpanch, foregrounds the theological justification for the jogini system. He states that it is the goddess Ooradamma who requires Syamamma to become the jogini. And it is indispensable to do so to save the village from any “blight(s)” (Shyamala 141). Hence, home for a Madiga girl in Andhra Pradesh always carries the threat, legitimised theologically, of being a purgatory before the sentence, that is, her becoming the jogini.

The opening section reaches its most symbolic moment when Syamamma joins her father in levelling the field’s wet soil. While she is sitting on the wooden plank,

which is dragged through the earth, she observes “without sadness, the weeds being pulled out with their roots” (Shyamala 138). She reflects, ordinarily/dryly, that “it is, after all, to plant crops that the weeds are to be removed” (Shyamala 138). The observation that is offered in the child’s first-person narrative is matter-of-fact; it is without any effect. But it expounds the very logic of the caste system, and how it defines the notion of home and belongingness. Weed, like the crop, grows in the same soil, draws from the same water and occupies the same field. But when they are expelled from the field, it is not done as an afterthought; it is considered illegitimate right from the beginning. Its presence on the field is provisional, and its removal is considered an indispensable process of purification for the main crop to sustain itself. Hence, the weed-crop imagery in the story reveals that the caste system does not cause any sudden rupture or expulsion from an already stable sense of belonging. It creates differential belonging within any given geography. Caste, hence, is not only a social hierarchy, but it is also a spatial regime that reorganizes the meaning of home and rootedness; it determines who belongs where, and under what conditions. Hence, the segregated Madiga settlement, the ever-looming jogini system, and the pollution associated with the Dalit body render their belonging revocable, precarious, and, at its very root, fragile.

If one returns to Syamamma’s sensorial experience of her father’s field, which opens the section, they will realize that whatever she experiences through her senses does not ultimately belong to her. Hence, the titular wound in the story is not indicative of sudden displacement; it is emblematic of revelation; it is the “throbbing” pain of the latent logic of caste geography and differential belongingness that comes to the forefront (Shyamala 158). And the revelation begins with Syamamma’s escape to the hostel in Tandur.

II: Ananthamma has to wake Syamamma in the dark before the break of dawn so that Balappa can take her to the hostel in Tandur. He does so to spare his daughter the “grief” and the “bondage” of the jogini system (Shyamala 139). The decision to dedicate Syamamma as a jogini came from the village heads as a reaction to Balappa’s decision to educate his daughter, despite her being a Dalit. Since his decision to educate his daughter obstructed the “obstinacy” of the caste system, which does not permit education and occupational mobility to Dalits (Shyamala 149). As Ambedkar states in “Philosophy of Hinduism”, the caste system does not “allow Hindus” to “take to occupations where they are wanted, if they do not belong to them by heredity” (68). He adds, “If a Hindu is seen to starve rather than take to new occupations not assigned to his caste, the reason is to be found in the caste system” (Ambedkar 68). Village revenue accountant Karnam Srirama Sharma Pantulu also summarizes this very restriction:

The government has no shame. ‘Education for all’, they say! If everybody is educated, who will do the work? Each person has an occupation, a

skill...where the barber, the dobhi, the cobbler and the labourer. . .each has his own function and place. Each has to do his duty (Shyamala 149) Hence, the parents prepone taking their daughter to the hostel by three months. After being woken abruptly in the night, Syamamma expresses her bewilderment: What was all this commotion about? I did not feel like asking them at that moment. 'I'll come to know by and by, I thought. But my mind didn't stop wondering. I kept listening to their words. The village seemed to be thinking about me. It was clear that the matter at hand was as prickly as a thorn bush! That was why my family was so concerned (Shyamala 140)

If one stays with the adjective "prickly" and the image of the "thorn bush", they can begin to infer the intensity Shyamala ascribes to her escape. She does not use the term "stab" to describe Syamamma's sudden departure. She does not render it as a singularly unexpected moment of rupture. Instead, the escape has pricked and established the beginning of what Bhabha, in his essay "The World and the Home," describes as "recognition". But here the "recognition" of "unhomely" is not sudden or "shocking"(141). It is "prickly" precisely because it emerges from an embodied knowledge that had always existed beneath their everyday life. Balappa's refusal to comply his daughter's body to the caste's sexual order does not suddenly create precarity. Rather, it reveals the fragility and revocability, as discussed in section I of the paper, which have always defined Dalit habitation. The escape hence becomes the beginning of an inevitable transformation of embodied awareness into one's social lived reality, which will soon culminate in the family's complete displacement. In this sense, "unhoming" in the story acquires a meaning distinct from Bhabha's conceptualization. It is not merely the unsettling collapse of the boundaries of "home" and the "world". Rather, it is a moment of realisation that home was never fully one's own in the first place (Bhabha 141).

The entire journey to Tandur poignantly registers Syamamma's "unhoming" within her own geography. She escapes to Tandur under the "feverish stillness" of the night, as the threat of caste-ordained sexual violence on Syamamma's body has transformed the "intimate recesses of her domestic site" (Bhabha 141). It has made her home unsafe to inhabit. The escape, which happens under the "three plough spike constellation", is the same constellation she previously sat to listen to her grandmother's stories. But now, the sky and the constellation seem strange to her.

But one must note that the escape to the hostel is in no measure of liberation or freedom. It is a movement from one revocable existence to another. In the hostel, institutional protection is partial, and her presence there has left the family behind entirely exposed. The weed has been pulled from the field. But even after being pulled, it still remained a weed. The escape has not turned it into a crop. Consequently, it cannot be harvested on any other ground.

III: Deepa Sreenivas, in her essay “Forging New Communities: Gendered Childhood through the Lens of Caste,” argued that “upper-caste and middle-class” feminist sensibilities view the “abstraction” of the girl child from her “regressive” family and community as the ultimate step toward emancipation (267-68). Within that logic, institutions like schools and hostels are “perceived” as a “haven” for the “girl child critical for equipping her to claim her place in the nation as a citizen” (Sreenivas 269). In other words, the hostel in Tandur, through a “liberal feminist gaze”, should have provided Syamamma with protection and true belonging (Sreenivas 269). But Shyamala rejects such a framing.

First and foremost, one must critically analyse the protection hostel provided to Syamamma. It was indispensable for Balappa to immediately remove his daughter from the village to delay her fate as a jogini. But the admission into the hostel did not automatically make her safe. In fact, Balappa even expresses the transient nature of the protection that the hostel warranted when he tells the warden, “Whatever happens to her life later, take her into the hostel now” (Shyamala 143). One must focus on the word “now”. It is profoundly telling. It reveals that the father himself did not think with certainty that the institution was the ultimate protection against the jogini system. He knows that the hostel only temporarily interrupts the caste fate bestowed on his daughter; it does not prevent it.

Shyamala also expresses the hostel's institutional limits through the figure of the warden. She assures Balappa that the jogini system is legally prohibited in India, under the Telangana Devadasi Prohibition of Dedication Act of 1988, and that she can help the family seek police intervention. But such assurances, as the story will eventually unfold, are fragile and untrue. Sriram Sharma clearly states that the village is a “self – contained republic” and that the caste hierarchy is inescapable (Shyamala 149). Within this context, sending Syamamma to the hostel may have protected her, for a short period, from becoming a jogini, but it does not ultimately stop her dedication. On the contrary, Syamamma’s presence in the hostel escalates violence back in the village, as it represents, to the upper-caste authority, an open defiance. Syamamma’s protection from the jogini system actually comes through another form of violence. It is only when landlord Anantha Reddy forces Balappa to relinquish his land and excommunicate the family from the village that Syamamma is prevented from becoming a jogini. Hence, the hostel is a suspended liminal space that offers neither true protection nor a sense of belonging.

Affectively, as well, the place does not provide any solace. For Syamamma, the hostel is a place of poignant absence, where she goes about her routine life, worried about her family members left exposed in the village. Each night, she pulls her sheet over herself, and remembers

...events at home with a shudder, and my stomach sank in anxiety. I wondered what had happened to my father, what the landlords had said to him, whether they had abused him or beaten him up, and how they might have made him suffer. I thought about how much my mother and

Sangavva must have cried and wept by myself. I had nightmares and would wake up suddenly, sitting bolt upright. I missed my family deeply and wanted to go back to see them (Shyamala 144)

The memory of home, when it appears in Syamamma's consciousness, is not a sentimental longing for the village she has left behind. She does not romanticize her homeland. She does not imagine an ideal return. She spends her nights obsessively catastrophising the violence her family could experience after her departure. The homeland is not characterized as a lost paradise but has now completely transformed into a site of caste horror. Consequently, the desolate young girl does not "desire" her "homeland"; she expresses what Avtar Brah calls "homing desire" (192). When Syamamma sleeps alone in the hostel, she returns to the memories of her home that are profoundly intimate.

At home, I used to snuggle against my mother's warm body. If I had to go to the bathroom, my mother would wake up. When we went to bed, my grandmother Sangavva and her mother, Lasumavva, would regale us with stories. When we slept in the yard, we would count the stars in the sky and tell each other stories about the constellation. . . (Shyamala 144)

Here, the imagination of home is not geographical. It is deeply sentient. For Syamamma, the safety of her mother's body and the warmth of her grandmother's stories constitute her "feeling at home" (Brah 197). And hence, Syamamma doesn't long for "centre", the "locus", from where (the) dispersion" occurred (Brah 181). Her desire is to return to feeling safe again, a possibility destroyed by the family's ultimate excommunication from their land and village.

IV: The material dispossession of Balappa reveals how the village functions as a "self-contained republic" that allows for Dalit habitation as long as they adhere to the caste order (Shyamala 149). It, in fact, also reserves the right to revoke the habitation altogether, leaving no possibility of return to it. Balappa's displacement first occurs in the landlord Anantha Reddy's house and then extends to his fields. To get to the landlord's house, he must cross the "Madiga quarter, then the mala colony and the Telaga bazaar. . . (to reach) the centre of the village" (Shyamala 149). This movement follows the caste geography of the village, wherein Balappa has to move away from the segregated margins to reach to the centre that houses the upper-caste authorities. The violence on Balappa's body and the displacement do not happen in isolation. It is committed and witnessed by the village elders. The village elders include the present sarpanch, "sub-inspector of police, the ex-sarpanch Chandra Reddy, the moneylender Badrappa Setu, the village revenue accountant Karnam Srirama Sharma Pantulu" (Shyamala 149). The presence of village elders showcases a critical gap. It highlights how caste is not a traditional system that survives outside of the state authorities. It, on the contrary, is enacted and reinforced through the very structures that are supposed to protect and deliver justice. The contradiction becomes even more glaring when the land transfer

happens before the police sub-inspector, the same person the warden asks Balappa to approach for help.

Balappa's coerced land transfer becomes even more significant when placed in the broader historical context of Dalits' land tenure in Andhra Pradesh post-Independence. The Andhra Pradesh Assigned Lands (Prohibition of Transfers) Act, 1977, was enacted to safeguard lands assigned to poor Dalit families like Balappa from being forcefully transferred or dispossessed. In fact, any sale or transfer of the assigned land would be considered "invalid and illegal" (Ramachandra & Venkatesarlu 28). But in the report titled *Rekindling Hope? Access, Retention and Development of Land: A Dalit Perspective*, it is revealed that such land reforms were "breach(ed)" by "dominant upper-caste tenants" like Anantha Reddy (vi). Shyamala's narrative materialises this very breach when Karnam Reddy, in the presence of a sub-inspector and a revenue accountant, forces Balappa and Sangavva to affix their thumbprints on a plain white sheet (*sada bainama*). The thumbprint then becomes a symbol of forced consent to the dispossession of Balappa's own family.

It is after forced land transfer that Sangavva and Ananthamma begin their lamentation:

From now on, the red Earth field will not be ours!
The black clay field beside the canal will not be ours!
The Madiga quarter will not be ours!
The home and yard we were born and brought up in will not be ours!
The house we had built with lime and mortar will not be ours!
We have become birds without a nest!

We have become orphans without a place to go! (Shyamala 157)

It is here that the metaphor of "birds without a nest" gains significance, poignantly reflecting the specific nature of Dalit dispossession. A nest, by nature, is fragile as opposed to a house made of "lime and mortar" (Shyamala 157). It is made twig by twig, by whatever is left by the world. And it stays together, not because of structural strength, but because nothing has broken it yet. This is exactly what Shyamala has been arguing through the four movements in the story. Syamamma's family never had a stable home. It was woven through threads allowed by the caste order, always vulnerable to unravelling. And once the compliance was denied, it completely destroyed their habitation. It removed any illusions of belongingness and rootedness. In the language of the metaphor, the nest has been destroyed; the twigs scattered with nothing to return to. And the branch remains, like it always did, as part of the tree.

It is here that Shyamala also deconstructs the myth of return. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie states that a diasporic and displaced writer compensates the irretrievable loss of homeland by producing "imaginary homelands, (multiple) Indias of the mind," transforming idyllic, nostalgic imagination into a generative site of writing. (10). But even this imagination

presupposes that the home at some point in time was one's own unconditionally. But Syamamma has no such point. Home was never a place of pure belonging; It was a wound all along. And the displacement has not dulled the memory of home. In fact, in Syamamma's retrospection, it has turned into a "throbbing" wound that is still "raw" (Shyamala 158). Over the years, the wound has refused to be closed; it has refused to be aestheticized. And it is precisely the refusal and the rawness of the wound that becomes impetus to what Limbale defines as "Dalit consciousness". Syamamma, as a narrative representative of Shyamala, states that it is this "very refusal to become a jogini" and her "father losing his land" that defined her entire life (Shyamala 158). It is this very moment that forms her "revolutionary mentality concerned with struggle" (Limbale 32). And she does this by writing her "throbbing memory" (Shyamala 158). In her writing, Shyamala does not produce an imaginary homeland; she testifies against precarious Dalit habitation, caste-ordered internal displacement, and the impossibility of any return.

V: This paper rigorously argues that Gogu Shyamala's "Raw Wound" compels us to rethink the conceptual vocabulary of South Asian Migration and Diaspora Studies. The hegemonic migrant figure, who migrates from a stable homeland to a foreign land by crossing national borders and sustains themselves through the myth of return, does not account for Dalit displacement. The article argues that Dalit belonging, even at home, is precarious and conditional on their compliance with the caste order. And any transgression leads to a displacement within the borders of India, with no possibility of return.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/25**NEITHER LOST NOR FOUND: CODE-MIXING AS HYBRID
HOMEMAKING AMONG KURUKH-SPEAKING ORAON MIGRANTS
IN WEST BENGAL****STUTI BHAGAT**

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Abstract

When Oraon communities migrated from Jharkhand to West Bengal (WB), they carried with them their linguistic heritage. Kurukh, the North Dravidian language is geographically remote but culturally vital. The WB Kurukh speakers are exposed to several Indo-Aryan languages. The presence of Bengali and Hindi as the dominant institutional languages and Sadri (Nagpuri) as a mediator creates a complex multilingual contact zone in which the maintenance of heritage language is both precarious and creative. This paper explores the code-mixing practices among Kurukh speakers of West Bengal. It argues that linguistic hybridity (i.e., the instances of code mixing) is not a sign of erosion but rather an expression of dwelling. It is a linguistic space that speakers actively construct and occupy amid the pressures of language shift and the necessity to retain cultural identity. The current paper is based on the data collected from a fieldwork conducted between 2018 and 2019. The linguistic evidence under scrutiny is patterns of lexical, pragmatic, and structural code-mixing across Kurukh, Sadri, Bengali, and Hindi. Deriving from Bhabha's understanding of the third space, the instance of code-mixing exercised by the Oraon community is discussed as a third space that indexes the displacement and construction of a functional linguistic space. The current paper will be an addition to the existing diaspora studies on language. It examines how, in the context of migration, language plays an important role in negotiating one's identity, memory and belonging.

Keywords: code-mixing, Kurukh, Oraon diaspora, language, linguistic memory, third space, West Bengal

Introduction: Language, Migration, and the Question of Home

Language is one of the casualties of migration. The role of languages when communities migrate across geo-linguistic boundaries is to posit it as a site of negotiation, a marker of origin, a tool of adaptation and an arena of identity-making. When the Oraon community, speakers of the Kurukh language, migrated from the Chotanagpur plateau of Jharkhand (JH) to West Bengal (WB), they precisely created a condition of cohabitation of multiple languages (Bhagat, "crisis"). WB has become a multilingual contact zone wherein Hindi and Bengali are dominant institutional languages, with Sadri the lingua franca. Linguistically, these languages intersect in complex and layered ways.

In South Asia, the discussion on the migration-language dyad focused on language loss, shift and endangerment. On a similar theme, Lakra and Rahman's approach to Kurukh's instances of code mixing /code switching among the Kurukh speakers in Ranchi, Jharkhand, linguistically explains the different patterns of Hindi and Sadri influence on Kurukh speech. They explained the structural mixing in Kurukh with Sadri and Hindi as the symptom of language vulnerability and placed the language within the UNESCO's endangerment framework. Given that Kurukh is an understudied language, such work accounts as valuable and empirically necessary. Whereas the current paper proposes a complementary lens, which is when a tribal community, likewise Kurukh, migrates, it will not focus on what is lost but on what is built. The theoretical frameworks of Homi Bhabha's concepts of 'third space', Alastair Pennycook and Emi Otsuji's notion of 'metrolinguism', Joshua Fishman's work on 'language maintenance', and Li Wei's concept of 'translanguaging', will contribute in the current paper's agenda which is the code-mixing practices of Kurukh speakers in West Bengal constitute a form of hybrid homemaking. It is a creative and agentive process that the displaced speakers implement to construct a linguistic dwelling.

The data for the current study are drawn from the fieldwork conducted among the Oraon communities of West Bengal, which is documented in the unpublished thesis "Language Contact and Language Change: A Case of Kurukh Language Spoken in West Bengal and Jharkhand" (Bhagat, "language contact"). The site of investigation was the tea garden areas of the Darjeeling district and the Alipurduar district. The methodology for the picture-description tasks, sentence-construction sessions and collecting their anecdotes of migration. The implemented methodologies generated rich instances of naturalistic code-mixed sentences exhibiting instances of non-Kurukh lexical items across multiple word classes.

The current paper consists of six sections. The theoretical framework implemented in the current study is presented in Section 2. This is followed by a brief account of the sociolinguistic and community background in Section 3. Section 4 presents the analysis of the data, particularly the lexical, structural and discourse marker dimensions of code mixing. Section 5 situates the linguistic findings in relation to the diaspora studies and linguistic homemaking. Section 6 summarises the new perspective towards the understanding of linguistic phenomenon: codemixing and the role of these linguistic hybridisations in the case of Kurukh speakers of West Bengal.

Theoretical frameworks: Third space, metrolinguistic, translanguaging, and language maintenance

To theoretically illuminate the complex linguistic surroundings of the Oraon speakers, the paper draws insights from post-colonial cultural theory and sociolinguistics. It establishes the foundation to reinterpret the deficient connotation associated with code-mixing in a language. The practice of

structurally complex amalgamation of language should be regarded as a strategic step and not as a symptom of a lexical retrieval issue or inadequate proficiency. Homi Bhabha's concept of "*third space of enunciation*" provides the basis to explicate how the Oraons navigate around socio-cultural aspect in the migrated land. The *third space* is a site of cultural negotiation and hybridity, which is an in-between zone in which fixed meanings are destabilised and new forms of cultural expression emerge. When the concept of third space is applied in the context of languages, it opens up the zone of code-mixing itself. This is the place where Kurukh and the surrounding languages meet, blur, and produce utterances that belong fully to neither system nor yet are expressive of both. The Oraon migrant speaker inhabits this space not as a victim of linguistic in-betweenness but as its active architect.

Similar to Bhabha's third space, the concept of "*translanguaging space*" (Li) offers a parallel understanding of the hybridisation of language. It is defined as a medium that facilitates the multilingual speakers to draw on their entire linguistic repertoire, which is across languages, registers and modality – a unified communicative resource. "*The translanguaging space has its own transformative power because it is forever evolving and combines and generates new ideas, values and practices*" (Li15). The Kurukh speaker's stance of code-mixing exhibits precisely what is implied by translanguaging space, i.e., deconstructing the predetermined norms associated with multiple languages, such as codes of formal settings or the code of the dominant group of a region. The Oraon community's usage of their mixed form of language reflects their ability to integrate different aspects of language present in their linguistic repertoire to display a cognitively well-articulated performance.

Furthermore, Otsuji and Pennycook's concept of metrolingualism presents insight into how everyday language use, as a common multilingual practice, in various grassroots socio-economic settings holds a significant meaning. "*Metrolingualism – multilingualism from below – focuses therefore on language practices rather than the local implementation and appropriation of language policies. To understand multilingualism from below, we need sociolinguistic ethnographies of language in use that include local understanding of language and do not impose pre-given understandings of the language and multilingualism*" (Pennycook and Otsuji 13). It is the fluid, creative, and locally meaningful use of language by people whose lives are organised around constant mobility and contact. It precisely describes the condition of the Oraon migrant. For Pennycook, survival may be guaranteed not by the maintenance of the same but rather "*from a local perspective, survival may be guaranteed by constant change, through the acquisition of newness, through difference*" (106). Thus, from the perspective of metrolingualism, the code-mixing practice of Kurukh among the Oraons of West Bengal is not a decline of the language, but it is a form of adaptive linguistic resourcefulness that helps the Kurukh speakers to meet their communicative goals.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, Joshua Fishman's reversing language shift establishes that the survival of language largely depends on intergenerational transmission. A heritage language survives not simply because the speaker uses it, but because it is passed from one generation to another. When this transmission weakens at any point in time due to dominant language pressure, as a socio-economically superior code, the heritage language retreats. This shift to superior code is not a conscious abandonment, but instead a structural logic of multilingual life. Bhagat precisely provides a glimpse of this dynamic alteration in the linguistic environment of the Oraon tribe. The study documents that Hindi is the dominant language across the various interactional domains, including family and religious activities. Moreover, Kurukh, as a medium of conversation, displayed disparity, wherein the younger generation preferred other languages over their native tongue, while it remains a dominant code for the older generation. Thus, the usage status of Kurukh is not a straightforward decline. The code-mixing strategy implemented by the speakers is a crucial point and cannot be dismissed as merely residual. A closer examination of these patterns will foreground the potential active and identity-laden community choice.

Overall, the above discussion on the various frameworks will suggest a reorientation of the existing analytical point of view, which is that the migrant speakers' mixing of language should not be perceived as language erosion but a linguistic dwelling.

Community Background: Oraons in West Bengal

The Oraon (or Kurukh) people are one of the largest Scheduled Tribe communities in India, with a historical homeland in the Chota Nagpur plateau of present-day Jharkhand (Hahn, Roy). During the colonial period, when the tribe migrated as tea plantation labourers, they concentrated in the tea-estate districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Alipurduar. Generations later, these communities have remained in West Bengal, now occupying a complex sociolinguistic position. These Kurukh speakers are living in a Bengali-dominant state, and are in contact with Hindi through national media and migration networks, and united with other tribal communities through Sadri as a shared lingua franca.

The Oraons in this region are highly multilingual. As documented in fieldwork (Bhagat, "language contact"), West Bengal Oraon speakers actively use Bengali, Hindi, Sadri, and Kurukh across different domains. Bengali is used in formal as well as informal institutional contexts, Sadri for inter-tribal solidarity, Hindi for media and wider national communication, and Kurukh within the community for intimacy, ritual, and cultural memory. The Oraon's multilingual condition is not a disruption of an otherwise monolingual community but represents the community's rich constitutive condition.

However, the generational dimension appears critical. The fieldwork conducted in West Bengal revealed a pattern of intergenerational disruption in Kurukh usage. The younger speakers below the age of 35 were largely unavailable for data

collection. This age group has been reported to have largely shifted to dominant languages such as Bengali, Hindi, and Sadri. The older generation, by contrast, demonstrated comparatively greater consistency in Kurukh usage across domains. Their speech showed significant evidence of contact-induced change through borrowing and code-mixing. Fishman's framework helps to conceptualise the shift, which is further outpaced by the community's cultural motivation for heritage language maintenance. Hence, the current paper will foreground how the language survives in the migrated land through code mixing in a contact zone. Although the failure of intergenerational transmission of Kurukh is evident, its creative and generative practice is persistent. In West Bengal, Bengali, Hindi and Sadri offer greater institutional access than Kurukh. This precisely exemplifies the structural volatility of the language. Kurukh's capacity to absorb Indo-Aryan elements allows a larger communicative goal – successful transmission of meaning and cultural knowledge. The current paper will foreground the conditions of language survival, focusing on what speakers do within the contact zone. Although the failure in intergenerational transmission is evident, the creative and generative practices persist. It is this gap that the present paper addresses.

To illuminate linguistically on the above established understanding, a series of Kurukh data will be analysed, providing a rich and theoretically significant code-mixing practice traced in the data. It is important to remember that the data presented in the next section does not represent a degraded or transitional form of Kurukh. It represents a fully functional and culturally embedded variety of Kurukh as it exists in the diaspora.

Data Analysis: Code-Mixing as Homemaking

The data presented in the following sections outlines the structural pattern of code mixing evident in the West Bengal Kurukh speakers' usage. Three types of code mixing are evident: lexical code mixing, structural code mixing and discourse markers and pragmatic mixing.

Lexical Code-Mixing: Building a Portable Vocabulary

The most pervasive form of code-mixing in the corpus is at the lexical level. The insertion of Hindi, Sadri, or Bengali words into Kurukh utterance frames is not random. The patterns of lexical insertion reveal a coherent underlying logic. It reflects both the communicative demands of multilingual life and the diasporic speaker's negotiation between cultural worlds.

Nouns constitute the most heavily borrowed category, a finding consistent with the cross-linguistic borrowing hierarchy proposed by Matras, according to which content words are the most easily transferable elements (Bhagat 98–99). In the West Bengal data, Hindi and Sadri nouns for abstract concepts appear consistently. These lexical items are those outside the traditional pastoral and foraging economy of the Oraon. Numerous concepts such as "respect" (izzat), "profit" (faida), "recognition" (manyata), and "acceptance" (swikrti) are borrowed

directly. Their phonological form of the source language is largely retained while they are integrated into Kurukh morphosyntactic structures (Bhagat103). Consider the following example from the corpus, in which a speaker reflects on the value of cultural work:

1	lek ^h ək gut ^h i	na m	rəʔo	ənu badə t	nū	em	rəʔom	er a	nən ake
	Writer. CLF	Na me	Stay.V.F ut.3SG	Tran slator	Postp.	We. Excl	Stay.V. Fut.1Pl. Excl	S e e	Do. V.
	aḍin	tʃiʔo m	hone se	adʒ	Viveka nand	bəʔa	ka	nin	Rab indr anat h
	His.Acc	Give. V.Fut. 1Pl.E xcl	filler	Tod ay		Say	Or	Your	
	bəʔa	arhi		hū	man səmman	rəʔo			
	say	They.Gen		Emp h	Respect	Stay.V.Fut.3 SG			

The above sentence, uttered by a speaker, exhibits how the speakers move fluidly between Kurukh grammatical structures and Hindi-origin content words. The words such as /lek^hək/ ‘writer used along with Sadri Pl marker /gut^hi/, /ənubadəṭ/, ‘translator’, /man səmman/, ‘respect’ are some of the crucial evidences of borrowed items that do not disrupt the Kurukh sentence. These Indo-Aryan words have integrated through Kurukh case markers, classifiers, and verbal inflections. This is not the speech of someone who has “lost” Kurukh; it is the speech of someone who has expanded Kurukh to contain the conceptual vocabulary of their social world.

A similarly telling example concerns the number system. The fieldwork documents that virtually all cardinal and ordinal numbers in the West Bengal variety are drawn from Hindi or Sadri, with the sole exception of the native Kurukh numeral for “one” (Bhagat 105–106). This is not merely a gap-filling strategy; it reflects a broader shift in the cultural contexts in which numbers are used — education, commerce, employment — all of which operate through dominant-language frameworks. The retention of the native word for “one” is symbolically significant; the smallest, most foundational unit of counting remains Kurukh.

Adjectives present a particularly revealing case. The fieldwork shows that Kurukh lacks lexicalised adjectives for abstract emotional and aesthetic concepts — love, sadness, happiness, beauty (Bhagat, 2021, p. 120). These are borrowed without exception from Hindi or Sadri. The sentence-

2.	nəmhæe	b ^h afā	bəhuṭ	sundər	b ^h afā	hike
	We.Gen.Incl	Language	Very	Beautiful	Language	Be.V.P res
	“Our language is a beautiful language.”					

(Bhagat)

The above sentence has Hindi as its source language and Kurukh as the recipient language or receiving language. The adjective of the source language / **sundər** / ‘beautiful’ and the adverb of the source language / **bəhuṭ** / ‘very’ are found in the grammatical frame of the recipient language. It is emblematic of this co-occurrence. These uses of Hindi lexical items do not alter the grammatical structure of the recipient language. These instances are known as “lexical importation” (Weinreich), where there is no disruption of the morphosyntactic integrity of the source language when linguistic items are transferred into the recipient language.

The speaker uses the language of the dominant languages of aesthetics to declare the worth of the aesthetics which is being displaced. This is no fault of the Kurukh. But it's a very naturalistic linguistic resourcefulness, the kind of practice that Pennycook identifies. He claims that the speakers under the contact situation are not doing poorly on language maintenance but are doing very complex communicative activities. In the above sentence, the speaker strives to convey something meaningful with his/her most expressive words. The speech has a quiet and strong statement to make that Kurukh lives, that it continues to be legitimate to claim as one's own. The irony and the poignancy are that this is being said in borrowed language. In this context, this borrowing attitude doesn't take away the sentiment. It strengthens their conviction in the value of Kurukh, if anything, because they are asserting its value with all the language means at their disposal. This is what Bhabha would identify as the third space, or a space of enunciation where meanings in culture are not merely received but are negotiated and digitally re-constructed. The syntax in (1) and (2) above is Kurukh, and the praise words are Hindi. This creates a mixed discursive field in which the speaker asserts his/her belonging in terms of what is possible only in the field. Building on Li Wei's translanguaging does not involve the blending of two discrete systems of language but instead involves the seamless use of an integrated linguistic repertoire to assist in the expression of identity. This code-mixed (in the strict sense) instance is an instance of hybridity as homemaking.

Structural Code-Mixing: Grammatical Integration as Dwelling

The data revealed instances of structural integration wherein the borrowed elements are not merely placed into Kurukh utterances but grammatically absorbed into the Kurukh system. Verbs offer the clearest evidence of this structural integration. Kurukh, as a fusional and partially agglutinative language, attaches a rich inflectional morphology to verb roots. The morphological structure of a finite verb is the verb form with tense, aspect, gender, number, and person marked on it. The fieldwork documented that borrowed Indo-Aryan verb roots are fully integrated into this system: they take all the Kurukh inflectional markers as if they were native roots (Bhagat, “language contact”). Thus, the Hindi verb root /pəɽna/, ‘to read’ becomes /pəɽ-ɖ.ən/, ‘I read’ in Kurukh. The verbal structure exhibits Hindi verb inflected by Kurukh morphemes for tense, gender, and agreement without alteration of the root. The same applies to /lik^hna/ ‘to write’, /tʃəl^hna/, ‘to go’ and others.

The following example illustrates this process:

3	rodʒ	pəɽri bari	nin	k ^h əbəkagadʒə n	pəɽʔadəe		
.	Everyda y	Mornin g time	You.Nom.2S g	Newspaper	Read.V.Pres.M .2Sg		
	You read the newspaper every morning (m)						

(Bhagat 113)

Here, the noun /k^həbəkagadʒ/ ‘newspaper’, verb /pəɽna/ ‘to read’ and adverb /rodʒ/ ‘everyday’ are embedded in a sentence whose tense and agreement morphology is entirely Kurukh. The sentence is neither pure Kurukh nor pure Hindi; it is a third-space utterance — fully functional, communicatively successful, and linguistically hybrid.

The conjunct verb constructions in Kurukh have a more complex structural integration. The document data exhibit a productive pattern in which a borrowed Indo-Aryan (IA) verb root (V1) is combined with a grammaticalized Kurukh light verb (V2). This verbal structure produced conjunct verbs such as /biswas kəɽna/ ‘believe + do’ and /pəsənd kəɽna/ ‘like + do. Here, the IA verb carries the semantic content, and the Kurukh verb carries grammatical function (Bhagat, 2021). The V1 (IA) + V2 (Kurukh) pattern is not an absolute borrowing from any one language. It is a new structural pattern, created in and through the contact situation in WB.

From a translanguaging perspective (Li), these patterns of structural creativity do not indicate incompetence but a sophisticated multilingual mastery. It is evidential that speakers’ proficiency level is strong enough to enable them to integrate borrowed verb roots into the Kurukh inflectional system and create new conjunct

verb patterns through cross-linguistic combination. These speakers are not "mixing" two discrete systems out of an inability to keep them apart. Code mixing presents an entire linguistic repertoire as a unified resource which produces utterances that are precisely calibrated to achieve the communicative demands of their social world.

Discourse Markers and Pragmatic Mixing: Code-Mixing as Social Navigation

The third dimension of code-mixing discussed in the current section involves discourse markers. These are pragmatic particles that manage the flow of conversation, signal speaker stance, and maintain interactional coherence. The data shows extensive use of Indo-Aryan discourse markers such as the Hindi word /matlab/, 'meaning', Sadri /toh/, 'so', and the Bengali word /mane/, 'meaning' woven throughout the Kurukh utterances (Bhagat 129–130).

Discourse markers are among the most borrowable elements in any language. Linguistically, they operate at the periphery of the propositional content of an utterance (Bhagat, "language contact"). These linguistic elements are not borrowed consciously, and they reflect the habitual and intimate multilingual practice. The pervasive presence of IA discourse markers in the Kurukh data signals a deep social embeddedness in a multilingual community. In sentence 4, the speaker who uses Bengali / mane ki / to manage a Kurukh narrative is performing their social identity as a West Bengal Oraon. It is non-discretely and without any hindrance, representing a person's complex linguistic repertoire whose daily life moves between languages as naturally as between rooms of a house. In the following excerpt the speaker reflects on their village of origin:

	emhæ	əsəl	pəddə t ^h u	məndʒ a	g ^h a g ^h ra	t ^h ana	pədd a	hike	t o	enj hæ
	Our.Ge n.Excl	Rea l	Villa ge. CLF	Happe n.V.Pr es	Gh argr a	Poli ce stati on	villa ge	Be.V .Pres	F il l e r	I.g en
	dʒənrə r	ma ne ki	mod ^h rər	kerər	ebs ər	kerə r				
	know	Fill er	Forge t.V	Go.V. Perf.3 PL.M	For get. V	Go.V.Perf.3 PL.M				
'Our real village came to be Ghaghra Police Station, Ghoratanga...meaning, the village is there, so we...had forgotten, forgot.'										

(Bhagat)

The speaker's use of /to / (Hindi/Sadri) and /mane ki/ (Bengali) as discourse connectors. They are interleaved with Kurukh verbal constructions and case-marked nouns, producing a narrative voice that is simultaneously anchored in Kurukh and shaped by the linguistic environment of West Bengal. The act of narrating migration, of remembering a "real village" /əsəl pəḍḍa/ now distant, is performed in the hybrid voice that migration itself has produced. Here, through language, the speaker is navigating through his transparent medium for memory, which is in itself a record of the journey.

When the above linguistic stance is viewed through the proposed theoretical instance, then it is evident that the pragmatic dimension of code-mixing connects directly to the concept of homemaking. The speaker uses the appropriate discourse marker for the appropriate social moment and also displays how they navigate through a community. The West Bengal Oraon speaker who fluently deploys Bengali filler in a Kurukh narrative is not confused about which language they are speaking. They are demonstrating a mastery of the social rules of their hybrid community. The mixed language is not a problem to be solved, but the Kurukh used in this form denotes the home they have built.

Discussion: Toward a Linguistics of Diasporic Homemaking

The data presented above invite a reconceptualization of code-mixing in diaspora contexts. Standard sociolinguistic frameworks, following Fishman (1991) and Weinreich (1953), have tended to read code-mixing as a symptom of language shift. It is presented as evidence that the heritage language is being eroded by dominant-language pressure. This reading is exemplified in Lakra and Rahman's study of Kurukh in Ranchi, which carefully documents the extent of Hindi and Sadri code-mixing across age groups and urban-rural settings. The referred work frames these patterns as indices of the language's endangered status. Their work is an important empirical contribution. Although the endangerment lens is necessary, it is insufficient on its own. It tells us what is happening to the heritage language but does not tell us what the speakers are doing with it.

The current paper attempts to answer the question, which is, what speakers are doing, the data suggest, is building a home. The Oraon migrant in West Bengal exists between two geographical and linguistic worlds: the Jharkhand homeland of Kurukh and the West Bengal social world of Bengali and Sadri. Neither world alone provides a sufficient linguistic dwelling. On one hand, Kurukh, in its 'pure' form, cannot name the bureaucratic, educational, and commercial realities of West Bengal life. It may lack the adjectives for beauty, the verbs for reading and writing, and the numbers beyond one. On the other hand, Bengali and Sadri, in their dominant-language forms, cannot carry the weight of Oraon cultural memory, ritual practice, and intracommunity intimacy. Instead, it is the hybrid third-space variety of West Bengal Kurukh that justifies both the linguistic roles.

This is what Bhabha means when he argues that the third space is not an empty space but a productive site of new cultural formation. The mixed Kurukh of West

Bengal is not Kurukh minus something; it is Kurukh plus something. A diaspora variety that has incorporated the linguistic tools needed for diasporic life. As Pennycook and Otsuji argue for urban multilingual communities more broadly, this kind of creative linguistic mixing is not a deviation from a norm. Such linguistic amalgamation is the norm for people whose lives are constituted by contact, mobility, and negotiation.

Subsequently, the concept of translanguaging (Li) is particularly important here because it shifts the unit of analysis from discrete languages to the speaker's full linguistic repertoire. In the translanguaging framework, multilingualism is perceived as a management of multiple competing systems and a unified communicative resource which is easily accessible to the speakers. Their rich linguistic repertoire helps them to navigate smoothly, mixing more than two languages as per the demands of the moment. The WB Kurukh speakers use Kurukh, Hindi, Sadri and Bengali, not as separate competing systems, but a single integrated repertoire that helps them in meaning making. The resulting utterances are not imperfect versions of any single language, rather a hybrid competence that only life in the contact zone can produce.

During the analysis, a crucial observation from the above discussed data concerns about the phenomenon of self-correction. In sentence 4, the speaker uses the hindi inflected verb / dʒənrər / 'to know', and then shifts in its Kurukh equivalent, i.e., / modʰrər kerər / and / ebsər kerər / 'to forget'. These instances of self-correction are not a sign of confusion but signify metalinguistic awareness. It is a conscious assertion of linguistic loyalty in the face of dominant-language pull. Such moments of correction are acts of homemaking in the most literal sense. The speaker is actively involved in maintaining their Kurukh identity even when they utter a heavily mixed utterance.

It is also significant that certain grammatical categories resist borrowing entirely. Furthermore, Bhagat recorded the usage of Kurukh pronouns and the adverb of negation with no divergence. These linguistic elements remained unmixed across the collected data. These are the most intimate, most grammatically integrated elements of the language. They perform as the most fundamental operations of reference and proposition. Such an instance of resistance to borrowing suggests that the Kurukh speaker maintains a core grammatical identity even while constructing a lexically and pragmatically hybrid variety.

Conclusion

The paper argues that code-mixing among the Kuruk-speaking Oraon migrants in West Bengal constitutes a form of hybridisation. The creative and agentive process of mixing languages allows the speakers to construct a linguistic dwelling corroborated in the space between their heritage language and the dominant language of the migrated region.

The proposed theoretical frameworks, i.e., Bhabha's third space, Pennycook's metrolingualism, Fishman's language maintenance and intergenerational

transmission and Li Wei's translanguaging space, support that the Kurukh's code mixing is beyond the mere act of gap filling or substitution. It is an active and agentive linguistically blended meaning-making process. A lexical, structural and pragmatic code-mixing is a culturally embedded usage of language that enables displaced speakers to maintain as well as reconstruct their belongings across the language and geographical region. Thus, the result of such a complex variety is not a degraded Kurukh, but rather a diaspora variety. It has its own coherence, competencies and has a relationship to the history of the migrated community and their survival.

These implications are applicable beyond the community under observation. As South Asian migration and diaspora studies increasingly venture into cultural survival and expressive agency, the current linguistic study is offering a unique and fine-grained understanding of language usage in everyday practices. The paper also proposes a new approach towards understanding code-mixing as a means for a community to retain their past in the migrated lands. When the Oraon speaker of WB says, 'our language is a beautiful language', i.e., "nəmɦæ bʰaʃa bəɦʊʃ sʊndər bʰaʃa hike", it is an instance of mixing Kurukh, Hindi, and Sadri, and it is not an error but a creation of a hybrid linguistic form.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/26**THE HEART OF A KINGDOM: REAFFIRMING FAITH AND
CULTURE AS REFLECTED IN *NUSH AND THE STOLEN EMERALD*****AATHIRA JYOTHIKUMAR**Research Scholar, Department of English, St. Joseph's College
University of Calicut, Kozhikode, Kerala, India**DR. MONCY MATHEW**Professor and Head, Department of English, Govt. Arts & Science College
University of Calicut, Kozhikode, Kerala, India**Abstract**

In today's India people struggle to converse in their own mother tongue, and perceives anything traditional mostly as being dated and at times considers Western validation as the greatest form of recognition. This paper examines these notions by looking into how hybridity and third space function in *Nush and the Stolen Emerald* (2024) by Jasbinder Bilan, and how they represent the methods by which irregular power dynamics operate. Anushka, the eleven-year-old princess stands against such power dynamics, as her oath to bring back Lakshmi's emerald stolen from her kingdom by the British acts as the foundation stone for the text, thereby representing the idea of resistance. Hybridity and third space are two key conceptual ideas that helps in forming a new cultural identity where the colonizer's cultural components are absorbed by the colonised, thereby creating and shaping a new space where the colonizer's supremacy is challenged or reduced. The novel showcases these two concepts to be taking shape within the text, whilst highlighting the need to resist the process of hybridity at certain critical junctures in order to preserve the cultural uniqueness of those who have been conquered. The theme of resistance permeates throughout the text, and this paper explores the varied methods by which Bilan puts forth the central message regarding why colonised cultures must fight against ceaseless colonial oppression, which may either be explicit or implicit.

Keywords: British Colonialism, Children's Literature, Culture, Resistance, Hybridity, Postcolonial.

Introduction

Okonkwo's tragic demise in *Things Fall Apart*, Saleem turning into dust in *Midnight's Children*, or Kath Walker's declaration of a lost culture in the poem "We Are Going", reflect instances whereby cultural hybridity becomes a tool to carry out colonial oppression, wherein one culture flourishes at the expense of another. These works put forth the latent message that the courage to protect one's culture and to preserve it in its entirety, is at times necessary. Indigenous beliefs and systems are forced to perish, owing to rapid currents of change created by

dominant ideologies. These ideologies are provided with different names, yet the underlying aim remains the same, which is to appropriate traditions and beliefs without ever giving due respect or credit. *Nush and the Stolen Emerald* (2024) by Jasbinder Bilan, represents both the amalgamation of cultures, and the need to resist it, when the colonised community's culture is downplayed or negated. Nush or Anushka, represents this form of resistance, as she aims to safeguard her kingdom's cultural artefacts and sense of identity.

Marwan M. Kraidy in his work *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalization* (2005) refers to hybridity as a "prima facie global condition" that is caused by innumerable factors such as wars, slavery, intermarriages, and invasions (Kraidy 46). Homi K. Bhabha is credited with popularising the term hybridity in his work titled *The Location of Culture* (1994):

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. (159)

Bhabha goes on to say that when hybridity occurs, it helps in the creation of a 'Third Space'. In the third space, the colonizer's supremacy is challenged through the process of cultural exchange which could happen voluntarily or involuntarily, and by carrying out the act of imitation or 'mimicry', the colonizer's power is both contested and reduced (122-123).

Jasbinder Bilan has written numerous works of children's literature with the aim of educating a global audience regarding the intricacies present within Indian culture. Recipient of the Costa Children's Book Award, her works reflect the synthesis of Eastern and Western cultures through which her protagonists learn to navigate the world that keeps on transforming. In *Nush and the Stolen Emerald*, Bilan showcases the bravery of a young princess named Anushka, referred to as Nush throughout the book, as she travels to England in order to bring back Lakshmi's emerald that belonged to her kingdom. The work is set during the nineteenth century, and the author has taken numerous creative liberties when it comes to representing real characters and certain scenarios. Anushka, the eleven-year-old princess from Jaisalmer, takes her twin brother, Arian's place, as she dresses up as a boy and travels to England with her father, the Maharaja of Jaisalmer, whose aim is to talk with Queen Victoria about the atrocities committed against the kingdom by the East India Company.

Nush of course, has a different plan in mind, as she has vowed to return the emerald back to its sacred place, the lotus chair kept in the palace of Jaisalmer, from where it was stolen by the East India Company and then gifted to the Queen

of England. Anushka later discovers that the emerald kept in Queen Victoria's palace is a fake, and that the real one was taken away by Captain West, the Queen's most trusted advisor, and Bessy Walker, who used the alias Miss Nicolson, and acted as a governess for the royal children, including Anushka, as her father was kidnapped and sent back to India by Captain West when he raised suspicions about the authenticity of the emerald, which thus forced Anushka to stay all alone in England for a long while. Anushka finally restores the emerald to its original place, and helps the English forces capture Captain West and Bessy Walker, leading to a happy conclusion for a tale filled with both mystery and intrigue.

In the text, an instance is presented where Anushka learns to speak English in order to communicate with the British royal family. She learns the language quickly and is complimented for her usage of it, as is represented through her father's words, "Her majesty is most impressed with you, my dear. With your English, and the way you are getting on with the royal children. Everything is going in the right direction" (Bilan 111). This particular instance acts as a testament to the idea of hybridity as through her usage of the English language, Anushka is able to become friends with the Queen's children, and this acts as the keystone for cultural transactions to transpire.

Christmas is celebrated in the palace, and the celebrations remind Anushka of Diwali, which in turn makes her feel homesick. She tries to dispel these thoughts by adopting the festival and perceiving it in her own way, as is elucidated through Anushka's words, "The golden glow of the candles makes everything glimmer with magic and I send a Christmas wish across the seas to Arian, my family, and Jaisalmer" (90). Queen Victoria's children are fascinated to hear about Diwali, and Princess Vicky, the eldest of the children, views both festivals as occasions meant to be celebrated and cherished, as she is confident that with the arrival of Christmas, Anushka will start feeling more cheerful and happy as all children do (89). Both festivals are perceived as the same, with their cultural specificities and nuances forgotten, in an attempt to showcase and foreground commonalities between two distinct traditions, showcasing a new space of identification, where different cultural identities are formed.

A sense of commonality is also created when Anushka views her first pantomime, and she remarks that as she has seen numerous classical dance performances in India and has heard tales from Indian mythology, she views the pantomime as being a presentation filled with similar elements of storytelling and artistry (92). These instances where two different systems of tradition coalesce, helps in forming a new sense of identity. But ambivalence is also present in such situations, where the colonised culture is made to feel more divided than ever. Ambivalence is a term that is used "to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. It refers to a simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person or action" (Ihidero and Liman 1).

The feeling of ambivalence and a sense of innate tug of war happening within Anushka's psyche is also represented, as she is forced to imbibe certain Western ideas, and this happens both knowingly and unknowingly. Bilan throughout the work, does represent numerous instances where both the colonizer and colonised cultures share similarities, but the central element that makes Anushka's bravery stand out, is her resistance to cultural exchange where the power dynamics are never the same, or is not in the colonised culture's favour.

The idea of resistance and to not be enslaved by the trappings of Western civilization, is an undercurrent that permeates throughout the book. Anushka's determination to bring the emerald back, knowing that it would offend the Queen and the entire English empire, is the first mark of resistance, as she firmly believes that the emerald belongs to her kingdom. Even her own family, though aware that the emerald belongs rightfully to Jaisalmer, does not take concrete actions to bring the gem back, and Anushka prays to goddess Lakshmi to bless her quest, as she does not want to adopt a passive approach like her family:

Whispering a final prayer, I call to her to bless my voyage, even though I know I'm being disobedient and Papa will be angry at first. I press my palms together and pray for all of us – for Arian, to give him courage, for Papa, to give him fire and charm, but most of all for me, to help me be braver and more valiant than ever, and speed my return home. (Bilan 35)

Anushka acts on the contrary to accepted norms, and after persuading everyone that the emerald has been destroyed, she brings the real gem stone back to her kingdom, as the emerald symbolises the rich cultural history of her kingdom. Her adoption of the English language is also met with innate resistance by her own conscience, as she keeps on using Hindi words throughout the text.

When she meets up with Arian in England, who was kidnapped by Captain West, she uses her own language once again and when using it, a sense of freedom is what Anushka feels. The importance of language and its role in forming a person's identity, is a central concern that has been taken up in the work titled *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986) by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, wherein he puts forth the relevance of language through the words, "In my view language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation" (65). Anushka's constant usage of words like '*Chalo*' and other such terms, indicates her love for her mother tongue that refuses to die down. She even states that the process of using English words does not feel natural, as she feels strange when using the word 'Crow' instead of '*Kaa*', as it feels alien to her (Bilan 143), representative of the fact that language holds the power to shape one's identity.

A difference regarding both nations is also implied by Bilan, wherein the moment Anushka arrives in England, she is taken aback by the atmosphere rife with polluted air, "The air is still and biting, sharp as a tiger claw, the area around the

docks soot-blackened, with the acrid smell of smoke and coal everywhere” (55). In Jaisalmer, the air is both fresh and in tune with the natural world, and such a portrayal implies regarding how the Western world was going through a phase of industrialisation, and this in turn acts as a foreshadowing of the issues related to climate change that the present-day world is forced to endure. Here, the questions relating to hybridity and colonisation does arise, as most colonised countries were forced to adopt this model, whereby the natural landscapes of the nation had to be destroyed in order to create money for the Empire. This form of development, something that Anushka views as new, as such a rapid rate of industrialisation is yet to reach Anushka’s kingdom, is critiqued, as it destroyed the sense of harmony that was prevalent between mankind and nature.

The animals are also treated with cruelty, as it is remarked that forests that once teemed with wildlife have been destroyed by the British (Bilan 12). The process of gifting animals to foreign kingdoms also represents a sense of hybridity, as Anushka feels sad to see birds trapped in ornate cages being taken to England along with monkeys and deer, who are also forced to endure the same fate. Anushka is well aware that these creatures will never enjoy the fresh air and beauty of their homeland, and she resonates with these animals, as she feels her kingdom and her treasures being taken away by foreign powers through the usage of brute force. These instances are used by the author in order to represent the way in which colonialism impacts different aspects prevalent within a nation, ranging from economic factors to the environmental characteristics that is part of a country and its ethos. Anushka views the pain of these creatures and of her people as being extremely relevant, as it has taught her the way in which power can be misused in order to target innocent entities, and she views her own country as a victim, whose generosity was taken advantage of by the British forces as is represented through the theft of the emerald, which is more than a jewel for Anushka and her people, as it is a symbol of their longstanding cultural values.

The Queen also tries to introduce Anushka to Christianity as is illustrated through the incident, whereby the Queen and her family along with Anushka were travelling to St. Paul's Cathedral, and Anushka remarks, “I know it's a special trip because Queen Victoria is very keen to lure me to her country's beliefs. She has gifted me my very own Bible and would like me to become a Christian like herself, her family and most other people in Britain” (Bilan 176-177). Anushka decides to see the church, but resists the notion of changing her religion. Though a child, Anushka refuses to jeopardize her beliefs and notions of religion, and does not allow it to be negated. Even after arriving in England, she remains rooted in her traditional beliefs, as is showcased through the instance, wherein she uses prayer beads from the *rudraksha* tree. She has even brought a statue of the goddess Lakshmi to pray, and does not allow any foreign influence to taint her faith in her own country's ideas and virtues.

Her refusal to wear British outfits, and instead opting for Indian clothing most of the time is another aspect of resistance, as she refuses to conform to the British idea of style, and so, finds comfort and beauty in wearing Indian outfits. This instance also showcases the fact that choice of clothing and attire is emblematic of cultural heritage and traditions, and Anushka refuses to forget either one. She wears a sari when visiting famous British monuments and feels comfortable doing so (Bilan 176), whereby her innate sense of pride in her way of life is represented. Finally, Anushka's longing for her homeland is a yearning that resonates throughout the text. In an instance, where Nush learns ice skating when in England, she states that though she finds happiness when doing such an activity, she still misses the joy she would feel when she was in her own kingdom. When in Southampton with the Queen's family, Anushka is once again reminded of home, and she recalls the Jaipur bazaars where she used to have kulfi with her Mama, and thinks of the desert where she and Arian used to race together (138). Everyday Nush is reminded of her homeland, and her determination to make it back home no matter what, manifests throughout this work.

Criticisms regarding the concept of hybridity has been very much prevalent within the realm of postcolonial studies. Aijaz Ahmad was vocal about his disapproval of the concept and remarks that people are led to believe that new identities can be formed “out of any clay that one could lay one’s hands on”, and when doing so, erases the historical origins of varied cultures, making identities seem like elements one can latch on to as a result of an increased rate in globalisation (Ahmad 20). The idea of hybridity does have its benefits, but the concept of cultural appropriation and the mechanisms of power cannot be ignored in the process, as the colonised culture is forced to intake the colonizer’s values and ideas, and it is this aspect of hybridity that Anushka resists.

Parallels can be drawn with real incidents when examining the novel. The theft of the emerald by the East India Company, echoes the theft of the Kohi-i-Noor and other Indian artefacts still kept within varied British museums. The inherent message is to get these cultural artefacts back, so that it can also return to its homeland just like Anushka. Bilan has also stated that Anushka's character was created as a result of being inspired by a real person named Gowramma. Gowramma was the daughter of the Maharaja of Coorg, and she along with her father visited England in the year 1852, and stayed there without ever coming back to India:

We don't know what Queen Victoria and the Maharaja of Coorg discussed on his visit but history tells us that although he stayed in England and never returned to India, he left Gowramma under Queen Victoria's guardianship. She was just eleven years old. She was baptized at Buckingham Palace and became the Queen's god-daughter. (Bilan, “A Note from the Author”)

Gowramma died at the age of twenty-two, and it is clear that she led a hard life, as “it must have been very hard for her living such a long way from home and being kept apart from her family” (Bilan, “A Note from The Author”). The Queen also planned to marry off the young princess at first to Maharaja Duleep Singh of Punjab, with the aim of spreading the influence of Christianity in India, as Duleep Singh had also converted to Christianity, and the Queen saw this as an opportune prospect as it would popularise Christianity within Indian royal families which in turn would spread amongst the general populace in India (Zaman, “Of a lost game!”).

These ideas are reflected in the text in a different form, with Anushka choosing to not bow down to religious pressure. The author comments that her greatest inspiration for writing this story was a question that she had asked herself, “What if Gowramma hadn’t accepted her fate of staying at the palace and something entirely different had happened?” (Bilan, “A Note from The Author”). The answer to this question resulted in the inception of this story and the creation of Anushka, as she embodies the spirit of resistance.

Bilan’s usage of the medium of children’s literature is also noteworthy, as she makes use of this medium in order to teach a younger audience about the workings of British colonialism, and how the British Empire treated the masses present within colonies. Scenarios are presented of British soldiers marching through Indian villages and the villagers plead with the soldiers for mercy (38). Anushka’s father vehemently condemns the barbaric conduct of the East India Company as they choose to extort money from the Indian villagers in the name of taxes, whilst knowing very well that the villagers are struggling through a state of dire desperation and poverty (38). Anushka’s father also remarks that they are fighting for the preservation and protection of their land, as this right has been stolen from them by the British colonisers, whereby their people are made to suffer in order to make sure that the British Empire flourishes. Such instances are showcased throughout the work, in order to create awareness about the true nature of colonial rule.

Bilan also sees hope within the children of the future, as the Queen’s children, especially the eldest, Princess Vicky, is represented as a kind person who sympathises with what Anushka and her kingdom are going through. When Vicky’s brother Bertie speaks in support of colonialism, stating that “Wars are the way of the world” (Bilan 204), Vicky advises him to not be “heartless”, and states that it is their duty to help Anushka in her quest for the emerald, as what had occurred was a grave injustice against Anushka’s kingdom. Anushka also debates with Bertie, in order to make him see the perspective of the colonised communities as is reflected through the words, “How would you like it if my papa came with his army and wanted to take over London!” (204). Hearing this, Bertie understands the flaws in his perspective and remarks that his perception is wrong, as he had never thought about the incident from such a perspective (204). Anushka helps the

Queen's children to tap into the ideas relating to sympathy and empathy, whereby they are made aware of the flaws of their kingdom. As a result, Bilan never forgets the power of hope and change, as each new generation has the strength to rectify mistakes made by one's ancestors, as is exemplified through both Anushka and the Queen's children, which makes Bilan's choice of using children's literature as a means to convey such messages, all the more significant and powerful.

Thus, *Nush and the Stolen Emerald* was able to depict the different ways through which cultures amalgamate in order to create a new space and identity. But the truth remains that when this process occurs, power dynamics shift and thereby removes the concept of a level playing field, favouring one culture over the other, usually the colonizers over the colonised, a fact that Bilan represents through her work. Anushka decides to resist such a form of hybridisation, wherein her culture is arrogated and so, chooses to preserve the sanctity of her own country's beliefs and traditions. The emerald is not just a gem stone for Anushka, it is a symbol of a living breathing civilization that though conquered and looted for innumerable years, yet refuses to acquiesce defeat. It is emblematic of her ancestors and so, is emblematic of her, and by showcasing bravery and tremendous willpower, Anushka brings the emerald back, an act that is representative in the modern-day world of bringing the stolen artefacts back to India, as it is only by doing this, that India can feel a semblance of justice that has been long overdue. Ultimately, Anushka represents the spirit of nationalism and resilience, two key qualities that are symbolic of India's strength.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/27**TRANSNATIONAL MASCULINITIES, ALIENATION, AND
DIASPORIC IDENTITY IN SABIN IQBAL'S *SHAMAL DAYS*****KRISHNA PRADEEP**Research Scholar, Department of English, St. Thomas College, Kozhencherry
M G University, Kerala, India**PROF. (DR) TOM THOMAS**Professor, Department of English, St. Thomas College, Kozhencherry
M G University, Kerala, India**Abstract**

Sabin Iqbal's *Shamal Days* (2021) is a novel that explores the life of a Keralite, who is an expatriate living in a small West Asian Gulf country during the politically turbulent 1990s. The novel which revolves around the middle-aged bachelor Abbas, heading the editorial at a newspaper, mostly gives a narrative of personal alienation, professional servility, fractured relationships, and the broader socio-political unrest of the region, revealing the precariousness of the Gulf "dream" for skilled South Asian migrants. The article tries to examine the construction, negotiation, and crisis of transnational masculinities in Sabin Iqbal's *Shamal Days*. It makes use of the theoretical frameworks of R W Connell's "masculinity" and "transnational masculinity" and Caroline Osella's foundational work on migration, money, and masculinity in Kerala. This study examines how the novel articulates the tensions embedded within migrant masculine subjectivity. It highlights the gap between the ideal of being a "provider", maintained through sending money home and gaining social status and the harsh realities in the host country, such as insecurity, emotional loneliness, and a sense of worthlessness. Through close reading, the study shows how migration disrupts traditional paths of masculinity, leading to mixed and often conflicting identities shaped by ambition, frustration, and self-reflection, especially after returning home. By foregrounding literary representations of male migrant subjectivities, this paper addresses a significant gap in both Gulf migration literature and masculinity studies, which have largely focused on sociological data or women's experiences. It argues that *Shamal Days* illuminates the affective and psychological costs of circular migration, contributing fresh insights into diasporic identity formation and the gendered dimensions of belonging in contemporary South Asian fiction.

Keywords: Transnational masculinities, diasporic identity, Gulf migration, Kerala diaspora, alienation, South Asian literature

Shamal Days (2021) is a whimsical, ironic take on the aspirations and resentments of expatriate life in a tiny desert country, and on the political unrest in the region. Sabin Iqbal explores the life of a middle-aged bachelor heading the editorial at a

newspaper in an imagined country in the Arabian Gulf. The protagonist Abbas is surrounded by the loneliness and the dreariness of the dry and dusty shamal winds. The novel is set in the 1990s, with the escalating violence in West Asia serving as a backdrop. It tells the story of Abbas and of the small newsroom that brings together people from different backgrounds and with individual stories but shared editorial rooms and stories, to a country built and run by the expatriate workforce. The study of transnational masculinities in the context of Gulf migration has emerged as an important interdisciplinary field connecting gender theory, migration studies, sociology, and literary criticism. Drawing upon R.W. Connell's concept of "Hegemonic" and "Transnational masculinities", scholars have increasingly examined how migration reshapes masculine identities through changing relations of labour, class, mobility, and emotional life. In the Kerala-Gulf migration context, masculinity is not merely a cultural identity but also an economic and social performance deeply tied to migration, and familial responsibility. Transnational masculinities refer to the ways masculine identities are shaped, negotiated, and transformed across national borders through labour migration, remittance economies, and diasporic experiences. In *Men Around the World: Global and Transnational Masculinities* (2017), Jeff Hearn argues transnational masculinity as a way of understanding how men's gendered identities, power, and hierarchies are produced and reshaped across national borders through global processes such as migration, militarism, finance, media, and activism. Filippo and Caroline Osella argue that Gulf migration reshaped masculinity in Kerala through new forms of consumption, economic mobility, and social status (118–24). The Gulf migrant emerged as a symbol of social mobility and masculine achievement, particularly through visible signs of wealth such as modern homes, gold, and consumer goods. However, this idealized masculinity often conceals experiences of alienation, insecurity, and emotional isolation within the host country. As the Osellas suggest, migration produces "new forms of masculinity" shaped simultaneously by aspiration and instability.

Migration from Kerala to the Gulf countries has been one of the most important social and economic changes in postcolonial South Asia. In *The Gulf Migrant Archives in Kerala* (2024), Karinkurayil sheds light on the long-overlooked reality of the cultural dimension of labour migration from Kerala. After the oil boom of the 1970s, many Keralite men migrated to the Gulf in search of employment and better economic opportunities. This large-scale migration greatly influenced Kerala's economy, family life, and social culture. Money sent back home by migrant workers became a major source of economic growth in the state, and the "Gulf migrant" gradually became a symbol of success, social mobility, and masculine achievement. Filippo and Caroline Osella point out that migration in Kerala became strongly connected with 'money, masculinity and changing relations of consumption'. In Kerala society, masculinity increasingly came to be associated with a man's ability to migrate abroad, accumulate wealth,

support his family through remittances, and demonstrate his status as a successful provider through visible economic achievement (Osella and Osella 118–20). As a result, the Gulf migrant came to represent the ideal male provider whose social status depended largely on financial success and public respect.

However, the celebrated image of the Gulf migrant often conceals the emotional and psychological consequences of migration. While migrant men may gain prestige within the homeland, they frequently experience labour exploitation, social invisibility, loneliness, and emotional alienation within the host country. As Osella and Osella note, “Displays of substantial cash wealth emerge as important displays of masculine power and agency” (Osella and Osella 119), suggesting that masculine identity under migration remains unstable and continuously negotiated. Gulf migration therefore generates contradictory masculine experiences in which economic aspiration coexists with insecurity, displacement, and emotional vulnerability.

These changing masculine identities can be understood through the framework of transnational masculinity developed by R.W. Connell (1998), who argues that globalization and transnational economic structures reshape masculinities across borders, producing forms of masculinity linked to labour mobility, global capitalism, and migration. Masculinity, according to Connell, is “simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture” (Connell, 2005, p.71). In the context of Gulf migration, masculinity becomes closely tied to remittances, provider responsibility, social prestige, and migration success. Yet these ideals are destabilized by precarious labour conditions, prolonged bachelorhood, and emotional isolation in the Gulf. Consequently, migrant masculinity emerges as fragmented, hybrid, and emotionally precarious. Sahana Hedge (2021) mentions *Shamal Days* by Sabin Iqbal offers a compelling portrayal of migrant male subjectivity in the Gulf. Rather than romanticizing migration as a narrative of success, the novel foregrounds the emotional exhaustion, existential uncertainty, and fractured identities of Malayali migrant men. Through irony, satire, and introspective narration, the text reveals the contradictions between the social expectation of masculine success and the lived realities of alienation, disposability, and cultural dislocation.

The Migrant as Provider: Masculinity and Economic Obligation

In the Kerala- Gulf migration context, masculinity is closely connected to the role of the economic provider. Since the Gulf migration boom of the 1970s, the migrant man held the central position within Kerala’s society as the figure responsible for ensuring the financial stability and upward mobility of the family. The success of migration is often measured not through personal fulfillment but through the migrant’s ability to earn, remit money home, and maintain the economic well-being of dependents. As Filippo and Caroline Osella argue, Gulf migration in Kerala transformed masculine identity through money, masculinity and changing

relations of consumption. Masculinity therefore becomes deeply tied to earning power, economic responsibility, and public displays of financial success. Within this framework, the Gulf migrant is expected to embody the ideal masculine role of the successful provider. Remittances become not merely economic transactions but symbolic markers of masculine achievement and social value. A man's worth increasingly depends upon his ability to support parents, educate siblings, arrange marriages, construct houses, and maintain family prestige. Osella and Osella note that "migrating to the Gulf ... is also a move away from payyanhood ... towards full adult status as a householder, defined by the combination of marriage, fatherhood and showing ability as a 'provider'" (120). The migrant body thus becomes economically productive, valued primarily for its capacity to generate income across borders.

This provider masculinity also produces intense social and psychological pressure. Migrant men are burdened with the expectation of constant financial success, regardless of the harsh realities they face in the Gulf. Failure to remit money or achieve visible economic progress often results in shame, anxiety, and loss of social respect. These are vividly represented in *Shamal Days* by Sabin Iqbal. The novel exposes the gap between the socially admired image of the Gulf migrant and the harsh realities of migrant life in the Gulf. Abbas and other migrant characters are trapped within the constant pressure to appear successful while enduring loneliness, exhaustion, and emotional despair. The novel repeatedly shows how migrant workers sacrifice personal happiness in order to maintain their provider role. Sabin Iqbal vividly captures the exploitative labour structure underlying migrant masculinity in these lines:

"The small desert country was like a hive of bees-of expatriates who arrived from different parts of the world, only to work. To bend their backs in the sun and merciless heat, to turn their blood into money they could send home" (Iqbal 9).

This description directly reflects the economic burden placed upon migrant men. Their labour, physical suffering, and emotional sacrifice are transformed into remittances that sustain families and social prestige back home. The novel also emphasizes the temporary and insecure status of migrant workers despite their economic importance. Abbas reflects:

No matter how many years they lived in the country, slogging it out in the sun, killing themselves day by day, knowingly estranging themselves from their own backyards and bedrooms back home, they would never become a part of the country-they would always remain expatriates, the second-class, indispensable residents. (Iqbal 52)

This passage reveals the contradiction at the heart of transnational masculinity. Although migrant men are admired in Kerala for their earning power, they remain socially invisible and politically excluded within the Gulf States. Their masculinity depends upon economic success, yet their existence in the host

country remains temporary and precarious. The pressure to maintain the public image of success is another important aspect of provider masculinity in the novel. Through irony and psychological introspection, *Shamal Days* critiques the myth of Gulf success that dominates Kerala's social imagination. While migration promises upward mobility and masculine prestige, the novel reveals the emotional exhaustion, alienation, and precarity hidden beneath the image of the successful Gulf migrant. Thus, the text demonstrates that transnational masculinity in the Gulf is shaped not only by economic aspiration and provider responsibility but also by fear, loneliness, and the constant burden of sustaining masculine respect through money.

Emotional Isolation and Prolonged Bachelorhood

One of the most profound consequences of Gulf migration is the emotional isolation experienced by migrant men who remain separated from their families and intimate relationships for extended periods of time. In the Kerala -Gulf migration context, masculinity is traditionally connected to marriage, fatherhood, domestic authority, and emotional responsibility within the family. However, migration frequently disrupts these conventional masculine roles by producing prolonged bachelorhood, suspended domestic life, and emotional disconnection. As a result, migrant masculinity emerges as emotionally fragmented and psychologically unstable.

The Gulf migration system often demands that men live alone in labour camps, shared rooms, or temporary accommodations while their families remain in Kerala. Such conditions interrupt the normal life of domestic masculinity, where marriage, intimacy, and fatherhood are central to masculine identity. Anamika Ajay argues that "masculinity is constantly negotiated and reconfigured within transnational family arrangements" (Ajay), highlighting how migration destabilizes emotional and familial masculine roles across geographical distance. Masculinity in migration thus becomes detached from physical domestic presence, creating anxiety, loneliness, and emotional exhaustion. This emotional fragmentation is strongly represented in *Shamal Days*. The novel portrays Gulf migrants as men trapped within repetitive cycles of labour, isolation, and longing. Although migration promises economic success and social prestige, the everyday reality of migrant life is marked by emotional emptiness and suspended intimacy. The migrant men exist physically in the Gulf while remaining emotionally attached to homes and relationships in Kerala, creating a fractured sense of belonging. Hedge (2021) observes the novel repeatedly highlights the loneliness and emotional exhaustion produced by migrant life. Sabin Iqbal captures the repetitive and emotionally draining existence of expatriate workers through the description: "Walking along the Corniche was a study of people. Of all kinds of miseries and hopelessness" (Iqbal 51).

The novel also foregrounds the condition of prolonged bachelorhood that characterizes many migrant lives in the Gulf. Economic instability, visa

restrictions, and temporary labour arrangements often prevent migrant workers from bringing their wives or establishing stable family lives abroad. Consequently, marriage and intimacy remain suspended. The absence of emotional and sexual companionship produces psychological frustration and repression. Iqbal further illustrates this emotional alienation through the migrant workers' awareness of separation from home and intimacy, "They remembered their distant wives, and the shadowy interiors of their faraway homes, where they held their newly-weds close for the first time, oblivious to their nascent shyness. Their eyes were clouded with tears, their muscles ached, and mists of grief shrouded their hearts" (Iqbal 55).

The novel also reveals how migration weakens paternal and familial relationships. The migrant father remains emotionally distant from children growing up in his absence, while husbands struggle to maintain intimacy through long-distance communication and periodic visits. In *Shamal Days*, where emotional loneliness becomes central to the migrant experience. The novel shifts attention away from celebratory narratives of economic success and instead foregrounds alienation, psychological exhaustion, and emotional vulnerability. Humor and irony in the novel frequently mask deeper feelings of despair and isolation, revealing the fragile emotional condition of migrant men. Another significant aspect of the novel is its portrayal of emotional numbness and existential emptiness. The migrant workers gradually become emotionally detached as survival and economic responsibility dominate their lives. Sabin Iqbal writes: "Most Asian men in the country had become prisoners of their own circumstances and could not go back home, unless they were sick or dead" (Iqbal 53). These lines powerfully captures the psychological consequences of migration, where emotional expression itself becomes difficult under harsh labour conditions and prolonged separation. Masculinity here is shaped not through emotional fulfillment or domestic stability but through endurance, sacrifice, and silent suffering. Thus, *Shamal Days* demonstrates that migration produces emotionally fragmented masculinities marked by loneliness, sexual repression, emotional exhaustion, and fractured domestic relationships. While Gulf migration socially constructs the migrant man as a successful provider, the novel exposes the hidden emotional costs behind this masculine ideal.

Diasporic Alienation and Fractured Belonging

One of the central themes in *Shamal Days* is the sense of diasporic alienation experienced by Gulf migrants who exist between homeland and host land without fully belonging to either. The migrant characters inhabit a liminal or "in-between" space where identity becomes fractured by displacement, nostalgia, and cultural dislocation. Although they remain emotionally attached to Kerala, they are physically and socially removed from it; at the same time, they are never fully accepted within the Gulf societies in which they live and work. This creates a diasporic consciousness marked by instability, rootlessness, and emotional

estrangement. The novel repeatedly emphasizes the temporary and exclusionary condition of migrant existence in the Gulf. Sabin Iqbal writes: “No matter how many years they lived in the country...they would always remain expatriates, the second-class, indispensable residents” (*Iqbal* 52). This tells about the workers are economically necessary yet socially excluded. Their identity remains permanently suspended between usefulness and alienation. The migrant subject thus occupies what can be described as a borderland identity, neither fully integrated into the host country nor fully connected to the homeland left behind.

The novel portrays migrant life as emotionally empty and culturally detached, where repetitive labour and displacement gradually weaken one’s sense of self. Iqbal captures this emotional dislocation through the line: “Oceans made him sad. Their blue-grey stretch beyond the horizon reminded him of departures to unknown lands and long periods of waiting for those who never returned” (*Iqbal* 53). This reflects the migrants’ nostalgic attachment to Kerala and their inability to form meaningful belonging within the Gulf. Memory becomes a substitute for home and intimacy, intensifying feelings of separation and loss. The novel also highlights how migration creates a fractured identity crisis. Migrants return to Kerala carrying emotional and cultural changes that distance them from their own homeland. They become strangers both abroad and at home. This condition reflects the liminality of diasporic existence, where identity is constantly negotiated across borders, cultures, and emotional spaces. Thus, *Shamal Days* portrays Gulf migration not simply as economic mobility but as a deeply alienating experience that produces fragmented masculinities and unstable forms of belonging.

Conclusion

Shamal Days presents Gulf migration as a deeply transformative experience that reshapes masculinity in complex and contradictory ways. From Connell’s framework of transnational masculinity and Filippo and Caroline Osella’s work on migration and masculinity in Kerala, this study has shown how the novel critiques the romanticized image of the successful Gulf migrant. While migration promises economic mobility, social prestige, and masculine success, the lived realities of migrant men are marked by labour precarity, emotional isolation, loneliness, and fractured belonging. The novel demonstrates that masculinity in migration is unstable, emotionally costly, performative, and deeply transnational. Migrant men are compelled to maintain the image of the successful provider through remittances and public displays of prosperity, even as they experience alienation, psychological exhaustion, and cultural displacement in the Gulf. Through its portrayal of emotional fragmentation, suspended domesticity, and diasporic insecurity, *Shamal Days* exposes the hidden vulnerabilities beneath dominant narratives of Gulf success. By examining literary representations of migrant male subjectivity, this article contributes to masculinity studies, Gulf migration studies, South Asian literary

studies, and diaspora studies. It highlights the importance of literary texts in understanding the affective and psychological dimensions of migration that are often overlooked in sociological approaches. Ultimately, the novel reveals that behind the socially celebrated image of the Gulf migrant lies a deeply precarious masculine identity shaped by loneliness, displacement, emotional vulnerability, and the continuous struggle for belonging across borders.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/28**THE LIMINALITY OF BELONGING: DECONSTRUCTING 'HOME' IN
SELECT PARTITION SHORT STORIES****RAHUL CHAUHAN**PhD Candidate in English, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University Delhi
New Delhi, India**Abstract**

The notion of "home" in relation to the 1947 Partition of the Indian subcontinent extends beyond the physical structures; it serves as a contentious locus of memory, trauma, and identity. This paper interrogates the ontological stability of 'home' in migration narratives, particularly through an analysis of a set of short stories, namely Salil Choudhary's "The Dressing Table" and Intizar Husain's "An Unwritten Epic" and "The City of Sorrow." These texts indicate that in times of radical displacement, 'home' transitions from a stable geographical coordinate to what Homi Bhabha defines as a "liminal space". These short stories use letters, diary entries, and other forms to present a personal history as a counter-archive to the official history. Urvashi Butalia puts it, "(p)ersonal history ...does not pretend to be objective" (21). The aim is to cull out the multiplicity of 'voices', the unofficial and the emotionally surcharged. In Salil Choudhary's story, the 'home' is rebuilt with things that have been thrown away. The main idea behind the second-hand dressing table is that it is a "palimpsest" of lost lives. At first, the main couple feels safe from the horror of Partition, but when they find Rahimuddin's letters, their peaceful home life is turned upside down. The dressing table, the letters, and the run-down two-room tenement are all examples of what Marianne Hirsch calls "postmemory" (25) artifacts. Husain's idea of home often lies in "elsewhere," which could be a lost past or a made-up landscape. This means that the memory of their original home (India) keeps them from fully living in their new home (Pakistan). The "home" turns into a ghostly presence that can only be reached through writing letters and telling stories.

Keywords: Deterritorialization, Intezar Husain, Material Memory, Partition Literature, Postmemory, Salil Choudhary.

The Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 brought unprecedented upheaval to the lives of millions of people, with approximately twelve million people being displaced from their native lands and homes. These people lived in the new country like refugees in the most wretched conditions in temporary rehabilitation camps. For most of the refugees, these transitory camps transitioned from what Dibyadyuti Roy calls "transitory *non-places* into referential spatial locations or *places*" (21) in his article "From *Non-places* to *Places*: Transforming Partition Rehabilitation Camps through the Gendered

Quotidian.” To elaborate on the difference between ‘non-place’ and ‘place’, Roy alludes to French anthropologist Marc Augé’s formulation. According to Augé (2008, p. viii), the concept of pairing places with non-places serves as a tool for assessing the level of social interaction and symbolism within a space. Augé emphasizes that any location can potentially shift into a non-place and vice versa, as “‘place and non-place are like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed’ (Augé qtd. in Collins, 1996, p. 11)” (Roy 23). Roy borrows the term ‘refugee diaspora’ from the cultural geographer Pablo Bose. Bose does not subscribe to the 1951 UN Convention, which defines a refugee as “a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country. (qtd. in Dey & Roy Choudhury, 2009, p. 3)” (Roy 22). Bose considers this definition to be inflexible and overly simplistic. While ‘refugee diasporas’ might indeed consist of individuals compelled by conflict or persecution to abandon lands and homes with which they have deep-rooted political, economic, and cultural connections, it is more often their homes that are left behind rather than entire nations. As a community living in exile, ‘refugee diasporas’ are frequently identified by their nationality—such as Somalis, Afghans, or Iranians—but are their ties to ‘home’ truly based on the nation itself? Within the broader diasporic community, this connection is not always so straightforward. (2006, pp. 59–60; author’s emphases) (Roy 23). Roy “operationalizes the term refugee as anyone who was forced to move beyond their *lived spaces*—due to the physical and psychological rigors of the 1947 Partition—within and between a truncated India, East Pakistan and West Pakistan” (23).

Arup Ratan Chakraborty, in his essay, ‘Liminality in Post-Colonial Theory: A Journey from Arnold van Gennep to Homi K. Bhabha’, discusses the concept of ‘liminality’ in detail. He states, “Liminal space is the ‘in-between’ location of cultural action, in which according to various cultural theorists, anthropologists and psychologists meaning is produced” (145). Drawing on the theories of Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner, and Homi K. Bhabha, Chakraborty problematises concepts such as liminal space, home and homelessness, and diasporic experiences. He states that another significant aspect of the diasporic experience is the concept of ‘home.’ Migration, whether forced or voluntary, involves leaving one’s country for a foreign land. This displacement leaves migrants feeling homeless and rootless. They miss their native lands. “This ‘homelessness’ according to Bhabha can be real and metaphorical” (Chakraborty 150).

Homi K Bhabha uses Sigmund Freud’s concept of ‘the uncanny’, which means unhomely, to elaborate on the migrant experience in the post-colonial context. In his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), he states that the migrant’s life in a

foreign land is a “half-life ...gathering the past in a ritual or revival” (139), negotiating between the lost ‘home’ and the new world before them. “The memory of homeland haunt them and sometimes they live reviving their past” (Chakraborty 150). For second-generation migrants, their picture of their homeland is not based on firsthand experience but on what they have heard from their parents. This is why Salman Rushdie calls it ‘Imaginary Homeland’. In his collection of essays titled *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), he states, “(o)ur identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, we fall between two stools, but however ambiguous and shifting the ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy” (Rushdie 15).

Urvashi Butalia, in *The Other Side of Silence* (1998), recounts hearing Partition stories from her family as a child, which did not affect her. However, witnessing the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, where Sikhs were targeted and killed, profoundly impacted her, prompting her to study the Partition. She wanted to understand why communal tensions repeatedly plagued the Indian subcontinent, as seen in the 1984 riots and the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition, which led to anti-Muslim riots. Witnesses of these events felt it was “like Partition again” (Butalia 5) and were shocked it could happen in their own country. During Partition, people sought refuge in ‘safer’ areas “surrounded by their own kind” (3), but after Partition, they lived like refugees in rehabilitation camps, meant to be temporary but becoming permanent. Butalia’s frustration in researching the Partition arose from historians’ neglect of its “underside”—the emotions, trauma, and silence surrounding it. She questioned if this was historiographical oversight or a deeper reluctance to confront such painful trauma (347). The generality in history books omitted the affective aspect, as explored by feminist oral historians such as Butalia (1998), Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin (1998), Veena Das (2007), and Aanchal Malhotra (2017). These historians unearthed silenced voices in subjective narratives, which Butalia calls ‘personal history,’ stating, “(p)ersonal history ...does not pretend to be objective” (Butalia 21). The aim is to extract diverse ‘voices,’ both unofficial and emotionally charged.

Reversing the well-known phrase “the past is a foreign country” (qtd. in Rushdie 9), which serves as the opening line of L.P. Hartley’s novel *The Go-Between*, Rushdie reflects on an old photograph displayed in his room from a time before his birth. He observes in his book, *Imaginary Homelands*, “it’s my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time” (9). He says that when he revisited that house, he “stood outside it, neither daring nor wishing to announce myself to its new owners. (I didn’t want to see how they’d ruined the interior.) I was overwhelmed” (Rushdie 9). It was at that moment that the idea for his pathbreaking novel, *Midnight’s Children* (1981), took shape in his mind, as he recounts. How would someone feel if he/she went to revisit the homeland they had, forcibly or otherwise, abandoned? How

would one associate with the present-absent feeling? In Mohan Rakesh's short story 'The Owner of the Rubble,' Gani Miyan takes the risk of revisiting his home in Amritsar, where he is taken to be a kidnapper of children as a woman picks up her child and goes inside the house saying, "(s)top crying, you devil! If you don't, that Muslim will catch you and take you away!" (Bhalla 1: 69). An atmosphere of sheer xenophobia and communalism exists everywhere. The house was reduced to rubble and ash. Even that rubble does not belong to him anymore, as Rakkha Pahlwan is the new owner of that rubble.

These are some aspects of narratives discussed in this paper. In Salil Choudhary's short story 'The Dressing Table', Nanda, the narrator's wife, harbors a wish to rent a new house and buy a dressing table with a large, clear mirror since the mirror of their dressing table is broken. This is a quintessential middle-class desire. The cracked mirror on the previous dressing table distorted the image. Mirrors are used as symbols of "exploration of identity, the nuances of perception and the intricate dance between appearance and reality" (Farzand) in literature. In the short story, the cracked mirror reflects the distorted reality of the main couple's life. They had not been touched by the horrors of the Partition. The second-hand dressing table with a clear mirror offers a clear reflection of reality when they read the letters. The new 'home' is rebuilt with things that have been discarded. The main idea behind the second-hand dressing table is that it becomes a mnemonic object and a "palimpsest" of lost lives. Initially, the main couple feels safe from the horror of Partition, but when they find Rahimuddin's letters, their peaceful domestic life is turned upside down. Alok Bhalla discusses in his book *Stories About the Partition of India* (1994) that in Salil Choudhary's 'The Dressing Table', "intelligence and moral imagination are defeated as they confront the massive dislocation of people from their familiar surroundings caused by the Partition. Each of them is concerned with the sorrow of migration, with uprooted people who find that they have nowhere to go" (1: xxi)

During the train journey, Rahimuddin meets a Hindu family. The middle-aged man from that family is elated to learn that Rahimuddin is a painter and insists that he come to their house in Calcutta to teach their children how to paint. They share food and spend their entire journey talking. However, just as the family is about to deboard the train, the gentleman asks Rahimuddin for his name. "Rahimuddin Choudhury" (1: 30), he tells them. At that moment, everything suddenly changed. "You could easily pass for a Bengali" (1: 30), remarks the gentleman and leaves. The mother asks the children to throw away the puris that Rahimuddin had shared with them as they walk across the railway station.

Rahimuddin decides to move to Deccan in search for job assignments. Leaves behind his Bengali identity. He puts it, "I have almost forgotten the fact that I am a Bengali" (Bhalla 1: 34). He starts learning Urdu, and his wife stops attending Rabindranath Sangeet classes. These are all signs of the cultural alienation that Rahimuddin and his wife undergo. The role of newspapers in

times of crisis is also reflected upon in the short story with suspicion: as Rahimuddin's letters reflect, the newspapers were playing the dirty game of inciting riots and spreading rumors, leading to widespread paranoia and xenophobia in the country.

Towards the end, when the narrator goes in search of Rahimuddin, he comes across "(a) two- room dilapidated house full of about twenty people. The condition of women was worse than the building. They were refugees from East Bengal who had just arrived there" (Bhalla 1: 36- 37). The narrator's wife is "convinced that if Amina's story is published in the newspapers, she will come back to claim her dressing-table" (Bhalla 1: 37). However, all such hopes are shattered when the readers are made to realize that a man in suspicious circumstances is found with some drafts and paintings. He is taken to be a madman and a spy, and the newspaper headline reads, "A Pakistani Spy Arrested" (Bhalla 1: 38). It is not revealed whether the man was indeed Rahimuddin, who had returned searching for his home and wife. He was an everyman. It was an everyman tragedy. The story raises the question of Rahimuddin's belonging. Does he belong to the jail or to the lunatic asylum, just like Toba Tek Singh, Intizar Husain's short story 'An Unwritten Epic' offers a scathing critique of the dream of a new nation that many Muslims envisioned. Like them Pichwa, a respected Pahlwan of Qadirpur, is filled with patriotic fervour when he learns about the formation of Pakistan. He even ties a Pakistani flag to the banyan tree near the Idgah. The Banyan tree near the Idgah symbolizes Hindu-Muslim harmony. However, all his dreams are shattered when he learns that Qadirpur is not in Pakistan. He then takes the Pakistan flag away and decides to defend his homeland, Qadirpur, until his last breath. Qadirpur is an old land of warriors. The narrator puts it, "(i)ts earth is reddened with the blood of its beloved sons" (Bhalla 3: 71). However, the current state of Qadirpur is miserable as "(t)he reddened earth there, the air full of cries for help, the charred houses, the demolished mosque, the ruined wrestling arena- all these things tell a story eight hundred years old" (Bhalla 3: 71).

An insignificant place like Qadirpur is made a battleground between Muslims and Jats. However, the insignificant place is provided significance by a great warrior, Pichwa Pahlwan. "Qadirpur's entire fame rested on Pichwa" (Bhalla 3: 59). He gave a fitting reply to the Jat army, armed with cannons, gunpowder, arrows, and swords, to conquer Qadirpur. This is the story of Pichwa, a courageous pahlwan who some feared had mystical powers. The narrator, a writer himself, wishes to write an epic about Pichwa's bravery. A great epic like the *Mahabharata*, which he would have titled the Qadirnama. However, he is in a dilemma about writing an epic during a tragic period like the Partition, when no one's life story is honorable anymore. The same is true for Pichwa. He goes to Pakistan and lives a life of wretchedness, begging for food, work, and shelter. The narrator wishes that Pichwa had died fighting for Qadirpur. He would have

been regarded as a martyr. However, he is now just an ordinary, poor, wretched human being. The Partition was a time for the proliferation of opportunists like Naim Miyan, who had better connections and made fortunes after migrating to Pakistan. It is no time for a warrior hero like Pichwa who dreams of owning a bigha of land in whose corner he would grow a mango orchard and, in another, would open a wrestling arena. His dreams are never realized. Desperate to see his homeland, he returns to Qadirpur from Pakistan, only to find that Qadirpur has been occupied by the Jats and renamed as Jatunagar. The grim reality of the newly found land of Pakistan prompts the narrator to draw on his memory to write about Qadirpur. He says, "Pakistan is a reality, while Qadirpur has become a story, a story I can tell" (Bhalla 3: 71).

Postcolonial critic Gyanendra Pandey states in his book, *Remembering Partition* (2001), "(t)his book ...attempts to analyse the moves that are made to nationalise populations, culture and history in the context of this claim to nation-statehood and the establishment of the nation-state. In the process, it reflects on how the local comes to be folded into the national in new kinds of ways – and the national into the local – at critical junctures of this kind" (1). It is in these interstices of the national and local that Husain's short story intervenes. Pandey makes some significant comments on Husain's 'An Unwritten Epic.' He puts it, "Pichwa is the central character of this epic. He is an unlikely hero, since he was simply a local tough, a body-builder, master in the art of club-fighting and head of what might be called the village gymnasium. But (says the author) he possessed 'a certain dignity and greatness', and this was after all to be an epic of the common people (*Jumhurnama*)" (54). Commenting upon the clash of the grand narrative of the national history with the minor narrative of the local/subjective narratives, he puts it, the 'small voice' of literature, much like the 'small voice of history,' faces an unprecedented threat of being overwhelmed by the forces of nationalism, globalization, and the associated 'disciplines.' Qadirpur translates to 'the home or dwelling of Qadir' (referring to a Muslim resident or ancestor), while Jatunagar means 'the home or town of the Jats' (a Hindu caste group). Additionally, 'Nagar' is a suffix that is more sanskritized compared to 'pur' (Pandey 202-203).

Even the narrator cannot seem to write the epic and suffers financially. He resolves that he would do fine financially if he could work "if not in a factory, then in a flour mill" (Bhalla 3: 79). Naim Miyan gets him a flour mill, and he feels he is now "a responsible citizen – a dutiful member of a rising nation" (Bhalla 3: 79). The story ends with disillusionment. Disillusionment with materializing anything constructive or creative in the tragic time of the Partition, in the newly found land of Pakistan, where opportunists make a profit and talented people remain at their mercy. Home is nowhere to be found. Husain often envisions home as being "elsewhere," which might refer to a bygone era or

an imagined setting. This means that the memory of their original home (India) keeps them from fully living in their new home (Pakistan).

In Husain's 'The City of Sorrow', the city is not merely a setting but a character in itself. Its deserted streets tell the story of partition. The three men are trapped in this city. The city provides no solace or shelter to them. As the First Man says, "(t)error had gripped the street. There was still some light, though darkness had begun to creep over everything" (Bhalla 2: 87). The Second Man also provides a similar description of the city. He puts it thus: "Each street I ran through was a blind alley; every neighborhood I took shelter in was a trap. I couldn't find a way out of the city of ruins" (89). The second man, who had been running away from the girl he had raped, in the streets, where each street, each neighbourhood seemed like the same, deserted and silent. He reaches an open field occupied by a large crowd. In that group, the children were crying with hunger, the lips of adults were chapped, the breasts of the mothers were dry; fresh faces had withered, fair women were covered with dust" (Bhalla 2: 89). He asks them what curse has befallen them. "They answered – O unfortunate man, this is the city of sorrow. We are the doomed ones whose life has been destroyed. Now we sit here waiting for death" (Bhalla 2: 90). Somehow, the second man understands their grief and says, "(t)ell me truthfully, O people, are you the ones who came here from far off places to build your homes in the city of peace? They replied – Yes, you have recognized us. Now our homes lie in ruins" (Bhalla 2: 90). For a moment, the second man remembers that he was born in Gaya, and then he starts philosophizing about everything being an illusion and that there is only suffering in this world. Soon, the sense of belonging is lost when the Third Man says, "(a)fter recognising one's real self, it is difficult to live" (Bhalla 2: 92). The Third Man associates the migrations with *hijrat*, a religious Islamic concept associated with the *hijrat* of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina. He wishes he had not come to the city of sorrow and had disappeared into the forests of Nepal as his mother did. By confessing his sins and expressing regret over his migration, the third man feels alive. However, the other two men make him realize that there is nowhere to go and he is dead too. The Third Man realizes that he, too, died when he "turned his back on his own people" (Bhalla 2: 98).

In their article "Narrating the Void: Storytelling and Its Limits in Intizar Husain's An Unwritten Epic, Leaves, and City of Sorrow", Shashank Kumar Bharti and Dr Bindunath Jha comment on the stylistics of Husain's short stories. They put it, "Husain's stories serve as reflections on language's failure and the limits of narrative in the aftermath of historical disaster" (366). They further remark, "'City of Sorrow' creates an allegorical environment plagued by memory and loss. Husain employs these tactics to present a distinct literary perspective on the Partition, one that prioritizes silence, suggestion, and myth above realism" (366). Husain tacitly uses myths and metaphors in his short stories, giving his narratives

an allegorical meaning. Bharti and Jha comment, “Husain’s approach broadens our view of Partition literature. It’s not just about violence or displacement; it’s also a deep reflection on the challenges of language, memory, and meaning when confronted with historical disasters” (367). They capture the essence of Husain’s narrative when they comment, “Husain externalises the psychological suffering of the Partition through this ghost city. Central is displacement. Characters are anonymous or vague; the city itself is rootless. This portrayal captures not just physical exile but also a more profound ontological dislocation—a loss of historical, spiritual, and cultural foundation” (Bharti and Jha 368).

Veen Das discusses that her book *Life and Words* (2007) “describes the way that the event attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life and folds itself into the recesses of the ordinary” (1). Talking about the limits of language and communication in times of a historical tragedy, she puts it, “(t)her repression of voice and hence of confession, of autobiography” (6). “Thus, there were men and women who spoke, and if asked, they told stories about the violence they had seen or endured on their bodies. My thought was that perhaps they had speech but not voice” (8).

In his book *Of Hospitality* (2000), Jacques Derrida explores the idea of home by deconstructing the ethics of hospitality, which involves being a host and being open to the risk of hostility. In ‘The Dressing Table’, the letters in the dressing table offer the main couple the possibility of hospitality, serving as hosts to the haunting tales of the Partition that the letters carry. The letters also made them feel hostile. However, this is what they have to bear to be good hosts. Deleuze and Guattari comment in their book *Anti-Oedipus* (1972),

“The schizo is not revolutionary, but the schizophrenic process—in terms of which the schizo is merely the interruption, or the continuation in the void—is the potential for revolution ... Courage consists, however, in agreeing to flee rather than live tranquilly and hypocritically in false refuges. Values, morals, homelands, religions, and these private certitudes that our vanity and our complacency bestow generously on us, have many deceptive sojourns as the world arranges for those who think they are standing straight and at ease, among stable things.” (341)

The courage of Pichwa is no longer valuable and has lost its use value in Pakistan. Rahimuddin's painting talent is useless in times of crisis, where it's the dog-eats-dog world. The Three Men live a schizophrenic existence in which they lack an integrated self or ego and keep projecting themselves onto each other. The city of sorrow remains a city of ruins full of graves, where there is no space for the living. It is a deterritorialized space, as defined by Deleuze and Guattari. Eugene W. Holland, discusses in his article “Deterritorializing ‘Deterritorialization’: From the ‘Anti-Oedipus’ to ‘A Thousand Plateaus’”, Deterritorialization, according to Deleuze and Guattari, incorporates “the freeing of “schizophrenic” libido from pre-established objects of investment: from the

mother's breast, for instance, or from the family triangle of the Oedipus complex. At the same time, but in the social register, it designates the freeing of labour-power from the seigneurial plot of land, the assembly line, or other means of production" (57). Thus, all these characters in the short stories, namely Rahimuddin, Pichwa, and the Three Men, are deterritorialized by being uprooted from their homeland and from the means of production. They continue to live like refugees, devoid of rights and property. In the reterritorialized new land of Pakistan, the likes of Naim Miyan find jobs and acquire wealth through their connections with the powerful.

Marianne Hirsch's book *The Generation of Postmemory* (2012) is a work on the Holocaust that examines photographs, family albums, and other testimonial objects. In her book, she discusses that in a historical tragedy, what is at stake is "not only a personal/familial/ generational sense of ownership and protectiveness, but an evolving ethical and theoretical discussion about the workings of trauma, memory, and intergenerational acts of transfer" (1-2). She collected the images and artifacts of Holocaust victims and survivors in an "attempt to reconstruct the traces of lost communities" (24). Her work on postmemory is relevant to understanding the significance of tracing memory through objects collected in the aftermath of a tragedy. She puts it, "(m)emory is mediated, cultural, but it has also escaped through the open doorway in the photograph to haunt the natural landscapes of the present. The ghosts have become part of our landscape, reconfiguring the domestic as well as the public spaces of the postgeneration"

(25). The objects like the dressing table, letters, the Banyan tree near the Idgah, and the run- down two-room tenement are all examples of what Hirsch calls "postmemory" (25) artifacts.

To conclude, these narratives focus on fundamental human existential issues: lacking belonging, unable to express pain, and grappling with existential anxiety. Examining Salil Choudhary's "The Dressing Table" with Intizar Husain's "An Unwritten Epic" and "The City of Sorrow," this chapter shows how Partition stories challenge clear or comforting notions of "home." They explore how memories, ethics, and realities fracture the concept of home. Displacement is not a singular catastrophe; it persists, affecting thoughts and morals long after borders were set. In "The Dressing Table," Choudhary highlights ordinary household items that become hollow symbols of loss. Home doesn't feel secure; it feels unfamiliar. You sense what once existed, now replaced by emptiness in old routines. Conversely, Husain takes a different approach in "An Unwritten Epic," dismantling grand narratives. The character Pichwa starts out as a potential hero, but his aspirations disintegrate—Pakistan isn't the place he envisioned. The gap between expectations and reality is vast, and Husain candidly portrays this disconcerting truth. This sentiment intensifies in "The City of Sorrow." Nothing feels resolved. People move like spectres,

trapped between life and death, revisiting memories and regrets. No one has a true identity. The story examines that “survival” after Partition is so burdened with guilt and sorrow it barely qualifies as living. The inability to forget perpetuates pain, influencing every action. Collectively, these stories resist defining “home” as a tangible place or secure feeling. It’s haunted, fragmented by memories and uneasy decisions. There’s no closure—no one returns whole. Instead, individuals remain stuck, waiting for belonging or resolution that never arrives. Thus, Partition doesn’t merely reside in the past. It continues to affect people, altering self-perception, storytelling, and understanding of settling somewhere—even long after history’s headlines have moved on.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/29**EARLY RESILIENCE CIRCLES: CHILD RIGHTS-BASED
COMMUNITY APPROACH FOR INCLUSIVE DISASTER READINESS****SUCHITA KANOO**Research Scholar, Department of Social Work
Assam University, Silchar, India**DR. JOYASHRI DEY**Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work
Assam University, Silchar, India**Abstract**

Children are often the hardest hit during disasters, not only in terms of immediate safety but also through lasting effects on their education, mental well-being, and sense of stability, especially in flood-prone regions like Barak Valley, Assam. This paper builds on the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, viewing children not just as vulnerable, but also as capable of contributing to their own safety and recovery. It uses a life cycle lens to show how these needs differ across early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence, and why responses must reflect these differences. Current disaster frameworks, including those promoted by the UNDRR, often remain reactive and adult-focused, with limited attention to children's participation and emotional resilience. Based on a systematic review of existing studies and policy documents, this paper identifies key gaps in current approaches. To address these gaps, the current paper proposes the Early Resilience Circle model, a community-based system that connects children, families, and institutions to strengthen preparedness before disasters occur, making resilience more inclusive, practical, and sustainable over time.

Keywords: Child Protection, Inclusive Resilience, Community-Based Framework, Early Resilience Circles, Disaster Preparedness.

Introduction

In the Barak Valley of Assam, floods do not arrive as crises; they follow a pattern. However, with rising waters, families shift routines, classrooms empty, houses fill, while daily rhythms adapt to submerged ground. Afterward, when levels drop, rebuilding quietly begins. For children raised here, hardship does not break normalcy; it forms part of it. Flooding repeats, shaping children through cycles rather than shocks. This issue stands out due to a core disconnect: disaster management models rarely align with the lived realities of children in flood-affected areas. Most planning focuses on single emergencies; they rely on an idea of calm before disruption, then healing after. Yet for children in places like Barak Valley, stability remains absent. Floods recur annually, which severely impacts

schooling, mental well-being, and community settings vital for growth. Though research into disaster governance is shifting, progress remains uneven. Attention turns to how children engage with communities where lived experience builds adaptive strength, provided openings exist for genuine inclusion (Mort et al.).

A different angle emerges through the CUIDAR model: children often detect subtle environmental threats overlooked by top-heavy decision structures (Delicado et al., 246-57). Still, the transformation lags behind insight; significance follows from this. Left out of readiness efforts, children's insights disappear. Emotional injuries stay for years if mental health care trails behind rebuilding work. Without schools built into emergency plans, every flood breaks education, lacking ways to bring it back on track. Viewing uprooting solely through a bodily lens overlooks sorrow, confusion, and severed ties felt by young people unseen, unaided. Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction, or CC-DRR, stands out in current research as a way to address long-standing oversights. Rather than seeing the children only as victims, this approach insists they take part in planning, adjusting, and growing stronger before the crises hit. Support for such ideas has grown inside global agreements, including the UNCRC and the Sendai Framework. Paper realities fail on the ground in the Barak Valley. Across South Asia, floods uproot millions of young lives, collapsing schools and familiar routines. UNICEF's findings reveal that damage stretches beyond infrastructure; when places vanish, children's emotional stability, safety, and learning fade too, leaving deep long-term scars well after waters recede.

Huang et al. deepen the understanding further, children uprooted by crises in South and Southeast Asia often stay cut off from schooling over time, thanks to broken facilities, rigid registration rules, and missing mental health resources. Rather than acting as stable hubs when calamities strike, schools rarely appear within emergency readiness strategies at all. Though climate risks grow, governance across South Asia often stays one step behind, scrambling rather than planning. A closer look at policies reveals gaps. Mall et al. point out how efforts to reduce disasters still operate in isolated departments, even as threats become clearer (14-27). In Surat, research by Jamshed et al. highlights a deeper imbalance: those on the margins endure greater harm due to missing services and weak safety nets common elsewhere (9297-326). For children caught in such settings, danger stacks up not just unstable housing, but damage to schools and scarce emotional care adds to their burden.

Looking at current research helps shape what this work aims to do. One goal involves reviewing recent studies about how children take part in disaster planning and emotional recovery. Another aim looks into weaknesses found in today's policies that manage disasters. Instead of just focusing on events, attention shifts toward how the loss of the environment is tied to memory and affects young people differently. Rather than top-down models, the emphasis moves to local solutions built around children's needs in areas often hit by floods.

Centered on children, the Early Resilience Circle (ERC) model shifts focus away from treating child well-being and psychosocial aid as afterthoughts. Instead of attaching services to current frameworks, this approach builds around their needs from the start. Networks link children, households, learning environments, local organisations, along with natural surroundings, forming connections meant to last beyond emergencies. Preparedness here unfolds gradually, shaped by ongoing engagement rather than sudden response.

Objectives of the Study

- 1) To understand the impact of the top-down disaster management plan in child participation, psycho-social care, and institutional coordination.
- 2) To suggest the Early Resilience Circle (ERC) framework as a proactive community strategy for localised flood preparedness.

Methods

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Although some research was ruled out for being too technical, work emphasising child-led readiness was used. Peer-reviewed papers formed the core of what we kept, though reports from recognised bodies like UNICEF also qualified. Full access mattered only if texts obtainable in complete form appeared in the analysis. Where engineering dominated without attention to people or policy, those pieces fell away. English-language availability guided selection, particularly when focused on how communities in South Asia handle crises. Resilience, tied to emotional and mental strength, counted strongly toward inclusion.

Search Strategy

Following standard methods for systematic reviews shaped the approach taken. A broad sweep through several digital libraries such as PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ScienceDirect pulled together key works mostly from 2018 to 2026. Terms like "Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction," "psychosocial resilience," "climate displacement," "flood vulnerability," and "community resilience," focused on South Asia, guided the search. Instead of fixed pairings, terms shifted forms to match how different fields express similar ideas. Coverage reached into education, disaster research, and children's rights literature by adjusting phrasing each time. Though timing mattered, precision in wording made the real difference; what emerged was less about volume, more about fit.

Data Extraction and Thematic Synthesis

Among the initial 148 records, a closer look narrowed it down to 23 studies included in the final narrative. Though each of these 23 shaped the core themes, only key examples appear here; others helped confirm patterns behind the scenes. Instead of listing everything, the analysis focused on standout findings to keep things clear. Starting from raw data, this paper built meaning step by step through three open-ended phases

Starting with coding, it was labeled key passages to spot repeated ideas and reasoning about policies. Sorting themes began by comparing codes again and

again until patterns appeared, when one study said "uprooting" while another called it "displacement," both got placed together under a single term. Groupings formed slowly, shaped by repeated review. Similar ideas found each other, even when words differed at first glance. Starting from initial ideas, early themes took shape through analysis, pushing past surface descriptions. Patterns began emerging under careful review, shaping how elements connect within the framework. These recurring structures slowly defined what would become the core of the ERC approach. Building on observation, each insight contributed to a clearer form taking place over time. Foundations settled not by design but through repeated recognition of similar arrangements across cases.

Analytical Orientation and Limitations

From the analysis, nine themes emerged: child involvement, broken systems, and education flow among them. Since one researcher led the interpretive work, agreement checks between coders did not take place, fitting patterns seen in qualitative studies that value reflection over statistical repetition. Secondary sources shaped much of the foundation, marking a key constraint. Though useful, the ERC framework remains theoretical without field testing yet to come. Empirical grounding must follow, built from real-world community inquiry.

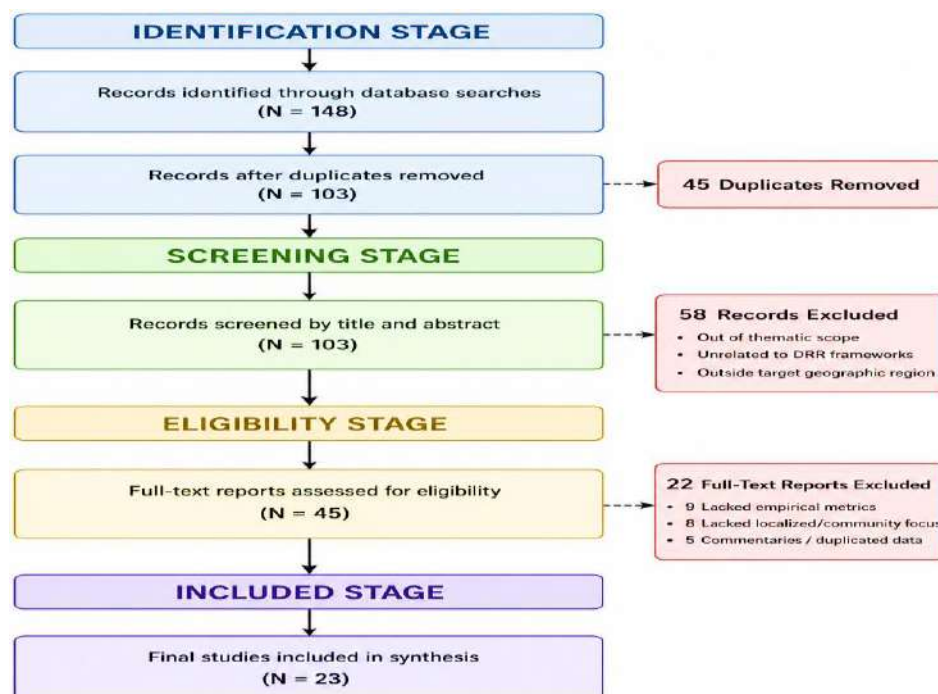


Figure 1: PRISMA 2020 Flow diagram

Source: Researchers' own creation

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This paper establishes the Early Resilience Circle (ERC) by shifting the disaster paradigm from top-down, reactive management to inclusive, systems-based prevention. Grounded in the UNCRC and Sendai Framework, it redefines children from passive, vulnerable victims into active participants whose unique environmental insights optimize local risk reduction (Delicado et al.; Mort et al.). Disasters cause ecological displacement and profound psychosocial trauma, eroding a child's sense of belonging (Pacheco et al.). The ERC integrates early mental healthcare and child-led agency directly into continuous grassroots institutional networks, counteracting systemic inequalities to protect marginalized communities before crisis hits (Mall et al.; Spencer and Thompson).

Synthesis of Literatures

Looking across key studies shows disaster research now emphasises people, minds, and justice more than rigid systems. Earlier methods focused on control; current views are built around community strength, emotional impacts, and fairness. Table 1 below shows the emerging patterns from the recent studies (2018-2026). It reflects how ideas change over time, connecting broader developments instead of listing isolated findings. While some themes repeat, others signal new directions are considered, and certain concepts take on different meanings today.

Priority Level	Core Emerging Research Trend	Consolidated Authors and Years	Shared Views
Crucial Foundation	Youth Agency and Active Participation over Passive Victimhood	Mort and Delicado; Delicado et al.	Spotting hazards that grown-ups overlook, children contribute firsthand insights into how neighborhoods stay safe. Now viewed differently, they take part actively rather than endure danger passively.
Crucial Foundation	Upward Knowledge Transmission and Creative Pedagogy	Han et al. ; Le De et al.	Young minds explore dangers through play, using toys such as LEGO or Minecraft. When children learn about safety this way, anxiety fades. Lessons move beyond classrooms, reaching living rooms, kitchens, and dinner talks. Families begin doing things differently, shaped by

			what a child discovered during build time. Understanding spreads quietly, starting small, growing strong.
Crucial Foundation	Integrating Early Psycho-social and Emotional Well-being	Spencer and Thompson; Pacheco et al.	When skies darken with change, hearts grow heavy under silent pressure. Long before storms arrive, quiet efforts to include people soften fear's edge. Stability survives where reaches early, stretching beneath chaos like roots in soil care. Emotional weight meets wild weather, yet foresight holds pieces together.
Crucial Foundation	Dismantling Fragmented, Reactive Governance Frameworks	Lassa et al.; Mall et al.	Responses fail when dictated solely by the central authority's post-crisis. Lasting resilience grows where schools, health centers, and community groups link steadily without waiting for orders. These connections operate ahead of emergencies through shared routines rather than hierarchy.
Crucial Foundation	Climate Justice, Resource Equity Vulnerability Flow	Jamshed et al. ; Pecharroman and Hahn	Left behind when aid arrives are those in makeshift homes, while help flows more easily to influential neighborhoods, where power connects and resources follow elsewhere in silence. Assistance programs seldom reach those without legal homes, and those with influence decide who receives resources. The uneven flow reveals deeper imbalances in access.

High Significance	Climate Displacement, Land Losses and Institutional Barriers.	Huang et al. ; UNICEF ; Wesselbaum	Global standards on human rights and disaster resilience fail to match the community-designed response strategies. Home feels less steady as skies turn strange. Schools often refuse enrollment because fixed policies fail flexible needs. Belonging fades where stability stood.
High Significance	Empirical Data Modeling and Remote Technology Integration	Mester et al.; Sen et al. ; Laskar et al.	Satellite data maps street-level flood traces onto community layouts using Bayesian inference and Dempster-Shafer frameworks. Combining wide-area visuals with localized tools exposes home deterioration, building resilience, and population recovery speeds. Though distant, these orbital images capture granular outcomes shaped by local terrain, response behaviors, and structural material limits.
Contextual Baseline	Translating Global Policy Mandates to Grassroots Realities.	UN Sendai Framework; UNCRC.	Global standards on human rights and disaster resilience fail to match community-designed response strategies. Top-down directives ignore local knowledge, creating practical mismatches. International frameworks assume uniform capacity, but real-world planning faces uneven resources; guidelines shift meaning through lived experience.

Table 1: Consolidated Thematic Matrix of Contemporary Disaster Research Trends (2018-2026)

Children often spot risks adults miss during disaster drills. Research by Mort et al, alongside work from Delicado et al, shows children hold insights tied to their surroundings. Their involvement shifts how communities prepare, not through top-down orders but shared input. International agreements like the UNCRC and Sendai Framework back this move, framing inclusion as a right, not a favour (United Nations). When plans include children's voices, responses tend to reflect real conditions on the ground. Not long ago, scholars began questioning conventional top-down teaching models. Rather than accept routine emergency exercises as enough, Ronan and Towers suggest grasping linked social and natural patterns matters more during repeated disasters (1-23). Children, it turns out, can shift family habits. Han et al found that when students grow confident about hazards at school, their knowledge flows upward into homes. Engagement grows stronger through playful learning; activities involving Minecraft or LEGO help ease fear, deepen connection to surroundings (Le De et al., 867-78).

Now seen as key to safety, psychosocial support shifts how communities prepare for environmental changes. Rather than waiting until after crises strike, integrating care early helps people regain control, say Pacheco et al; similarly, Spencer and Thompson show it lessens feelings of powerlessness. Millions of children's lives across South Asia face disturbance due to environmental moves, according to UNICEF (Weathering). Such movement often involves more than changing locations; it breaks ties to place, vanishes shared memories, and interrupts daily patterns of living. When floods hit places such as Assam, school access often stops for long stretches because buildings collapse while systems fail to respond swiftly, as highlighted by Huang et al.

In Northeast India, Sen et al. (2021) used a Bayesian network across 500 homes to prove that while physical building strength matters, socioeconomic factors like education and aid access determine recovery speeds. Long-term readiness requires forward-looking financial and structural planning. Similarly, Borah et al. found that fertile soils keep vulnerable, low-income farmers in flood-prone areas. True adaptation requires blending infrastructure with local farming methods and lived experience.

Despite its regional scope, the study by Laskar et al. in the Barak Valley of southern Assam applied Dempster-Shafer evidence theory to measure housing vulnerability at 23 locations. Working alongside academics, public works engineers, and local disaster authorities, a team collected data from 434 households after calamities struck. Resilience was assessed using two distinct paths: one focused on physical durability like building type, wall strength, and foundation height; the other tracked social rebound through earnings, schooling, and aid access. Because the response carried certainly mathematical handling revealed that lasting safety emerges only when built environments are paired with economic and community support systems. Infrastructure alone cannot ensure recovery if societal conditions remain fragile. This balance is emphasised by

contemporary modelling, which shows that tracking both environmental and non-climatic impacts across assets provides critical baseline performance indicators (Ricciardi et al.). This matches up with broader assessments that advocate for localized, multi-hazard indicators to truly compute community recovery capacity (Amaratunga et al.), a concept recently expanded to show how Silchar's housing and transportation assets function together when under severe flood stress (Sen et al.).

Despite policy claims, South Asian disaster management reacts late and lacks coordination (Mall et al.). This delay compounds climate-induced human displacement, economic damage, and casualties (Wesselbaum; Mester et al.). Systemic biases route aid to advantaged groups, marginalizing vulnerable populations (Jamshed et al.; Pecharroman and Hahn). Lacking inclusive public systems, child-led efforts remain small-scale (Mudavanhu et al.; Lassa et al.), necessitating the Early Resilience Circle framework.

Structural Gap in the Disaster Governance

Systemic weaknesses and structural barriers consistently limit children's disaster participation. In the Barak Valley, uneven planning access restricts meaningful youth involvement.

- *Reactive and Fragmented Framework:* Disaster strategies react post-crisis, leaving sectors fragmented (Mall et al.). Programs for children rely on temporary aid, disappearing when funding runs out (Lassa et al.).
- *Neglect of Psychosocial and Emotional continuity:* Authorities prioritize infrastructure, ignoring emotional trauma (Spencer and Thompson; Pacheco et al.). Rigid rules block displaced children from classrooms (Huang et al.).
- *The Missing Voice and Unequal Power:* Policies exclude children's hazard insights (Mudavanhu et al.; Le De et al.). These inequalities justify the Early Resilience Circle model (Jamshed et al.).

The proposed Approach: The Early Resilience Circle (ERC) Model

Resilience, as per the Early Resilience Circle (ERC) model, does not act only during emergencies; it unfolds steadily within everyday community routines. Rather than waiting for disruptions, this approach embeds strength through ongoing practice. Built on five central elements, it serves as a cohesive structure aimed at filling current governance voids. Each dimension supports stability without relying on dramatic turning points.

Child Participation as a Foundation

Children take charge under the ERC approach, moving beyond just receiving aid to shaping their own protection. Instead of waiting quietly, they join safety groups that let them share ideas and identify danger together. Through hands-on activities like risk mapping, children help identify problems in places where they live and learn. Messages from these efforts reach decision makers through organised paths built into local systems. As children grow, methods change games teach basic

skills early on, while older youths step into mentorship tasks. Participation adjusts naturally, watching what each stage can understand and do. Here, the whole process grows alongside with them.

Psychosocial Preparedness

When disasters strike, feeling in control often vanishes, yet planning ahead can change that outcome. School counsellors working early help children regain stability before crisis hits. Further trauma-aware classrooms make space for healing through routine. Places designed just for children offer safety when the waters rise. Recovery becomes possible not because damage fades but because people adapt earlier. Evidence shows such preparation leads to stronger long-term coping (Spencer and Thompson; Pacheco et al.).

Educational Continuity

When floods come every year, as they do in places such as the Barak Valley, education must keep moving. Because of this, the ERC approach weaves learning into emergency preparation. Instead of pausing everything, schools follow special teaching plans during crises. Enrollment stays open for children who have had to move, allowing them to rejoin without delay. Lessons also include knowledge about local risks and safety steps. Schools then become steady spaces, not just buildings but centers of morality. Even if classrooms are damaged, their role in daily life continues.

Connecting People and Families

A young person's ability to cope often grows from the people around them day by day. Children, it turns out, can shape how homes respond to danger. This idea is built on Han et al, "trickle-up effect." Instead of top-down rules, children share insights that shift family habits. When households join in local hazard spotting and exit strategies, actions fit better with daily life. The things which works follows from place-based knowledge, not outside templates.

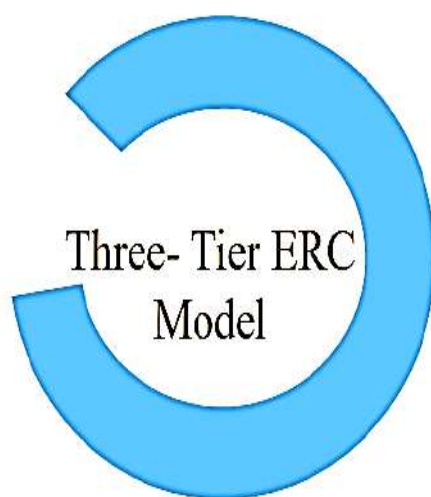
Institutional Coordination

Instead of short-term aid efforts funded by NGOs, lasting safety comes through stable systems built into government frameworks (Lassa et al.). Connected groups, such as schools, health services, emergency planners, and city officials, work better when aligned under one approach. The ERC method pushes for ongoing coordination, not isolated responses. Resilience grows stronger when structures stay active between crises situation.

Ecological Displacement and Belonging

Another important component of the ERC model that makes it apart is how it looks at ecological displacement. When floods hit, damage goes beyond buildings. Children lose touch with the place they know, along with friends and routines. Staying steady emotionally matters just as much when everything else shifts. Instead of focusing only on survival, this approach holds space for connections, keeping ties strong between a child, their schools, and neighborhood, where belonging becomes part of safety.

Overall, it can be said that resilience is shaped differently here, framed not as a personal strength but as a shared experience. Prevention comes through involvement, shaped by group effort rather than top-down planning. Safety is not only about shelter; it also includes staying rooted where floods repeatedly occur. Belonging remains even when waters rise, because connection matters just as much as survival.



Primary Circle - Children, peer mentors, Anganwadi workers:

Focus Pillars: Child Participation, Psychosocial Preparedness, and Ecological

Displacement and Belonging.

Actions: Foster emotional readiness by building stability before crises hit, empower children to actively shape their own protection through peer-to-peer education, and provide first-line monitoring of risks while addressing the immediate emotional impact of environmental change.

Secondary Circle - Teachers, ASHA workers, SHG members, local youth leaders: *Focus Pillars:* Educational Continuity and Connecting People and Families.

Actions: Promote inclusive risk communication and lead psychosocial sessions to strengthen community social bonds for coping. Ensure learning is maintained during emergencies by keeping educational pathways active, serving as a vital bridge between immediate family units and formal institutions.

Tertiary Circle - Panchayat members, local NGOs, disaster management officials: *Focus Pillars:* Institutional Coordination.

Actions: Drive resource mobilization and align government, NGO, and institutional efforts into shared preparedness networks. Integrate child-centered data into broader policy planning and conduct post-disaster audits specifically from a child-rights perspective to ensure long-term sustainability.

Figure 2: The Early Resilience Circle (ERC) Model

Source: Researchers' own creation

Discussion

The most important outcome in this review is how deeply inherent the flows are within disaster governance systems. In nearly every region and organisation, children are pushed aside while emotional well-being gets overlooked education rarely links into emergency strategies. These gaps pointless to broken tools and more to broken frameworks, calling not for small fixes but for deep-rooted change on human rights. Children often get seen only through the lens of weakness, which holds back how systems respond. When policy treats them as fragile, solutions stay focused on shielding rather than involving. Yet methods like those in CUIDAR or the work by Le De et al, show another path: inviting children into risk planning brings fresh insights about danger nearby. Their involvement shapes

safer spaces in ways adults alone cannot. Seeing children as active contributors fits ethical standards and also works better in real situations.

In the Barak Valley, recurring floods, rather than isolated events, systematically erode children's long-term emotional well-being. While structural attributes like wall strength and foundation height dictate initial resistance, enduring community resilience hinges on swift household response times and permanent structural stability (Sen et al.; Laskar et al.). Consequently, the ERC model introduces a paradigm shift, embedding mental and social readiness into daily community routines rather than treating them as emergency measures. Because prolonged educational disruptions severely impair child development (Huang et al.), robust learning networks must function continuously during crises instead of waiting for disasters to pass.

Because gaps in wealth and opportunity shape who suffers most, unfair outcomes tend to deepen existing divides. Studies led by Jamshed, alongside work from Pecharroman and Hahn, show how responses frequently help those already advantaged, while children on the edges deal with growing dangers. Across northeast India's flood-prone regions, unequal structures grow sharper under shifting climates warmer weather alongside unpredictable rains puts poor farmers at greatest risk, even though they rely on rich river-deposited earth for crops (Borah et al.). Recovery after extreme events moves faster for some than others; how much money a family earns, their education background, along with whether help arrives from formal support systems shapes outcomes clearly seen in field studies (Sen et al.; Laskar et al.).

To counter this pattern, the ERC approach pushes readiness shaped directly by communities themselves, crafted slowly, fairly, together. Because local insights shape the system, resilience grows from within. When farming traditions inform planning, support reaches those often overlooked. Rather than depending solely on rigid, centralised structures, protection emerges through shared understand. Community-driven methods prioritise people who face the greatest risks. Financial safeguards become more responsive when built with not just for vulnerable households. It remains clear is how dangerously split the current system has become. When education, health, and disaster bodies fail to align, vulnerabilities emerge in unpredictable ways. Evidence points towards three central areas where policy must shift, putting children's involvement into a real policy framework instead of just talking about it. Right away, support systems blend emotional care with learning pathways when built into plans early. Starting sooner means structures naturally include both mental well-being and a steady education flow. Frameworks shaped at the beginning carry these elements without needing later fixes. When introduced upfront, human needs and knowledge progress fit together more smoothly.

Working together across agencies helps break down separate systems, linking efforts where safety for the child becomes shared responsibility through unified

oversight. Working together through joint structures like those linking university experts, infrastructure planners, and local disaster teams in recent area assessments (Laskar et al.) helps officials tackle flawed assumptions while filling missing information that often derail standard policy design. In the ERC framework, it redefines “preparedness,” shifting it beyond mere logistics into an ongoing social practice. Instead of focusing only on supplies or plans, it grows through everyday interactions within communities. This approach fits well with recent research emphasising prevention rather than response. Because people take part actively, outcomes are shaped locally rather than imposed from above. Over time, reliance moves away from external interventions towards shared local knowledge.

Future Implication

Preparedness woven into everyday life shields those most at risk long before a crisis hits. Fragility within communities undermines even the strongest embankments without attention to fair distribution of support. Shifting power means listening first to children's ideas. Shared efforts keep things moving through repeated contact rather than hierarchy. Care for people's minds should already have a place in emergency planning to heal thoughts along with structures.

Conclusion

This paper looked into why disaster preparedness often breaks down in flood-affected zones such as the Barak Valley, revealing gaps where children's perspectives are absent, mental-health concerns go unaddressed, and response units operate without alignment. Instead of depending solely on fixed solutions, evidence from local studies shows community strength matters as much when social systems weaken, even strong embankments fail to protect (Laskar et al.). Starting differently each time, the Early Resilience Circle method fills key voids through combining learning consistency, mental health care, and child involvement within everyday routines. Instead of relying on orders from above, readiness grows through teamwork much like how scientists, builders, and emergency planners cooperate during on-the-ground work (Laskar et al.). In vulnerable landscapes where changing weather patterns endanger poor farm families living on flood-prone river deposits (Wesselbaum), solutions need both strong built structures alongside traditional agriculture knowledge and personal insight (Borah et al.). Using complex math tools and local multi-hazards indicators allows decision makers to generate flexible measures of recovery strength even when real-world data is incomplete (Amaratunga et al.; Ricciardi et al.), while still prioritising community perspectives in surviving shocks (Laskar et al.).

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/30**PSYCHOLOGICAL DISPLACEMENT AND THE SEARCH FOR
BELONGING IN MAHESH DATTANI'S PLAYS****M. DHIVYA**Research Scholar (Part-time), S. F. R. College, Sivakasi
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**DR. K. MANGAIYARKARASI**Research Guide and supervisor, S. F. R. College, Sivakasi
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**Abstract**

Displacement in literature is often associated with migration and exile, but it can also exist in emotional and psychological forms within one's own family and society. Mahesh Dattani's plays portray individuals who feel isolated, emotionally disconnected, and socially excluded despite living within familiar cultural spaces. This paper explores psychological displacement in *Tara*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. The discussion focuses on how women and queer individuals experience alienation, silence, and identity crisis within patriarchal and heteronormative structures. Through these plays, Dattani presents home not always as a place of comfort, but often as a space of repression and emotional conflict. Drawing from diaspora studies, queer theory, and gender studies, the paper argues that displacement can also emerge through emotional trauma, social exclusion, and denial of identity. Dattani ultimately portrays belonging as a deeply human emotional need connected to dignity, acceptance, and recognition. By extending the idea of diaspora beyond geographical movement, Dattani's dramatic world highlights the emotional suffering of marginalized individuals in contemporary Indian society. The paper also examines how silence, memory, trauma, and family expectations shape the emotional lives of his characters. Through realistic dialogue and emotionally layered characterization, Dattani presents displacement as a deeply personal experience that exists even within one's homeland. His plays therefore broaden the understanding of diaspora and belonging in modern Indian English drama.

Keywords: Psychological Displacement, Belonging, Identity Crisis, Internal Diaspora, Alienation, Mahesh Dattani

Introduction

Indian English drama has undergone significant transformation in the post-independence period. Earlier dramatic traditions largely focused on mythology, nationalism, and social reform, but contemporary playwrights gradually shifted attention toward the psychological and emotional realities of modern life. Urbanization, changing family structures, globalization, and emerging discussions

on gender and sexuality deeply influenced modern Indian theatre. In this changing literary landscape, Mahesh Dattani emerged as one of the most important dramatic voices because of his willingness to address issues that mainstream society often considered uncomfortable or controversial.

Dattani's theatre is strongly rooted in contemporary Indian social reality. His plays do not merely entertain audiences; they question accepted social norms and expose emotional suffering hidden beneath ordinary domestic life. He focuses particularly on marginalized individuals whose voices are frequently silenced within patriarchal and heteronormative social systems. Women, queer individuals, emotionally vulnerable people, and socially neglected characters occupy central positions in his dramatic world. His plays therefore become spaces where invisible emotional struggles are brought into public discussion.

A major strength of Dattani's drama lies in his realistic portrayal of human relationships. Instead of presenting dramatic conflicts in exaggerated forms, he portrays emotional pain through ordinary conversations, silences, memories, and fragmented relationships. Families in his plays are often emotionally unstable despite appearing socially respectable. This contrast between external normalcy and internal suffering creates emotional intensity within his theatre.

Another important aspect of Dattani's work is his exploration of identity. His characters continuously negotiate between personal desires and social expectations. They struggle to balance individuality with cultural norms, resulting in emotional conflict and psychological instability. Such struggles frequently create a sense of alienation and displacement.

One of the recurring concerns in Dattani's plays is the idea of displacement. Traditionally, displacement has been associated with migration, exile, and diaspora. Diaspora literature often deals with people who move away from their homeland and experience alienation in foreign spaces. However, recent literary studies have expanded the meaning of displacement beyond geographical migration. Emotional isolation, identity crisis, and social exclusion can also create forms of internal exile. A person may continue to live within the same family, society, or homeland and still experience a deep sense of alienation. Such emotional and psychological displacement becomes an important aspect of Dattani's dramatic works.

Contemporary Indian English drama has emerged as an important literary space for questioning social norms and exposing the emotional realities hidden within society. Among modern Indian playwrights, Mahesh Dattani occupies a significant position because of his bold engagement with issues that were often ignored or silenced in mainstream discourse. His plays discuss patriarchy, gender discrimination, homosexuality, emotional repression, family conflict, and the struggles of marginalized individuals. Instead of presenting heroic or idealized characters, Dattani portrays ordinary people burdened by loneliness, guilt, silence, and emotional insecurity. His dramatic world reflects the tensions of

contemporary urban Indian society where individuals struggle to balance personal identity with social expectations.

One of the recurring concerns in Dattani's plays is the idea of displacement. Traditionally, displacement has been associated with migration, exile, and diaspora. Diaspora literature often deals with people who move away from their homeland and experience alienation in foreign spaces. However, recent literary studies have expanded the meaning of displacement beyond geographical migration. Emotional isolation, identity crisis, and social exclusion can also create forms of internal exile. A person may continue to live within the same family, society, or homeland and still experience a deep sense of alienation. Such emotional and psychological displacement becomes an important aspect of Dattani's dramatic works.

Dattani's characters frequently feel disconnected from the people and environments around them. Women struggle against patriarchal oppression, queer individuals hide their identities to survive social judgment, and emotionally vulnerable characters remain trapped within silence and trauma. Their homes fail to provide emotional security or belonging. Instead, home becomes a site of repression, conflict, and emotional suffering. Through these portrayals, Dattani presents displacement not merely as physical separation but as an emotional condition rooted in social inequality and lack of acceptance.

The concept of belonging is equally important in Dattani's plays. Human beings naturally seek emotional recognition, dignity, love, and acceptance. However, many of Dattani's characters are denied these emotional needs because of rigid social structures. They continuously negotiate their identities while struggling against gender roles, cultural expectations, and social prejudice. Their lives reflect what may be called psychological diaspora, where individuals become strangers within their own social and emotional worlds.

This paper examines psychological displacement and the search for belonging in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. These plays are significant because they portray different forms of emotional exile experienced by women and queer individuals in contemporary Indian society. The study explores how trauma, silence, patriarchy, memory, and identity suppression contribute to internal displacement. Drawing ideas from diaspora studies, queer theory, and gender studies, the paper argues that Dattani broadens the meaning of diaspora by focusing on emotional alienation rather than physical migration alone.

The study also attempts to show how Dattani's dramatic technique strengthens the emotional impact of these themes. His realistic dialogues, fragmented family relationships, symbolic use of memory, and psychologically layered characters create a strong sense of emotional realism. Through his plays, Dattani gives voice to individuals who often remain invisible within dominant social structures.

In contemporary society, where discussions about identity, gender, and belonging continue to evolve, Dattani's plays remain highly relevant. His dramatic world encourages readers and audiences to rethink accepted social norms and recognize the emotional struggles faced by marginalized individuals. The paper therefore explores not only literary themes but also the larger social realities reflected in Dattani's theatre.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical discussions surrounding diaspora and identity have changed considerably in recent decades. Earlier studies viewed diaspora mainly in relation to migration and geographical displacement, but contemporary criticism increasingly recognizes emotional and psychological forms of exile. Such perspectives become highly relevant while analysing Mahesh Dattani's plays because his characters often experience emotional homelessness despite remaining within familiar cultural spaces.

Diaspora studies mainly examine the experiences of people separated from their homeland due to migration, colonialism, slavery, or political conflict. However, scholars later began to emphasize that feelings of displacement may also emerge through emotional isolation, cultural exclusion, and fragmented identity. Stuart Hall's concept of identity suggests that identity is never stable or complete; rather, it is continuously shaped through social experience, memory, and representation. This idea helps explain the emotional fragmentation experienced by Dattani's characters.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of "unhomeliness" is particularly significant in understanding Dattani's dramatic world. According to Bhabha, individuals may feel psychologically alienated even within their own homes and societies. Familiar spaces no longer provide emotional comfort or belonging. Dattani repeatedly presents homes as emotionally conflicted spaces filled with silence, repression, and emotional instability.

Queer theory further contributes to this study, especially in relation to *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. Queer theory challenges dominant assumptions about sexuality and gender identity. Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity argues that gender roles are socially constructed and repeatedly performed rather than naturally fixed. In Dattani's plays, queer characters frequently perform socially acceptable identities in order to survive social judgment and rejection.

Feminist criticism also provides an important framework for analysing women characters in *Tara* and *Bravely Fought the Queen*. Patriarchal systems often deny women emotional freedom, individuality, and equal recognition. Feminist scholars argue that women are frequently expected to remain silent and emotionally submissive within family structures. Dattani's female characters struggle against these oppressive expectations while attempting to preserve their emotional dignity.

Psychological displacement forms the central theoretical concern of this study. Psychological displacement refers to emotional alienation created by trauma, exclusion, silence, and identity suppression. Unlike physical migration, psychological displacement exists internally. Individuals may feel emotionally disconnected even while remaining within familiar social and cultural spaces. This concept helps explain the emotional experiences of Dattani's characters, who often become strangers within their own homes and relationships.

Trauma theory also becomes relevant in understanding Dattani's plays. Emotional trauma does not disappear easily; it continues to shape identity, memory, and relationships over time. Many characters in Dattani's dramatic world remain haunted by painful memories and unresolved emotional conflicts. Their inability to communicate openly deepens emotional isolation and internal exile.

Through these interconnected theoretical perspectives, the present study analyses how Dattani expands the meaning of displacement beyond geographical migration. His plays suggest that exclusion, emotional repression, and lack of acceptance can create powerful forms of psychological diaspora within contemporary Indian society.

The present study draws from diaspora studies, queer theory, and gender studies to analyse psychological displacement and the search for belonging in Mahesh Dattani's plays. Although diaspora is traditionally associated with migration and exile, recent critical discussions have expanded its meaning to include emotional and psychological forms of alienation. The idea of internal diaspora becomes particularly relevant while studying Dattani's dramatic world because his characters often experience displacement within their own homes, families, and societies.

Diaspora studies mainly examine the experiences of individuals who are separated from their homeland due to migration, colonialism, or forced displacement. Scholars such as Stuart Hall and Homi K. Bhabha argue that identity is never fixed but continuously shaped through memory, culture, and social experience. Hall's concept of cultural identity emphasizes fragmentation and instability within identity formation. This idea becomes relevant in Dattani's plays where characters struggle to understand themselves within oppressive social systems.

Bhabha's concept of "unhomeliness" is especially useful in analysing psychological displacement. According to Bhabha, individuals may experience emotional alienation even within familiar environments. Home no longer functions as a secure or comforting space. This idea closely reflects the emotional condition of Dattani's characters who feel disconnected from their families and social surroundings despite physically remaining within them.

Queer theory also provides an important framework for understanding *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. Queer theory challenges heteronormative social structures and questions fixed ideas of gender and sexuality. Judith Butler's discussion of gender performativity argues that gender identity is socially

constructed rather than naturally fixed. In Dattani's plays, queer characters constantly perform socially acceptable roles in order to survive within conservative society. This creates emotional conflict and identity fragmentation. Gender studies further help in analysing the experiences of women characters in *Tara* and *Bravely Fought the Queen*. Patriarchal structures often deny women emotional freedom, individuality, and agency. Feminist criticism examines how social systems silence women and reduce them to traditional gender roles. Dattani's female characters struggle against emotional neglect, social expectations, and male authority. Their emotional suffering becomes a form of internal exile.

Another important concept relevant to this study is psychological displacement. Psychological displacement refers to emotional alienation caused by trauma, exclusion, silence, and identity suppression. Unlike physical migration, psychological displacement exists internally. Individuals may feel emotionally homeless even while remaining within familiar cultural spaces. Dattani's plays repeatedly portray characters who experience such emotional disconnection.

Memory and trauma also play significant roles in shaping emotional displacement. Many characters in Dattani's plays remain trapped within painful memories and unresolved emotional wounds. Their inability to communicate openly deepens their isolation. Trauma becomes both personal and social because it emerges from larger systems of inequality and repression.

Through these theoretical perspectives, this paper examines how Dattani transforms the idea of diaspora into an emotional and psychological experience. His plays reveal that displacement can exist not only across nations and borders but also within homes, relationships, and identities.

Psychological Displacement in *Tara*

Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* is one of the most emotionally intense plays in contemporary Indian drama because it exposes how deeply gender discrimination operates within family structures. The play revolves around conjoined twins, Tara and Chandan, whose lives are shaped by a tragic medical decision influenced by patriarchal thinking. Through this deeply personal story, Dattani reveals how emotional trauma and inequality create psychological displacement within the family.

The play immediately establishes an atmosphere of emotional tension and fragmentation. Although Tara and Chandan share a close emotional bond, they gradually become victims of hidden family secrets and social prejudice. The family's decision to give the better chance of survival to Chandan reflects the social preference for masculinity. Tara is denied equal opportunity simply because she is female.

Tara's emotional suffering becomes the central focus of the play. She is intelligent, emotionally mature, and sensitive, yet she constantly experiences neglect and disappointment. Her alienation does not emerge from external society alone but

from betrayal within her own family. The emotional wound becomes more painful because it originates from the people who are expected to love and protect her. Bharati's character represents maternal guilt and emotional conflict. She attempts to compensate for the injustice done to Tara through excessive affection, but emotional trauma cannot easily be repaired. Her emotional instability reflects the destructive effects of patriarchal values not only on daughters but also on mothers themselves. Even though Bharati participates in the decision, she remains emotionally haunted by guilt.

The father's emotional distance further intensifies the atmosphere of silence within the family. Communication remains fragmented and incomplete. Much of the emotional pain in the play is expressed indirectly through pauses, hesitation, and silence. Dattani's dramatic technique therefore mirrors the emotional repression experienced by the characters.

Chandan's psychological condition is equally important. Even after moving to London and renaming himself Dan, he remains emotionally trapped within memories of Tara. Physical migration fails to provide emotional freedom because psychological displacement continues to exist internally. His fragmented identity reflects the inability to escape emotional trauma.

The relationship between memory and displacement is strongly visible in the play. Chandan reconstructs the past through memory, attempting to understand guilt, loss, and identity. The past constantly interrupts the present, showing how trauma shapes emotional existence. Tara's absence becomes emotionally present throughout the play.

Dattani also critiques the social construction of gender roles. Tara's tragedy is not accidental; it is produced by a patriarchal society that values male identity more than female existence. The emotional suffering experienced by Tara reflects the larger condition of women who are denied equality and recognition within society. The play therefore presents home as a space of emotional conflict rather than emotional security. Family relationships become sources of pain, guilt, and silence. Through *Tara*, Dattani expands the idea of displacement beyond physical movement and presents emotional alienation as a deeply human experience.

Alienation and Emotional Exile in *Bravely Fought the Queen*

In *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Mahesh Dattani examines the emotional condition of women trapped within patriarchal domestic spaces. The play portrays marriage and family not as sources of emotional support but as systems of control, silence, and repression. Through emotionally complex characters, Dattani reveals how women experience internal exile even within socially respectable households.

The play centres around the Trivedi family, whose outward appearance of sophistication hides emotional violence and psychological instability. Dolly and Alka, the two central female characters, struggle to maintain emotional balance within deeply oppressive marriages. Their husbands dominate family relationships through authority, manipulation, and emotional neglect.

Dolly's emotional condition reflects exhaustion and helplessness. Although she attempts to preserve family harmony, she remains emotionally unfulfilled and isolated. Her marriage lacks intimacy and understanding. Instead of functioning as a partnership, it becomes an emotionally suffocating structure. Alka experiences similar emotional neglect and frustration.

The emotional atmosphere of the household is marked by tension and suppressed anger. Genuine communication rarely occurs. Conversations often remain incomplete or emotionally evasive. This inability to communicate openly creates emotional distance among family members. Dattani shows how silence itself can become a form of emotional violence.

Daksha's character introduces another layer of psychological trauma into the play. Her mental instability reflects the long-term effects of emotional repression and violence. Memory becomes painful rather than comforting. The traumatic past continues to shape present relationships, creating emotional fragmentation within the family.

One of the most striking aspects of the play is the contrast between appearance and reality. The Trivedi family attempts to maintain an image of urban respectability, but beneath this surface lies emotional emptiness and cruelty. Dattani critiques the hypocrisy of middle-class society where external success often conceals private suffering.

Patriarchal power structures dominate the emotional lives of women in the play. Female characters are expected to tolerate emotional neglect and remain silent for the sake of family stability. Their emotional needs are ignored or dismissed. Such experiences create a deep sense of alienation and displacement.

The title *Bravely Fought the Queen* carries symbolic significance. It reflects the silent resistance of women who struggle to survive emotionally oppressive conditions. Although they continue to search for dignity and recognition, they remain emotionally displaced within their own homes.

Dattani also uses symbolism and fragmented dialogue to strengthen the emotional atmosphere of the play. Emotional truths often emerge indirectly through symbolic references and hidden tensions. This dramatic technique creates a realistic portrayal of emotional repression within families.

Through *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Dattani reveals how patriarchal systems create psychological exile for women. The play demonstrates that displacement can exist even within physically secure domestic spaces when emotional acceptance and individuality are denied.

Queer Identity and Internal Diaspora in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*

On a Muggy Night in Mumbai is considered one of the earliest Indian English plays to openly discuss homosexuality in urban Indian society. At a time when queer identities remained largely invisible within mainstream theatre, Mahesh Dattani courageously brought queer experiences into public discussion. The play

explores not only sexuality but also loneliness, secrecy, fear, and emotional isolation.

The queer characters in the play experience constant emotional displacement because society refuses to fully accept them. Their lives are shaped by fear of rejection and social judgment. As a result, they are forced to hide their true identities behind socially acceptable appearances. This creates emotional fragmentation and psychological conflict.

Kamlesh represents emotional vulnerability and the desire for acceptance. He longs for emotional intimacy and honesty but remains trapped within a society that condemns homosexuality. His emotional struggles reveal the loneliness experienced by queer individuals who cannot openly express themselves.

Sharad presents a different emotional response to social rejection. He appears confident and humorous, but beneath this exterior lies insecurity and emotional pain. Dattani avoids presenting queer characters as stereotypes. Instead, he portrays them as emotionally complex individuals searching for dignity and belonging.

The play strongly critiques heteronormative social structures that force individuals to lead double lives. Some characters attempt to preserve public respectability while privately suppressing their true identities. This division between public self and private self creates psychological displacement.

Bunny's character reveals another dimension of emotional conflict. He struggles between social expectations and personal identity. His inability to reconcile these pressures intensifies emotional isolation. Dattani suggests that emotional suffering emerges not from queer identity itself but from social intolerance and exclusion.

The idea of home becomes deeply complicated in the play. Although the characters remain physically within their homeland, they do not experience emotional belonging. Society denies them acceptance, visibility, and recognition. Their lives therefore reflect a form of internal diaspora.

Dattani's dramatic language contributes significantly to the emotional realism of the play. Conversations move between humor, intimacy, tension, and vulnerability. Emotional truths emerge gradually through personal interactions rather than dramatic declarations. This subtle realism strengthens the emotional impact of the play.

The play also challenges traditional notions of masculinity in Indian society. Queer characters struggle against social expectations that define masculinity through heteronormative behaviour. Their emotional conflict reflects the pressure to conform to socially accepted identities.

Unlike traditional diaspora narratives involving migration across nations, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* presents identity itself as a site of displacement. Emotional exile exists within society because individuals are denied the freedom to live honestly and openly.

Through this play, Dattani humanizes queer experiences and expands the understanding of belonging, identity, and emotional displacement in contemporary Indian drama.

Comparative Discussion

Although *Tara*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* focus on different social realities, they are deeply connected through the recurring themes of emotional alienation, silence, identity crisis, and the search for belonging. In all three plays, Dattani portrays individuals who feel emotionally displaced within familiar social environments. Their suffering emerges not from physical migration but from emotional exclusion and social rejection.

One of the strongest similarities among the plays is the role of family as a site of emotional conflict. In *Tara*, family becomes a space of betrayal and gender discrimination. In *Bravely Fought the Queen*, marriage and domestic relationships create emotional suffocation for women. In *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, queer individuals remain emotionally distant from family and society because they fear rejection and invisibility. In each play, the idea of home becomes emotionally unstable.

Silence is another major connecting element. Characters frequently suppress their emotions instead of communicating openly. Hidden truths, emotional repression, and unspoken trauma create psychological fragmentation. Dattani carefully uses pauses, incomplete conversations, and emotional hesitation to reflect this silence dramatically.

The experience of identity crisis also unites the characters across these plays. Tara struggles against gender discrimination that affects her self-worth and identity. Chandan experiences guilt and emotional fragmentation. Dolly and Alka feel emotionally trapped within patriarchal expectations. Kamlesh and other queer characters struggle to reconcile personal identity with social norms. In every case, identity becomes unstable because society refuses to accept individuality.

Another important similarity lies in the relationship between memory and trauma. Characters repeatedly revisit painful experiences that continue to shape their emotional lives. Memory in Dattani's plays is not comforting; it often intensifies emotional suffering. Trauma therefore becomes a continuing emotional reality rather than a completed past event.

Dattani's dramatic technique strengthens these themes effectively. His realistic dialogue, emotionally layered characterization, and symbolic use of domestic space create powerful emotional realism. Rather than using grand dramatic action, he focuses on ordinary interactions and psychological tension. This subtle approach makes the emotional suffering of the characters more believable and relatable.

The plays also collectively critique patriarchal and heteronormative social structures. Women and queer individuals are repeatedly denied emotional freedom

and equal recognition. Their emotional displacement reflects broader social inequalities existing within contemporary Indian society.

Another significant aspect connecting the plays is the idea of invisibility. Many characters feel unseen, unheard, or emotionally neglected despite living among others. Emotional neglect becomes a major source of loneliness and alienation. Dattani suggests that human beings require emotional recognition and acceptance in order to experience belonging.

The plays therefore broaden the understanding of diaspora and displacement in literary studies. Traditional diaspora narratives often focus on migration across nations and borders. Dattani, however, presents displacement as an emotional condition that can exist within one's homeland, family, and personal relationships. His dramatic world demonstrates that social exclusion and emotional repression can create forms of psychological diaspora without physical movement.

By combining themes of gender, sexuality, memory, trauma, and emotional isolation, Dattani creates a dramatic landscape where belonging remains fragile and uncertain. His plays encourage audiences to recognize the emotional suffering hidden beneath ordinary social structures and question the systems that produce such alienation.

Relevance of Dattani's Plays in Contemporary Society

Mahesh Dattani's plays continue to remain highly relevant in contemporary society because the issues he addresses are still deeply present within social life. Gender discrimination, emotional neglect, identity suppression, and intolerance toward queer identities continue to affect many individuals despite social progress and increasing public awareness.

One of the reasons Dattani's plays remain important is their realistic portrayal of emotional suffering within ordinary families. Many social problems are often hidden behind the image of a "normal" family. Dattani exposes these hidden emotional conflicts and encourages audiences to confront uncomfortable realities. His plays therefore function not only as literary texts but also as social critiques. The discussion of queer identity in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* remains particularly significant even today. Although legal and social attitudes toward homosexuality have changed in India in recent years, queer individuals still experience discrimination, silence, and emotional isolation in many spaces. Dattani's portrayal of queer emotional struggles continues to resonate strongly with contemporary audiences.

Similarly, the emotional experiences of women in *Tara* and *Bravely Fought the Queen* remain socially relevant. Patriarchal structures continue to influence family relationships, emotional expectations, and gender roles. Women are often expected to prioritize family stability over personal freedom and emotional wellbeing. Dattani's plays therefore continue to speak meaningfully to contemporary gender realities.

Another important reason for the continued relevance of Dattani's theatre is his focus on mental and emotional wellbeing. Modern society increasingly recognizes the importance of emotional health, trauma, and psychological support. Dattani's characters reflect the emotional consequences of silence, repression, and lack of acceptance. His plays encourage audiences to think more sensitively about emotional suffering.

Dattani also remains relevant because of his humanistic approach. He does not present characters as completely good or evil; instead, he portrays emotionally complex individuals shaped by social systems and personal vulnerabilities. This complexity makes his characters realistic and relatable.

Through his dramatic works, Dattani invites audiences to rethink accepted social values and become more empathetic toward marginalized individuals. His plays therefore remain important contributions to contemporary Indian literature and theatre.

Although *Tara*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* focus on different social realities, they are connected through the recurring themes of emotional alienation, identity crisis, and the search for belonging. In all three plays, Dattani portrays characters who feel emotionally displaced within familiar social environments.

The women characters in *Tara* and *Bravely Fought the Queen* experience oppression through patriarchal structures that deny emotional freedom and individuality. Similarly, queer characters in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* suffer because society refuses to accept their identities. In each play, emotional suffering emerges from social expectations and rigid cultural norms.

Another important similarity among the plays is the role of silence. Characters often fail to communicate openly about their emotional pain. Suppressed emotions create tension, loneliness, and psychological fragmentation. Silence therefore becomes a major source of emotional displacement.

Memory and trauma also connect the plays. Characters remain emotionally trapped within painful experiences that continue to shape their identities and relationships. The inability to escape emotional wounds intensifies their sense of isolation.

Dattani's dramatic technique further strengthens these themes. His realistic dialogues, fragmented family relationships, and psychologically layered characterization create emotional realism. Through ordinary domestic situations, he exposes deeper emotional and social conflicts.

Most importantly, all three plays redefine the idea of diaspora. Dattani shows that displacement can exist without physical migration. Emotional rejection, social exclusion, and identity suppression can create forms of psychological diaspora within one's homeland.

Conclusion

Mahesh Dattani's plays offer a sensitive and realistic portrayal of individuals who struggle to find acceptance within their own homes and society. Although his works are not traditionally placed within diaspora literature, they strongly reflect emotional and psychological forms of displacement. In *Tara*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, characters experience loneliness, identity crisis, silence, and alienation because they fail to fit into socially accepted norms.

Dattani's women characters suffer under patriarchal expectations, while queer characters face rejection and invisibility within heteronormative society. These experiences create a sense of internal exile where individuals feel emotionally disconnected from the spaces and relationships around them. The idea of "home" in Dattani's plays therefore becomes complicated. It is not always a place of comfort; at times, it becomes a source of pain, repression, and emotional isolation. Another important aspect of Dattani's dramatic world is the role of memory and trauma. Many characters continue to carry emotional wounds that shape their identities and relationships. Their inability to communicate openly further deepens their isolation. Through such portrayals, Dattani reveals the hidden emotional struggles that often remain unnoticed in contemporary society.

This study ultimately suggests that displacement should not be understood only in terms of physical migration. Emotional exclusion, lack of acceptance, and identity suppression can also create forms of psychological diaspora. By bringing marginalized voices to the centre of his plays, Dattani broadens the understanding of belonging and highlights the emotional need for recognition, dignity, and human connection.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/31**ACADEMIC LANDSCAPES AS SITES OF IDENTITY FORMATION
AND EMOTIONAL BELONGING IN THE SELECT WORKS OF
SHARON CREECH AND ANDREW CLEMENTS****M. IDA**Research Scholar, Department of English
Sri Meenakshi Government Arts College for Women
Madurai Kamaraj University**DR. G. ARUL SELVI MARIYA**Associate Professor, Department of English
Sri Meenakshi Government Arts College for Women
Madurai Kamaraj University**Abstract**

School, as an institution, not only is a formal space for education, but is a microcosm of the large world that shapes the identity of the individual. In Children's Literature, school is an inevitable and significant narrative space where every child's experience in terms of forming friendship, negotiating hierarchy or facing moral, social and emotional conflicts unfolds. In today's academic landscape, schools have transformed their dimensions from being a mere site of didacticism and norms to be locale of skill sets, competence and commercial brands. The teachers are no more authoritative figures of knowledge but are considered as co-agents in the learning process. Sharon Creech and Andrew Clements, the pivotal and influential children's novelists vividly portray school as a personal space for emotional discovery and as a dynamic system for social transformation. The Paper endeavours to discuss the academic landscape, the trio combination of teachers, students and academics that are depicted in Sharon Creech's *A Fine, Fine School*, *A Smart, Smart School*, *Hate that Cat: A Novel*, *Love that Dog: A Novel* and Andrew Clements' *Frindle*, *The Report Card*. The paper is an attempt to disclose the positive and detrimental effects that a school ambiance can have on the children. The paper proposes to support its argument in the light of postmodern thoughts that give prominence to the subjective experiences of the students and social dimensions of schools.

Keywords: School, Academic Landscape, Teacher, Learner, Skills, Diaspora, Postmodernism

Children's literature, a distinct spurt of academic enthusiasm, has come a long from its shallow pursuits and concerns of instruction, leisure principles and didacticism. From its embryonic phase, Children's literature has emerged to be a luxuriant and sovereign body of 'responsible' literature reflecting social implications and inspiring the young minds towards a social change. As the

interplay between the learners' understanding of the world and the literature chosen and read by them becomes a mechanism for transmitting socio-cultural values, it is essential chiefly for children's literature to keep up its social responsibility. As the children develop their literary skills through stories, folktales, rhymes etc. at a very young age through children's literature, the undeniable influence it leaves becomes crucial to consider.

Both Sharon Creech and Andrew Clements are teacher-turned fiction writers. It seems that it becomes inevitable for them to escape from their mental locale, which is the school ambience, where they possibly relished best of their lifetime influencing the neophytes. Roughly in all their works, school is the milieu; the teaching-learning dimensions, teacher-student affiliation, the influential role of the teachers, the heterogeneous students, their attitudes, their friendships etc. are the numerous thematic facets of their works. Both Sharon and Andrew stand for the creative, purposeful, interesting ways of imparting education over the 'mere' academics.

The Teacher-turned Novelist Sharon Creech is the best-selling American Children's author known for her distinctive knack of storytelling. She is the first American to have received awards in both the U.S. and abroad, including the Newbery Medal, the Newbery Honor and Great Britain's Carnegie Medal. Infused with emotional honesty, Sharon deals with a variety of themes derived mostly from her personal experiences as a school teacher.

The Newbery Medal winner Sharon Creech's *A Fine, Fine School* is a funny picture book with a gentle satire on the present educational system that maroons the learners in the academic island. While the children long to explore the real world around them which is immensely filled with quality life lessons, schools like "Fine school" limit the treasures of life within the boundary of academics.

The ambitious, zealous Principal Mr. Keene, who was an able leader, feels much pleased and elated to observe the obliging, participative and passionate spirit of the teachers and students. He often remarked, "Aren't these fine children?" Aren't these fine teachers? Isn't this a fine, fine, school?" (AFF 4). Being overwhelmed with the satisfactory performance of the school, Mr. Keene decided to run the school 24x7x365 - first on Saturdays, then on Sundays, then on holidays, then in the summer. The exuberant administrator Mr. Keene, without considering the dire aftermaths of this unique practice, assumed that all was fine with the fine school. It was Tillie, a studious, courageous student who geared herself up to enlighten Mr. Keene about the shattering effects of limiting the value of life within the academic landscape, whereas, life outside the school is equally rewarding and invaluable. Tillie expressed the agony of not being able to spend time with her dog Beans, her little brother and that she had not learnt to climb a tree so far, which she felt and found to be 'great living' that a 'fine school' cannot afford.

The effective communication of the young mind, Tillie, the trust and respect that Mr. Keene had already earned (which is evident as nobody groaned or opposed

the idea of extending the school hours) eventually led to revelation and reformation towards a constructive change. Mr. Keene without more ado genuinely expressed “You, all of you -children and teachers- you need to learn how to climb a tree and sit in it for an hour” (AFF 31) having realized the thoughtless ‘fine’ deed that he had been engrossed in all those days.

Deftly crafted *A Fine, Fine School* is indeed a clarion call for the present educational administrators to disengage their claim that flood of academic works and swarm of tests would make the learner-individual successful. The triumphant note of Sharon Creech’s *A Fine, Fine School* lies in letting the child voice the essentials of growth that is derived from life experiences and social interactions. Though the world is in need of committed, ardent Principals, educational administrators like Mr. Keene, the purpose of education should not be defeated. Tillie becomes the symbolic representation of the younger generation that tries to demolish the rigid walls of the autocratic educational system.

A Smart, Smart School, which is written as a sequel to the *New York Times* bestselling picture book, *A Fine, Fine School*, is a step forward in conveying a deep message to the knowledge-alone-inclined educational system. The message is quite eloquent that a school can be certainly ‘smart’ if it encourages creativity over rote learning. Contemplating on the extensive use of the word ‘smart’ which has become a household term with the advent of technology, one should wake up to the realization that real smartness lies in the balanced blend of knowledge and skills, especially, creativity.

Mr. Keene, the overzealous Principal of the ‘fine’ school and Tillie, her dog Beans are all back in the Smart school. Mr. Keene, who used to stroll the school hallways, would observe and encourage children’s drawing, painting and other skills. He would also promptly acknowledge the teachers’ effort in honing the students’ skills. The sudden burst of Mr. Keene’s appendix followed by treatment and rest, led Mr. Tatters to be Principal. The children and the teachers badly suffered the intense and ‘mere’ academic spirit of Mr. Tatters who never gave even an iota of space for creative skills. Soon, the entire school became obsessed with continuous tests and evaluation and consequently, became oblivious of flowers, fun and frolic. However, the reversal of fortune happened when Mr. Keene recovered and returned to make the school truly smart and holistic in its endeavours.

The contemporary digital era has already embraced a plenty of ‘smart’ schools claiming to impart education that makes the learners dexterous, adept and competent. However, the impending realization is that education which does not involve skills is not holistic and if education is not holistic, it cannot be education in its true sense.

Sharon Creech’s *Love that Dog* is a Newbery Award-winning verse novel that evolves from an anti-poetic view given on poetry to immortalizing poetry for its

amazing worth. Jack, the child protagonist, despised the idea of poetry considering that as meant for girls.

I don't want to
Because boys
Don't write poetry
Girls do. (LTD 1)

Jack's such cynical opinion and resentment got extremely reversed into adoration and gaining expertise in poetry with the constant impetus given by the highly dedicated teacher Miss Stretchberry. Miss Stretchberry acted as a catalyst entirely bent upon reversing Jack's prejudice on poetry. She consistently persuaded Jack by involving him in a range of activities related to reading poetry, writing poetry on his pet and inviting Jack's inspirational poet Walter Dean Myers to the school. The passionate and influential teacher Miss Stretchberry's efforts got well paid off when Jack developed an irresistible adoration and zeal for poetry.

Love that Dog as a verse novel in fact sings the glory of the robust, untarnished attitude of a great teacher Miss Stretchberry. The influential effect prompted by Miss Stretchberry continues in *Hate that Cat*, a sequel verse novel of *Love that Dog*. In *Hate that Cat* Jack got another year to study in Miss Stretchberry's class and his poetic journey got further advanced, and Jack's use of poetic devices like onomatopoeia, alliteration etc., testify this. It was Miss Stretchberry who was to be credited for Jack's growing desire for poetry. The academic landscape depicted in these two verse novels is quite optimistic and hopeful. The pivotal role played by the teachers in any academic ambience is unquestionable. The world is in huge need of iconic teachers like Miss Stretchberry whose influence assuredly affects eternity. The cheering role of teachers like Miss Stretchberry could help the learners strike chords with even the so thought unattractive genres.

While *A Fine, Fine School* and *A Smart, Smart School* portray the unconstructive traits of the educational system that practises disseminating dry knowledge and accumulating information as the thumb rule, *Love that Dog* and *Hate that Cat* render an encouraging portrait of ardent teacher who could miraculously transform the learners' attitude even to the extent of gaining expertise in the subjects. The works of Sharon Creech call for an academic landscape that encourages critical reflection, social interaction and skill development towards innovative pursuits and that is governed by the 'real' educational leaders who could audaciously raise the curtain of the 'fictional' educational system.

With more than 80 books published to his credit, Andrew Clements is yet another endearing, entertaining American Children's author. *Frindle*, Clements' debut novel, is the winner of the 2016 Phoenix Award. *Frindle* has also won an incredible twenty-two state award and is also a recipient of the prestigious Christopher Award. Like Sharon Creech, Andrew Clements is also a Teacher-turned Novelist whose teacher traits, nostalgic school experiences, the cherished

and devastating moments spent with the students expressed in lucid style make his books a great choice for classrooms.

Frindle, which is set in a school environment, over again emphasizes the crucial role played by the teachers in chiseling students to be creative, ambitious and triumphant. The entire idea of the novel is foreshadowed in the following main conflict expressed by Mrs. Granger, the language arts teacher of the Fifth grade.

“Who says dog means dog? You do, Nicholas. You and me and everyone in this class and this school and this town and this state and this country. We all agree. But if all of us in this room decided to call that creature something else, and if everyone else did too, then that is what it would be called, and one day it would be written in the dictionary that way. WE decide what goes in that book.” (*Frindle* Chapter 5)

Nick Allen, the Protagonist of the novel, who was induced by such thought provoking ideas decided to be creative. Knowing the rigid temperament of Mrs. Granger, he thought that he cannot execute his creative ways in her class. Yet, Nick started being creative and used the new word Frindle for pen. He tried several ways to publicise the word and soon Frindle became a common word. Infuriated by Nick’s awful idea, Mrs. Granger punished the class with impositions. But, the excitement of using the new word escalated and became a big news in a news channel of New York and eventually got into the Dictionary. Nick did not realise the subtle inspirational role played by Mrs. Granger until she sent a Dictionary to Nick where the word Frindle was printed with a one line explanation and which Mrs. Granger herself used to teach. “This is a brand new dictionary I recommend that my students use for their homework and now when I teach them how new words are added to the dictionary, I tell each and every one of them to look up the word Frindle.” (*Frindle* Chapter 15)

The novel ended with Mrs. Granger being proud of having inspired the class to be creative and to use the language in a more amusing and fascinating way. The academic landscape in *Frindle* reassures the compelling and decisive role that teachers play in enhancing and enriching students’ potentials and skills. The teachers could be directly inspirational like Miss Stretchberry in Sharon Creech’s *Love that Dog* and *Hate that Cat* or could be implicitly persuading like Mrs. Granger.

Andrew Clements’ another remarkable school story, *The Report Card* is the winner of the William Allen White Children’s Book Award in 2005. It’s an academic satire that calls into question the way the parents and the teachers perceive Education to be and insist that they should reconsider their narrow perception on education emphasizing unduly on Assessments, Grades and Performance.

The Report Card is a sharp satire on the society that follows an educational system entirely committed to eulogizing academic Grades and the high IQ Performers. Nora Rowley, the protagonist is one such extraordinary student who was always

looked up to as being ‘different’. That is where the trouble started for Nora as she believed that “They’re all based on a bunch of stupid information that anybody with half a brain can memorize. Tests and grades and all of it—it’s all...just stupid.” (TRC 34) Nora, who not only possessed high IQ but high EQ too, empathized with the low-scoring students who pathetically struggled to run in the Grade race. She witnessed the undue pressure that was laid on students like Stephen Curtis who were underestimated in terms of their grades and were made to feel unworthy and unintelligent. Nora, who wanted to get good riddance of such ridiculous practice, purposely started scoring grades as low as D and on par with Stephen. Nora was absolutely glad in securing D grades as it put her in the ‘normal’ realm and not as somebody who was gazed at for being great, gifted and extraordinary.

Being shocked by Nora's academic degradation when Nora's parents met the principal and later when her father forced Nora to take up a program for the ‘gifted’ as her IQ was identified to be approximately 188, Nora furiously questioned, “Who gets to say what my full potential is? An IQ test? Shouldn't I have something to say about what I want to accomplish? What if what I really want is to be normal?”(TRC Chapter 2) After a series of heated arguments, several episodes of conflicts between teachers, Nora, her classmates and parents, Nora revealed her intentional low scoring performances and expressed how the hype of the grade system pollute the academic landscape and hurt the students educationally, emotionally and socially.

Andrew Clements' observation and experience as a teacher has indeed helped him genuinely voice a powerful message that the grading system / ‘The Report Card’ can be devastating if that alone becomes the yardstick to determine one's success. The plot of *The Report Card* is exactly the scenario of the present ‘mark mongers’ educational system that restricts the holistic perspective of education within its stringent academic boundaries. Nora's parents are the prototypes of today's greedy parents who could not accept the Report Card with low grades but aspire for ‘more’ and ‘only academics’ in their children. The character of Nora is symbolic of the stress and pressure that students endure for the sake of Grades and of the outlook of the society.

Sharon Creech and Andrew Clements, through their stark portrayal of the academic landscape, essentially express their concerns over the stringent, theoretical, narrow, autocratic academic approach that is devoid of skill education. Despite such dark representations, both the authors have portrayed influential teachers like Miss Stretchberry, Mrs. Granger whose passionate teacher traits leave indelible remarks. Having served as teachers, both Sharon Creech and Andrew Clements share a similar viewpoint that education should necessarily include creativity and language competency in its curriculum as both these have ‘power’ entrenched in them - power to question, communicate and express. John Dewey's theory of experiential, pragmatic learning grounded in practical, real-

world experience and meaningful exploration are the sheer educational ideals that Sharon Creech and Andrew Clements also like to instil in the academic landscape. The advent of Postmodernism has influenced all aspects of life and its impact on the concept of education is no exception. The postmodern stance is that the teachers should help students build self-realities that are formed by society and the environment. It calls students to build their own learning methods based on their skills and experience. The postmodern theory emphasizes on transformational methodology that caters to the requirements of the learners. The sum and substance of these core ideals of postmodernism are indeed the anxious thoughts of Sharon Creech and Andrew Clements that are expressed in fine creative and hopeful spirit looking forward to behold an insightful, rewarding academic landscape.

Children's Literature, which is often associated with didactic and instructional concerns, represents school as a vivid emotional space where children negotiate identity, belonging, emotional acceptance and childhood. Drawing upon the theoretical and critical insights from Diaspora studies, the paper demonstrates the fact that the representation of schools in the select fictions of Sharon Creech and Andrew Clements are not just academic landscapes but intermediary or transitional, productive spaces that profiles children's experiences at the emotional and social levels, particularly their identities. The experiences of search for identity, establishing identity, a sense of belonging and constructing 'homes' through adaptation and interpersonal interventions metaphorically parallel the framework of diasporic studies or experiences.

The select fictions critiqued in the paper help realize that Children's Literature offers a dynamic site to mediate emotional displacement beyond geographical relocation. Further, the paper asserts that academic landscapes in Children's Literature can be interpreted in the light of diaspora discourse to discuss the psychological, social and emotional transitions entrenched in childhood experiences. Stuart Hall's opinion that identity is not something constant, but constantly re-formed through negotiations and experiences is evident in Sharon Creech's and Andrew Clements' classrooms, playgrounds, libraries and school corridors as the characters work through peer groups, alienations, adaptations and continually reshape their identity and remake 'homes' in and through school.

Sharon Creech's and Andrew Clements' fictions hold ties to both postmodern perspective and diaspora thought offering nuanced depictions of academic landscapes that redefines pedagogical zones as metaphorical, yet potential micro-diasporic spaces of transition, diversity and reconstructed belonging.

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Index:

Name of the Books

Frindle
The Report Card
A Fine, Fine School
A Smart, Smart School
Hate That Cat
Love That Dog

Abbreviations

Frindle
 TRC
 AFF
 ASS
 HTC
 LTD

DABEER SI/SF & MA/32**FRACTURED ASPIRATIONS: RETHINKING THE AMERICAN
DREAM IN THE INDIAN DIASPORA EXPERIENCES****DEEKSHA**Research Scholar, School of Law
Bennett University (The Times Group)**SAGAR**Assistant Professor, School of Law, Justice and Governance
Gautam Buddha University**Abstract**

The “American Dream” has long functioned as a powerful narrative shaping migration aspiration among the Indian diaspora, particularly in the context of high-skilled mobility to the United States. However, recent shifts in immigration regimes, tightening visa policies, and rising socio-political anxieties have called into question the durability of the promise of a “better life.” The paper delves into the question of how restrictive mobility regimes and lived experiences of precarity reshape the meaning and viability of the American Dream for the Indian diaspora. Drawing on scholarship in migration and diaspora studies, the paper argues that the American Dream is not uniformly eroding but is increasingly conditional, stratified, and precarious, mediated through legal regimes, racialized hierarchies, and neoliberal demands. While Indian migrants continue to be positioned as “model minorities” within global economies, their mobility remains tightly regulated through visa dependencies, green card backlogs, and employment-linked legal status, producing a condition of prolonged uncertainty.

The paper employs a qualitative, thematic analysis of existing literature supplemented by policy documents to trace the disjuncture between aspirational narratives and lived realities. The paper contributes to diaspora studies by reframing the American Dream not as a declining ideal but as a selectively accessible construct, sustained through global inequalities while simultaneously generating new forms of vulnerabilities. In doing so, the paper highlights the need to critically reassess migration as a site of both opportunity and constraint in an era of increasingly securitized borders and conditional belonging.

Keywords: Indian Diaspora, Migration, American Dream, Discrimination, Racism, Cultural Diplomacy

Introduction

The idea of the “American Dream,” coined by James Truslow Adams (1931) has long occupied a central place in the global imagination of migration, symbolizing the promise of upward mobility, economic prosperity, meritocratic success and social transformation through individual effort. Historically associated with the

expansion of post-war American capitalism and liberal democratic ideals, the ‘dream’ emerged as more than a national ethos but evolved into a transnational narrative capable of sharing aspirations far beyond territorial boundaries of the United States. For migrants across the Global South, particularly from postcolonial societies, the United States came to represent not merely a destination of employment but a site of imagined modernity, mobility and self-making (Hochschild 1995; Cullen 2003). Within this broader migratory imagination, the Indian diaspora occupies a particularly significant position. Since the late twentieth century, especially following the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and the acceleration of neoliberal globalization in the 1990s, Indian migration to the US has increasingly been characterized by high-skilled mobility in sectors such as information technology, medicine, engineering, finance and academia (Lal 2008; Kapur 2010).

The rise of Indian professionals within the American knowledge economy has often been narrated as one of the most visible success stories of contemporary globalization. Indian diasporic community in the USA is frequently represented through the discourse of the ‘model minority’ which is highly educated, economically productive, technologically skilled and integrated into structures of global capitalism (Prashad 2000; Shukla 2003). The expansion of the H-1B visa program, growth of Silicon Valley and increasing transnational circulation of skilled labor reinforced the perception that the US remained the ultimate arena for professional advancement and missile-class aspiration among Indians (Banerjee 2006; Chakravartty 2005). Migration became embedded within familial, educational and social imaginaries in urban India, where mobility to the US came to signify not only economic mobility but also symbolic social prestige and global citizenship. As Sanam Roohi (2017) argues, the pursuit of the “American Dream” among Indian migrants cannot be understood merely through economic rationality; rather, it is deeply mediated through networks of caste, kinship, social capital and regional mobility structures that selectively enable certain populations to access transnational opportunity.

Yet the celebratory narrative surrounding Indian success in the United States often obscures the contradictions and vulnerabilities embedded within contemporary mobility regimes. Recent shifts in immigration governance, securitized border politics, visa restrictions, labor market anxieties and anti-immigrant nationalism have increasingly destabilized the promise of secure upward mobility historically associated with the American dream. The contemporary diasporic conditions marked by prolonged uncertainty, temporariness and conditional legality as a result of green card backlogs, restrictive pathways to permanent residency, fears surrounding visa renewal or job loss are generating conditions of structural precarity despite high levels of educational and professional achievement.

This contradiction reveals an important tension within contemporary migration regimes, i.e. migrants may be economically indispensable while simultaneously

remaining politically and legally insecure. As Aihwa Ong (1999) conceptualizes, neoliberal states increasingly produce forms of “flexible citizenship” wherein mobility and belonging are selectively distributed according to economic value rather than universal inclusion. Similarly, scholars of critical migration studies have argued that borders today function less as fixed territorial barriers and more as dispersed regulatory mechanisms governing labor, legality and social membership (De Genova 2017; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). Indian high-skilled diaspora thus occupies a paradoxical position where they are celebrated as engines of innovation and global competitiveness while remaining vulnerable to deportability, racialization and institutional insecurity. Moreover, the “model minority” discourse itself requires critical interrogation. While Indian diaspora is often projected as evidence of successful multicultural incorporation such as narratives conceal the racialized hierarchies and uneven structures underpinning migrant inclusion in the US. The racialization of Asian and South Asian communities within the US has historically oscillated between selective inclusion and exclusion depending upon labor demands, geopolitical context, domestic politics and nationalist anxieties (Lowe 1996; Mishra 2007).

In this context, the paper argues that the American Dream is increasingly becoming conditional, stratified and precarious which is shaped by restrictive immigration regimes, racialized structures of inclusion and neoliberal demands for flexible labor. The paper investigates whether changing mobility regimes impacts the meaning and viability of the American Dream for the Indian diaspora. In this light, the paper seeks to move beyond binary narratives of success or failure and instead examine how aspiration itself is being reconfigured under the framework of conditional belongings.

The Changing Role of Indian Diaspora in the Socio-Economic and Political Structure of the USA

The history of Indian migration to the US is often narrated through the triumphant vocabulary of meritocracy, technological excellence and immigrant success. Such narratives, however, risk flattening the deeply uneven and historically contingent structures through which Indian mobility to the US has enabled, regulated and constrained. The contemporary visibility of India-origin CEOs, Silicon Valley professionals and politically influential diaspora networks obscure the fact that Indian mobility to the US was historically shaped by anti-Asian hostility, colonial displacement and restrictive immigration regimes. Early Indian migration to North America emerged within the context of British colonialism and global labor circulation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Despite the social taboo associated with losing one’s Dharma if travelled overseas, economic transformation under colonial rule pushed many Indians into transnational migration circuits (Mishra 2007). Most early migrant were Punjabi Sikh peasants and laborers who travelled to the Pacific Coast seeking employment in agriculture, railroad construction and lumber industries (Leonard 1992). Their arrival,

however, coincided with the consolidation of white settler nationalism in North America where Asian migrants were increasingly perceived as racial and economic threats. Indian migrants were constructed simultaneously as racially undesirable and economically exploitable, valued for cheap labor while denied social belonging. The Komagata Maru incident of 1914 became emblematic of this contradiction where Indian migrants were denied entry into Canada under exclusionary immigration (Johnston 2014). Similar exclusionary impulses shaped American immigration policy through the Immigration Act of 1917 or the Asiatic barred Zone Act which effectively prohibited immigration from India and much of Asia. This legislation institutionalized racial exclusion within U.S. immigration law and dismantled the first phase of Indian labor migration to the US limiting them to the position of “impossible subjects” (Ngai 2004).

The transformation of Indian migration occurred only after the mid-20th century, particularly through the Luce-Celler Act of 1946 and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. While the Luce-Celler Act permitted a small annual quota and granted Indians the right to naturalize as American citizens, the Hart-Celler Act fundamentally restructures the logic of American immigration by abolishing racially discriminatory quotas and privileging skilled migration and family reunification (Daniels 2004). The emergence of the Cold War knowledge economy and post-war American scientific expansion created new demands for technically skilled labor, particularly doctors, engineers and scientists from postcolonial nations such as India (Saxenian 2006). Consequently, Indian migration after 1965 became increasingly class-selective, dominated by English-speaking, urban, middle-class professionals whose educational mobility aligned with the needs of American capitalism.

As of 2026, the government data provides a figure of 5.4 million Indian Americans/ Indian origin people to be residing in the United States Invalid source specified.. Far from just participating in the labor force, Indian immigrants have become vital for the US economic growth. Indian representation across various sectors in US has seen both a steady growth as early as 1990's with the initial inflow of H1B workers in the US IT sector. The US leverages its technological advancement as a key factor in maintaining a dominant global position in tech exports, but this also requires a constant supply of workforce. While the US was not able to internally meet the demand, Indian IT workers proved to be the solution to this problemInvalid source specified.. Though initially there have been several barriers to Indians getting promoted in such landscapesInvalid source specified., the situation has changed since and Indians have now become the driving force behind the development of IT sector in USInvalid source specified.. Over the years, Indian diaspora has gained traction in different sectors and has since replaced its 'workforce' identity with 'business owner' identity. The studies show that Indians have a steady and significant contribution in several US industrial sectors with the biggest contributors being Pharmaceuticals and IT sector. Beyond

their roles as tech workers Indians are now transitioning into founders, launching start-ups and establishing cross border businesses Invalid source specified.. This change ripples into positive effects as these businesses act as critical conduits for trade and investment between India and US Invalid source specified..Through creation of new market forces, Indians ensure that the US market as a whole remain competitive by continuously diffusing innovations across sectors. For the Indian population the paradigm of ‘American Dream’ has shifted from being the beneficiaries to being the architect of it. Through relentless technological innovation, robust entrepreneurial ventures, and the forging of powerful transnational economic networks, Indian Americans continue to profoundly enrich the US economy while driving forward global technological progress Invalid source specified.. The IT boom of the 1990s intensified this process through the rapid expansion of the H-1B visa program, which enabled American corporations to recruit large numbers of Indian software engineers and technology professionals (Xiang 2007). Indian workers became indispensable to Silicon Valley’s growth and to the restructuring of global information capitalism.

At the same time, the Indian diaspora has emerged as a major political and economic force within the US. Indian Americans today constitute one of the wealthiest and most highly educated immigrant groups in the state, occupying influential positions across technology, medicine, academia, finance and public policy. According to the *Pew Research Center*, over 5.2 million people of Indian origin currently reside in the US, making them one of the largest Asian-origin populations in the country. Indian-origin entrepreneurs and executives have become central to the American innovation economy, particularly in Silicon Valley, where transnational professional networks between India and the US have reshaped global technological production. Simultaneously, the political visibility of the diaspora has expanded significantly. Diaspora outreach has increasingly become a feature of both Indian and American electoral politics, visible through large-scale spectacles such as the “Howdy Modi” event in Houston, which symbolized the convergence of diaspora nationalism, populist politics and transnational political mobilization.

Yet the increasing visibility of the Indian diaspora should not be mistaken for unconditional inclusion. Contemporary immigration politics in the US continue to be marked by securitization, anti-immigrant nationalism and restrictive visa governance. Indian migration to the US therefore cannot be understood solely through the language of success and achievement. Rather, it reflects the evolving tensions between mobility and control.

Challenges and Fractures in the American Dream

While the Indian diaspora in the United States has emerged as one of the most visible and influential migrant communities globally, its experiences continue to be shaped by broader structural, political and socio-cultural complexities within contemporary migration regimes. Hence, diaspora formation in the US reflects an

ongoing negotiation between aspiration, identity, legality and belonging within an increasingly globalized yet securitized world order. Examining these broader challenges is therefore essential to understanding how the contemporary Indian diaspora navigates the contradictions to live its 'American Dream.'

Firstly, the socio-economic visibility of the Indian diaspora in the United States has often been accompanied by the construction of the community as a "model minority," a discourse that celebrates Indian Americans as exceptionally educated, economically successful, professionally disciplined, and culturally adaptable. While this narrative appears superficially positive, scholars of migration and race studies argue that the model minority framework functions as a racialized mechanism of selective incorporation that obscures structural inequalities, depoliticizes immigrant struggles, and reinforces hierarchies within multicultural America (Lowe 1996). The stereotype positions Indian migrants as evidence of the success of meritocratic capitalism while simultaneously masking the conditions of labor extraction, visa dependency, and social negotiation through which such mobility is produced. The visibility of Indian doctors, engineers, academics, and technology workers became closely associated with narratives of immigrant exceptionalism and neoliberal productivity (Kapur 2010). However, scholars caution that this representation is highly selective and class specific. Vijay Prashad (2000) argues that the celebration of South Asians as "successful minorities" often operates through a politics of racial triangulation in which Asian-origin communities are valorized in contrast to other racial groups while remaining outside the boundaries of full national belonging. In this sense, the model minority myth does not eliminate racialization; rather, it reorganizes it through seemingly positive forms of stereotyping.

The stereotype also imposes significant cultural and psychological pressures upon members of the diaspora. Rupam Saran's work (2016) on Asian Indian youth demonstrates that the expectation of educational excellence, economic achievement, and social conformity produces intense pressures of identity negotiation among second-generation and 1.5-generation Indian Americans. The image of the "successful Indian" frequently marginalized experiences of mental health struggles, discrimination, intergenerational conflict, and cultural alienation. Positive stereotyping thus becomes a disciplinary mechanism that restricts the complexity of diasporic experiences and renders invisible the heterogeneity within the Indian diaspora itself, including differences of caste, class, religion, gender, and migration status. Furthermore, the apparent visibility of Indian Americans within elite professional sectors does not necessarily translate into unconditional social acceptance. Indian immigrant identity in the United States remains deeply shaped by race, power, and postcolonial histories rather than linear narratives of assimilation. Following the events of 9/11, many South Asians experienced heightened racial surveillance, xenophobia, and suspicion despite their perceived socio-economic integration (Bhatia 2015). These experiences reveal the fragility

of model minority inclusion within moments of nationalist anxiety and securitized politics. The diaspora's incorporation into American society therefore remains contingent and politically mediated rather than universally secure. The model minority stereotype also intersects with broader neoliberal logics that value migrants primarily through economic productivity and professional utility. Indian migrants are frequently represented through the language of "high-skilled talent," innovation, and technological contribution, particularly within sectors linked to the digital economy.

Secondly, the H-1B visa regime, which became central to the expansion of Indian migration during the information technology boom of the 1990s, exemplifies the contradictions embedded within neoliberal migration governance. Indian professionals are incorporated into sectors critical to the American economy while simultaneously remaining subject to legal uncertainty, bureaucratic regulation, and shifting political priorities. The visa regime created "immobilized mobility," whereby migrants are globally mobile yet structurally constrained through employer-sponsored legality and exploitative subcontracting arrangements (Banerjee 2006). As Robin Savinar (2019) demonstrates, H-1B workers frequently navigate unstable labor markets through strategies of "job hopping" and "hunkering down," balancing aspirations for upward mobility against fears of visa loss and deportability. Similarly, recent scholarship on "liminal legality" illustrates how highly skilled Indian migrants experience prolonged uncertainty due to green card backlogs and employment-linked legal status, despite possessing high levels of income and educational attainment (Gambol et. al 2025). Their incorporation into American society remains contingent rather than secure. The legal vulnerabilities associated with high-skilled migration have intensified amidst changing immigration policies and securitised border governance in the United States. Policy shifts under nationalist frameworks such as the "Buy American, Hire American" agenda increased scrutiny over H-1B approvals, visa renewals, wage requirements, and employer compliance procedures, generating heightened uncertainty for Indian professionals and technology firms (Salamah and Babu). Thirdly, the legal complexities of mobility extend beyond visa acquisition to encompass prolonged green card backlogs, administrative delays, travel restrictions, and uncertain pathways to permanent residency. Because employment-based immigration categories in the United States are constrained through country-specific quotas, Indian nationals face disproportionately long waiting periods for permanent residency despite high levels of professional participation within the American economy. This produces what migration scholars describe as "liminal legality," a condition wherein migrants remain socially integrated and economically productive while lacking secure legal permanence (Goldring et al.). Recent policy developments have further intensified these insecurities. The Indian Council of World Affairs notes that enhanced vetting mechanisms, deportation procedures, visa delays, and heightened scrutiny

of employer-sponsored pathways have increased uncertainty for Indian students, professionals, and families navigating American immigration systems. The report further argues that these developments have implications not only for individual migrants but also for India–U.S. relations, labor mobility, and diaspora-driven economic networks. Simultaneously, delays in visa processing and re-entry procedures have disrupted family life, employment continuity, and transnational mobility for Indian professionals travelling between the two countries. Importantly, these legal constraints reveal how contemporary migration regimes increasingly privilege flexibility for capital while restricting certainty for migrant labor.

Recent scholarship increasingly suggests that sections of the Indian diaspora are beginning to reassess the long-standing imagination of the United States as the ultimate destination of security, prosperity, and permanent settlement. The 2026 Carnegie Endowment survey reveals that nearly 40 percent of Indian Americans have considered leaving the United States due to a combination of political dissatisfaction, economic pressures, immigration anxieties, and concerns regarding safety and social climate. The findings indicate that despite high levels of educational and economic success, many Indian Americans perceive their belonging within the United States as increasingly uncertain and conditional rather than stable and secure (Kapur et al.). The survey further highlights anxieties surrounding anti-immigrant rhetoric, identity-based politics, and restrictive immigration policies, particularly amidst growing political polarisation in the United States.

Jayesh Rathod's work (2024) *Exiting the American Dream* deepens this argument by critically interrogating the assumption that migration to the United States necessarily culminates in permanent incorporation and assimilation. Rathod argues that a growing number of immigrants and racialised minorities are engaging in forms of "exit planning" due to frustrations with immigration precarity, democratic instability, and experiences of social exclusion. Rather than portraying the American Dream as entirely disappearing, Rathod demonstrates how migrants increasingly negotiate the United States through strategic calculations about legality, security, and long-term belonging. His related concept of "pressured exit" further illustrates how structural conditions such as prolonged visa uncertainty, racial anxieties, and shifting political climates can make continued residence emotionally and socially exhausting.

Together, these interventions reveal an important transformation within contemporary Indian diasporic consciousness: while the United States continues to symbolize opportunity and mobility, it is no longer universally imagined as a guaranteed site of permanent belonging. Instead, migration increasingly operates within a framework of contingency, negotiation, and conditional incorporation.

Conclusion

The experiences of the Indian diaspora in the United States reveal the complex and evolving nature of the American Dream within contemporary regimes of migration, labor mobility, and global politics. Historically imagined as a space of opportunity, upward mobility, and secure settlement, the United States continues to retain immense symbolic and material significance for Indian migrants, particularly within the domains of education, technology, entrepreneurship, and professional advancement. However, the findings of this study demonstrate that the American Dream is not uniformly declining; rather, it is increasingly becoming conditional, stratified, and mediated through structures of legality, race, class, and geopolitical uncertainty. Access to mobility and belonging is shaped not merely by merit or economic contribution but by changing immigration regimes, nationalist politics, and selective forms of incorporation.

The contradictions embedded within contemporary migration governance have become particularly visible amidst the resurgence of anti-immigrant nationalism in American political discourse. Statements by President Donald Trump describing India as a “hell hole” and, in broader rhetoric about immigration, portraying developing countries in derogatory terms reflected the growing normalization of exclusionary nationalist politics. Simultaneously, images of undocumented migrants being detained, handcuffed, and deported have intensified anxieties surrounding dignity, legality, and belonging among immigrant communities, including sections of the Indian diaspora. Such developments reveal how migrants, despite contributing significantly to the American economy and innovation ecosystem, remain vulnerable to the volatility of domestic political narratives and securitized border regimes.

At the same time, the future trajectories of Indian migration are undergoing important transformations. While the United States continues to attract highly skilled Indian professionals and students, increasing numbers of migrants are also exploring alternative destinations such as Canada, Australia, and the United Arab Emirates due to comparatively flexible immigration pathways, faster residency opportunities, and emerging economic prospects. Discussions surrounding return migration to India have also gained visibility, particularly among professionals navigating prolonged visa uncertainty and changing aspirations regarding quality of life, security, and stability. Consequently, Indian mobility is becoming increasingly multipolar rather than singularly oriented toward the United States.

Ultimately, the Indian diaspora’s contemporary experiences challenge deterministic narratives of both triumphant assimilation and complete decline. The American Dream persists as a powerful migratory imagination, but it now operates within a global landscape marked by conditional belonging, differentiated citizenship, and negotiated futures of mobility.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/33**REMEMBERED HOMES AND FEMALE SELFHOOD IN ANITA
NAIR'S *LADIES COUPE* REDEFINING HOME AND BELONGING
THROUGH WOMEN'S NARRATIVES****G. KIRUBAHARI**Research Scholar, S. F. R. College, Sivakasi
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai. India**DR. K. MANGAIYARKARASI**Research Guide and Supervisor, S. F. R. College, Sivakasi
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai. India**Abstract**

Ladies Coupé by Anita Nair explores the emotional struggles of Indian women living within patriarchal social structures. The novel examines themes of memory, belonging, loneliness, female identity, emotional displacement, and the search for freedom. Through the train journey of Akhila and the stories narrated by women passengers in the ladies' compartment, Anita Nair questions conventional definitions of home and domesticity. The women characters experience home not merely as a place of comfort and security but also as a site of emotional suppression, silence, sacrifice, and patriarchal control. Their memories and narratives reveal the complex relationship between women and domestic spaces in Indian society. This article analyses how the novel redefines the idea of home through female selfhood, emotional independence, and personal dignity. The study further examines the symbolism of the train journey, narrative technique, feminist perspectives, and the significance of storytelling in female empowerment. Through emotional reflection and shared experiences, the women attempt to reconstruct identities beyond traditional gender roles. The article argues that *Ladies Coupé* presents home as a psychological and emotional space shaped by autonomy and self-realization rather than merely by social duty.

Keywords: Home, Memory, Belonging, Feminism, Patriarchy, Female Identity, Emotional Displacement

Introduction

Anita Nair is a renowned writer who was born in Kerala. She is a novelist, journalist, short story writer, and notable poet. The bulk of 20th century books focus on women's concerns and their standing in Indian culture. Great female writers in Indian English literature, such as Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Anita Nair, portray a feminist view of Indian culture. In Indian English fiction, female writers explore gender problems, the complicated interaction between men and women, and the role of society in shaping individuals. Her bestselling novels, *Better Man* and *Ladies Coupé*, have been translated into other

languages worldwide. Indian English literature has made major contributions to the portrayal of women's realities in patriarchal culture. Contemporary Indian women authors constantly question institutions that limit female autonomy and confine women to home responsibilities. Their stories delve into issues such as identity, emotional estrangement, resistance, and the search for selfhood. In this perspective, Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé* is significant in feminist literary debate because to its sympathetic representation of women negotiating independence and belonging within restrictive societal structures. The story follows Akhila, a forty-five-year-old single lady who travels a train to Kanyakumari in quest of answers about her life. Throughout the voyage, she shares a ladies compartment with five women of various ages, occupations, and socioeconomic origins. As the ladies share their unique stories, the compartment changes into a place for emotional confession and self-reflection. Their accounts highlight women's quiet struggles inside patriarchal household systems (Nair 21).

The women in *Ladies Coupé* have contrasting experiences with their homes. Home gives comfort and social identification, but it also becomes a place of emotional suffocation and invisibility. As a result, the novel calls into question the long-held belief that domesticity automatically meets women's emotional needs. Instead, Anita Nair portrays women who seek independence and self-esteem outside of socially mandated boundaries. The train ride serves as a metaphor for personal growth and self-discovery. Temporarily free of patriarchal monitoring, the women discuss marriage, sexuality, loneliness, parenthood, violence, and desire. Their chats contradict conventional societal beliefs about ideal womanhood and highlight the emotional exile that women face even in their own homes.

This article looks at how *Ladies Coupé* redefines home and belonging via memory, narrative, emotional mobility, and female solidarity. The research also looks at the symbolism of the train voyage, narrative style, feminist theoretical viewpoints, and character portrayal in the work.

Review of Literature

The article "The Concept of Patriarchy and Female Defiance" by D Silvia Flavia in Anita Nair's "Ladies Coupe" examines inequality and a society dominated by men. The influence of a culture dominated by males on women's lives is examined in Anita's narrative. She refrains from restricting the experiences of women to a particular ideal. She highlights how important it is for women to deal with their issues themselves, without outside assistance.

In his work "Deconstructing Gender Roles: A Reading of Anita Nair's Ladies Coupe," C.V. Abraham (2016) argues that although Anita Nair has rejected feminism, her characters are rebellious, contemporary, middle-class Indian women. He underlined that women are not treated equally to males, but rather to elderly men and those with disabilities. He cited Gayatri Spivak's assertion that a text can never be completely dismantled.

The analysis reveals that Deepika B. submitted a PhD thesis to Periyar University in 2023 titled Multifarious Dimensions of Women in the Select Novels of Anita Nair. This thesis has attempted to present the female characters in Anita Nair's fiction and has depicted women's lives against the backdrop of Indian social and familial life, where her female characters endure a range of experiences—many of them painful—due to patriarchal oppression in the home. They experience abandonment, career obstacles, and physical abuse. The thesis examines how women are oppressed by long-standing patriarchal social practices and provides a perspective on how women suffer emotionally in the patriarchal system, subtly criticising society.

Methodology

This research analyses Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé* using a qualitative feminist literary method. The research is largely based on textual analysis of the novel, with an emphasis on topics such as feminine identity, emotional displacement, belonging, patriarchy, and self-hood. Selected incidents, character experiences, symbols, and narrative techniques are examined to understand how the novel represents women's emotional and psychological struggles within patriarchal society. The study also uses feminist theoretical frameworks to critically analyse the material. The concepts of gender performativity proposed by Judith Butler, female subjectivity discussed by Simone de Beauvoir, and feminist literary criticism articulated by Elaine Showalter are used to analyze the women's experiences and narrative representations. These theoretical viewpoints contribute to a better understanding of how socially established gender norms affect women's identities, relationships, and emotional lives in the novel. In addition, the research uses interpretive and analytical methods to explore symbols such as the train journey and the ladies' compartment, which represent transition, freedom, solidarity, and self-discovery. The paper uses careful reading and theme analysis to explore how Anita Nair redefines home, belonging, and female autonomy in modern Indian culture.

Feminist Theory and the Concept of Home

The notion of home is essential in feminist discourse. Historically, home has been connected with warmth, emotional security, affection, and belonging. However, feminist researchers contend that home environments may serve as both places of emotional exploitation and patriarchal control. According to Simone de Beauvoir, women are frequently identified as "the Other" in patriarchal culture rather than as independent individuals (Beauvoir 26). This secondary placement confines women to socially mandated home responsibilities. In Indian society, women are generally expected to prioritise family obligations above personal goals. Marriage and motherhood are frequently described as the pinnacle of feminine identity. Women who crave independence are often seen as rebellious or selfish. Beauvoir goes on to say that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir 283). This remark emphasises how societal expectations and patriarchal conditioning

shape feminine identity. *Ladies Coupé* exemplifies this conditioning, since many women repress their inclinations in order to retain social respectability and family acceptability. Despite feeling lonely and frustrated in their personal lives, characters like Akhila, Janaki, and Margaret Shanti internalise conventional notions of sacrifice, obedience, and emotional reliance. Kate Millett goes on to explain that patriarchy occurs through institutions like family and marriage, which promote male domination (Millett 25). Anita Nair's work criticises these institutions by depicting women who are emotionally isolated despite performing traditional gender roles. The ladies in the narrative come to see that home cannot give true belonging unless it provides for dignity, independence, and uniqueness. As a result, Anita Nair reconstructs the idea of home as a psychological location rather than a physical one.

Home as a Space of Safety and Oppression

The work continually depicts home as both comfortable and repressive. Women acquire social identity from family systems, but they also feel emotionally confined inside them. Anita Nair depicts home space not only as a place of tenderness, but also as a system that restricts female autonomy and independence. Akhila's life exemplifies this dichotomy vividly. Following her father's death, she assumes financial responsibility for her family. Despite her willingness to sacrifice her own pleasure for the sake of others, her emotional needs are not met. Her family relies on her financially but denies her independence and respect. Akhila regrets that she has become "a paying guest in her own home" (Nair 43). This comment exposes her emotional detachment inside the household sphere which she financially supports. Akhila further criticises the expectations placed on women, stating, "A woman can live alone only if she is a rebel" (Nair 28). The phrase reveals patriarchal fears about female freedom and implies that society sees independent women as dangers to conventional gender norms. Anita Nair uses Akhila's experiences to attack a societal structure that rewards women primarily for sacrifice and service while denying them uniqueness and emotional happiness. Janaki's narrative also demonstrates the emotional reliance caused by patriarchal training. Throughout her life, she has transitioned from her father's protection to that of her husband and son. She readily acknowledges, "First there was my father and brothers; then my husband. When my husband is gone, there will be my son waiting to take off from where his father left off" (Nair 19). Her confession demonstrates how strongly women internalise reliance as a feminine virtue in patriarchal societies. Janaki also feels that "a woman is not meant to take on the burdens of the world" (Nair 20), reflecting the conventional notion that women should be emotionally and physically reliant on men. Despite her intelligence and professional success, Margaret Shanti endures psychological oppression in her marriage. Her dictatorial husband, Ebenezer Paulraj, is continually humiliating and dominating her. Margaret angrily observes that "marriage is a cage" (Nair 103). This metaphor emphasises women's emotional enslavement inside

patriarchal home institutions. Although she is educated and financially independent, her uniqueness fades in married life as she is reduced to meeting her husband's expectations and domineering conduct (Nair 93). As a result, the house becomes a place where women's identities are limited to duty, obedience, and sacrifice rather than emotional satisfaction and originality.

Memory and Self-Reflection

Ladies Coupé relies heavily on memory since the ladies recreate their identities via recall and narrative. The train travel provides a momentary introspective space in which previous experiences are critically analysed. The ladies compartment becomes a confessional zone where suppressed emotions and hidden worries are revealed via storytelling. The women's memories show emotional wounds that lie underneath socially acceptable looks. Their experiences highlight loneliness, anxiety, compromise, and frustration. Through storytelling, the ladies try to understand themselves beyond the socially imposed gender stereotypes and expectations. Akhila's memories vividly depict the conflict between duty and desire. She gave up love and friendship to accomplish family commitments and is now deeply lonely. Looking back on her life, she realises that "she had never done anything for herself" (Nair 57). This realisation exposes the emotional self-denial expected of women in patriarchal family structures. Akhila also regretfully admits that "all these years she had lived for others" (Nair 58). Her observations show how women are taught to repress their personal wants in favour of sacrifice, responsibility, and familial commitment. Anita Nair uses Akhila's recollections to challenge a societal structure that associates ideal womanhood with emotional endurance and self-effacement. The act of remembering also serves as resistance. By telling their own tales, the women reclaim voices that have historically been muted in patriarchal culture. According to Elaine Showalter, women's writing frequently strives to regain "a female framework for the analysis of women's literature" as well as female experiences that have been removed from hegemonic discourse (15). *Ladies Coupé* uses storytelling as a form of self-assertion, allowing women to confront silence and emotional restraint. Prabha Devi's recollections illustrate her steady metamorphosis from meek housewife to confident woman. Learning to swim symbolises freedom and self-discovery. This event makes her realise that "for the first time in her life, she had done something for herself" (Nair 156). The statement represents a watershed point in Prabha Devi's personal development, as she begins to recognise her identity outside family norms. Her recollections also suggest that swimming provided her "a sense of freedom she had never known before" (Nair 158). Prabha Devi develops her own identity through recollection and reflection, outside of patriarchal conceptions of wifehood and domestication. Thus, memory becomes a means of emotional emancipation, resistance, and self-awareness for the novel's female characters.

Emotional Displacement and the Search for Belonging

Although the ladies in *Ladies Coupé* are not geographical migrants, they nevertheless face significant emotional displacement inside their families and relationships. Despite living in socially acceptable home systems, they experience significant feelings of estrangement and invisibility. Akhila's situation mirrors this inner fragmentation, as she realises that she has always been perceived in terms of socially prescribed roles rather than as an independent individual. This emotional exile results from a contradiction between personal desire and social expectations. The women in the ladies' compartment describe lives marked by unspoken compromises, where satisfaction is constantly postponed. The tale implies that home life frequently requires a silent surrender of the self, demonstrating how women internalise restraint as responsibility rather than overt tyranny (Nair). Akhila's voyage represents an internal migration toward selfhood. Her questioning of independence—whether a woman can live alone without male validation—is central to her change. She eventually realises that she needs to learn to live for herself before she can live for others (Nair). Her emotional ambiguity parallels the plight of many women who have been raised to think that identity is only complete inside familial duties. The train serves as a potent symbol of change and transformation. Unlike the immovable construction of a house, the rolling train implies opportunity, movement, and transformation. Inside the ladies' compartment, women can briefly escape patriarchal supervision and express identities that are often restricted in household areas. This restricted yet moveable environment provides a platform for openly sharing emotional tales, allowing suppressed subjectivities to emerge. Understanding these narratives makes Judith Butler's idea of gender performance crucial. Butler contends that gender is not an innate characteristic but rather something built over time via repeated activities. She asserts that "gender is the repeated stylisation of the body" and is determined by performance rather than substance (Butler 33-34). In this way, the women eventually realise that many features of femininity are socially imposed performances rather than innate identities, formed by repetition, expectation, and cultural conditioning. The narrative concludes that real belonging stems from emotional authenticity rather than societal conformity. The women's chats in the compartment demonstrate that what appears to be "normal life" is frequently a carefully managed performance of roles rather than an expression of the self. Through collaborative storytelling, students begin to challenge their forced identities and explore alternate ways of being.

Symbolism of the Train Journey

The train journey serves as one of the novel's most essential symbols. Trains have long represented mobility, transition, and transformation. In *Ladies Coupé*, the voyage represents female self-discovery and emotional liberty. From a feminist spatial viewpoint, the train serves as a liminal zone in which established identities disintegrate and new subjectivities develop. Akhila's desire to go alone defies

patriarchal norms. Indian society frequently prohibits women, particularly unmarried women, from travelling alone. Her journey therefore becomes an act of resistance (Nair 12). This act may also be interpreted through Judith Butler's idea of performativity, in which socially created gender roles are destabilised when people deviate from conventional expectations of conduct and mobility. The women compartment serves as a temporary feminine enclave, distinct from masculine control. Inside this compartment, women discuss private stories without fear of being judged. The train therefore becomes a metaphorical alternative home built on empathy and honesty. In Foucauldian terms, this place may be viewed as a heterotopic setting in which traditional social structures are suspended and alternative forms of relational identity arise via discussion and shared storytelling. The movement of the train also represents psychological change. As the train approaches its destination, the women become more self-aware. This trajectory is consistent with the notion of narrative as a process of identity creation, in which subjectivity is produced via storytelling and reflexive consciousness. Kanyakumari, the last destination, further represents rejuvenation and transformation. It signifies confluence, change, and opportunity since it is located where three oceans meet. Akhila's trip toward Kanyakumari represents her emotional rebirth. Symbolically, geographical convergence represents the merging of fragmented female identities into a more integrated sense of selfhood, indicating a shift from societal confinement to self-recognition.

Female Solidarity and Shared Experiences

Female solidarity is another major element in the work. Despite their various social and economic backgrounds, the women have shared experiences of patriarchal tyranny. Their common experiences support Simone de Beauvoir's claim that womanhood is historically produced within systems of social and cultural subordination. Beauvoir states, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir 283), emphasising the role of societal conditioning and patriarchal norms in shaping gender identity. The act of storytelling fosters emotional connection between strangers. By sharing personal experiences, the women see that their battles are not isolated individual issues, but rather part of wider social processes. The confessional mood in the ladies' compartment converts private anguish into communal knowledge, exposing how personal experiences are inextricably linked to institutionalised gender injustice. In this way, storytelling serves not just as narrative, but also as a kind of resistance to silence and emotional repression. Janaki's reliance, Margaret Shanti's humiliation, Prabha Devi's discontent, Marikolanthu's pain, and Akhila's loneliness all highlight distinct aspects of gender injustice. Despite their differing situations, the women face comparable types of emotional repression, social control, and limited autonomy. Their lives exemplify Judith Butler's view that gender norms are constantly reinforced via repetition, discipline, and social performance (Butler 33–34). The story therefore reveals patriarchy not as an individual experience, but as

a broad cultural system functioning across economic and social divides. Their chats become therapeutic because the ladies are finally understood rather than judged. The *Ladies coupé* therefore becomes a place of emotional healing and mutual appreciation. This temporary feminine space serves as a counter-public sphere, allowing women to express stifled feelings and rebuild fragmented identities via empathy and discourse. The emotional solidarity that develops within the compartment confronts patriarchal seclusion by substituting silence with mutual recognition. Anita Nair believes that female unity may combat patriarchal silence and isolation. Shared experiences promote empowerment and emotional resilience. Through communal narrative and emotional honesty, the women go from passive acceptance to self-awareness and psychological resistance. Finally, the novel suggests that female solidarity may be a powerful tool for regaining agency, dignity, and emotional authenticity in patriarchal society.

Marikolanthu and the Violence of Patriarchy

Marikolanthu's narrative reveals the terrible truths of gender and economic injustice. Her experiences demonstrate how vulnerable women may become targets of exploitation and societal hypocrisy. Her marginalisation may be explained using intersectional feminist theory, namely the premise that oppression occurs concurrently through gender, class, caste, and social position. According to Kimberlé Crenshaw, power structures cross to generate various types of discrimination for marginalised women (Crenshaw 1244). Marikolanthu's suffering exemplifies this multilayered oppression, in which poverty and social vulnerability exacerbate patriarchal aggression. Marikolanthu is rejected and stigmatised after being subjected to sexual violence. Society blames woman instead of the male culprit (Nair 236). Her story depicts the hard reality that marginalised women confront inside patriarchal culture. The communal response to her pain exemplifies what feminist critics call victim-blaming, in which patriarchal systems maintain male power by shifting guilt to women. Simone de Beauvoir's remark that women are positioned as the "Other" inside patriarchal frameworks is particularly applicable here, since Marikolanthu is denied dignity, justice, and emotional acknowledgement (Beauvoir 26). Despite the great anguish, Marikolanthu eventually gains emotional strength and perseverance. Her survival itself becomes a kind of resistance. Rather than allowing trauma to totally destroy her identity, she continues to live under severely unequal social conditions. Her perseverance exemplifies feminist conceptions of survival as political resistance, in which persistence itself confronts institutions that seek to silence and eradicate marginalised women. According to Bell Hooks, resistance frequently begins with the unwillingness to sacrifice one's humanity in the face of oppressive systems (hooks 113). Anita Nair uses this character to widen the novel's feminist perspective by tackling themes of socioeconomic injustice, violence, and social exclusion. Marikolanthu's story stops the novel from reducing feminism to

middle-class emotional unhappiness; rather, it emphasises the tangible realities of exploitation, bodily abuse, and economic fragility. Her narrative reveals the worst aspects of patriarchal culture, in which female pain is normalised and societal morality is extremely selective and deceitful. In doing so, the novel broadens feminist discourse beyond domestic oppression to include a wider intersectional criticism of gendered injustice.

Narrative Technique and Storytelling

The narrative structure of *Ladies Coupé* makes a big contribution to its feminist standpoint. The novel employs interwoven episodes spoken by many women, allowing multiple female voices to emerge throughout the narrative. This polyphonic form opposes male-dominated storytelling traditions by emphasising women's subjective experiences. Elaine Showalter contends that women's writing strives to restore female experiences that have been omitted from hegemonic discourse (Showalter 11), and Anita Nair's narrative method exemplifies this feminist intervention. The conversational storytelling approach is similarly similar to oral traditions in which women relate their experiences and feelings, converting private sorrow into collective consciousness. The use of confessional tales fosters emotional connection and psychological depth by sharing the women's worries, wants, and difficulties. The women use storytelling to repair identities that have been fractured by patriarchal demands. Storytelling becomes transformational because it helps individuals to reframe pain that has previously been muted inside household contexts. This is consistent with Hélène Cixous' notion of *écriture féminine*, which encourages women to communicate silent emotional truths via writing and self-expression (Cixous 880). Their stories thus serve not just as personal confessions, but also as acts of feminist resistance. The broken narrative structure reflects the splintered identities of the women themselves. Their disrupted dreams and emotional suppression demonstrate the impacts of patriarchal domination. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity discusses how women struggle with true desire and socially imposed gender norms that are maintained by repetitive performance (Butler 33-34). Thus, storytelling functions as both a literary method and a feminist act of self-expression, allowing women to oppose silence, reconstruct identity, and recover emotional agency.

Redefining Home and Female Identity

Ladies Coupé made a significant contribution by redefining home. Anita Nair questions the notion that domesticity inherently ensures female fulfilment. From a feminist standpoint, the novel challenges patriarchal notions of home as a naturally safe and caring environment for women. Instead, household space frequently becomes a place of emotional restraint, stillness, and gendered responsibility. Simone de Beauvoir contends that women have always been limited to socially imposed home duties that limit their uniqueness and independence (Beauvoir 451). Nair's portrayal of family life echoes this critique by showing the emotional constraints placed on women in patriarchal households.

Home becomes relevant to the ladies in the story only when it allows them to express their emotions and be themselves. A physical residence that lacks respect or freedom cannot give true belonging. The ladies gradually realise that their identity should not be only based on sacrifice and obedience. Their experiences contradict patriarchal beliefs that ideal womanhood necessitates quiet and self-denial. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is crucial here, as the women begin to challenge socially enforced feminine norms reinforced by repetition and cultural expectation (Butler 33-34). Through self-reflection and shared experiences, people gradually go beyond identities defined solely by obligation and subordination. Akhila's change at the end of the story represents this reframing of self. She comes to recognise her own desires and emotional needs rather than live solely for others (Nair 265). Her path exemplifies the feminist claim that female identity must arise via self-recognition rather than patriarchal acceptance. The story therefore portrays female identity as developing, flexible, and self-determined, rather than socially dictated. *Ladies Coupé* concludes that actual belonging is attained not by adherence to conventional home duties, but with emotional authenticity, liberty, and the ability to identify oneself freely.

Conclusion

Ladies Coupé is a significant feminist literature that examines women's emotional experiences in patriarchal society. Anita Nair explores themes of memory, belonging, emotional displacement, and female selfhood via the interrelated experiences of women travellers. The novel's polyphonic narrative format highlights different female voices while challenging the usual male-centered literary framework. Elaine Showalter contends that women's literature strives to restore marginalised female realities inside hegemonic discourse (Showalter 11), and Nair's narrative style exemplifies this feminist literary intervention. The novel questions traditional notions of home by demonstrating how domestic environments may bring both comfort and oppression. Despite performing socially acceptable gender norms, the female protagonists feel emotionally alienated. Using narrative, recollection, and self-reflection, the women increasingly redefine belonging in terms of dignity, freedom, and uniqueness. Their experiences align with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which describes how femininity is socially produced and maintained via repeated cultural expectations (Butler 33-34). The train ride represents emotional liberty and self-awareness, serving as a liminal area in which women can momentarily transcend patriarchal constraints and reclaim hidden identities. It is important to note that Anita Nair does not completely abandon families or relationships. Instead, she critiques unequal structures that deny women autonomy and emotional recognition. The *Ladies coupé* becomes a symbolic alternative home where women may speak openly, encourage one another, and construct identities that defy patriarchal norms. Female solidarity and shared storytelling help the women transcend their individual sorrow into communal consciousness. By

foregrounding women's voices and experiences, *Ladies Coupé* contributes significantly to feminist literary discourse and contemporary discussions of identity, home, and belonging in Indian society.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/34**WAGES LOST: GENDERED EMOTIONAL LABOUR IN MIGRANT
NARRATIVES OF *DIHADI* AND *HOMEBOUND*****MRITTIKA MALLICK**Department of English, Jadavpur University
West Bengal, India**SOUMILI PAUL**Department of Sociology, Jadavpur University
West Bengal, India**Abstract**

Male migrant workers during the Covid-19 lockdown had their wives, mothers, sisters and lovers waiting for them to arrive home. At a time when transport and communication were restricted, migrant workers walked countless miles in the desperate attempt to reach home. 'Home' that they desperately sought after was not just a spatial longing but also an emotional one, deeply rooted in their remembrance of their mother's handmade food or their spouse's tenderness that they let go of temporarily to earn a wage. *Dihadi* (2021), independently produced and directed by Mayukha and Nidhi Patel, and its inspirational counterpart *Homebound* (2025), directed by Neeraj Ghaywan, remain popularly as two Indian films that brilliantly capture the socio-political constraints and marginal inequalities faced by migrant workers returning home during the Covid-19 lockdown. Both the films showcase similar contexts to depict the struggles that many Indian men underwent, not just because of their migrant identity but also their marginal class, caste and religious identities. The protagonists' emancipation from their socio-cultural identity lies in their successful earning of the daily wage that leaves them with the prospect, hence responsibility, of providing bread for their family. The women in both films, however, contribute to invisible emotional labour as they wait with patience and silence for the men to return. Arlie Russell Hochschild's argument on emotional labour calls this "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display (that is) sold for a wage". Wage becomes an essential marker of the lives of these characters whose identities are formed out of labour exchange. This paper will compare and analyse the two films employing a Marxist lens combined with the theoretical framework of Affect theory to study how the male protagonists journey out to earn wages in exchange for their physical labour, while the women at home doubly lose theirs, first through performing unpaid domestic labour, and second, by paying the price of the men's lost labour through their own emotional labour.

Keywords: Migrant Labour, Indian Cinema, Covid-19 Lockdown, Gendered Labour, Emotional Labour

Introduction

The surge of pandemic films began as a genre after the global COVID-19 crisis in 2020. While most of these films captured the medical or apocalyptic impact of the disease in mostly non-fictional and some fictional work, some films represented the socio-cultural, political and economic struggles of humankind during the pandemic. Films like *1232 KMS* (2021), *India Lockdown* (2022) and *Bheed* (2023) drew parallels to real-life struggles of daily-wage earners who were vastly impacted by the sudden announcement of the nationwide lockdown by the Indian government. While the upper and middle classes began working from home and waited for the shutdown to be lifted, daily wage earners struggled to find their way back home as they spent weeks migrating from street to street across India. The first case of COVID-19 in India was reported in January 2020, but the government's delay in initiating public awareness campaigns and preparing citizens for the impact of the pandemic led to unprepared consequences for millions (Shukla). The first phase of the lockdown was announced more than a month later in March 2020 after the United Nations and the World Health Organisation (WHO) called for a formal, global lockdown at the beginning of the same month. The abrupt call for a nationwide lockdown announced with a four-hour notice period, stating a complete halt to transport, daily work and commute for twenty-one days, came with "severe humanitarian consequences" as the decision failed to consider vulnerabilities of the marginal classes like those of daily wage workers and migrant labourers (Shukla). With the sudden shutdown of trains, buses and local vehicles, migrant workers who left their homes for work were stranded in unknown lands with no place to live or go, no means to travel back home and no work to earn their daily bread. India saw a "migration of biblical proportions" as the workers set off to travel hundreds and thousands of kilometers away towards their homes that were often located in different states by whatever means of commute they could obtain at the moment, and quite frequently they would travel all the way by foot (Vats). The issue worsened with the lockdown's extension as the disease's fatality increased in the phases that followed. Alongside the widespread anxiety over an unprepared lockdown, misinformation and unawareness regarding the virus, and increasing mortality rates among victims, the issue of mass migration of daily wage workers persisted across several states in India. Newspapers with front page headlines and cover pictures of migrant workers and their families waiting at highway bus stops or railway platforms were widely circulated, read and sympathized with by the upper and middle classes from the comfort of their living rooms. Despite its coverage on various national news media, the criticality of the issue received a much-needed global acknowledgement much later when Neeraj Ghaywan's film *Homebound* (2025) made it to the 98th Academy Awards as India's official entry for the Oscars 2026. The film, true to its name, offered us a cinematic engagement with the incredibly

difficult homeward journey of countless migrant workers during the COVID-19 lockdown through the characters of Shoaib and Chandan.

Inspired by a 2020 New York Times essay by journalist Basharat Peer, “A Friendship, a Pandemic and a Death Beside the Highway”, *Homebound* featured the delicate portrayal of marginal lives in India and an interfaith friendship emerging against a rural landscape. The essay captured a striking moment during India’s COVID-19 lockdown, covering the story of two childhood friends, Mohammad Saiyub, a young Muslim man, and Amrit Kumar, a Dalit man, whose homeward journey during the first phase of lockdown became viral after the release of a photograph showing one friend cradling the other’s feverish, dehydrated body on the side of a highway. The characters of Shoaib and Chandan in *Homebound* were sketched inspired by them. However, since its release, the makers of *Homebound* have had to clear multiple allegations pointing to plagiarism of sources. In 2021, a film *Dihadi* was directed and produced by Mayukha and Nidhi Patel, which made rounds on a few online platforms. The word “dihadi”, synonymous with “daily labourer”, captured the struggles of Babban, a migrant worker who gets stuck on his way back home from Gujarat during the lockdown, while his wife awaits him in Uttar Pradesh. The film’s independent production with non-professional actors and aesthetics made out of low-budget resources did not make prominent recognition at the time of its release, but caught the general public’s attention four years later in 2025 when Neeraj Ghaywan’s *Homebound* was released. A Reddit post made rounds calling out the makers of *Homebound* for plagiarism, citing instances of big production houses overshadowing independent cinema, ignoring their original ideas and hard work. Author and journalist Pooja Changoiwala also initiated legal action against the makers, claiming an unlawful copy of the title, scenes and narrative of her 2021 novel *Homebound*. However, the makers of *Homebound* stated that the existence of the aesthetically and conceptually similar *Dihadi* or the novel *Homebound* was unknown to them and that the film was completely inspired by Basheer’s essay. While it is necessary to begin this paper with the rightful awareness of the creative and production history of such films which represent lives of minorities and the marginal working classes, it shall however not delve into the fragmentary copyright claims of the two films but treat them both as conceptually similar, with *Homebound* as an inspirational counterpart of *Dihadi* simply because it appears later in timeline and offers comparable cinematic parallels.

Thematically, both films are about returning home in times of precarity. “Home”, as it were, is not just a geographical belonging but a belonging that is deeply rooted in one’s emotions, memories and nostalgia. However, in the two films that the paper studies, a larger question is posed to the audience: what is home for the Dalit, the Muslim and the other marginalised communities in a country that often reminds them that their belonging is only temporal? Secondly, what is home for women of such marginalised [communities? It is necessary to analyse what

constitutes “home” first before we understand how space and belonging are closely tied with the formation of identity, how they produce emotional labour, how that differs between men and women, and how that affects the wages earned or lost.

Methodology

In an article by Feliciano, the author attempts to document the usage of content analysis in Social Science research. Content analysis, while within reach of researchers, has had limited usage in research, with interviews, observation, and controlled experimentation enjoying a considerable privilege. This paper seeks to employ content analysis within a feminist framework to divulge the representative women characters in the films *Homebound* (2025) and *Dihadi* (2021). The broad scope of content analysis includes the determination of characteristics of selected content. Having categorised the “source of information as personal or non-personal, this paper relies on non-personal sources of information to identify the “characteristics of broad concepts in the Social Sciences” (Feliciano).

Neeraj Ghaywan, the director of *Homebound* (2025), crafted a story to allude to the socio-economic decisional mishaps that were undertaken by the Government of India, in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. These allusions were political in nature, and so were the characters. Since characters are central to how we look at stories, and they shape our thoughts regarding the story, the centrality of Mohammed Shoaib Ali (played by Ishaan Khatter) and Chandan Kumar (played by Vishal Jethwa) in *Homebound*, and Babban in *Dihadi*, removes the significance of any other peripheral character, however important they were in the development of the films. With recent research suggesting that stories are more effective than arguments, the audience tends to identify with the characters they themselves resonate with. Portraying Babban, Chandan, and Shoaib sympathetically, with the maximum screentime, eliminates any formation of sympathy and identification with other characters (Polletta). Chandan’s mother, his sister, Shoaib’s mother, and Babban’s wife, Bimla, were the peripheral characters who, if given greater screentime, could’ve roused similar sympathetic adulation and, in turn, the centrality could’ve shifted from the male protagonists.

Leavy’s understanding of representative characters set the tone for an analysis of the women characters of the two films. Representative characters essentially are those that reveal the cultural and political conditions of the time in which they are set. In this paper, focusing on the peripheral characters named above, we disclose the socio-cultural conditions that the women, in the families of migrating sons and husbands, have to withstand. While the protagonists of the two stories seem to be the “representative characters”, we are explicitly shifting our focus from them to present an analysis that is rooted in capturing women’s emotional and physical labour.

Content analysis refers to extracting distinctive themes independently from existing cultural products. The authors have independently viewed the two films

and noted the similar and dissimilar emerging themes. Cultural artefacts necessarily possess two qualities: they are naturalistic and non-interactive. To maintain the authenticity of content analysis and the research being undertaken, it is necessary to confirm that the content possesses the two aforementioned qualities (Leavy). The films, directed by Neeraj Ghaywan, Pooja Patel and Nidhi Patel, have been produced independent of the authors' influence and represent the discourse of the creators and the social context they were created in, versus the discourse of the researchers. Thus, for content analysis to be truly feminist, the production process should also be looked into (Leavy).

Parasuraman's take on how the frames have been smoothed out to make the films palatable to the general public relies on aesthetic storytelling to convey a sentiment. However, he questions at what point the imagery gets reduced to an "aesthetic" that it begins to "undo" the brutality of the context. When the visuals began to capture Chandan's mother's cracked heels, and cracked heels alone, it distanced her, and her labour, from the context itself. The brutality of walking barefoot at a construction site was simply reduced to the pain of physical labour. The visuals failed to deal with the affect: the mother's pain while "performing" her daily-wage job, and her refusal to wear shoes, so that she could keep herself 'grounded', was reduced to Chandan buying her shoes with his hard-earned money. The visuals' closure came right at the conclusion, where Shoaib presented her with the "new" shoes, post Chandan's death. Thus, the scene removed focus from the brutality of physical labour and affectual labour, by creating an emancipator of pain, as shown by the "new shoes". Reflection should not be replaced by representation, as was argued by Stuart Hall (Parasuraman). This is also attuned to the representation of caste-based labour. Chandan's mother was under fire for having cooked for the school children, being a Dalit woman. The mother's engagement with the Other ended with them speaking over her and getting her dismissed from the workplace. The film, while creating Sudha with the ability to shatter the stereotypical image of Dalit representation on-screen, gave her limited time, and at no point of time did she engage with the Other. The representational discourse, with the on-screen presence of a Dalit woman, with visuals of her as the victim, aids in the creation of stereotypical images of a Dalit woman, where her oppressors are often given more power over her. One such limitation of representational politics is that the community does not essentially engage or talk "with" the other; they are shown to only "talk back". Engaging with the Other and not just within themselves creates a space for dialogue and conversation. In opposition to representation, Dalit presentation is what Edachira argues for. The Brahminical discourse on Dalits prevents them from "becoming" and intends to keep them, frozen in a way, the caste-based society intended (Edachira).

What began as a story about the gruelling yesteryears of the COVID-19 pandemic and the aftermath of an ill-timed and poorly implemented lockdown brought in

questions of caste, class, gender, and labour. While the noteworthy visuals bring out the realities, most of them remain as an aesthetic image of labour being performed. While making the women perform the roles they were confined to, one realises how they have been reduced to their familial relational role as it gets introduced to us, as such. The paper thus analyses the migratory stress that befell the womenfolk of the household, although not explicitly represented.

Home and Belongingness

When Shoaib in *Homebound* is offered the possibility of migrating to Dubai for work he seems pensive. He says that home for him constitutes his mother's homemade tomato chutney, the prayers that remind him of his ancestors, and the land, skies, friends, language that surround him. He keeps hoping to advance his career as a salesman or qualify the government exam for the police service so that he could work from the vicinity of his home. When the realities of Shoaib's daily life at home come into foreground, it becomes apparent how Shoaib's longing for home is more geographical than emotional. He lives with his elderly parents and supports them financially. His father, a farmer in occupation, who cannot walk anymore because of a damaged knee, shares a verbally abusive relationship with his son as he is seen constantly criticising Shoaib's habits and decisions. A typical example of negative reinforcement and aggressive parenting often seen in brown Indian households, comes into foreplay in this father-son dynamic. Despite all this, Shoaib chooses to work at a place from where he could return back home everyday, hoping his presence will help his family financially as well as share his mother's burdens of caretaking of a sick parent. Shoaib's mother remains a silent spectator in this exchange. Her voice does not partake in household decisions; she only contributes in the domestic care of her ailing husband, and in the kitchen space as she is often seen saving better pieces of meat for her son and his friend Chandan. Shoaib is emotionally burdened at home because of his familial constraints.

Chandan's home on the other hand is comparably more affirmative of his career. Although impatient, he first awaits his qualifying results for the police job, meanwhile also trying his luck at completing graduation from a college with Sudha, and then waiting for his joining letter after he clears the government exam. His impatience is comforted by the emotional support of his parents and sister Vaishali. Chandan's mother plays a vital role in representing female daily-wage labourers who work at construction sites. Her voice becomes a significant reminder of the hope that women of marginal classes carry within themselves for an aspirational life. Unlike Shoaib's family where he is the sole earner, Chandan's family has more support, with both his parents being daily wage labourers. When Chandan's appointment in the police seemed unsure to arrive, his mother took up a cooking job at a school and his father planned to migrate to the Surat textile mills in Gujarat, both ensuring their family's financial security was not compromised.

A steady family support creates a longing for home that is more inward and emotional for Chandan.

However, the comfort of home, geographical or emotional, does not remain for long for either character. After failing to qualify for the police service examination, Shoaib continues at his office working as a salesman with the aim to earn enough for his father's knee replacement surgery. There, he becomes a victim of regular Islamophobic jokes and corporate microaggression, leading him to resign feeling disrespected. The first blow to Shoaib and his family came when he failed the police service exam and they went through a dissolution of hope for the "better life" that they thought could be achieved through a government job offering security and respect. The second blow came when Shoaib returned home with the news of his resignation leaving them with no stable source of income. In these instances, Shoaib's relationship with hope itself cracked, as he found himself in moments when home itself seemed to sigh with him (Munib). On the other hand, Chandan qualified for the exam. His dream of rebuilding his home's leaky roof and gifting his family a concrete house seemed attainable with this success. However, the results create an egotistical misunderstanding between the two friends out of competitive jealousy. They get into a squabble, stop talking or meeting each other, and life unfolds for them silently, simultaneously. With the news of his qualification, Chandan stops going to college and starts preparing for his physical tests, hoping to start working in the police force as soon as possible. This upset Sudha, a highly motivated young woman whom he met on his way to the police service exam and got romantically interested in. She proudly worships Ambedkar, values education and urges Chandan to complete his graduation. While Chandan was waiting for his appointment letter, he heard from a local administrator that it might take many months to arrive. At the same time, Chandan's mother faces intense casteism as upper-caste villagers' storm into the school where she cooked children's mid-day meal and threaten her to stop feeding their children. This was the last straw for an already impatient and hopeless Chandan. In despair, he expresses to his sister how the world keeps dragging him down the more he tries to lift himself up. The scene is reflective of the struggles of socially and economically backward masses of India whose lives, despite being hardworking and deserving, seem like "an endless Sisyphean cycle" (Munib). He decides to migrate to Surat, Gujarat to work in textile mills where his father had initially planned to go. After Shoaib's resignation from the salesman post, he too moves to Surat and finally reconciles with Chandan there. For the first time, Shoaib lets out his emotional exhaustion through tears instead of anger, as Chandan holds him close and lets him cry. The scene becomes a moving reminder of how friendship allows emotional gateway in times of hopelessness.

The decision to migrate came from a place of rupture in belongingness within the characters' own selves. The longer Chandan waited, the farther his dreams of building a home for his parents went. In Shoaib's case, extending his wait meant

extending his father's ailments and denying him the resources for a faster surgery. In *Dihadi*, Babban's family background or history is not particularly shown, except for a few occurrences of Bimla, his wife, and allusions to their child, who never appears onscreen. The last exchange with Bimla before he migrates for work only appears in the form of memory and does not reveal much about the dynamic he shares with the rest of his family. Babban expresses to his friends in Gujarat that he would never leave his wife and home if he did not have the need to. The resemblance between the trajectory of the men in *Homebound* and *Dihadi* lies in their compulsive migration from Uttar Pradesh to Gujarat in search of work. It is only after they move that they give in to emotions in a way that was never possible or visible back at home. In a country where every other space reminded them of their caste, religion, identity, the characters felt belonging profoundly in their home. Munib writes, "Home in the film is not merely a physical structure; it is an inanimate presence, almost a living being with whom the characters share an intimate relationship." Yet, when every opportunity to stay back home failed them, they decided to move out primarily for three reasons. First, they carried the responsibility of earning wages to support their family. Second, to earn dignity and respect that could be promised only through work and their ability to contribute to the family financially. Third, and most importantly, to be emancipated from the socio-cultural and familial constraints of the marginal class that never allowed them to be themselves inhibited. Through work and dignity, the three men were also on a quest for self-identity.

This brings us to the next part of our discussion where we shall delve deeper into the question of home and belongingness, how they affect women differently than men, and how and if at all they get to seek for emancipation.

Emancipation and Emotional Labour

Lesa Lockford's essay "Leaving Home: Abandoning a Problematic Metaphor" delineates how "home", actual or metaphorical, is a contested concept and location. It is marked not only by who and what we let in but also by what we keep out (Lockford). For their quest for identity, financial security, familial and socio-cultural emancipation, Chandan, Shoaib and Babban all bear the prospect of moving out of their home as the last beam of hope to get out of their Sisyphean cycle of struggles. However, this notion starkly changes when the female characters of the two films are studied. Babban's wife, Shoaib's mother, Chandan's sister Vaishali, his mother and Sudha all share the same woes as the male characters. Yet, when met with multiple setbacks to their hope for a "better life", they do not get the choice to leave home.

The female characters engage in physical labour in a way that does not emancipate them but burdens them further emotionally. Shoaib's mother stays back with his father, tending to his ailments, nursing him for a quick recovery. She remains a voiceless attribution to Shoaib and his father's life while her son migrates to Surat. Chandan's mother refuses to stop working and continues to help contribute to the

family fund. When Chandan urges her to wear sandals at work and take care of her cracked feet, she recalls the story of her mother with cracked feet, marching into farmlands, drawing parallels to a soldier marching into the battlefield. She says that it is only those feet that she inherited from her mother, and they are not just body parts, they are the sickle that keeps her rooted to the soil. Her words become a haunting reminder of how the body of the lower caste becomes both burden and legacy, passed down through generations as the only tool or capital (Munib). When she takes up the job of a school cook, she faces casteist abuse by the local villagers and is denied the right to feed children. Meanwhile, Chandan's sister, Vaishali, is often seen performing sanitary work at the same school. It lays bare the caste system that restricts Dalit people from performing respectable work for better pay and living. Vaishali, despite her wish to study and work, is also denied the opportunity to continue her education as her parents could only invest in one child. She becomes a victim of societal sexism within her own family, with her life predetermined with domestic duties, labour and sacrifice, while her brother, by virtue of being male, gets encouraged to pursue exams, jobs and aspirations, however precariously (Munib). In a confessional scene, when Chandan grieves over the hopeless struggles of his life that keep lifting him down, Vaishali expresses annoyance that he is the only one in the family who has been given more choices than anyone else. She expresses that she is exhausted, and her unsentimental confession marks the profound contradiction of male marginality that Chandan suffers under the oppressive caste system, yet within home, he is the privileged one, while Vaishali remains doubly marginalised as a Dalit woman (Munib).

On the other hand, Sudha, who comes off as the most assertive among all other female characters, sticks to her decision to graduate, despite her partner Chandan choosing to leave college, and subsequently her, to migrate for work. Before Chandan goes away, she expresses her disappointment in this decision and decides to part ways. However, on Chandan's birthday, Sudha visits him at his workplace and surprises him. In the brief hours of their meeting, Sudha is already anticipating the next meeting. It only lays bare what even the most principled strong women would do for the men they love, as Sudha travels all the way to meet Chandan, only for a few hours. When her autorickshaw sets off, she leaves with a distant gaze on Chandan, carrying the pain of love and departure in her eyes until they meet next time. Sudha's counterpart, Bimla in *Dihadi*, also left waiting for Babban with their child, does not, however, have the means to visit her husband. In her limited onscreen presence, we get to know nothing much about her apart from her continued concern for Babban. In a flashback, Bimla is seen serving food to Babban and wishing him a safe and quick return home. The married couple share a caring relationship, but that does not free her from her societal responsibilities and household chores. Bimla is starkly contradictory to Sudha. Her character is

portrayed as nothing more than a concerned wife, awaiting the return of her husband.

Notwithstanding the differing characterisations of each female character, all of them share a common ground, with themselves as well as the male counterparts, and that is, labour. According to Marxist theory, labour, more specifically labour-power, is what workers sell directly to the capitalist for a wage. Unlike the men, all the women commit to doubled labour, one that is physical and visible, and the other emotional, invisible. The commitment to caretaking an ailing husband, to continue manual work for family support, to fulfill domestic chores out of societal expectations all require physical labour. However, unlike them, the men bear the prospect, hence responsibility, of earning the bread for the family and escaping the social constraints in a land away from home, earning wage in exchange of labour. The women's physical labour in the domestic space of her home gets her no wage. Marxist feminists like Silvia Federici argue in their work about the labour that reproduces the waged workers through activities like cooking, childcare, caretaking of elderly parents and emotional sustenance. This labour exists entirely outside the wage relation and hence is rendered invisible by capitalism, although the capital could not function without it. So in a way, the visible act of performing physical labour is plainly invisibilised as the labourer does not receive her wage. The other kind of labour, invisibilised both inward and outward, is that of emotions. In all the work that the female characters commit to, they perform what Arlie Russel Hochschild calls "deep acting" and "surface acting", which aim to convey an attempt to change what is privately felt and what is publicly displayed, respectively (Wharton). The nursing of the ailing husband requires Shoaib's mother to accept a silent life of caretaking in the absence of her son, the persistence at continuing manual labour requires Chandan's mother to give up bodily rest to constantly worry about their family funds, Vaishali's act of performing domestic chores requires her to sacrifice dreams of education and financial freedom, Sudha's continuation as a graduate student at college compels her to give up her relationship with Chandan, and Bimla's confirmation to the societal gender roles of a supportive wife obliges her to never reveal her own aspirations but only continued concern for her husband. Hochschild's theory on emotional labour takes examples like those of frontline workers and receptionists who have to put on an emotional display that may not align with how they actually feel, in exchange for wages. However, when the women of *Homebound* and *Dihadi* are studied, the characters constantly engage in emotional labour not only to not gain any wage in exchange but to, in fact, lose them. They undergo this loss twice - once when the men migrate to Gujarat for work, and another time when the men are not able to return home due to the state-imposed lockdown. When they leave, the women bear smiles, attempting to hold everything together, for their words of encouragement would be the only source of strength for the wage earners to leave the emotional and geographical comforts of home. While the

physical labourer ventures out in the quest for identity, wage and emancipation of socio-cultural and familial constraints, the emotional labourer at home remains in silence, praying for their safe return and performing deep acting to enable the inflow of wage at home by the means of the migrants. They do not get wages out of this emotional labour but lose wages in the form of strength, well-being and stability as the entire responsibility of maintaining both physical and emotional order of the household falls on them while the men remain absent from the picture. What also happens as a result of emotional labour is what Hochschild calls “emotional dissonance”, drawn from the Marxist concept of alienation along with the psychological concept of cognitive dissonance, where the workers may develop “a sense of self-estrangement or distress over time” owing to a constant display of emotions regardless of that being congruent with their feelings (Wharton). The men only benefit from the women’s labour by relying on them for emotional support and use their invisible labour to quest for self-identity, while the women lose theirs. Once again, this refers back to the invisibilization of such labour by capitalism, even though capitalism is not able to function without it. A second time, the women lose their wages for their emotional labour as a direct consequence of the men losing their wages for physical labour as work shuts down with the announcement of the lockdown. As the days extend, the income pauses, and once Chandan in *Homebound* and Babban in *Dihadi* pass away in a hopeless death, the income stops permanently. Bimla’s reaction to Babban’s death is not screened, however Chandan’s death marks the first time when deep and surface acting make way for an emotional outcry in Chandan’s mother and in Sudha, thus breaking the chain of wageless emotional labour. The performance breaks, the wages are lost, and the doubly marginalised home continues to exist, merged with the identities of the women themselves.

Death and Offspring Migratory Stress:

John Brown went off to war to fight on a foreign shore
His mama sure was proud of him!
He stood straight and tall in his uniform and all
His mama’s face broke out all in a grin
-John Brown, Bob Dylan

John Brown stood out as an anti-war poem in the wake of the early 20th century warfare. The poem captures a mother’s pride when her son has been drafted for war and sent to a foreign land. Initially, John Brown’s mother is seen expressing elation at her son’s military and patriotic endeavour. The poem reflects migratory stress and the consequences of war. Similarly, when Chandan and Shoaib migrated to the urban metropolis, making do in shared apartments, their mothers were initially delighted. Such is often the case with families in low and middle income families that depend on their children’s assistance and proximity (Yahirun et al.). In scenarios such as these, evidenced by the cultural landscape of Mexico and drawing similarities, aged parents take on a different role (especially as caregivers)

when their children move out to seek material and financial wealth for the family. Chandan and Shoaib's mothers' initial joy to witness their sons' domestic migration is a result of them imagining a better future. Nonetheless, their emotional distress was neglected. Shoaib's mother, being emotional after her son decided to join Chandan as a factory worker in Surat, was downplayed, as was her journey, throughout the film, where she remained a secondary character. Chandan's mother's dejection appeared only after she heard of his death. Such was her representation that Chandan, while on his deathbed, hallucinated his mother's cracked heels, and thus, alluded to the physical labour that she had been undertaking to keep their family afloat.

Research suggested that offspring migration could have different effects on mothers and fathers. The work looked into the Latin American tradition of mothers and women being the primary caregivers, and after their offspring migrate, their roles become intensified. When Shoaib was working at a corporate space, where he would come home, at the end of the day, his ailing father had support. Without him at home, the caregiving shifts to his mother, completely. Similarly, women are also supposed to include their family and household members in their social network more than men, which could be illustrated by how Vaishali (Chandan's sister) kept the family together through video calls and regular updates (Yahirun et al.).

Yahirun & Arenas also spoke about the variegated emotional distress that affected the families of those migrants who crossed the US-Mexico border. Post-lockdown, the state borders in India no longer remained porous, putting migrants' families through greater distress.

As he turned away to walk, his Ma was still in shock
At seein' the metal brace that helped him stand
But as he turned to go, he called his mother close
And he dropped his medals down into her hand
-John Brown, Bob Dylan

John Brown's mother looked at her unrecognizable son, who had been wounded by the State machinery, and couldn't find her gallant son anymore. Chandan's mother, who was once proud of him for bringing his family material wealth, now bears the guilt of his death. The medals that John Brown dropped in his mother's hand could be compared to the pair of shoes that Chandan had prepared to gift her. The pair of shoes symbolises the fruits of his labour, as do the medals.

Thus, the all-engulfing metropolis took away Chandan from the rural countryside, offering materialistic emancipation as a consolation.

Conclusion

Homebound, having been nominated for the 98th Academy Awards as India's entry for the Best International Feature Film category, might sound like it made a way for the re-emergence of "parallel cinema". Neeraj Ghaywan's bid to commercialise *Homebound*, along with the cuts suggested by the Central Board

for Film Certification (CBFC), and the alleged plagiarism allegations, make it similar to any other film that has received some critical acclaim. The film, while attempting to appeal to the young and urban populace, tiptoes around the issue without explicitly mentioning governmental failures during the implementation of COVID-19 measures. *Dihadi*, an independent film, although it lacks lustre, seems to have delivered what could have been expected on a limited budget.

Homebound shouldn't be considered as the yardstick for anti-caste films. It runs parallel to movies like *Article 15*, which promised to make a dent in the dismantling of the caste system but ended up portraying the Brahmin saviour complex. Neeraj Ghaywan, while being a Dalit filmmaker himself, has been making strides vehemently into Bollywood with his films that portray intersectional oppression. It seems that he has been trying to tone down the "caste question" to make his films palatable to the Indian audience, given the prevailing intolerant political atmosphere. Nevertheless, it had become relevant to contribute to the discourse of women and how familial migration affects them. The paper intended to do the same.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/35**TRANSGRESSING DISRUPTIVE REALITIES AND EMBRACING
SURVIVAL BEYOND CIVILIZATIONAL FRAMEWORKS: AN
ECOFEMINIST STUDY OF JEAN HEGLAND'S INTO THE FOREST****IVLEEN KOUR**Research Scholar, Department of English
University of Jammu, Jammu, India**PROF. SADAF SHAH**Professor, Department of English
University of Jammu, Jammu, India**Abstract**

The present paper offers a comprehensive ecofeminist reading of Jean Hegland's *Into the Forest*. The paper investigates multifaceted ways in which the novel critically interrogates the predominance of capitalist-patriarchal structures that exploit ecology, escalate social fragmentation, and enrage human vulnerabilities. Set against the background of a dystopian landscape marked by electricity failure, technological collapse, and communication disruption, the paper exposes the inherent vulnerabilities of modern civilizations excessively dependent upon conventional infrastructures and consequently heading towards an apocalypse. By bringing into foreground sisters Nell and Eva's lived experiences within their dilapidated social commune, the study recounts the ways women bodies and natural world have parallelly served as sites of constant exploitation. Therefore, building upon theoretical articulations of Vandana Shiva, Val Plumwood, Elizabeth Dodson Gray, and Karen J Warren the study examines such interconnected oppression of women and nature, while simultaneously highlighting an alternative sustainable model of survival. Through sisters' strict rejection against oppressive social structures, their displacement, and re-establishment of new home in wilderness, the paper not only signifies an inverted interdependent eco-feminine relationship, but also reimagines both women and nature as active agents of renewal and empowerment. The paper ultimately, establishes wilderness as not primarily a physical refuge, but rather a generative space with immense capability of rebuilding an interdependent collective planetary life.

Keywords: Dystopian, Patriarchy, Technology, Natural world, Feminine.

Introduction

In the middle of 21st century human civilization finds itself enmeshed in a complex web of ecological destabilization. Intense change in climatic patterns, global increase in temperature, exhaustion of resources, and gradual breakdown of socio-political institutions are pushing the fragile human civilization towards its doom.

The deleterious impacts of massive industrialization to boost economy, uncontrolled excavation to procure rare earth minerals, and unrestrained development, not only interrogate the traditional ethics of co-existence, but also illuminate the way capital-centred avarice is propelling mankind towards an irreversible disintegration of natural world and its critical ecosystems. The accelerating frequencies of climatic catastrophes, food and water insecurity, and heavy displacement of vulnerable populations explicitly expose that the pernicious effects of environmental deterioration are not limited to nature, but also take a toll on human civilizations and intensify global inequality, penury, and violence. Conventionally, the expansion of technology, establishment of industrial infrastructure, and globalized economies which were earlier celebrated as milestones of progress are now unveiling the huge ecological cost they have yielded as lands turn barren, ecosystems are ruined, and life-supporting resources go scarce. As ecological limits left breached, the necessity of reestablishing an interdependent relationship between modern civilization and natural world becomes apparently visible, vindicating the long existing fact that humans and nature are interdependent on each other. The ecological crisis is thus not only an environmental issue, but rather a systemic issue that affects socio-political structures as well. Therefore, in the present-day scenario ecological crisis appear as one of the frequently explored domains, and the texts set against the backdrop of deteriorated environments have emerged as central focus of critical enquiry. By addressing this ecological breakdown, the research corpus on one hand cast questions upon grassroot causes of socio-political disintegration, while on the other illuminate the possibility of bleak futuristic existence.

Historically, with the rise of anthropocentrism, a decisive epistemic shift in which humans (traditionally a white male) not only positioned him at the epicentre of universe but also established himself as a separate and superior to other entities like women and natural world, legitimizing the other's reduction into a passive source meant to serve his ends. Such hegemonic worldviews backed by Aristotelian arguments, Baconian scientific theories, or Cartesian dualistic structures collectively argued for an advanced model of scientific progress that instrumentalized nature primarily into a resource of utility and perpetuated subjugation of women for their reproductive capacity. Various socio-intellectual movements whether Renaissance, Humanism, or Enlightenment, that laid the foundations of western ideology further elevated a masculinized model of rationality wherein reason was aligned with masculinity, culture, and mastery, while marginalizing women and nature, vindicating their domination as a step towards progress and technological advancement. As such instrumentalizing ideologies were reinforced in postmodernist societies the capitalistic economies enforced natural world to be heavily dissected simultaneously relegating women to be controlled and utilized by patriarchal authorities. Consequently, women and

natural world, the only two producing forces of cosmos, emerged amongst the most exploited entities within the dominant socio-political structures.

This exploitation of women and natural world has finally emerged as one of the most prominent concerns of the contemporary literary scholarship, critically arguing that industrialized capitalism and patriarchal dominance have constantly treated both women and natural world as resources to be controlled, commodified, and consumed. Various critically acclaimed dystopian texts from female authorship depict highly fragmented societies governed by totalitarian regimes, ravaged landscapes, and exploited women, wherein the protagonists emerge as subversive agents, ethical visionaries, and resilient actors who confront systemic violence, thrive to fabricate a communal solidarity, and restore ecological order. Building upon the such dystopian articulations of gendered and ecological disparity, where women carry an ecological consciousness and appear as provocative figures in reconstructing a sustainable model of existence, the paper undertakes an ecofeminist reading of Jean Hegland's *'Into the Forest.'* Set against the background of an apocalyptic society, the study argues that the narrative aptly unveils the way capitalism and patriarchal violence converge to threaten agency of both women and nature. The paper therefore, seeks to establish that *Into the Forest* is not plainly a dystopian account that serves as a standard warning about the unsettling futuristic realities, instead a comprehensive text that unfolds an alternative model of existence relying on the coexistence with the natural world. By bringing into nuclei the protagonists Nell and Eva's gradual rejection on technological dependence and a conscious turn towards ecological self-sufficiency, the present paper delineates that survival cannot be achieved solely by establishing mastery over nature, but through an ethical coexistence with it. On a broader spectrum, the study engages with the interrelated crisis of ecological destruction, gendered disparity, and capitalist-patriarchal exploitation, ultimately contributing towards ecofeminist, dystopian, and apocalyptic studies.

Theoretical Framework

Ecological feminism is a theoretical framework that studies intersection of feminism and ecological criticism. Ecofeminist theorists argue that subjugation of female and exploitation of ecology actually originate from similar capitalist-patriarchal ideology that assumes both as passive entities that could be exploited to meet their ends. The theory holds that women and nature have long been symbolically as well as materially connected in multiple ways which is consequently utilized to justify their subjugation and exploitation. The expression was initially curated by author Francoise D' Eaubonne in her text *Feminism or Death* (1974) arguing that the male dominated systems of power are responsible for environmental devastation and subjugation of women. She contends that the capitalist-patriarchal societies consider women, natural world, nonhuman animals, and other marginalized entities as rigidly others to be controlled, manipulated, and consumed by man. The movement grew rapidly in late 1980's and 1990's as the

foundational theorists started criticizing western dualistic paradigms that created hierarchal structures positioning women and ecology as highly inferior and irrational to the scientific world of man. However, scholars from different backgrounds including postcolonial and animal studies expanded the framework beyond gender and ecology to include colonial exploitation, marginalization of indigenous cultures, replacing of sustaining cultures, and mass commodification of animals, constituting the theory into a broader intersectional framework that critiques various isms of domination.

The study incorporates various concepts and arguments from key thinkers like Elizabethan Dodson Gray's critique of phallocentric Biblical deconstructions alongside Val Plumwood's critical insights on modern anthropocentric frameworks to interrogate the ways capitalist ideological structures mould theology and philosophy as an instrument to perpetuate domination and exploitation of nature. The body of research also applies Karen J. Warren's concept of Sexist-Naturist language to demonstrate the manners through which patriarchal discourse legitimizes subordination of women by metaphorically aligning them with nature and nonhuman animals. The paper ultimately draws upon Vandana Shiva's concept of Women as Custodians of biodiversity to emphasize women's indispensable role in maintaining ecological balance, preserving seeds, and protecting indigenous species to ensure environmental sustainability and collective survival.

Jean Hegland is an American author critically acclaimed for her environmentally conscious feminist fiction. Hegland spent most of her early years in a rural setting where her deep connection with forest, land, and specific ecosystems profoundly shaped her literary imagination. Her body of works including fiction like *Windfalls*, (2004) *Still in Time: A Novel* (2015) and a nonfictional account *The Life Within: Celebration of a Pregnancy* (1991), intricately delve into the family dynamics, complexity of moral dilemmas, environmental responsibility, and challenges imposed on the women within contemporary capitalistic-patriarchal societies. Often longlisted for numerous prestigious awards her works are bounded by common thematic articulation of deteriorating eco-human interactions, criticism of patriarchal paradigms that relegate women and nature to be exploited, and instead offer a counter discourse that promotes care, sustainability, and nurturance over control or subjugation. *Into the Forest* (1997) is an evocative post-apocalyptic narrative set in collapsed near-future United States. The novel depicts a sub-urban locale of Redwood, California where unregulated capitalistic development, uncontrolled technological advancement, and ecological destruction culminate in an absolute collapse of electrical infrastructure, widespread agricultural breakdown, depletion of vital natural resources, and accelerated proliferation of life-threatening diseases. The grievous socio-ecological circumstances have thus compelled the incompatible populations to migrate for other provinces of States in pursuit of safety, economic sustenance, and food

security. In contradiction to the other characters who readily succumb or plan to escape the systemic crisis, protagonist Nell and Eva neither succumb nor migrate the chaos, but instead adapt to natural world for a prolonged sustenance. The orphaned sisters assertively renounce technologically driven anthropocentric world and deliberately reestablish their home within the wilderness, discovering an alternative mode of resistance, regeneration and defiance against oppressive structures. This conscious rejection and deliberate immersion on one hand articulate a feminist rejection of ruthless technological mechanisms, while on the other fabricate an ideal eco-human relationship. Therefore, through expedition of sisters, Hegland demonstrates that survival is not solely dependent on technological mechanisms and when multiple modern institutions collectively disintegrate, nature appears as an ultimate protective and resilient space with the power of sustaining human life.

Theological and Anthropocentric Justification of Ecological Exploitation

In Redwood, California, as depicted in the novel capitalist oriented heavy industrial excavation, overconsumption of resources, and constant depletion of forest cover has resultantly led to eruption of sudden ecological crisis. The afflicted population of Redwood is consequently abandoned to scavenge for basic amenities like food and water, struggle for fuel resources while gas stations have completely run out of it, and contend with rampant spread of incurable diseases like T.B, AIDS, and infective fever. Moreover, erratic weather fluctuations, increase in temperature and continuous rainfall have further worsened the circumstances. Nell, elder of the two sisters, contemplates distressing circumstances of her locale and critically reflects on the ways human actions themselves constitute the fundamental cause of catastrophic circumstances. She observes that the ozone is being depleted, forests are rapidly disappearing, the agricultural lands of California required an increased dosage of fertilizers and pesticides while producing diminished quantity of toxic production. Simultaneously the unemployment reached alarming levels, leaving population at urban centres frustrated and hopeless. (Hegland 14) As a result, Californians either succumb to the harsh conditions and physical violence, or simply abandon their homes undertaking a perilous journey to Boston. Through depiction of urgent environmental challenges like depletion of ozone, exhaustion of resources, reduction of global forest cover, and increased dependence on chemical fertilizers, Hegland recounts the multifaceted ways in which modern civilization and its technological expansion exploit natural world and disrupt the ecological balance which reciprocally results in creation of large-scale socio-ecological complications. Ecofeminist scholarship argues that such exploitation of natural world is actually in a concealed way driven by capitalist-patriarchal ideologies that empowers man as master or owner of the nature. In her text *Green Paradise Lost* (1979) Elizabeth Dodson Gray deconstructs the way phallogocentric deconstruction of Christian theological texts establish nature as subservient to

man. Gray holds that according to Biblical parable of Creation of Man, man was created the first and foremost, and all the other entities like woman, children, animals, and ground of nature were all created after him and thus destined to serve him. She writes that “The Genesis myth establishes a hierarchal structure of inequality and legitimates the temporal priority and higher status of the male.” (Gray 30) In accordance with Elizabeth Dodson Gray’s views the Genesis myth of creation establishes man as master of both woman and nature according to chronology of their origin. Hence, women exist to serve him, meanwhile natural world is simultaneously reduced into docile force to be shaped and exploited by man. Gray opines that such phallogocentric theological claims that establish man as above and rationally superior from the other entities, are actually the core reason behind exploitation of ecology. Drawing upon such theoretical articulations in *Feminism and The Mastery of Nature* (1993) Val Plumwood takes dig on anthropocentric worldviews, Platonic rationality, and Cartesian dualistic hierarchies that collectively constitute a model of dominance that not imposition man as superior or highly separated from natural world, but also advocate for an instrumentalized utilization of natural world. She opines that the dominant western ideologies have regarded man’s relationships with natural world as purely instrumental, defining humanity’s connection with the ecology in terms of utility and self-interest only. Within such perspectives humans are positioned as strictly apart and superior to nature, viewed merely with the purpose of meeting human needs. (Plumwood 147) She argues as a consequence of such ideologies, nature is seen as something very invaluable in its own and is related to humans in materialistic terms only. Taken together, both the theoretical claims imply that various cultural, philosophical, and theological frameworks that establish man as a master and separated entity actually empower him with an agency for optimum exploitation of nature. Therefore, the dire social and ecological complications like climatic change, unemployment, food crisis, and global warming are immediate consequences of mastered-humanistic exploitation of ecology. Along the similar lines, the environmental catastrophes Hegland portrays throughout the narrative are powerful literary expression of failed anthropocentric worldviews and ultimate consequence of human induced environmental degradation. By depicting a heavily devastated world she explicitly exposes the inherent flaws in western ideology and lethal consequences it has yielded mankind. Such intensified ecological challenges on a broader spectrum vocalize the repercussions future generations might have to face if they continue to inherit and practice such ideologies.

Illusion of Technological Utopianism and Human Decline

Alongside the profound ecological degradation, California is simultaneously experiencing a comprehensive technological collapse as well. The city has completely run out of power supply, there is an absolute breakdown of various communication networks, cessation of any kind of vehicular movement due to

unavailability of fuel, and a severe scarcity of essential commodities within the utility stores. Much like an ordinary individual, Nell anticipates restoration of electricity to run her computer claiming that, “I miss the quick click of my computer keys and the glow of the screen,” (Hegland 5) while Eva awaits to run her records to practice her ballerina. But the prolonged situation shatters hope, compelling millions of Californians to displace and seek migration to continue everyday life. Nell and Eva’s long wait, and the impulsive large-scale migration underscores the profound dependence of modern society on technological infrastructure. The collapse of electricity, communication networks, transportation, and supply chain reveal the extent to which contemporary civilizations are increasingly dependent on technologically mediated conveniences. As Carl Sagan, a renowned astrophysicist and science communicator writes in *‘The Demon Haunted House: Science as a Candle in the Dark’* (1997) that within in the contemporary civilization most crucial elements are profoundly dependent on science and technology. Moreover, things are also arranged in a manner that almost no one understands science and technology behind such elements and this could be perception of disaster. (Sagan 26-27) He believes that modern man has constructed himself a society which is not merely using technology but is entirely dependent on it. From transportation, healthcare, agriculture to internet, everyday human survival is intertwined with technology. But, despite of the fact of being intensely reliant on these mechanisms, he proposes a crucial paradox that at its core most of individuals are primarily a passive consumer of technology and absolutely ignorant about its production. This negligence as a result could bring forth a disaster as they will be unable to cope-up with the havoc brought with its failure. Similarly in the novel, the migration, chaos, and violence that occurs with failure of technological mechanisms in the Redwood explicitly explains the uncertainty, psychological distress and social instability that occurs when people are ignorant about production, management, and handling of technical instruments and resultantly suffer in its absence. The narrative therefore, ultimately foretells the grim realities futuristic civilizations have to undergo in apocalyptic situations. Through depiction of unsettling circumstances people experience in California, Hegland not only exposes the ignorance of modern man about technical knowledge or their reluctance to engage with and bring about a change in their surroundings, but also exposes the humanistic tendency to simply withdraw or escape such situation to avoid inconvenience, ultimately unveiling the inherent fragility and inert reliance of self-sufficient modern civilizations.

The Politics of Sexual and Verbal Abuse

Grieving two intimate bereavements, the orphaned sisters are confronted with sexual violence as well. Trapped within their Redwood house, Eva is sexually harassed by a local acquaintance Stan. The depiction of cruel offence like rape against women expose dark realities of patriarchal societies that view women and

their bodies as sites of sexual needs, and often exploit them for sexual pleasure. Rape cannot be assumed as an act of physical violence or bodily attack solely, but rather a psychological assault utilized by men to dominate, control, and terrorize women. As Susan Brown Miller argues in her *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975) that rape functions as a systematic instrument of terror and domination through which men sustain a persistent state of fear and subordination. (Brownmiller 15) Rather than an act driven solely by sexual desire, Susan Brownmiller holds that rape is an instrument men have long utilized to maintain both patriarchal power and instill trauma in women across cultures. Along with physical degradation and social humiliation, such sexual assaults leave behind a deep psychological wound that keeps victim in a state of trauma throughout life. Studies have long claimed that women made victims of such crimes at tender age frequently experience a state of depression, anxiety, and disassociation. Hegland reflects a similar distressing state through her narrative when Eva's rape leaves both the sisters in a constant threat of further attack and trauma as Nell says that "There is no place we feel safe. Going outside for wood takes all the courage, and still I cringe and wince, every moment expecting to be attacked. Inside we feel both exposed and trapped." (Hegland 130) Enduring physical and psychological trauma that comes with assault, Eva is further subjected to verbal abuse as well. Leaving her in extreme pain Stan addresses her as bitch. Her abuse in derogatory term like bitch articulate the way men utilize language as a tool to subjugate women in the misogynistic patriarchal societies. In her essay "Taking Empirical Data Seriously: An Ecofeminist Philosophical Perspective" appearing in *Ecofeminism: Women, Nature, and Culture* (1997) Karen J. Warren puts forward concept of Sexist-Naturist language, a male generated offensive language that associate females and feminine attributes to that of nonhuman animals, ultimately inferiorizing both. She writes that "The language used to describe women, nature and nuclear weaponry often is sexist and naturist. Women are described in animal terms as pets, cows, sows, foxes, chickens, serpents, bitches, beavers, old bats, old hens, mother hens, pussycats, cats, birdbrains, and harebrains." (Warren 12) Warren is of the view that language, usually believed to be neutral linguistic discourse, is actually a patriarchal ideological apparatus which reinforces dominant hierarchal worldviews on women. By addressing Eva as bitch, Stan, a literary representation of a dominant man, reduces her merely to an animal to be tamed, utilized, and controlled by men. The derogatory remark in a broader sense signifies a logic of objectification that strips women both of her rationality and individuality, compelling them to serve as mute servant of man much like an animal.

From Destruction of Patriarchal Confinement to Flight into Wilderness:

Initially both Nell and Eva cling to the belief that the disruption of technology and society is temporary and will eventually restore, but with the psycho-sexual assault and constant fear of being watched their illusion of normalcy is shattered,

compelling them to burn their home and finally opt for survival by establishing home within Californian wilderness. In *Into The Forest*, the protagonists' Redwood house that earlier stood for a patriarchal notion of safety and attachment, eventually becomes a trapping space that pushes them into fear, illusion, and dependency. In a research article entitled, "*Girl Power: Back to the Future of Feminist Science Fiction with Into the Forest and Arrival*" appearing in *Filmy Quarterly*, Sophie Mayer contends that destruction of family house starkly appears as sisters' first liberating act. In her opinion the destruction of family home not only symbolizes shattering of rigid gender ideologies associated to patriarchal home but also highlights slow collapse of the myth that home protects women. (Mayer 35) Generally, in conventional patriarchal discourses, the threshold of the home is constructed as a symbolic boundary that ensures safety, order, and moral protection particularly to women but sometimes the same boundary can instead become a space of fear, restriction and vulnerability that women strictly need to break to achieve autonomy. The destruction of family home by Nell and Eva hence, hence becomes a decisive act of female liberation as they refuse to passively accept this false promise of safety and adapt forest as their new home. Instead of anticipating for circumstances to revert or migrating to Boston in pursuit of better living conditions, they establish a new home within the Redwood's natural world for survival. This gradual shift from hopeful anticipation to pragmatic adaptation marks the remarkable transition in both the sister's psychological and existential journey.

Reclaiming Survival beyond Dominating Modernity:

Renouncing their dependence on dwindling stocks of utility stores, Nell and Eva consciously decide to cultivate their own food and sow every seed they have long preserved with whatever limited resources they are left with, mentioning that, "We've planted every seed we've got, every seed our father left us, even those unidentified ones that stifled down into the bottom of the box. We're fertilizing every volunteer, pleading with every plant to live, to thrive, to blossom into food." (Hegland 144) Nature reciprocates their nurturance, labour, and attachment with productive outcomes as they sooner observe flowering gardens, vegetable patches, and squashes of golden blossoms. Through puissant act of sowing seeds and cultivating them predominantly with traditional subsistence-based agricultural practices, the narrative articulates a strict rejection of patriarchal agricultural paradigms centred around domination and exploitation. Contrary to the capitalist industrial mechanisms of agriculture that prioritize extraction, optimum production, and capitalistic gains, sisters' agricultural practices are deeply grounded in ecofeminist ethics of care, interdependence, and sustainability. By practicing such agrarian techniques, sisters revive ecology acknowledging its agency rather than subordinating it. The agricultural production therefore serves as a symbol of inverted eco-human relationship, with women emerging as leading exponents of biolife conservation. Nell extensively utilizes the excerpts from her

mother's *The Native Plants of California*, for achieving a nuanced understanding of the specific purpose the indigenous plants species of California serve and subsequently engage in preserving such species. She learns that maple trees yield sweet sap, Spanish moss can function as material for diapers, coltsfoot leaves produce salt once used by indigenous communities frequently. Moreover, acorn possess antibiotic properties, poppies act as pain relievers, and further identify certain plants that reduce fever, ease cold, and soothe skin ailments. (Hegland 157) Hence, along with restocking the food supplies, Nell and Eva shun conventional pharmaceutical conveniences and vividly draw upon their gained knowledge about native botanical species to cure illness, boost lactation milk in Eva, prepare herbal teas, and procure natural fabrics on their own. In her essay "*Women's Indigenous Knowledge and Biodiversity Conservation*" appearing in *Ecofeminism* (1993) written with Maria Mies, Vandana Shiva draws attention towards the fact that since time immemorial women are the foremost entity to work intimately with the land and always appeared as custodians of bioconservation across different cultures. Vandana Shiva puts forward that women have historically served as the custodians of the biodiversity by participating in its production, preservation, reproduction, and consumption. (Shiva 168) She holds that women have therefore served a critical purpose in protecting biodiversity whether it is through saving seeds, sustaining traditional practices, or protecting rare plant species, contributing towards the restoration of region-specific ecological balance and the re-establishment of eco-human harmony. *Into the Forest* critically problematizes a similar ecological crisis where replacement of subsistence based agrarian practices with exploitative capitalist mechanisms have led to the occurrence of an absolute food crisis, ultimately dealt by realigning with feminist care-based subsistent farming. In their dilapidating circumstances, Nell and Eva's cultivation of California's barren lands, preservation of seeds, and restoration of crucial native species by building a rapport with woods, closely mirror's Shiva's stance on women emerging as custodians of biodiversity and building a feminist regenerative relationship with land. Through cultivating diverse crops, utilizing organic products from forest for savoury, and adjusting with the environment accordingly, sisters rigidly reject the capitalist-patriarchal hierarchal human-nature relationship, and demonstrate an ideal ecofeminist bioconservation which is relational, sustainable, and deeply dedicated towards maintaining ecological harmony.

Transgressing their anticipation of resumption of electric power and desperate reliance on conventional electrical conveniences like generator, freezer, and fuel, Nell and Eva rather begin to incorporate environmentally conscious natural alternatives in their day-today life and say that: "... we have figured out how to bake potatoes among the coals in the woodstove in the living room, learned to fry pancakes and boil beans and the steam rice on its top. We had long since used up food in the freezer." (Hegland 12) Abandoning refrigerators, eschewing fuel

dependence, and cooking on self-sufficient source like firewood, illuminate a significant transformation from passive consumption to participatory engagement beyond conventional civilizational dependence. While capital centred economies subject nonhuman animals to commodification and exploitation, sisters rear animals and actively integrate them into their assimilative lifestyle. Eva's intimate knowledge about her hens Bathsheba, Pinky, and Lilth reflect her relationship with nonhuman animals grounded in care, attention, and inclusion. Ecofeminist theoreticians always argue that capitalist-patriarchies have long construed nonhuman animals (much like women) as essentially 'other' and thus utilized them either for commercial or consumption purposes. The novel starkly discards such dominating and exploitative relationships, and instead advocates for an inclusionary and nurturing relationship with both nature and animals for constituting a collective planetary life. Overcoming the constant fear of assault, they acquire basic self-defence skills not merely as a protective measure but to assert bodily autonomy within their precarious environment. They begin sourcing water directly from spring withdrawing feeble supplies of essential necessity like water within modern infrastructures. Such manual engagement with renewable resources not only symbolizes an adaptive resilience, but also highlights the ways to tackle grim realities with embedded knowledge. The inclusive lifestyle Hegland portrays in the novel, therefore on one hand underscores a rejection of passive dependency and an active assertion of female agency, while on the other vindicates women's capacity towards reconstituting a thriving environment.

Into the Forest, Hegland portrays a highly repressive futuristic social order wherein humans have ruined the ecological cover and are increasingly dependent on the technocratic institutions, strikingly similar to the contemporary excessive humanistic reliance on technology resulting in ruined environments. The narrative explicitly cautions that if modern civilization will passively keep relying on technocratic infrastructure for the core necessities it will not only ruin environment or plunder its resources, but also diminish their capacity towards generating self-sufficiency, making human civilizations possibly more prone to apocalypse and disintegration. As Nell exclaims to her father that, "Everybody in this whangdanged country is a capitalist, whether he likes it or not. Everyone in this country is one of the world's most voracious consumers, using resources at a rate twenty times greater than that of anyone else on this poor earth." (Hegland 3) The heightened consumerism, excessive consumption, and unreflective reliance Nell contemplates in the novel, on a broader spectrum expose the flawed ideologies, systemic inequalities, and concealed vulnerabilities existing in the so-called developed modern civilizations. However, Hegland reciprocates such extensively reliant of dominant ideologies with an alternative feminist model grounded in ecological self-sufficiency and relational inter dependency. In the utopian world of Nell and Eva amongst the Californian wilderness they reverse environmental deterioration by nurturing biodiversity, replace unassertive reliance

by adapting regenerative lifestyle, and envision an equitable commune transcending hierarchal social orders. The narrative thus inverts the trajectory of dystopian fiction that instils fear, insecurity, and vulnerability among characters, by reconfiguring resolute characterization within an optimal space breeding empathy, interdependence, and emotional resilience.

Conclusion:

Into the Forest is a post-apocalyptic narrative that unveils the precarious nature of bleak modern civilizations. With failure of power grid, exhaustion of resources, and disintegration of communication networks the study underscores that comforts and luxuries of modern world that one consumes ignorantly and passively can disintegrate, leaving them reliant on primitive natural world. The paper further reiterates that the same capitalist patriarchal ideology that exploits nature also functions as a mechanism for subordination of women, urging protagonists to repudiate the oppressive structures and embrace survival beyond desolate societies through a renewed alliance with natural world. Therefore, by foregrounding sisters' survival within the wilderness the paper transforms natural world into a dominant force with immense strength and agility to sustain human life. The study ultimately emphasises that a prolonged human existence consequently could never be achieved through dominating or conquering natural world, but through embracing collective standards of sustainable co-existence. Despite the profound ecological depth, gendered violence, passive humanistic dependence, and an apocalyptic future addressed through the narrative, the novel remains largely overlooked by conventional scholarly canons. The paper ultimately contributes to bring in light a crucial under explored narrative that proposes a compelling framework for human civilizations with reimagined relationship with nature. The paper in concluding terms persuades modern civilizations to contemplate their inert reliance or catastrophic futures and secure stability, adaptability, and renewal through ecological integration.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/36**REIMAGINING THE HOME IN DIASPORA: HYBRIDITY,
NOSTALGIA AND THE LIMITS OF RETURN IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S
THE NAMESAKE****S. NANDHINI**Research Scholar, Department of English, St. Mary's College
Thoothukudi Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu**Dr. F. MARY PRIYA**Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. Mary's College
Thoothukudi Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu**Abstract**

This paper explores the concept of home in a diasporic context and how it relates to the theoretical concepts of hybridity and nostalgia with reference to the novel *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri. He challenges the traditional notions of home as a fixed geographical space and, instead, presents it as a construction of memory, cultural displacement, and identity fragmentation. Through the experience of Ashima and Gogol in *The Namesake*, they are caught between their imagined homeland and adopted land. As immigrants, they negotiate their identities in-between cultural spaces, which results in forming their hybrid identities. This paper examines how memory and hybridity function together to form a fragmented notion of identity in immigrants' lives. Nostalgia is something that we reflect on as the longing for the past and having an emotional connection with our homeland, while hybridity emerges from the interaction between their home and adopted cultures. As a result, cultural identity is not something that we preserve but rather continuously reshape with new cultural values. By analysing the key moments in the novel, this paper elucidates home as not a fixed entity but as a construction of reimagined space, caught between memory and hybridity. This paper shows that home in *The Namesake* is not a place to which one can return but rather a reimagined space shaped by memory, loss, and cultural alienation.

Keywords: Diaspora, Hybridity, Nostalgia, Home, Identity

The idea of home varies for people from various disciplines. The word 'home' is very important in diasporic studies; the reason behind this is migration and displacement, which redefine the notion of home in many ways. We can define home as something related to family, comfort, sophistication, culture and belonging. It is usually understood as a fixed geographical space where a person can be born and raised. People living in the diaspora have a complex definition of home. For them, home can never be termed as a geographical place but rather an emotional and cultural space shaped by memory. Safran defines diasporas as "expatriate minority communities that are dispersed from an original 'center' to at

least two 'peripheral' places" which protects the myth and memory about their homeland" (83). 'Diaspora' is the movement of migrants who are displaced from their homeland to other lands to flee from colonisation or political conflict. When they moved, it caused a disconnected feeling towards their homeland. This migration creates identity fragmentation in the consciousness of immigrants. For this reason, they may not accept the homeland's culture. Therefore, diasporic individuals are physically present in their host land, but their emotional connections continue to be with homeland.

Memory plays a vital role in displacement. When you are away from your homeland, you will be missing your homeland's culture, tradition, food and values. Along with that, migrants should adopt their new culture to survive. While experiencing a new cultural environment, they began to adapt to the new culture and blend it with their own culture. After the intermingling of two cultures, the notion of home has ultimately changed. As Homi K. Bhabha states, "it is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (2). Identity is not firm; it continuously generates an in-between space when two intercultural encounters meet each other.

In the diasporic experience, the perception of returning home is the most predominant thing to discuss. Returning home is often associated with an emotional desire to reconnect with home culture. The idea of home is deeply associated with the novel *The Namesake*. It often demonstrates how the immigrants are emotionally longing for their return home. They have faced many struggles in returning. Lahiri depicts that returning to one's country is not easy; rather, it is an emotional and cultural experience produced by our memory, displacement and hybridity. It is very challenging to move from one's own country to another for the first-generation diasporic individual. In *The Namesake*, Ashima, a first-generation immigrant, holds an emotional connection with her homeland. She longs for the absence of her family, traditions and language. After she had moved to America, everything appeared strange. She built comfort and sophistication only in her homeland. Although she has experienced the tradition of America for more than twenty years, she could not disconnect herself from her homeland completely. After the sudden demise of Ashok, she has decided to split her identity between Eastern and Western cultures. Now, her identity splits between two countries, which gives her the dual identity. Her experience with the new land limits her thought to go home even though her emotional bond is with her own land.

When it comes to Gogol, it is more complex to return to his homeland. As a second-generation immigrant, he could not experience his home culture in person. Based on the stories of his parents, he came to know the culture of Bengal. If he had gone to visit his homeland, he would not connect himself with it; instead, he

feels emotionally distant and culturally alienated from it. And, simultaneously, he did not accept American identity on the whole because of his cultural identity.

Jhumpa Lahiri is a well-known writer in contemporary Indian literature, exploring more about migration, identity, and cultural displacement. Her writings are mainly focused on the reality of immigrants who balance across two cultures. According to her, migration is not a physical experience of moving from one place to the other; rather, it is an emotional experience of immigrants who strive to live between two cultures. In another way, we can say that diaspora is a lived experience of immigrants who moved from their homeland to the inherited land, but they are emotionally connected to their native culture. Lahiri reflects the hardships of immigrants clearly through the characters in her work, *The Namesake*. First-generation immigrants had an emotional connection with their homeland, while second-generation immigrants are struggling with cultural hybridity and identity fragmentation in both home and host cultural spaces. In the works of Lahiri, characters are deeply rooted in the traditional values of their homeland, and they gradually adapt to the modern western lifestyle in their inherited land. As a result, they are highly ambiguous in the way they manage both. They try to preserve both cultural values, but mostly they fail to obtain or literally negotiate in all ways. Through subtle narration, Lahiri demonstrates the complexities between two cultures, cultural alienation and the search for true identity.

In *The Namesake*, Lahiri portrays an identity crisis through the character Gogol, a second-generation immigrant struggling to define where he actually belongs. Gogol was born to Indian parents and grew up entirely in America, where he learnt all the Western ideals but still had some sort of undefined queries about his identity. Even though he was a son of Indian immigrants, Gogol fails to connect with traditional Indian values. He has been fully brought up in America, knowing all the Western ideals and comfortable with his American identity. Once he realises that his name is strange and cannot fit in the culture of his parents, he feels embarrassment and starts confusing himself with his identity. "He hates having to live with it, with a pet name turned good name, day after day, second after second" (Lahiri 76). He felt that his name appeared strange and could not fit into either culture. So, he rejects calling his name 'Gogol' and wants to change it to 'Nikhil' to create a new identity. But this change cannot go on to solve his inner confusion. Being a second-generation immigrant, Gogol faces cultural hybridity and displacement where identity is uncertain and frequently negotiated between cultures.

A nostalgic experience stands as one of the significant emotional experiences for diasporic individuals. It is not merely a remembrance of the past but rather, an emotional connection to produce the immigrant's cultural identity in a strange land. After migration, people remember their homeland through food, traditional stories and everyday practices. In this context the homeland survives through

memory, and the physical return is not easy for them to go on, but mentally they can prevail by reimagining realities.

In diasporic literature, hybridity is the formation of intermingling cultures and identities of the immigrants while migrating from their homeland. After their migration, they are going to face a new cultural environment. In spite of the migration, people are accepting both cultural environments: the culture of their native land and the cultural traditions of inherited land. The experience between two lands creates a hybrid identity. As Homi Bhabha said, "It is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (2). In diasporic literature these in-between spaces are more relevant in diasporic lives, explaining the condition of cultural fragmentation between their memory and reality, homeland and their adopted land.

Although several research papers on *The Namesake* have analysed diasporic identity, alienation, and cultural assimilation, with a combined relationship between nostalgia and memory. But few scholarly works have drawn on the ideas of intercultural interaction between memory and nostalgia, which makes more sense in the diasporic experience of home and belonging. Lahiri often leaves the idea of returning to the homeland unresolved. Therefore, this paper attempts to fill the gap between how nostalgia and hybridity complicate the return of immigrants to their home. This gap is more significant because a return in diaspora is not a physical movement that one can make to his homeland; rather, it is an emotional and cultural negotiation shaped by memory and hybridity. Through this theoretical perspective, this paper examines a deeper understanding of how Lahiri demonstrates in *The Namesake* that home is not fixed; it is reconstructed through hybridity, memory, and the limitation of return.

Hybridity is a significant theoretical concept of postcolonial theory proposed by Homi K. Bhabha. It is a cultural process where two cultures intermingle; it creates new cultural identities. According to Homi K. Bhabha, culture is unstable; it is continuously evolving when new cultural spaces are added to the home culture. Hence, hybridity involves the process of forming new cultural identities through intercultural exchange where two different cultures inculcate each other. We see that in diasporic studies, mostly migration happened to flee from colonialism or globalisation, where people of native land emigrate to a new land for the betterment of their standards. For this reason, they accepted both cultural values to sustain themselves in a foreign land. Therefore, a hybrid identity has formed. This theoretical concept challenges the traditional notion that culture is constant or fixed.

Another significant theoretical concept of Homi K. Bhabha is the 'third space', which means to create new cultural elements and identities in an in-between cultural space by constant negotiation. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha

explains, "It is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (2). In clearance with Bhabha's ideas, identity is formed when two cultures intersect.

Through the idea of third space, Bhabha explains that culture is unstable; it is fluid and evolving. People from postcolonial and diasporic countries are often confronting new cultural environments which Bhabha termed 'in-betweenness'. As Homi K. Bhabha says, cultural identity emerges through the interaction of different cultures within "interstitial" spaces (2). They are forming their identities by both native and foreign cultures. Therefore, they experience cultural confusion about their identities; this condition leads to the formation of new cultural spaces to prove how identity is shaped and negotiated between cultures rather than permanently fixed with a single cultural origin.

Following the idea of hybridity by Homi K. Bhabha, another important concept that I have included in this paper is nostalgia. It means the emotional and psychological connection of a diasporic individual who remains connected to their homeland by their memory. While hybridity focuses on the emergence of multicultural identities where two diverse cultures interact. Nostalgia foregrounds the emotional attachment of a people who maintain connections with their home. In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym explains, "Nostalgia is a longing for a home that no longer exists has never existed" (Boym xiii). Nostalgia means a physical desire to return home; rather, it is a psychological longing for home through memory. This idea is strongly linked to *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri because the characters are often experiencing an emotional connection with their homeland that remains active through memory and imagination even after the displacement. For example, being an American, Ashima longs for food, traditional values and comfort after the migration. Her feelings for home are gradually changed from what she had once experienced. "For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy — a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts" (Lahiri 49).

As a second-generation immigrant, Gogol felt a varied form of emotional experience with the homeland. He had a hidden sense of belonging with the homeland shaped by the stories and their traditions rather than by personal experience. Therefore, the novel demonstrates the idea of Svetlana Boym: home in diaspora is an emotional experience rebuilt through nostalgia that has never been reclaimed fully by return.

The concept of nostalgia and hybridity together can give a clear portrayal of diasporic identity and the notion of home and identity. 'Nostalgia' describes the emotional contact with the homeland through memories, rituals and cultural roots. It is strongly linked to the past because migrants felt their home was a place for peace, comfort and emotional satisfaction. Through memory, tradition and language, they preserve their homeland alive. However, after the migration, home

is no longer unchanged as once thought; it is idealised and emotionally reconstructed instead of a physical return. As a result, we can clearly see the diasporic people's longing for continuity with the past. Hybridity, as explained by Homi K. Bhabha, is a condition of living between two cultural worlds. Through the interaction with the host land, migrants can gradually adopt new life styles and cultural values while still engaging with the home culture. For this reason, a hybrid identity has formed between home and host cultures. In this process, we can clarify that identity is unstable; it is flexible, fragmented and often reconstructed.

The integration of nostalgia and hybridity helps with understanding the diasporic concept of home clearly. We cannot limit the home as physical space but rather as emotional and cultural space by memory. Nostalgia refers to the psychological connection with the past, while hybridity reshapes the past in present realities. This combination complicates the perception of return, making it seem that returning home is impossible for the people having hybrid identities. In *The Namesake*, Lahiri portrays the characters as continuously negotiating between memory and cultural belonging, presenting home as a reimagined cultural space in diasporic life.

In *The Namesake*, nostalgia and memory are more significant frameworks in understanding the experience of Ashima Ganguli, an immigrant who migrated to America but still has an emotional attachment to India. At the initial stage of the novel, Ashima feels emotionally detached and culturally alienated in the foreign land. Leaving behind her family, she loses all the emotional support and adjusts herself to an unfamiliar culture. She strongly desires her family, traditions, language and food. Her condition shows the diasporic individual's struggle to distance themselves from their homeland. As a first-generation immigrant, Ashima experiences emotional longing towards their homeland. It is highly impossible to forget one's own home culture soon. Even though she gained respect in America, her memory is always with the homeland. Ashima's desire to go home is no longer a physical environmental space; rather, it is a psychological attachment to cultural continuity. As Svetlana Boym states, "Nostalgia is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed" (Boym xiii). This idea is more significant in the life of Ashima; throughout the novel she remains connected with the homeland's memory and imagination.

Memory serves as a medium to reconstruct Ashima's emotional belonging to her homeland in a foreign space. She tries to rebuild her homeland's atmosphere in a host land by cooking Bengali food, speaking her own Bengali language, celebrating their festival, maintaining cultural standards, and doing daily practices. This practice shows the symbolic act of preserving their culture through everyday practices. Her home in America turned into to Bengali residence. She gradually incorporates all the ideals of her homeland through her actions on memory. Ashima knows that the return is physically impossible but mentally reconstructs the emotional and cultural space sustained through memory.

At the same time, in the novel *The Namesake* by Lahiri shows that nostalgia is connected to displacement and loss. After the migration, Ashima's notion of home is changed. "For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy — a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts" (Lahiri 49). She gradually adopted American culture and practices, once those were alien to her. She became independent and comfortable with the American space. But her desire for home remains the same. She is fully accepting of neither American culture nor her homeland's. Her simultaneous belonging to both India and America create a hybrid identity and fragmented nature. Through the experience of Ashima, nostalgia is not alone a remembrance of the past, but it is a mechanism through which diasporic people negotiate their displacement and want to preserve their native culture in an unfamiliar cultural space. Apart from geographical space, home is continuously recreated through memory and longing. Nostalgia proves the emotional complexities of diasporic people and how they construct their identity and idea for return to home.

While Ashima's life is emotionally attached to her homeland through nostalgia and memory, Gogol, a second-generation diasporic individual, experiences the intricacies of mixed identity (hybridity) and identity formation in diasporic life. Unlike his parents, he has not encountered his home culture; through stories and everyday practices of his parents, he came to know the rich culture of Bengal. Gogol was born and brought up in America; he felt a struggle to negotiate the culture of America. As a result, he caught an identity crisis and became disconnected from two cultures. Based on Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, identity is formed in in-between spaces where two different cultures intersect (2). Gogol's life becomes a constant negotiation between home culture and host culture and tradition vs modernity.

His identity crisis starts with the dissatisfaction of his name as 'Gogol', which symbolises cultural confusion. The name keeps reminding him, as a Bengali immigrant, but he wants to be attached to American society. Lahiri writes, "He hates having to live with it, a pet name turned good name, day after day, second after second" (76). The above line demonstrates Gogol's resentment toward the identity as being a 'Bengali' and its traditional values. With the intention of proving his identity and recognition within American society, he officially changed his name to 'Nikhil'. This change clearly shows his escapism from cultural alienation and desire to rebuild his identity as more recognised and modern. Gogol's life demonstrates the idea of Homi K. Bhabha's third space, where his identity is framed through continuous negotiation and in-betweenness. His identity neither fully Indian nor American; this creates cultural confusion and alienation. At the same time hybridity creates a deep understanding of the cultural identity and belonging of the diasporic individuals. In Gogol's journey, identity is not stable within a single cultural space; it is fragmented, negotiated and frequently changing.

The intricacies of memory and hybridity can be experienced not confined to Gogol's life but also through all the major characters in the novel. Each character signifies different kinds of reactions to diasporic identity. Ashima represents a person with strong emotional bonding and wants to continue her home culture even after migrating to America for many years. She reimagines her homeland's memory through rituals, food, language and community gatherings. Her identity is shaped only through nostalgia rather than cultural acceptance. Comparing with Ashima, Ashok is more practical in nature; he accepts American culture but still wants to preserve his cultural roots. Unlike Ashima, he approves of the fact that migration happens for their personal and professional growth, yet he keeps sustaining his emotional connection with home culture. As first-generation immigrants, both Ashima and Ashok want to preserve their identity while negotiating life in an adopted land.

In contrast with Ashima, Gogol and Sonia represent second-generation immigrants whose identities are formed by cultural hybridity and nostalgia. From birth they are experiencing American cultural space, influenced by their language and tradition. Gogol experiences a strong identity confusion with American culture. He struggles to negotiate between his own culture and his desire to acculturate with American culture. His name change is 'Nikhil', reflecting his strong need for defining his identity with what Homi K. Bhabha calls the 'third space'. Sonia maintains balance between American and Indian culture, which shows the flexibility of navigating hybrid identity. Moushumi is another example of hybrid identity and having an identity confusion, but she challenges traditional cultural expectations and wants freedom in a diverse world. Her belonging is uncertain, which shows the volatile condition of hybridity. Each character in the novel negotiates memory, nostalgia and hybridity in a varied form depending on their generation, experiences and the psychological attachment to their homeland. This tension leads to the impracticability of returning to the homeland, where a diasporic individual's idea of returning becomes more complex and often impossible. In Lahiri's *The Namesake*, return is not a physical action to go home; rather, it is an emotional connection with the homeland by reimagining the home through memory, belonging and cultural continuity. Svetlana Boym emphasises that nostalgia is a condition to remember home in which the definition of 'home' is no longer the same. Lahiri presents home as reimagined, sometimes inaccessible to return from the adopted land. Hence, the novel ultimately reconstructed home as something fluid and evolving cultural space rather than simply fixed as a geographical space. Every character in the novel struggles between their emotional connection with their homeland and adjustment to American society. As years pass, diasporic people realise that we cannot restrict home to a single nation or culture; instead, it is an emotional connection which remains forever in the memory of diasporic individuals. For the first-generation immigrants, home is alive in their memory and nostalgia, while for the second-generation immigrants,

home is evolving through hybrid identities shaped by both cultures. Finally, Gogol accepts his in-between identities instead of rejecting either culture. According to Jhumpa Lahiri, “Without people in the world to call him Gogol, no matter how long he himself lives, Gogol Ganguli will, once and for all, vanish from the lips of loved ones” (289). For the diasporic individuals, belonging to a single cultural space is not possible. By accepting their host culture, they could balance their personal and professional standards.

Thus, *The Namesake* by Lahiri illustrates that identity is shaped by constant interaction between hybridity and nostalgia. Nostalgia preserves the emotional attachment to the homeland while hybridity transforms identity through lived experience with the foreign land. This situation complicated the idea of reconnecting with the homeland, so home is never perceived as a fixed geographical space but rather an emotionally constructed cultural space formed through memory, displacement and cultural negotiation. Therefore, belonging in a diaspora does not originate through return but through the interconnections of diasporic identity in in-between cultural spaces.

In conclusion, *The Namesake* propounds that diaspora is a condition shaped by nostalgia and hybridity. The study argues that home in diaspora is not a stable place but an evolving cultural space through memory and hybridity. The novel further reveals how identity and belonging are framed due to displacement and cultural transformation, which limits the idea of returning home. Through the characters like Ashima and Gogol, hybridity stays an inevitable source of diasporic existence. This paper contributes to diasporic studies by showing how memory, hybridity and limits of return reconstruct the meaning with respect to home and identity in contemporary diaspora literature.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/37**CLIMATE DISPLACEMENT AND ECOLOGICAL LOSS IN PAOLO
BACIGALUPI'S *THE WINDUP GIRL* AND MARGARET ATWOOD'S
*ORYX AND CRAKE*****M. AABIDHA THASLIM**

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Lady Doak College, Madurai**Abstract**

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* offer vivid visions of posthuman futures and stand as leading examples. In these narratives, ecological collapse and climate instability form the backdrop against which nature itself is radically remade through bio- and nanotechnological interventions, resulting in manufactured ecosystems and engineered life forms. People from the Global South are exploited by the corporate powers in the reconfiguration of the new ecosystem with technological aids. The core intention of corporate-run groups and institutions is to provide instant gratification in the fields of pharmaceuticals, automobiles, beauty drugs, and other areas of enterprise where consumers participate. The cyborg and bionic beings in these texts function as more than imaginative constructs; they emerge as allegories for a world shaped by environmental degradation, where humans and non-human species alike are subjected to experimentation, surveillance, and corporate control. The authors' inventive terminologies, which blend scientific precision with literary imagination, trace the gradual shift toward posthuman conditions while exposing the bio-capitalist structures that govern such transformations. Drawing on James Hughes's *Citizen Cyborg*, this paper situates these developments within the rise of artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, and biotechnology, which enable the enhancement and reconfiguration of life itself. It further examines how such technological interventions intersect with ecological loss, climate displacement, resource scarcity, and loss of lives in both apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic contexts. Through a close reading of hybrids, chimeras, symbiotic entities, and genetically modified organisms, the study highlights how posthuman identities are embedded within new ideological frameworks shaped by environmental crisis. Ultimately, these narratives foreground the dominance of profit-driven corporations and gated enclaves, revealing a world restructured by unequal power relations in which the victims are most often the poor and the deprived. In doing so, they raise urgent ethical questions about a humanity that has failed to sustain both ecological balance and collective survival, compelling a redefinition of life in the age of greed and exploitation.

Keywords: Posthumanism; Speculative Fiction; Bioengineering; Biocapitalism; Ecological Loss

Introduction

The emergence of scientific inventions and their influence on society have been reflected in literary works since the Industrial Revolution. Writers such as Aldous Huxley, Jules Verne, and Mary Shelley speculated on the evolution of humankind through their science fiction narratives. Yet certain elements remain metaphysical to readers, as some works encourage imaginative engagement beyond immediate comprehension, given that readers may not be as speculative as the authors themselves. Science fiction further entered popular consciousness through film adaptations, where visual representation expanded the imaginative horizons of both readers and audiences. Over time, writers such as Margaret Atwood established themselves within the domain of speculative fiction, a genre that examines possible scientific developments and their social consequences in ways that readers can critically analyse and comprehend.

Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* stands as one such speculative narrative, though it foregrounds sociopolitical structures more than overt scientific innovation in its dystopian setting. Nevertheless, the resurgence of scientific advancement appears in the form of technological modifications applied to everyday life. Medicines have evolved from mere curative agents to performance enhancers. Human organs increasingly rely on technological substitutes, such as pacemakers, even at the most basic level of survival. Each year, new alterations are introduced with the intention of improving and extending human capabilities.

Organ enhancement and replacement, enabled by scientific fields such as biotechnology, nanotechnology, and microbiology, has expanded rapidly in the contemporary era. These developments are sustained by continuous experimentation and research, often involving both human and animal subjects, with the stated aim of improving technological precision and extending human capability. Such interventions increasingly shift medicine from therapeutic restoration toward enhancement, thereby intensifying institutional and technological control over the human body and lifestyle.

James Hughes, in *Citizen Cyborg*, articulates this optimism surrounding biomedical advancement:

Fortunately, we are making dramatic strides in extending life through medicine. While improvements in the quality of life and investments in public health drove the increase in life expectancy in the twentieth century, medical technologies that retard and reverse the aging process will drive the radical extensions of life expectancy in the twenty-first century (Hughes 25).

Novels such as Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy and Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* expand the horizons of speculative thinking with the attributes of

science fiction. Both writers extend their imagination in creating the traits, elements, and characters in such a way that they can no longer be called pure fantasy.

An examination of scholarly articles on the *MaddAddam* Trilogy reveals that a misunderstanding of the posthuman world becomes apparent. Although many critics attempt to articulate the ideological depth of Atwood's speculative vision, they often fail to distinguish between the nuanced forms of modification that structure this world. The subtle differences among engineered creatures, altered species, and transhuman processes are frequently overlooked. In some readings, all bioengineered animals in *Oryx and Crake* are broadly categorized as "gene-spliced," and the newly created posthumans are treated in a similarly undifferentiated manner. However, Atwood imagines a wide range of features and variations. To delve deeply into scientific terminology while analysing the novels may seem too far removed from claiming them as literary works. Without an interdisciplinary context, the reading may not be comprehensive for a reader well-versed in science. Otherwise, one might consider such transhumanistic modifications as merely imaginative creations based on limited scientific understanding within literature. To bring clarity to this interdisciplinary milieu, observing and categorising the characteristics distinctly becomes a basic requisite for both the reader and the researcher of posthuman and transhuman studies.

The terminologies may appear purely scientific, yet they acquire definite meaning when employed in futuristic novels such as Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*. Atwood's novel is a non-linear narrative in which the protagonist Snowman, also known as Jimmy, grows up in a HelthWyzer compound, a gated residential community primarily for scientists engaged in fields such as biotechnology and nanotechnology.

In *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy witnessed animals such as the rakunk, a pet gifted to him by his father on his birthday. The rakunk is a hybrid creature created by splicing the genes of a raccoon and a skunk. It was designed for consumer entertainment, deviating from conventional pets like cats, dogs, and hamsters. Similarly, wolvogs are hybrid variants formed by combining wolf and dog genes. Although they resemble domesticated dogs, they possess latent aggression. In compounds like HelthWyzer, such animals are employed as watchdogs.

In the same way, the Green rabbits are described as genetically infused animals, combining a rabbit with the bioluminescent genes of a jellyfish. They function as engineered "novelties," gradually replacing the natural with the artificial. Pigeons are portrayed as gene-spliced hybrids intentionally developed for medical experimentation related to human organ growth and artificial development, and they are designed to produce transplantable organs. They are illustrated as more intelligent than other hybrid animals in *Oryx and Crake*. In this sense, pigeons represent biomedical exploitation, as they are reduced to instruments for

cultivating human organs. The embedding of human genes within animal bodies exemplifies what may be termed “embedded posthumanism.”

Liobams are another hybrid variety from the novel that are created by crossing the genes of a lion and a lamb. Their existence indirectly parodies biblical symbolism and raises questions about divine creation. Rakunks represent aesthetic experimentation, wolvogs signify security manipulation, and pigeons embody biomedical exploitation. The infusion and transplantation of genes transform these animals into hybrids rather than merely genetically modified creatures. The spread of such hybrid terms does not indicate mere random experimentation; rather, it reflects a carefully structured hierarchy of intervention that is guided by corporate interests, aesthetic preferences, and biomedical priorities.

Jimmy’s mother expressed her disapproval of reconfiguring the existing creatures into hybrids. She could not accept the manipulation of living beings for corporate profit and scientific ambition. Before leaving, she wrote a note to Jimmy explaining that she had released the rakunk for its own good. This act shows her belief that even genetically engineered creatures deserve freedom and dignity.

Of all those transgenic hybrid animals, the pigeon stands out. It possesses qualities of a chimera, a term explained in James Hughes’s *Citizen Cyborg*. It is stated that the term “chimera” originates from a beast in Greek mythology that was “part goat, part lion, and part dragon” (Hughes 92). Its purpose is described as being for medical use. In reality, *Citizen Cyborg* explains that goats were engineered to produce human enzymes in their milk, “which can be collected and made into drugs” (Hughes 70).

In *The Windup Girl*, Bacigalupi introduces creatures called “Megadonts,” as genetically engineered elephants which are bio-hacked for their superhuman size and strength, and they are used to produce energy and power kink-springs in a world without fossil fuels. These massive creatures, far larger than natural elephants, pull spindle cranks in factories, generating mechanical energy for machinery, conveyor belts, and wind-up kink-springs that store power. They can be called “engineered agonies.” Where people and rescue groups raise concerns about anti-speciesist ideologies and the exploitation of animals for human greed, Bacigalupi’s genetically engineered animals reflect the continuation of such exploitation on a larger scale.

As described in *The Windup Girl*,

Megadonts groan against spindle cranks, their enormous heads hanging low, prehensile trunks scraping the ground as they tread slow circles around power spindles. The genehacked animals comprise the living heart of the factory’s drive system, providing energy for conveyor lines, venting fans, and manufacturing machinery. Their harnesses clank rhythmically as they strain forward. Union handlers in red and gold walk beside their charges, calling out to the beasts, switching them occasionally, and encouraging the elephant-derived animals to greater labor. (Bacigalupi 8)

In Zhang Xinyi's "Gene-Edited Life, Technocapitalist Violence, and Ethical Collapse: Posthuman Predicaments in Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*," it is stated that the novel offers a "profound reflection on the ethical evils incurred by anthropocentric hegemony in the world of genetic engineering" (67-68). It can be inferred that Megadonts embody posthuman subjugation amid ecological collapse, their pain allegorising the cost of corporate greed to all life forms.

Chimera

In *Citizen Cyborg*, the term "chimera" has been considered a threat to people and humanity because of its potential in research to create a creature similar to humans, which might cause havoc in the entire ecosystem. In the same book, it is mentioned that the activist Jeremy Rifkin was denied a patent to create a Humanzee, a combination of a human and a chimpanzee. He sought the patent to identify the line that should not be crossed so as not to affect the ecosystem.

Even at the beginning of the chapter "Cyborg–Citizenship," one of the most influential posthumans and ecocritical thinkers, Donna Haraway, states, "Monsters have always defined the limits of community in Western imagination." This suggests that engineering such hybrids, like chimeras and similar creatures, may eventually challenge or even exclude the traditional understanding of humanity in the future. Atwood was observant of not using the term "chimera," as it might generate argumentative concerns among readers. However, Donna Haraway's cyborg from her work *A Cyborg Manifesto* cannot be associated with genetically engineered characters such as the Crakers from *Oryx and Crake* and Emiko from *The Windup Girl*. This is because a cyborg is a humanoid creature made partly of machines and partly of humans. Meanwhile, the genetically engineered Crakers and Emiko, the wind-up woman, are genetically modified beings with certain characteristics infused into them.

The Crakers are reconfigured creatures with human traits, but with the removal of certain traits that bring negative consequences to society. In *Oryx and Crake*, the Crakers are created by the character Glenn, also known as Crake, an intelligent youth working in the compounds meant for scientists. He believed that certain human characteristics disturb the peace of society and therefore reconfigured humanity before introducing these new beings into the post-apocalyptic world. In *Oryx and Crake*, Crake asks his friend Jimmy, the protagonist of *Oryx and Crake*, to guide the new creatures in the cleansed post-apocalyptic world. Crake explains to Jimmy, "What had been altered was nothing less than the ancient primate brain. Gone were its destructive features, the features responsible for the world's current illnesses" (Atwood 356).

The intention behind engineering these genetically modified superhumans or human-like beings is different. Crake intended to create a utopian world with defenseless creatures who are less sensitive to destructive human tendencies such as racism, hatred, power, lust, and greed. To Crake, his own genetic programming

of the new creatures in the futuristic world is the actual primordial soup, according to him.

Emiko from *The Windup Girl* was made in Japan for the elites to exploit her physically. There were many “windups.” Emiko, a genetically engineered being created for sex and exploitation, was sent to Thailand as a disposable. She was physically exploited and humiliated by mainstream society, and later she decided to leave for the village where *the windups* live after enduring such exploitation. The story ends tragically, with Emiko never reaching the village.

The Crakers’ life begins after the apocalypse, whereas Emiko’s life begins within a dystopian setting shaped by ongoing ecological and social collapse. However, if Crakers and Emiko are to be identified with one transhumanistic perspective, then they come under “embedded transhumanism”. They are, after all, “a rational consumer being replaced by the biotechnological symbiont”. (Haraway). Atwood believes that the chain of life goes on after innumerable apocalypses. In Inas Samy Abolfotoh’s “The Cli-Fi and the Ecocritical in Margaret Atwood’s Ecopoetry, As Abolfotoh observes, it is said through Atwood’s “Spring in the Igloo” and “Bear Lament”, the extinction of the species or a whole ecosystem would not end life on Earth. One species dies out, other flourishes, and life in the natural world goes on and on” (173) poem “Spring in the Igloo” and “Bear Lament”, and scientists indirectly push themselves into a state of imprisonment. Michael Foucault has used a term in his work *Discipline and Punishment* called “Carceral Archipelago,” which is mentioned in one article called “The End of the World as we know it: Theoretical Perspectives on Apocalyptic Science Fiction”. as,” the prison transformed the punitive procedure into a penitentiary technique: the carceral archipelago transported this technique from the penal institution to the entire social body.”

Eugenics

‘Eugenics’ is another term often used by researchers in relation to selective breeding. In the *Citizen Cyborg*, Charles Darwin’s cousin, Francis Galton, is called the father of the doctrine of ‘eugenics,’ says that the quality of the human race could be improved through selective breeding. The intention of selective breeding, that is, eugenics, is to bring more intelligent children into the environment, to enhance their cognitive ability, and to make them strong enough to cope with the environment where everyone thrives. Some call it a threat to society, arguing that selective breeding could occur among the rich and privileged. Atwood repeatedly critiques eugenics, genetic elitism, and the corporate will to control intelligence and power.

Caecotrophs

In *Oryx and Crake*, the Crakers were, in fact, a type of eugenics designed to survive in the post-apocalyptic world. They were devoid of certain human traits such as jealousy, racism, and lust. “Crakers do not need to hunt or cook because they are caecotrophs, meaning they can digest unrefined plants by eating their own

excrement.” (Melissa Cristina Silva Se Sa). They hardly have any fear of death, and they could eat their own excrement when there was no food. Crake excludes the human population through the man-made plague with the help of pharmaceutical corporations. In Ambika Bhalla’s “Representations of Nature in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*,” Crake’s intention in reconfiguring the world with new creatures is mentioned as gullible, and one cannot blame the utopian aspiration of the human in engineering the new life: “Most of the terror and chaos portrayed in dystopian fiction results From Utopian Aspirations.” (Bhalla 26)

Scala Naturae

The term *Scala Naturae*, or the “Great Chain of Being,” refers to a hierarchical ordering of all entities, from plants and animals to humans and the divine, a concept elaborated in Western thought by Arthur O. Lovejoy (Lovejoy 55–58) to describe the enduring influence of hierarchical thought in Western intellectual history. In the context of *Oryx and Crake*, Crake’s engineered posthumans and hybrids disrupt the traditional hierarchy, replacing humans at the top and redefining the natural order. The deliberate reconfiguration of species through biotechnology and genetic manipulation challenges the anthropocentric structure of the *Scala Naturae*, emphasizing the ethical and ecological consequences of human intervention in life.

Bioluddites

There is no specific terminology as bioluddite in the novel; however, the term is often linked with Jeremy Rifkin, a stern critic of biotechnology. His activism through the Foundation on Economic Trends positioned him as what many would later call a bioluddite. There are many critics, such as Jeremy Rifkin and Fukuyama, who critique posthuman thought through their works of art. They can be identified by the above-mentioned term, yet such characters are portrayed or impersonated as Jimmy’s mother in *Oryx and Crake*. Jimmy’s mother can be identified as a bioluddite. Bioluddites are people who resist or critique advanced biotechnology, especially when it interferes with nature, human bodies, or ethical boundaries. In a society that normalizes gene splicing and hybridisation, her resistance becomes a moral opposition to embedded posthumanism and unchecked transhumanist progress. In *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy’s mother leaves the compound with a note for her son, a wordless message: “She had trashed Jimmy’s father’s home computer, not only the contents: she’d taken a hammer to it” (Atwood 70).

Eschatology

Both *Oryx and Crake* and *The Windup Girl* deal with the concept called eschatology. It refers to the end of the world or ultimate destiny. Although the novels’ conclusions are open-ended, the stories move through the apocalypse, which indirectly defines it as the end of the world. The replacement of the natural with the gene-spliced or genetically engineered, such as Happicuppa coffee,

Chickie Nobs, lab meats, and SoyDines from *Oryx and Crake*, and the U Tex variant of rice from *The Windup Girl*, is one of the configurations of the apocalypse. The term eschatology coincides with the apocalypse and illustrates the dystopian environment of the novels. On the Merriam-Webster website, it states that eschatology is “a branch of theology concerned with the final events in the history of the world or of humankind” and “a belief concerning death, the end of the world, or the ultimate destiny of humankind.” (Eschatology)

The purpose of deploying these terminologies is to prevent the reduction of scientifically grounded speculative fiction into mere fantasy, treating almost similar engineered resources as the same, and to avoid the redundancy or the unnecessary confusion of associating them with fantasy. Considering all kinds of engineered species as the same is equivalent to assuming metempsychosis in fantasy fiction. This paper examines with the consciousness not to make it a purely multidisciplinary work, but rather a fusion of contemporary life interpreted through literary texts. Moreover, the two different novels, with similar contexts of money, power, science, and corporate influence, employ similar terms irrespective of the authors presenting their works under different yet partly similar sub-genres: the science fiction of Paolo Bacigalupi and the speculative fiction of Atwood. Ultimately, the context is the same as the beginning of the New life with consequences both good and bad, as Bostrom says, “We may have no idea of what we are missing out on until we attain posthuman emotional capacities”. (Bostrom 11) To sum up, this paper conveys that reading the texts without knowing the variations, changes, and terms in science and speculative works of art is equal to reading fantasy and generalizing features, characters, and actions as mere magic, unrelated to the real world.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/38**CULINARY HEIRLOOMS AND DIASPORIC HOMECOMING: THE
REIMAGINATION OF CULTURAL BELONGING IN AMULYA
MALLADI'S *THE MANGO SEASON*****AKSHARA S RAJ**Research Scholar, Department of English and Centre for Research
St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam, Kerala, India**DR. JEENA ANN JOSEPH**Associate Professor, Department of English and Centre for Research
St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam, Kerala, India**Abstract**

The culinary heirlooms, comprising recipes, rituals, and the sensory memory of food, are the living archives through which diasporic individuals negotiate fragmented identities and recreate communal continuity amid displacement. Although research on diaspora has focused on theorising identity formation through language, religion and spatial memory, the intergenerational transmission of embodied culinary practices in diaspora remains undertheorized. Addressing this, the paper conceptualises food as a dynamic cultural script understood as a framework that organises embodied and repeatable culinary practices through which cultural memory is encoded and transmitted across generations. Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) notion of cultural hybridity and Svetlana Boym's (2001) concept of reflective nostalgia, this paper argues that sensory experiences of food, such as taste, smell, and texture, activate mnemonic functions for negotiating hybrid identities, without compelling immigrants into fixed forms. Through a close textual analysis of Amulya Malladi's *The Mango Season* (2003), this paper examines how the protagonist, Priya, reconnects with ancestral culinary practices as a site for negotiating her in-between cultural belonging. The novel focuses on Priya's homecoming during the annual preparation of "Avakai" (raw mango pickle) after seven years of her immigrant life. This paper highlights how culinary practice provides a medium for the tensions that exist between rootedness, autonomy, and the diasporic self. This embodied culinary engagement positions homecoming as an active process of negotiating belonging within the diaspora, thus redefining it as a performative and affective experience through which hybrid identities are constructed.

Keywords: Culinary Homecoming, Cultural Belonging, Diaspora, Hybridity, Intergenerational Memory, Nostalgia.

Introduction

Food transcends geographical boundaries by preserving cultural heritage while blending with different cultures. For diasporic communities, food mediates their

cultural imaginations as an archive, a form of cultural validation and a mode of performance. Food carries the memory of ancestral cuisines, encodes filial responsibilities, and signals commitment to cultural roots. When people move from one place to another, they often carry the strongest connection to their home through their physical senses including smell, taste and feelings. The smell of a particular spice, the techniques of preparing a specific dish, the rituals of cooking during festivals, these are among the most enduring sensory memories. Within diasporic narratives, these sensory encounters often spontaneously regenerate memories through which displaced subjects rediscover their fragmented identities. For the diaspora, food serves as an affective trigger that activates mnemonic and normative forces shaping their lives. This constitutes what this paper terms a cultural script. Adapted from Silvan S. Tomkins's *Script Theory* (1962), which posits that organised patterns of affective response generate normative expectations and guide behaviour across time, food as a cultural script designates a dynamic framework that encodes, reenact and transmit cultural memories across generations especially among diasporic individuals. Therefore, scripts are not just symbolic structures but embodied practices that can be activated by repeating or being sensory familiarity within communal participation.

This paper undertakes a close textual analysis of Amulya Malladi's debut novel *The Mango Season* (2003), which centres on Priya, an Indian immigrant who has lived in the United States for seven years and returns to her ancestral home in Hyderabad during the annual preparation of Avakai, a traditional raw mango pickle auspicious to Telugu culinary culture during the summer mango season.

By reading *The Mango Season* through the intersection of diaspora studies, gastronomy and cultural theory, this paper foregrounds the epistemic and affective dimensions of culinary practice in constructing diasporic subjectivity. This homecoming unfolds across the family's affective, sensory and cultural registers. The smell of mangoes and mustard oil, the ritualistic cutting of raw mangoes, the supervision of elder women, and the transgenerational conversations that occur during the culinary event draw Priya back to traditions she had partly abandoned, while simultaneously revealing the extent to which she has changed. Malladi consistently portrays culinary practices as a medium through which the body's experience merges with past memories, rather than using conscious thought applied by the mind to remember one. Priya reconnects with emotions estranged by displacement through sensory encounters with food.

Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) concept of cultural hybridity as a process of cultural translation and Svetlana Boym's (2001) typology of nostalgia, this paper analyses the role of sensory experiences such as, taste, smell, texture, and embodied practice as mnemonic performances that negotiate hybrid identities. Here, Malladi creates a rich literary terrain for exploring cultural belonging by highlighting the tension between the past and present, between ancestral cultural

expectation and independently constructed identity. Hence, Priya's homecoming shows her instability of belonging.

This paper further addresses how mainstream diasporic discourse has sidelined embodied and intergenerational food practices while privileging instead symbols such as religion, language, and spatial memory. By conceptualising culinary heirlooms as dynamic cultural scripts, this study positions food as a performative framework rather than an indicator of cultural continuity, one in which the cultural memory embedded within the food is materially enacted, transmitted, and transformed. The transmission of culinary knowledge is far from neutral, and it is governed by the hierarchies of caste, gender, and age that determine who may participate in the culinary ritual and who cannot.

The "Avakai" ritual is not, even within a diasporic context, merely an act of cultural creativity in the third space. The kitchen is therefore a place of both affection and discipline that perpetuates culture through either bonding or governance, in order to create cultural continuity within a family or community. Thus, through critical analysis of ritualised gastronomic engagement, this paper highlights how diasporic belonging is sustained through affective cultural exchanges, wherein memory, displacement, and power together shape conditioned and constantly activated forms of cultural identity. Any account of culinary homecoming that fails to examine these conditions risks aestheticizing the very constraints it should be critically interrogating.

Theoretical Framework

In *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990), Stuart Hall observes that diasporic identities are "always already" in the process of constantly shifting rather than fixed (Hall 226). Expanding on Hall's idea, Homi. K. Bhabha, in *Location of Culture* (1994), introduced the concept of "third space", a site of enunciation where cultural meaning is produced not through stable origins but through the instability of translation and negotiation (Bhabha 37). Bhabha conceives cultural hybridity not as a comfortable blending of different cultures, but as a site of contest and anxiety between dominant and minority cultures, thus disrupting settled assumptions about cultural identity (Bhabha 4). Bhabha claims that new cultural meaning can be created by examining these "in between" or "third spaces" (Bhabha 4). This is clearly seen in Priya's fractured identity, where her sense of diasporic identity oscillates between traditional family values and her own emotional attachments.

Svetlana Boym offers a further critical tool by distinguishing between restorative and reflective nostalgia. In *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), she highlights that, restorative nostalgia adopts a nationalistic orientation, seeking to reconstructing a "lost" homeland (Boym 70). Reflective nostalgia dwells in the ambivalence of longing, acknowledging the irreversibility of the past and resisting the impulse to recreate it wholesale. It is the second mode of thinking characterises Priya's relationship to her ancestral culinary practices in *The Mango Season*. Her nostalgia

retains its sense of self awareness and ambivalence rather than idealization, especially when she acknowledges that she was caught up in “that complaining-about-India thing that all of us America-returned Indians did” (Malladi 33).

Silvan S. Tomkins, in *Script Theory* (1987), argues that affects; emotions; derive their power from being linked to organised patterns. Affectively charged memories of events accumulate into “scenes”, which over time, consolidate into “scripts” (Tomkins 148). A script is a structural framework that determines how an individual interprets and responds to recurring situations (Tomkins 153). Complementing Tomkins’s framework, Maurice Halbwachs, in *On Collective Memory* (1992), argues that individual memory is always sustained and shaped by the group, for no memory can exist outside the social frameworks that preserve it (Halbwachs 43).

The “nuclear script” is the basic affective foundation built from positively charged early childhood scenes that anchor emotional identity (Tomkins 207). In the case of Priya, childhood scenes such as eating ripe mangoes and pomegranates in the summer with her grandparents, observing women of the household making “Avakai”, anchor her emotional identity. The “ideological script” encodes acceptable behaviour and naturalises relations of gender, caste, class where the very hierarchies that the culinary ritual simultaneously preserves and performs (Tomkins 170). The “commitment script” governs the individual’s negotiation of competing obligations, for example, Priya’s engagement to Nick represents a recognition of her emotional and social allegiances (Tomkins 179). She admits that “I could keep either Nick or my family” (Malladi 143), shows the emotional dilemma caused by the cultural conflict.

Arjun Appadurai’s and Anita Mannur’s gastronomical concepts represent not merely additional approaches to script analysis, but essential enhancements to it; they provide an account of how scripts are distributed unevenly across cultural and historical contexts, a dimension absent from Tomkin’s framework. Arjun Appadurai, in *How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India* (1988), conceptualises the establishment of a national cuisine as inherently political, emerging through regional negotiation, class formation and cultural standardisation (Appadurai 4-5). Anita Mannur in *Culinary Nostalgia: Authenticity, Nationalism, and Diaspora* (2007), conceptualises food as a medium through which diasporic subjects construct belonging and perform “culinary citizenship”, which is the capacity to claim cultural membership through cooking, independent of legal or linguistic proof (Mannur 13).

Integrating Bhabha in reading *The Mango Season*, food emerges as a powerful site of the third space. It is the space where Priya’s Indian and American identities create productive discomfort and generate new cultural possibilities. As applied in this paper, the concept of food as cultural script is intentionally hybrid, it draws on Tomkins’s affective mechanisms, while grounding them in social, cultural, and historical conditions foregrounded by the critical frameworks mentioned above.

Culinary Heirlooms and Diasporic Cultural Scripts

Priya Rao is the protagonist of the novel *The Mango Season* (2003) written by Indian diasporic writer Amulya Malladi. She returns to her homeland Hyderabad after seven years of life in the United States. Priya struggles with her traditional Andhra Brahmin family and their expectations when they discover that she is engaged to an American named Nick. Here, homecoming was influenced by continuous tension between both her cultural intimacy and estrangement, articulated by her thought, “It was as if there were two people inside me: Indian Priya and American Priya, Ma’s Priya and Nick’s Priya. I wondered who the real Priya was” (Malladi 81). It foregrounds the theme of this novel with hybrid identity and diasporic negotiation.

Malladi focuses on sensory perception, such as taste, smell and texture, an essential to invoking cultural continuity within diaspora. Ripe, sweet mangoes that dripped juices down your throat, down your neck. The smell of a ripe mango would still evoke my taste buds, my memories, and for a while I would be a child again and it would be a hot summer day in India” (Malladi 17). This passage exemplifies what Tomkins designates a “nuclear script”, a positively charged childhood scene that accumulates sufficient affect weight to anchor emotional identity across time and geography.

The novel starts with the recipe of “Avakai”, a South Indian mango pickle that symbolizes a deep connection to Andhra Brahmin heritage and culture. Its preparation involves both technical precision and ritualistic discipline, observing the dietary restrictions and measuring proportions according to inherited knowledge. The novel highlights how older women teach younger women by transmitting embodied knowledge, like gesture, proportion, and sensory judgments which becomes an archive of memory and cultural continuity. The process of transmission is explicitly portrayed when Priya’s grandmother rebukes the choice of mangoes made by Priya’s mother and insists: “I don’t have to taste; I know that they are not very good by the smell. Priya, you have to use your senses . . . your sense of smell to buy mangoes. I will teach you; if you learn from your mother, you will pick mangoes like these,” (Malladi 60). Culinary knowledge is not an abstract instruction but socially controlled power being transmitted through corrections and observations. This intergenerational transmission exemplifies what Halbwachs terms collective memory, wherein individual recollection is always embedded within and sustained by the social group, so that the knowledge of “Avakai” preparation survives not in any women’s mind but in the community of women who enact it together (Halbwachs 43).

As Mannur argues, such culinary performances constitute a form of cultural citizenship, as they allow diasporic subjects to inhabit cultural belonging through the body, independent of language or legal status (Mannur 13). According to Tomkins’s theory of the script, cooking acts as a historical continuum by linking current behaviour with inherited traditions established by successive generations

of Telugu Brahmin women. Malladi also shows how these scripts are vulnerable and rely on bodily repetition. When Priya is unable to cut the mangoes properly, she is able to show the disruption that comes in terms of cultural embodiment due to diasporic distance: “I was sorely lacking in both.....This time I cut the mango, not in two clean halves but two squishy portions” (Malladi 63-64). These ritualistic practices are further governed by religious norms of purity, seasonal cycles, and domestic disciplines. As Tomkins argues, the “ideological scripts” naturalise cultural norms and embed ethical value into everyday practices, thereby investing the dishes prepared through these rituals with both cultural meaning and moral authority (Tomkins 170- 171). The kitchen in the novel is an ideologically constructed space that is structured by caste and gender discrimination, as Priya makes clear that: “Rajni was not a Brahmin and so she was not allowed inside the kitchen... Rajni would be untouchable, in every sense of the word” (Malladi 40-41). Culinary continuity thus operates within regimes of exclusion that define participation in ritualistic tradition and its absence.

Priya’s return to Hyderabad is marked by her sensory experience upon reopening her cultural roots through mangoes, spices, and culinary practices. Priya’s ambivalent feelings about home are revealed through her relationship with food. The kitchen is a space she finds both familiar and full of emotional comfort, yet simultaneously suffocating due to its expectations of cultural conformity. She is confronted with traditions she has begun to distance herself from. The memories associated with each dish have been rendered exotic by her American life. This sense of alienation becomes more apparent when Priya comes to understand how disconnected she really is from her senses while participating in making “Avakai”: “I hadn’t done this for so long and I was stung by the loss. I had lost so much since I had left India and I hadn’t even thought about it. I had become so much a part of America that the small joys of dunking pieces of mango inside gooey paste were forgotten and not even missed” (Malladi 80). As Hall argues, cultural identity is not a fixed essence but a matter of “becoming as well as being” continuously negotiated through memory, experience, and representation (Hall 225).

Through the lens of Bhabha’s concept of ambivalence, the same practices that support a culture’s identity simultaneously generate the conditions for resistance (Bhabha 85). Priya’s refusal on arranged marriage disrupts the transmission of the community’s heritage values through culinary practices, creating contradictory environment in the kitchen, one that both enforces cultural conformity and provides opportunities for resistance. Priya’s grandmother’s instruction to use her sense of smell when choosing the best mangoes demonstrates that cultural memory is transmitted through embodied practice rather than discourse. But Malladi also shows how the kitchen operates through hierarchy and competition. As Priya says, “this mango pickle-making ritual like everything else was a power game” where “Lata and Ma were the contenders while Neelima, Sowmya, and I

were spectators” (Malladi 109). Thus, the culinary act here serves to be a representation of authority through the means of hierarchy.

The mango season is tied to cycles of harvest and abundance, and it mirrors the temporality of diasporic homecoming which is intense, fleeting, and marked by an acute awareness of loss. Mangoes symbolise both plenitude and ephemerality, underscoring the impossibility of fully recovering the past. Memory is not mere individual recollection but a culturally structured process through which the past is continually reshaped. For Priya, food anchors her to cultural continuity while simultaneously highlighting the gap between her past and present selves, while enacting precisely what Boym identifies as reflective nostalgia: an engagement with the past as a living resource rather than a fixed destination (Boym 19). In this manner, the reflective nostalgia is made clear by Priya recognizing her own behaviour of diasporic subjectivity: “I winced; I was doing that complaining-about-India thing that all of us America-returned Indians did. I had lived here for twenty years, yet seven years later, the place was a hellhole. Guilt had an ugly taste in my mouth. This is my country, I told myself firmly, and I love my country” (Malladi 33). Priya maintains a critical awareness of her nostalgia.

For Hall, cultural identity is established through representation and is always mediated by the senses and the material world (Hall 236). Malladi illustrates how Andhra Brahmin families use food to establish partial and contingent cultural affiliations negotiating their belongingness against competing social and personal demands. Each recipe in the novel traces a stage of Priya’s emotional and cultural journey; from “Avakai”, “Avial”, “Mango Pappu”, and “Curd Rice” in India carried across to America. The first section, “Happiness is A Mango”, establishes the notion of mangoes as a source of emotional fullness; the final section demonstrates the continuation of cultural memories through the transfer of “Avakai” from Andhra to America where Priya’s boyfriend Nick tastes it and he choose it over other available food in America. But Malladi at the same time illustrates that there is an end to translating culinary practices among diasporic populations. The pickle is eaten by Nick “without ghee or rice, which was as close to killing yourself as you could come with the hot-hot pickle ” (Malladi 244). While the Avakai manages to migrate as a physical object, it can no longer be ritually practiced within the context of American culture.

Culinary Scripts and Performative Homecoming

One of the most remarkable aspects about *The Mango Season* is its sustained emphasis on the sensory details associated with Andhra cuisine. Sensory details such as the pungency of mango while making “Avakai”, and the taste of unripe pomegranate during childhood excursions with her grandfather not only create a culinary description, but also constitute a mnemonic stimulus that recalls Priya’s cultural memories. According to Jon D. Holtzman, food memory involves multisensory experience involving smell, texture, and the physical experience of consuming food, all occurring simultaneously (Holtzman 365). Involuntary

sensory recall exemplifies this technique, as seen throughout the novel. When Priya comes across the familiar drinks and aromas, she is instantly reminded of her time in India: “I remembered waking up every morning to the smell of decoction” (Malladi 207).

Priya’s homecoming is filtered through this sensory experience. The smell of certain dishes cooked by the women of the family reminds her of childhood experiences that continue to resonate despite her status as a member of the diaspora. Andhra cuisine and its experience represent a sensory trigger for activating the “nuclear script”, forming the affective basis of cultural belonging (Tomkins 197). Her recollections are now mediated by her diasporic distance, producing ambivalence rather than certainty. This ambivalence is best understood through Boym’s concept of reflective nostalgia (Boyim 49). Her nostalgia continues to be critically self-aware as opposed to idealized, especially when she winced about her country, it is an instance where nostalgia is aware of its contradictions, where affection for the native land and critique coexist.

The warmth Priya feels in the Indian kitchen cannot be separated from the expectations placed on women, such as marriage, familial loyalty, and domestic obedience; that the same space enforces. Sensory pleasure is therefore a political act that sustains and reconstructs cultural scripts for generations. Priya’s reflective nostalgia also enacts what glocalisation theorises as the simultaneous intersection or interaction of global mobility and locally situated cultural forms (Robertson 38). Her homecoming does not simply recreate the past; it reconstitutes culinary practices as part of her diasporic consciousness which is refracted through the experiences of global displacement and transformed in the process. Through the tradition of “Avakai” preparation, one can observe how the individuals who have diasporic identities are continually reshaped by the interaction of their past traditions with their present realities. This shift becomes clear when Priya understands that “this was not home anymore. Home was in San Francisco with Nick. Home was Whole Foods grocery store and fast food at KFC... Home was familiar, Hyderabad was a stranger; India was as alien, exasperating, and sometimes exotic to me as it would be to a foreigner” (Malladi 148). Malladi explicitly moves the notion of home away from geographical location to habitual consumption, thus exposing that diasporic identity emerges out of hybrid practices rather than national identification.

“Avakai” preparation serves as a space where generational transference takes place. From Tomkins’ perspective, repetition in practice reconstructs an “ideological script”: therefore, normative expectations become embedded through repetitive actions. In *The Mango Season*, the older women’s authority in the kitchen rests on both culinary expertise, and their position within broader hierarchies of gender and familial authority (Tomkins 170-171). Priya’s relationship with Nick demonstrates that diasporic identity is not a binary

opposition between cultures but a site of ongoing negotiation between competing emotional and cultural commitments.

Through Appadurai's gastronomic framework, analysing cultural traditions requires attention to the class and caste- specific contexts that create them (Appadurai 3). The act of preserving Telugu Brahmin cuisine is not simply about preserving cultural heritage, where culinary continuity frequently hides the exclusions contained within it. What is presented as timeless tradition is often the canonisation of Telugu Brahmin practices, while the culinary traditions of many others has been become either marginalised or unrecognised here. Thus, cultural scripts are not equally available across all social communities, but instead, they are distributed unevenly (Appadurai 3).

While the ancestral kitchen can be experienced as a site of constraint, it simultaneously functions as a space of women's community and solidarity. The ancestral kitchen embodies Priya's ambivalence; the culinary ritual creates both a sense of belonging and of limitation. This ambivalence connects to Bhabha's concept of the third space (Bhabha 37). Therefore, the "Avakai" ritual cannot be perfectly recreated in the diaspora; rather, this inability is indicative of a transformation consistent with glocalisation (Robertson 38). Telugu Brahmin recipes become cultural idioms, recognisable yet transformed by their new contexts. The authenticity of material replication of every recipe will ultimately not exist in diaspora; however, the emotional and memory related aspects of the culinary ritual will endure.

Priya returns to a continuously redefined reality rather than to a world that had remained the same as before. She comes to realise that home is not a place but a performance which is enacted through the "Avakai" ritual itself. Here, identity is recreated through a series of culinary actions, each of which contributes to one's terms of situatedness in the world. Priya's diasporic consciousness shapes her performance in sense of cultural belonging, enacted ritualistically with both familiarity and distance. Moreover, her aunt Sowmya points out that Priya is now "stronger. You stand by your opinions a lot more than you used to and you don't let your Thatha get away with everything", reinforces the idea that returning home does not bring back her unaltered identity (Malladi108). Rather, the diasporic experience changes Priya's attitude toward authority and herself.

The way Priya negotiates this tension is also influenced by her cultural privilege, providing her with a level of cultural identification that is flexible rather than constrained. The capacity to productively inhabit hybrid identities is not available to all diasporic subjects equally. As Appadurai observes, belonging to a culture is experienced differently depending on your position within a social hierarchy, and thus the ability to negotiate cultural identities will vary based on the individual's position within that hierarchy (Appadurai 3). As a third space of negotiation, the kitchen simultaneously facilitates cultural exchange and reinforces the hierarchies of age, gender and authority (Bhabha 37). By reflecting on the culinary ritual's

intimacy and its limitations, she negotiates the way in which she performs the activities rather than complete assimilation.

The novel discusses the limits of culinary translations too. The culinary knowledge that exists in the body, as Priya's grandmother makes clear, cannot be transmitted through word-based communication but requires hands on repeated experience. Tomkins's definition of a script relies upon repeated sensory exposure, without previous experience, a script cannot be fully activated or sustained (Tomkins 150). The retention of original Telugu culinary terminology in the novel further reveals how the culinary terms are determined by specific class or caste contexts, and how the absence of other cuisines signals marginalisation. As Appadurai demonstrates, what authentic cultural expressions are often socially constructed through the process of cultural standardisation and representation (Appadurai 6). Thus, cultural hegemony is typically reached through particular scripts while others are marginalised.

Priya's homecoming is framed by a glocal movement in which cultural meaning emerges through the dynamic interaction between traditional practices and contemporary global circumstances that affect mobility (Robertson 38). In this way, food functioning as cultural script is perpetually reactivated, negotiated and transforming emotions, power and identity. The novel demonstrates that cultural belonging in the diaspora is neither static nor merely a choice, rather an ongoing product of the dynamic interaction among the affective scripts, social structures and social conditions.

Conclusion

Amulya Malladi's *The Mango Season* explores the meaning of food, memory, and belonging in diaspora demonstrating the culinary practices are cultural scripts of identity that sustain cultural continuity while simultaneously evolving through enactment. The framework of culinary script grounded in Tomkins' script theory, operates as a hybrid script in which the emotional truth of homecoming is preserved, yet linked to the ideological, historical, caste-based and class structures that frame it.

The novel illustrates the relationship between diasporic sensory experience and cultural attachment through Priya's return to Hyderabad during the mango season. Priya's homecoming is not a restoration of her origins, nor a rejection of tradition. Instead, it is a negotiation enacted within a third space (Bhabha 37). Priya's ancestral kitchen is an affectively rich and intimate space that enables female solidarity, while simultaneously constraining women through gender roles, caste hierarchies, and family dynamics.

Further analysis has revealed that culinary heirlooms act as generational archives that preserve and transmit embodied knowledge through methods other than language and text. As Halbwachs argues, such archives are never merely individual but collectively sustained, for it is the community, where the women gathered around the "Avakai" preparation that holds and transmits what no single

memory could preserve alone (Halbwachs 43). In the culinary process, one inherits not only technique and flavour, but also social structures such as gendered behaviour, caste hierarchy, family obligations, and cultural authority. The ideological, historical and religious scripts embedded in the culinary ritual are not separate; all coexist within the same affect, creating opposing feelings of freedom and restriction, and belonging and imposition. Multiple scripts simultaneously coexist within a single emotional event, explaining how diasporic subjects maintain ambivalence as a lived affective state rather than merely an intellectual phenomenon (Tomkins 149). The novel points out that the ability to negotiate a hybrid identity is unevenly distributed. Priya's ability to inhabit two cultures is facilitated by her class and caste privileges, which affords her the mobility to adapt to multiple cultural affiliations (Appadurai 18). Not all diasporic subjects possess the same capacity to migrate while maintaining a connection to their tradition. Thus, culinary continuity can never be culturally neutral, it is always linked with histories of exclusion, privilege, and unequal access to belonging. The culinary heirlooms of Telugu Brahmin cuisine are not just an archive of the past, but a dynamic performance of culture and identity that is continuously reinvented in the space between inherited knowledge and lived experience. Priya does not emerge from her homecoming with a fixed identity or permanent sense of connection to her home; rather the experience affords her to attain a more nuanced and self-aware relationship with identity, home and belonging. As a result, the novel reconceptualises diasporic belonging as an evolving process of negotiation that occurs through embodied culinary practice, rather than as the restoration of an idealised homeland. Therefore, gastronomic approaches in diasporic studies must be viewed as a theoretical space where affective memory, intergenerational transmission, and ideology interact.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/39**A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY OF MEMORY AND INDIA: ANALYSIS OF
THE NOVEL 'RED EARTH AND POURING RAIN' BY VIKRAM
CHANDRA****ADEEBA SIDDIQUI**Research Scholar, Department of English
Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India**Abstract**

The paper examines the text, *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995), by Vikram Chandra, using the theoretical frameworks of memory studies and postcolonialism. The narrative structure of the novel is built as a network of memories retold in the form of stories, reflecting upon the cultural, mythological, historical, and colonial past of the nation, where various characters participate in an act of storytelling, the principal of which is a monkey. Along with the tales of the nation's past, the novel interweaves a modern perspective through the stories of Abhay's adventures in America, who feels out of place in his hometown after four years of foreign education. The novel is postcolonial, investigating various aspects of the discourse, particularly the affective registers of identity crisis, self-doubt, and cultural alienation among the country's natives. The paper analyses the textual negotiation of memory, history, and identity in this multi-layered, non-linear, and digressive postcolonial narrative, demonstrating the act of resistance against cultural and historical erasure through storytelling. Using the tools of memory studies, this paper deconstructs the text to counter the orientalist narratives and attitudes that permeate the history of India as presented by the West. Despite being a fictional work, the text serves as a cultural archive and a site of memory for the act of remembrance, participating in resistance against the hegemonic Eurocentric idea of India as presented by Western historiographies.

Keywords: Cultural Memory, Postcolonial, Remembering, Cultural Archive, Orientalism, Myth.

Introduction

Chandra's debut novel, *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995), uses storytelling as a survival mechanism for a white monkey named Sanjay, who is on the verge of dying from a toy rifle wound shot by Abhay Misra, an Indian youth returned from America after completing his education. The novel, just like the *Arabian Nights*, is a series of stories within stories that generate out of the frame narrative, where the dying monkey strikes a bargain with Yama, the Deathlord in Hindu mythology, to postpone his death as long as he can keep an audience, including Yama, entertained with the act of storytelling. This act of storytelling is undertaken not only by Sanjay, who is too weak from his injury, but also by Abhay and his

parents, Ashok and Mrinalini, thus making it a life-giving act. The monkey's physiological trauma caused by the rifle wound is a near-death-like experience that triggers involuntary flashbacks from his human life in colonial India. Sanjay's return to human consciousness opens the door for the writer to create a convoluted story that moves back and forth in time and takes many different turns. The novel develops into a sequence of interrelated meta-narratives that stem from the characters' narrating, which is based on their recollections of their own experiences. The stories are typed by the monkey on Ashok's typewriter and then read out to the gathered audience in the Misra household's courtyard. The gathered audience also participates in this process by showing encouragement and enthusiasm for the act. This process echoes the Indian oral storytelling tradition, as seen in epics such as the Mahabharata, where wisdom is passed down through generations in stories.

Chandra establishes a challenging, unconventional narrative style in his novel compared to that of his Western counterparts. His work was published in 1995, making the author the recipient of the Best First Book Commonwealth Writers Prize and the David Higham Prize for Fiction. Chandra drew inspiration from the military memoir of Anglo-Indian soldier Colonel James Skinner, who served in the Maratha Empire and later in the British Army in the 19th century, to write his debut novel. The act of storytelling is threefold; firstly, Sanjay provides a counter-narrative blended with magic realism to the hegemonic Eurocentric colonial historiography. His stories intersect with memory and history at various levels, thus making the line between the two indiscernible. Secondly, Abhay's stories offer a contemporary perspective on postcolonial India, along with his adventures in America. Thirdly, Ashok and Mrinalini, who work as school teachers, give a cultural element to the story by narrating stories that are infused with Hindu mythology and folklore. The memories of the characters are central to these entwined stories, which are infused with mythical, colonial, and postcolonial experiences. Thus, the act of storytelling becomes an act of preserving and performing these memories in the novel. Though the storytelling mission is initiated to prolong the life of the monkey, it never ends, as the book ends by transferring the mission to Abhay after the monkey's death to save the life of Saira, a child from the audience who meets a fatal accident during the storytelling process in the field in front of the Misra house.

The novel is built around the idea that the stories keep their characters alive, the narrator and the tale, the creator and the creation, the artist and the art, are parts of one universe and interconnected as in the realm of cosmos, where they generate from each other and are kept alive in memory as long as they are told and retold. As in the Hindu mythology, the mechanical laws of dharma and karma control the lives of every creature in the universe, and these lives are in a continuous journey of birth, death, and rebirth in the cosmos according to the measure of deeds. Similarly, the tales in the novel are all interconnected as they originate from each

other, shaping the characters by the narratives they live in, and as the narratives are a production of their memories, desires, and experiences, they break the illusion of fixed identities in a fixed reality. The novel's unique structure makes it a microcosm of a realm of stories, in which the cycle of storytelling never ends, keeping its characters alive as long as they are remembered in the act. The development of the plot acts like a miniature cosmos where these stories are interlinked with each other, like growing out of the same cell into a complex organism. Thus, the novel highlights the cyclical nature of life and death in Hindu cosmology through these interconnected tales, which form a continuum.

Theoretical Framework and Analysis

The paper focuses on how memory in the text stages itself against the imperialist ideology of the West and acts as a site of resistance against colonial erasure. Memory plays a significant role in the narrative construction of the text, as displayed through the storytelling of various characters. This act of storytelling resonates with the ancient oral Indian storytelling tradition, which is in opposition to the Western stylisation of novel narrative structure. Chandra follows the tradition of Hindu epics like the Mahabharata of communicating knowledge via oral transmissions and thus stands apart from his Western counterparts, reclaiming his cultural roots. Sanjay, the monkey, who regains human consciousness from a previous life in the 19th century, is a carrier of memories across generations. The monkey's tales amalgamate legendary narratives, colonial history, and personal experiences; they resonate with Halbwachs' (1992) notion of collective memory, positing that memory is a social construct, and individuals remember within social contexts. Thus, Sanjay's storytelling act becomes a performance of collective memory, creating a sense of collective identity within the group in which it is performed, as they share the same national and cultural history. This memory performance acts as a counter-narrative to the colonial orientalist narrative, as it creates a space for reasserting subaltern voices and histories.

The novel acts as a medium of cultural memory in terms of Astrid Erll (2011), who believes that memory is not a passive recollection of past events but a dynamic process including cultural practice of mediation. As the great epic Mahabharata begins with Vyasa dictating to Lord Ganesha to write down his meditations upon Lord Brahma, the novel's complex narrative plot is developed by the monkey on the typewriter as a vessel for the author. As in the epic, the frame narrative is that of Ugrasravas, a Suta, born out of a Kshatriya father and a Brahmin mother, who narrates the tale of the Mahabharata to an assembly of sages in the Naimisa forests "to teach humanity of dharma" (C. Rajagopalachari 18). The typing monkey, allegedly a progeny of a Brahmin mother and warrior fathers in his previous human life, uses a similar frame narrative for his web of stories as they are narrated by Sandeep, a forest dweller, to a group of sages in the Himalayas. Sandeep had encountered a woman deep in the forests meditating upon water in her cupped hands, like "our first poet" (Chandra 29), Maharishi Valmiki,

as she escaped worldly life to find the meaning of life. This woman directs Sandeep with the wisdom she has gained after meditating for years and tells him that these stories are to cleanse the soul and clear the heart, as it is “*itihasa*” (Chandra 31). Chandra has created his epic as a vessel of cultural memory and a reservoir of myths, history, and cultural practices by alluding to the great epics of Hindu mythology. The text is a blend of mythic narratives with colonial history, thus creating a cultural archive from the indigenous perspective.

“I won't tell what happened,’ I stammered eagerly. ‘I’ll make a lie. I will construct a finely coloured dream, a thing of passion and joy, a huge lie that will entertain and instruct and enlighten. I’ll make The Big Indian Lie.” (Chandra 19)

These lines uttered by the monkey signify that memory is sustained through narratives. Not to tell what happened exactly suggests that retelling past events is a creative process in which memory is reconstructed through narration. The refusal to simply quote the facts is a challenge to colonial historiography, as Sanjay’s tales constitute stories from the colonial period in India. The word ‘lie’ can be ironic, as the author seeks to narrate a tale of the cultural and historical truth about India as a nation that stands in opposition to the orientalist narratives of the West. Erll’s idea of literature as a medium of cultural memory comes out in this novel, where the lie here is not merely a deception. Instead, it is the opening up of a discursive space that, while entertaining, also provides moral insights, rather like a mythology, making the narrative a reservoir for cultural memory, thus aligning with the great Hindu epic tales. “The Big Indian Lie” subverts colonial authority by choosing the indigenous tradition of oral storytelling. The lines are metafictional and expose the mechanics of official records and histories, as they are all selective, biased and insufficient. Chandra’s postcolonial strategy is revealed in the phrase, where he adopts the mode of storytelling to reclaim narrative fabrication and rewrite the history from an indigenous perspective to create an Indian image.

As a real-life soldier’s autobiography inspires the novel, Chandra introduces two characters based on historical people from colonial history through Sanjay’s stories. George Thomas and Benoit de Boigne were two European mercenaries who came to India with a strange passion for new adventures. Their attitude reflects the white man’s curiosity to explore the Orient and seek fortune in the mystical land. Boigne carries the book, *The Romance of Alexander*, with himself, hinting at his conqueror’s curiosity for the world, like Alexander the Great. These two characters fight battles and command armies for the native kings in India, and go through a challenge of embracing the otherness in the foreign land. While Boigne never interacts with the Other and stays isolated, finally leaving for home in Paris after accumulating enough wealth. Though Boigne returns to his homeland after several years spent in India, his consciousness remains divided. As he grows senile with age, he keeps on muttering that his life has been a dream.

His passion for conquering leads him into madness and a severe sense of identity crisis. The geographical distance between his homeland and his land of adventures somehow led to a crack in his subconsciousness, as he is unable to connect with his past experiences, and his memory deteriorates. To him, his life seems meaningless without being in touch with his past experiences, and thus, the forceful act to recall and reconnect makes him go mad. He pushes himself without sleep or food “to remember everyone and everything,” (Chandra 49) starting from his childhood. As he lies on his deathbed, he speaks, “No, I die. But my life lives on, and I live, and live, and live.” (Chandra 49). These words speak of his mindset as he wants to be remembered forever via stories of his exploits and victories in foreign nations, and the reason why his memory to him is so important. He is not able to fulfil the task as his last days approach him, leaving him muttering gibberish in foreign tongues which no one around him could understand. Boigne’s last efforts to reconnect with his past about the foreign adventures reveal his enslavement to the idea of a conqueror’s hunger.

Thomas, on the other hand, embraces the Other through his interactions with Guha, a forest dweller of the Vehi tribe. George Thomas, unlike Boigne, makes India a part of his identity by calling himself an Indian. The stories about his adventures in India reveal his interactions with the indigenous tribal communities. He truly assimilates with the culture and traditions of the Vehi tribe and fondly accepts them. His accounts of adventures reveal a true image of India, different from the colonialist perspective, where he is saved by the Vehi tribe after an attack from a tiger. Even as a warrior, he fights against the British in the armies of the native kings and never bows down in front of the outsider enemy. He finally gives up the battle against the British, as his sons Sikander and Chotta, born to a Rajput princess, are fighting against him. He returns to the land of the Vehi to take his last breath, where he had learnt to become a part of the Indian soil. Even though he is never fully accepted as one by the natives, he still chooses to embrace the otherness and makes himself a part of the soil where he acquires his name and fame as a soldier. Reverend Sarthey, Markline, and John Hercules Skinner’s accounts are representations of the colonialist ideologies of the British in the novel, which highlight their biases and prejudices against the natives of the country.

Sanjay’s narratives are not just historical accounts, but pictures painted about the rich cultural history of the nation. His stories are mixed up with magic realism and myth-making, which develop a cultural archive of the country. There are multiple allusions to the Hindu epics, where, once in a story, Sanjay swallows the English language alphabet for the printing press machine, which turns his throat blue, alluding to the mythical story of the Hindu God, Lord Shiva, who drinks the poison to save the universe, turning his throat blue. Sanjay, like his God, is saving himself and other natives working in a printing press workshop owned by Markline, an Englishman. Sanjay had used this set of alphabets to print hidden messages in the

orientalist narratives sponsored by the British. This instance is an attempt to create an alternative narrative. Sanjay's journey is an account of the struggle against the coloniser. He is magically conceived with his two brothers, James Skinner aka Sikander and Rober Skinner aka Chotta, from glowing laddoos eaten by their mothers. Sikander and Chotta are raised by a Rajput mother married to a white man, John Skinner. Sikander and Chotta, as kids, learn about their Rajput history from their mother and swear to become brave soldiers as expected of them. Unfortunately, as they grow up, they end up fighting for the East India Company and are disillusioned with themselves. Sanjay, who is initially under the influence of the coloniser's mindset of embracing the white man's mannerisms and education, ends up standing against his own brother, Sikander, who fights for the British. The tales narrated by the monkey build an interconnected web among these stories, as they are all part of each other, originating from each other, thus making the text a living archive.

The text becomes a site of memory as it contains multiple narratives overlapping and interconnected with each other as a living entity, growing from each other. Pierre Nora (1989) introduced the concept of the site of memory, which explains the symbolic sites of memory, such as monuments, museums, preserving the past, and, in this case, the narrative. The novel is a brilliant example of the difference between communicative memory and cultural memory, concepts developed by Jan Assmann (2011), a leading memory studies theorist. The storytelling act in the novel represents the short-term communicative memory, which is transmitted across generations orally, while on the other hand, being penned down by the author as a literary work, and the monkey using Ashok's typewriter transitions its position in the cultural memory, which is institutionalised and long-term via texts, rituals, and monuments. The tales narrated by Ashok and Mrinalini, the two teachers in the novel, are accounts of the mythological past of the nation, adding a cultural component to the memory of the past. The text becomes a site of cultural resistance in the face of colonial erasure as it invokes a sense of cultural identity in the postcolonial audience and a source of cultural memory as it interacts with the mythic, historical, and colonial past of the nation. The text, thus, can be called a storehouse and medium of cultural memory for a postcolonial India as it develops into a multi-layered narrative in continuity with the present.

According to Astrid Erll (2011), this text can be a perfect example of a memory text. Erll says that memory is dialogic, and in the novel, the tales of colonial encounters are juxtaposed with the accounts of mythical gods, reverberating a sense of cultural identity and thus complementing each other. The text not only preserves the collective memories but also performs and reconstructs them for the postcolonial readers. As Erll argues, memory travels across space, time, and media; the reincarnation of Sanjay as a monkey after several years displays memory traveling across space and time. Also, it traverses across media in the text itself, as the stories transmitted orally are archived in written records with the help

of Ashok's typewriter, and by the author into a literary work. Therefore, the text can be stated as a memory text in terms of Erll because it represents memory as a living process, exemplifying its mobility, multiplicity, and mediation. As the novel is a blend of history and fiction and claims to be "not untrue" (Chandra 31), the act of narrativization of characters' memories presents a new way of understanding the past. This relationship between history and fiction, where one describes what happened and the other represents what could or might have happened, is apparent in the novel. As history is obliged to consider facts, testimonies, and archives to create its narratives, fiction, on the other hand, is unconstrained and produces an imaginative space to look at the past from an unconventional perspective. Chandra's text, in an attempt to reclaim the past, delves into the task of representing history for its readers. This task begins with knocking the monkey into human consciousness from a previous life as a result of being shot by a rifle. As he lies in recovery, he attempts to make sense of what had happened in a previous human life. This attempt is later transmuted into a storytelling act, in which these memories are transformed into narratives to be narrated in front of an audience.

This act of narrativization of memories not just recalls what had happened for the monkey, but helps him reconcile with a sense of self to relate to. This conscious act of creating narratives out of memories aligns with Paul Ricoeur's (1998) concept of narrative identity and narrative emplotment. The fragmented, distorted version of memory that returns to Sanjay as he is in recovery from the rifle wound takes shape via storytelling. This traumatic event, the near-death-like experience, triggers Sanjay's memories from his previous life. The sudden overwhelming flashbacks, the panoramic images from his previous human life, haunt him as he lies on his deathbed waiting for Yama, the Deathlord. The trauma leads to a liminal crisis in his consciousness and merges his past and present experiences, rupturing the temporality. This event describes how memory acts in a near-death-like experience, as it hovers in a panorama of images overwhelming the consciousness of the subject that later demands narration to stabilise the identity. Thus, the act of storytelling is performative as it provides coherence to the images of the past life through narration and constructs his identity. Abhay's identity is also constructed through narrative, as he tells stories about his experience in America. Abhay's character undergoes self-exile after returning to his native place after spending four years in America.

Like Sanjay in his youth, Abhay is also fascinated by the idea of white education and believes it to be superior for postcolonial subjects. He is unable to adjust to his humble surroundings and feels out of place constantly. His character is reluctant to face his memories in the streets of Janakpur and feels alienated. He is in a constant struggle to avoid his life before he went to America, as it threatens his new identity as a foreign returned. His interactions and observations with his parents bring out a sense of displeasure in him, as it triggers the memories of his

old life. The feelings of anger and frustration take charge of him whenever he is forced to confront his past life, which becomes the only way of accessing and mediating his older memories. These memories are embodied in his bodily sensations of frustration and perspiration, exposing that memory is emotionally charged, and thus, the very same emotions associated with it become a channel to access them. Erll's (2011) idea of affective memory is in play here as anger and frustration are the affective modes to access Abhay's past experiences. Abhay's four-year foreign education builds a wall between him and his surroundings. He enters a state of trance as he feels out of place and is never fully involved with the place. He lingers around the place like a ghost, suppressing his old memories, and puts himself in self-exile. As he rummages through his stuff in the cupboard, he finds the toy rifle gun. He caresses the gun and holds it in his hands like an object of defence against his past self. The deliberate effort to avoid his past reveals the unresolved emotional tension it carries, and hence, the feelings of anger and frustration.

Many other characters like Sikander, Chotta, and Thomas face identity crises at some points because they are a breed of hybrid culture and thus trapped in a space of in-betweenness. De Boigne is intimidated by his adventures in the Orient in his last days and hence acts like a madman on his deathbed, urging him to be back in his dream-like experience in Hindustan. Thomas loses his European identity and calls himself an Indian dying alone in the forests. Sikander is killed because of his divided consciousness, which makes him unable to fully associate with any one of the cultures. Chotta commits suicide, calling his whole life a disappointment, which is spent serving the English as a soldier because of his strong Rajput beliefs. John Skinner spends his whole life as a sailor without setting foot on the lands of Hindustan or Britain. His body is disposed of in the ocean, as no one could claim it as their own. The text, thus, represents the struggles of the colonised at personal and collective levels, where the colonised subjects go through identity crises and cultural alienation in their homeland.

The text exposes Hercules, Sarthey, Charles, and Markline as representations and embodiments of colonialist ideologies. They consider themselves superior in all aspects and regard native culture and religion as superstitious, wicked, humiliating, and demonic. There are several accounts in the text where these characters belittle Indian lives and culture. They promote orientalist narratives as true and appropriate descriptions of India and try to save Indians from eternal damnation. Also, there are incidents where their true motives are disclosed, which is to gain materialistic wealth and loot India of its riches. They even admit that India is capable as a nation and does not need any foreign intervention to become any better. The physical and mental violence caused by the English is clearly visible in Janvi's character, who is bereft of her children, so that she does not influence her Indianness on them. She also chooses to commit suicide as she is forced to fail as a mother and finally become helpless. Abhay, who is in America

for education, faces racism and a sense of isolation among his peers. Amanda's parents talk of India as some exotic, mystical place that needed more years of colonisation by the British to become a better place. Even when he returns to India, he carries a sense of superiority in himself and moves around frustrated with the humbleness of his nation. Hence, the text is a great example of postcolonialism, which rebuilds the colonial past from the colonised viewpoint.

Conclusion

The novel is a web of stories representing the nation's history from an Indian perspective, including tales of mythology, battlefields, colonial struggle, magic realism, love, and passion. The author has attempted to decolonize the Eurocentric viewpoint of Indian history and rewrite it using memory as a tool to reconstruct the past events. Chandra's text is not merely fiction, as it is based on the autobiography of Colonel James Skinner. He has taken into account historical events and remodeled them in a cultural context. He has used his creative imagination to rewrite these historical battles and events from an indigenous perspective, connecting them to the cultural memory of the Indian subcontinent. As the monkey claims to be retelling the tales of history, which are not untrue, Chandra has painted a decolonized trajectory of the past events. The novel becomes a repository of cultural memory as it recreates these events by merging the actual history with mythic narratives, bringing out an impartial image of the nation's past. As the storytelling act brings out a collective consciousness in the audience, the novel becomes a project of resistance against the hegemonic Western historiography.

Chandra's text posits itself as a postcolonial counter memory, where it challenges imperialistic viewpoints by creating a decolonized picture of the nation's history using the cultural practice of oral storytelling. It is a significant work in the canon of postcolonial novels that builds its structure on the pillars of cultural memory and storytelling. The text investigates questions of hybridity, identity crisis, cultural alienation, self-division, and many other aspects of postcolonial discourse. The different voices in the text give the reader a novel representation of the past and question the Eurocentric view of India framed by the orientalist narratives of the West. Chandra merges mythic narratives, indigenous stories, folklore, and colonial history in dialogue with each other to embrace Indian cultural memory and identity. The text becomes a site of resistance against colonial erasure and a living archive, facilitating cultural continuity in postcolonial India. It uses memory to act as a bridge between the act of storytelling and national history, and offers a novel approach to studying postcolonial literature. It preserves collective memories of the nation's civilisation and reconstructs them as memory performances for the postcolonial audience. Thus, Chandra's text undermines imperial authority by juxtaposing history and myth in a collective cultural narrative. The text uses memory as an agency to reclaim its cultural

identity and history from colonial historiography by constructing resistance narratives about the marginalized voices.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/40**GOVERNING THE GHOSTS: CLIMATE DISPLACEMENT,
INSTITUTIONAL VACUUM AND FOREST GOVERNANCE IN
HIMACHAL PRADESH****Ms. ANGEL LAKHANPAL**

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Abstract

The Indian Himalayan Region is witnessing an ever-increasing rate of climate-induced displacement, leading to "ghost villages" with high rates of demographic decline. In Himachal Pradesh, decentralised forest governance bodies, such as Gram Panchayats for Shamlat Debts and Joint Forest Management Committees, depend on effective community participation. However, the effectiveness of decentralised environmental governance in the event of rapid depopulation remains a phenomenon that remains underexplored. For this study, we aim to explore the linkages between climate displacement, environmental change, and decentralised environmental governance through a secondary data analysis approach. The study, through its qualitative comparative case study approach, aims to synthesise existing data from the Census of India, Forest Survey of India and State Economic Surveys for Himachal Pradesh, and through an Elinor Ostrom approach for Institutional Analysis and Development, explore the situation in high-altitude districts such as Lahaul Spiti and Kinnaur. From the study's preliminary findings, it was established that there is a decline in demography associated with an "institutional vacuum" in terms of the management of the commons, which impacts monitoring, rule enforcement and collective decisions, all of which have been linked to mixed ecological outcomes, including natural regeneration and increased risk of invasive species, forest fires, and landslides. This paper proposes the conceptual framework of "Demographically Weakened Commons Regimes" to make sense of commons management in high-altitude districts. The policy implications are the need to develop adaptive governance instruments for absenteeism, digital participation instruments, and new legal instruments for commons management in climate-vulnerable regions. The importance of the study is that it helps in the management of institutional resilience in the face of demographic challenges in the Western Himalayas.

Keywords: Climate displacement, Ghost villages, Decentralised governance, Institutional vacuum, Forest governance.

Introduction

There are few places in the world that have such ecological and civilizational importance like the Himalayas. The Western Himalayas and Himachal Pradesh,

in particular, form the meeting place for high-altitude biodiversity, indigenous forms of land utilization, and a network of both official and unofficial systems of governance. However, there is something wrong happening within some communities of this region. Once vibrant with the movements associated with pastoral transhumance, agricultural and pastoral farming, and forest conservation practices have gone into silence. Homes stand empty. Lands remain idle. What also becomes dormant are the governance mechanisms practiced by these communities – the Gram Panchayats governing the Shamlat lands and Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs).

In this chapter, we consider an apparent paradox with profound implications: How is decentralised environmental governance affected by the fact that the communities on which it relies have started vanishing? The answer, as this study seeks to show, is not either the simple return of nature or the simple end of the institutions involved. Instead, it is a process of institutional void and a combination of environmental consequences that raise serious questions about the underlying premises of the whole paradigm of participatory governance.

The phenomenon to be considered is a new term that has been adopted both by academics and the media, namely 'ghost villages'. Although catchy, this terminology hides the complexity of the situation and the lives of those individuals who have left, those who are currently leaving, and those who are forced to move out. This problem concerns Himachal Pradesh districts such as Lahaul and Spiti, Kinnaur, higher areas of Chamba, and certain parts of Shimla and Kullu districts. These are places characterised by difficult winters, short growing seasons, diminishing water sources because of glacier retreat, and the convergence of the effects of climate change and economic marginality that render residing there unreasonable.

In this chapter, I take multiple approaches. First, the phenomenon of climate-driven forced migrations is framed within the context of environmental migration discourses and governance debates. Second, I discuss the contextual background about the governance of forests and commons in Himachal Pradesh. With the help of the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework of Elinor Ostrom, I explore the connection between depopulation and the efficiency of institutions in the case of commons. Third, I advance the original theoretical contribution of this research by introducing the idea of 'Demographically Weakened Commons Regimes.' Fourth, I investigate the ecological implications of demographically weakened commons regimes and propose some adaptive governance tools.

2. THE GEOGRAPHY OF DEPARTURE: CLIMATE DISPLACEMENT IN THE INDIAN HIMALAYAN REGION

2.1 Climate Change as a Driver of Migration

Since time immemorial, the literature dealing with environmental migrants has been plagued with issues of causation and attribution. It is highly methodological to isolate the cause-and-effect relationship between the climate of an area and

migration as migration itself has always been driven by multiple factors – including economics, networks, lack of basic infrastructure, and aspirations, apart from environmental conditions. However, a general trend emerging from recent literature regarding the Indian Himalayan Region is that environmental stresses are becoming increasingly important drivers of seasonal and permanent migration in the region.

The Indian Himalayan Region constitutes around 5.3 lakh square kilometers spread across eleven states and two union territories, with a population of around 50 million people who rely entirely upon natural systems for sustenance. In the Indian Himalayan Region, communities residing in the state of Himachal Pradesh find themselves inhabiting some of the most climatically fragile niches, characterized by mountain valleys, survival of which each year is dependent upon the amount of snowfall, river water availability, and temperature variations.

Projections of the climate of the western Himalayan region consistently indicate rising temperatures, decreased snowpack, rapid glacial melting, and an increasing number of extreme weather events such as heavy rainfall. The rivers Beas, Chenab, and Sutlej, which support agriculture and energy production in Himachal Pradesh, rely significantly on glacial and snow meltwater. As glaciers continue to recede – Himachal Pradesh has already lost many square miles of glacial territory since the last few decades – the water regimes of the rivers are also becoming less predictable, impacting agriculture dependent on irrigation in the mountainous regions.

2.2 Ghost Villages: From Metaphor to Reality

The expression of ghost villages is now quite prevalent in the Indian context, used to denote villages that have suffered dramatic and irreversible demographic loss. Such an occurrence is well-established in Himachal Pradesh through Census of India statistics between 2001-11 where population data shows marked depopulation at the village level, especially among mountain villages; initial results from more recent rounds of data collection indicate the trend has continued and even accelerated in some instances.

The problem here is that the phenomenon of ghost villages cannot simply be considered homogeneous. While there are cases where villages have been left entirely deserted without any permanent residents, there are also some places which still have a few elderly individuals who cannot or do not wish to move out of there; whereas young adults and children may have moved down to live in some town or city situated at lower altitudes. Some places, too, undergo seasonal migration with people moving down during winter months.

The district of Lahaul and Spiti, which lies in the cold desert trans-Himalayan region bordering with Tibet, has experienced a marked decline in its rural population over time, with some of its panchayats experiencing such decline that their electorate strength is just a tiny fraction of the number they had twenty years ago. Similarly, in Kinnaur district, the threat of warming temperature destroying

their apple orchards, coupled with danger from landslides and floods, has resulted in many villages losing their populations.

The trend is anything but arbitrary; it favors villages that are furthest from major urban centers, rely most heavily on rain-fed or glacial agriculture, are at greatest risk of natural hazards, and have the poorest road access and connectivity to information technologies. In terms of governance, this spatial pattern suggests that those villages suffering out-migration most rapidly are the same villages that had weak governance structures to begin with due to their remoteness.

3. THE ARCHITECTURE OF DECENTRALISED FOREST GOVERNANCE IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

3.1 Shamlat Lands and Gram Panchayat Authority

Himachal Pradesh has an entirely unique system of common land governance based on the Punjab Village Common Lands (Regulation) Act of 1961 applied to Himachal Pradesh, under which management and control of the Shamlat deh – village common land – is conferred to the Gram Panchayat. Such commons include pastureland, wasteland, forestland, and water bodies and serve as means of sustenance and survival for local communities; these lands provide grazing facilities, fuel wood, collection of non-timber forest produce, and buffer for any domestic resource crunch. It is the duty of the Gram Panchayat to govern such commons, prevent any encroachment, manage their use, and maintain their productivity. The logic behind this system of governance implies the presence and continuity of the community itself. Enforcement mechanisms work on the basis of social monitoring wherein the community members keep each other in check. Community consensus on issues such as grazing cycles, fuelwood requirements, and any change in land use is reached during gram sabha meetings, which require community presence and in fact demand it. Even panchayat membership is tied to residential and voting status in the locality.

3.2 Joint Forest Management and the Community Participation Model

In addition to common land management through panchayats, Himachal Pradesh has adopted Joint Forest Management (JFM) since the early 1990s, following the participatory approach adopted by the Forest Department of India after the National Forest Policy of 1988. In JFM, Village Forest Development Committees (VFDCs), which have been considered here under the wider category of JFMCs, are formed in villages surrounding Reserved and Protected Forests. These committees are responsible for the protection of forest fragments, forest regeneration activities, and their entitlement to forest produce.

Despite having one of the most expansive networks of JFM committees in the country, Himachal Pradesh has been shown to exhibit significant heterogeneity in the functioning of such committees. Even in stable population scenarios, Indian studies on JFM have demonstrated persistent problems, including elite capture of gains, minimal involvement of women and other marginal groups, lack of assistance from Forest Department officials, and the deterioration of motivation

within the committee members over time. In cases of declining populations, these weaknesses are greatly exacerbated.

3.3 Formal Structures, Informal Norms, and the Gap Between

One of the recurrent themes in the analysis of commons management within the Himalayan context is the interlinking existence of official government-sanctioned systems, which may coexist alongside informal systems that are older than the former ones and exist in parallel to them. Several mountain communities of Himachal Pradesh had traditionally managed their resources through complicated informal systems of devta-based resource management, clan-based pasture allocation, and informal adjudication of conflicts by elders.

The formal, decentralized system of resource governance did not necessarily negate the informal system of resource management, which was rather complementary to the former in that some issues could be resolved only within the informal setting. Due to population decline and inability to maintain the community required for both systems of resource governance, the consequence would therefore lead to not only a degradation of the formal governance system, but the whole set of overlapping systems of managing natural resources.

4. AN OSTROMIAN LENS: INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS AND DEVELOPMENT IN HIGH-ALTITUDE CONTEXTS

4.1 Ostrom's Design Principles and Their Demographic Assumptions

In her seminal analysis of commons governance, Elinor Ostrom's identification of design principles for sustainable common pool resource institutions, first published in her 1990 monograph, and further developed in decades of comparative empirical research since then, has been distilled into a list of seven principles that reliably characterise well-governed commons. Clearly defined boundaries, rules that fit the local context, collective decision-making, monitoring, graduated sanctions, mechanisms for resolving conflicts, and recognition of the right to self-organisation are now the cornerstone concepts of commons governance studies.

What is important for this study is that each of Ostrom's principles rests on an unstated premise: that there exists an active, participatory, and self-organising body of appropriators and rule-makers for the common pool resource in question. The principles refer to institutional architecture. But they say nothing about what happens when the human element upon which those institutions depend starts to dwindle. While this is not meant as a criticism of Ostrom's conceptualisation of commons governance, as her initial empirical database was largely made up of communities that had experienced little demographic turnover, it does illustrate a serious limitation in the relevance of the literature to dynamic demographic settings.

4.2 Applying the IAD Framework to Ghost Village Contexts

IAD theory, created by Elinor Ostrom and her team of scholars from Indiana University, provides a finer-grained tool than design principles. The IAD theory

focuses on the action situation, i.e., the contexts in which people interact and make decisions. It looks at how the biophysical environment, characteristics of the community, and rules-in-use influence outcomes within each action situation. From the perspective of this research, the IAD theory will be employed in examining three critical action situations in commons governance: monitoring, enforcement of rules, and collective choice arrangements.

In the case of Lahaul and Spiti and Kinnaur, declining population changes all of these action situations dramatically. Monitoring – the process of observing whether users follow rules regarding resource exploitation – requires community members to watch each other's actions. In a village where most families have left, there is no social monitoring – the core of community-based management – happening at all. There is no one to watch over the forest. No one checks if the cattle of one of the few remaining families graze past their designated area. No one reports the creation of a new encroachment in the commons lands.

The enforcement of rules encounters similar hurdles. Proportionate punishments for breaches of rules or graduated sanctions involve the ability to identify breaches as well as the power to punish the offender. For example, in an empty village, the gram sabha responsible for punishing breaches finds itself unable to form a quorum. The JFMC charged with informing the Forest Department of illegal logging may not even have functioning office bearers. The formal enforcement system, whose presence would be necessary to substitute for the community system, suffers from the geographical remoteness of high-altitude villages.

Decision making as a collective process involves coming to consensus about changes in rules and strategies for resource utilization. Perhaps this practice is most seriously undermined by outmigration, since in India's rural areas, democratic processes at the level of the gram sabha are already weak. Moreover, the process of decision making is rendered meaningless when a large number of members of the village are absent in their homes. The ones left behind to make decisions, generally elderly people lacking mobility and hence access to forests, lack the social prestige held by adults.

5. DEMOGRAPHICALLY WEAKENED COMMONS REGIMES: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

5.1 Defining the Concept

In order to analyse the condition of governance that arises out of substantial demographic reduction, this study introduces the term 'Demographically Weakened Commons Regimes (DWCRs)'. According to the concept of DWCRs, there would be the presence of formal institutions – in terms of legal requirement, committee formation, and statutory commons. However, the social process associated with these institutions, in terms of community involvement, social control, and collective action, will have weakened.

DWCRs differ from institutional breakdown. Institutional breakdown entails the disappearance of institutions. The DWCR phenomenon involves the presence of

institutions on paper and in reality, while their practical operation becomes hollow. There is a vast difference between these two phenomena, which is very important in terms of governance design. While institutional vacuum due to demographic weakness needs adaptation, institutional void without legal empowerment needs institutional construction.

DWCRs are also distinguished from the problems associated with elite capture or corruption, the pathologies that have received most attention in commons scholarship. While elite capture involves working institutions that serve certain social groups at the expense of others, a DWCR results from the weakening rather than misallocation of institutional power. It is not an issue of capture, but one of emptying.

5.2 Dimensions of Demographic Weakening

Weakening of commons regimes via demographic changes works on several related dimensions. First, the dimension of participation, whereby there is a lowering of the number of community members participating in decision-making and governance procedures. Meetings of gram sabha that once involved dozens of people find themselves unable to muster the required quorum. General body meetings of JFMC might only be graced by a few elderly members of the village. The basic premises of democracy underlying participatory systems are thus being undermined quietly.

The second factor is the problem of loss of knowledge. Much of the knowledge needed for managing commons effectively – knowledge about the vulnerable forest patches, overgrazed pastures, silted waterways, and advances of invasions species – is tacit, situated, and embodied in people who live their whole lives within the landscape. With the departure of these people, the institutional memory of successful commons management is disappearing.

The third factor is that of transformation of resource utilization. In the abandoned rural landscapes, the traditional uses of the commons are becoming less significant as there are fewer people to utilize resources. However, this apparent decrease of the burden can be deceptive because new burdens arise as a consequence of the lack of management and supervision in such areas. Illegal deforestation becomes more probable when intruders realize that nobody watches over commons. Political opportunists try to take advantage of the situation and claim the ownership of lands. Nomadic livestock grazers find deserted landscapes suitable to pasture their animals.

6. ECOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES: MIXED OUTCOMES IN UNMANAGED LANDSCAPES

6.1 Natural Regeneration and Its Limits

The most counterintuitive conclusion reached by the synthesis of the Forest Survey of India findings and other secondary sources in this research is that the decline in population numbers within some high-altitude districts of Himachal Pradesh may be correlated with an increase in the size of the forest. This should

come as no surprise on ecological grounds; without any extraction going on, there is a lot of natural regrowth that can occur. The saplings that were cut down previously for firewood grow up into proper sized trees and understory plants that used to be grazed are regrown.

It is important to note, however, that the implications of this correlation are not as optimistic as might otherwise be thought upon first glance. If natural forest regrowth occurs without any management or monitoring, then that forest will lack any protection against destructive outside forces. The regrowth could also suffer from compositional homogenization in comparison to the multi-species mixtures that were favored under traditional community management. Furthermore, the social-ecological feedback system which promoted rich forest ecosystems through frequent disturbances, such as grazing, selective logging, and controlled fires, is disturbed, resulting in potentially rich forests in terms of satellite measurements yet ecologically impoverished.

6.2 Invasive Plants, Increased Risk of Fires, and Landscape Instability

There are several other ecological issues that arise due to the lack of governance as a result of population loss. First, there are reports of invasive plant species, such as *Lantana camara* at mid-elevation altitudes and various exotic grasses, spreading in areas that were once open pastures or managed forests. Under community management, there was suppression of invasive plant species through controlled grazing and selective logging. Without any management, invasive plants are colonizing the ecological niches created by the departure of humans.

There are ecological risks associated with fire as well. Traditional practices in many parts of Himachal Pradesh include pasture burning and burning of the forest edge for grass regrowth and to clear away the accumulated biomass. While such traditional practices have been controversial due to the official stance of the Forest Department, they constituted a fire management practice. However, in their absence, in addition to the accumulation of dry biomass due to uncontrolled regrowth of the natural ecosystem, there is a higher potential for fire hazard in some of the high-altitude areas. Moreover, the decreased presence of community members results in lower ability to detect and report fires, which would be more efficient for local residents rather than any sort of remote monitoring system.

The third issue concerns the risk of landslides and erosion. Terrace farming in the Himalayas serves as a slope stabilization mechanism: the maintenance of terraces helps prevent slope erosion by channelling rainwater to the field rather than causing slope failure. In the case where terraces become abandoned due to population migration – which happens in many villages in Lahaul and Spiti and Kinnaur – it leads to the breakdown of the structure itself and gullies' formation, and increased landslide susceptibility. The landscape literally becomes less stable as the communities that maintained it depart.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS: ADAPTIVE GOVERNANCE FOR THE DEMOGRAPHIC FRONTIER

7.1 The Limits of Existing Frameworks

The current decentralized structures of governance in Himachal Pradesh – Panchayati Raj System, JFM, Shamlat – were conceived under the assumption of settled population bases. There are no clauses in any of these systems which deal with the issue of a sharp and irrevocable decline in population. The consequence is that these systems are being implemented for situations in which they have not been designed, leading to inevitable failure.

In villages where there are few villagers who are able to participate in Gram Sabha meetings as they are mostly living in far-off urban areas, the statutory provision of a quorum poses an impossible problem. Similarly, the requirement of holding regular general body meetings by JFMCs is a nonstarter in cases where its members are spread across different locations. The prescription for keeping the panchayat offices running in villages becomes practically impossible in those places which have lost their settled population base.

7.2 Adaptive Governance Instruments

In this research, a series of instruments of adaptive governance have been recommended to ensure institutional efficacy amidst population shrinkage. Rather than suggesting an alternative approach to community-based governance, these instruments should be seen as methods of sustaining community-based governance even as the community becomes physically scattered.

The first instrument suggested relates to legalising and implementing digital participation. The coronavirus outbreak made clear that gram sabha meetings can be conducted using video conferencing facilities, and several state governments introduced temporary provisions allowing digital participation during panchayat processes. At present, what is required is the creation of a sustainable and effective legal framework – a legal framework which not only makes digital participation a basic right rather than an emergency privilege but also ensures the availability of the necessary technical means to facilitate it in remote areas with poor internet access. To the displaced residents who live in cities like Shimla, Chandigarh, and Delhi, for example, digital participation in governance procedures is entirely feasible and perhaps even more consistent than their occasional travel back to their villages of origin.

The second intervention is the design of a new legal classification – the Absentee Commons Member. Present laws do not clearly define the rights and duties of migrants who continue to lay claim to the communal resources of their original communities. The design of legal rights and obligations for absentee membership – the right of migrants to take part in the decision-making process regarding the use of communal property, their duty to pay the necessary contribution to the maintenance of the commons, and the means of realizing these rights and

obligations – will solve the problem of ambiguous legal status faced by migrants and their compatriots left behind.

Finally, the third intervention refers to Forest Guardians – compensation paid to local people or specially appointed individuals who are engaged in monitoring and reporting activities that should be carried out by the whole active community. Forest Guardianship programmes are widely used around the world, from community rangers in Africa to watershed services payments in Latin America. Forest Guardianships are likely to prove beneficial in the case of Himachal Pradesh. For example, this kind of programme could provide additional income to elderly people residing in high altitude villages of Himachal Pradesh.

7.3 Institutional Resilience as a Policy Goal

However, these particular tools represent a higher level of governmental policy aims; specifically, an institutionally resilient system of commons governance capable of operating within a range of demographic circumstances, from the total presence of communities to their near complete disappearance. This idea of institutionally resilience does not refer to the static preservation of current institutional forms but instead to the ability of these institutions to adapt to the needs of the communities, which might not align perfectly with how these governance frameworks expect them to be.

Western Himalaya is not likely to become less stressed by climate changes. The same reasons that caused demographic shrinkage in this region – the disappearance of glaciers, vulnerable agriculture, marginalisation, attraction of city life and education – do not go away. If any kind of institutional framework continues to work on assumptions that communities remain demographically stable and present in the area, the mismatch between such governance and reality can only get more pronounced.

8. CONCLUSION: THE STAKES OF GOVERNING THE GHOSTS

The ghost villages of Himachal Pradesh are not just sociological phenomena or simple numbers in demography. They constitute the forefront of the governance problem that will play a key role in environmental management around mountains throughout the world, as the effects of climate change become more pronounced and populations react to it by migrating. The issue of what kind of environmental governance is possible if communities are moving, thereby becoming less static and less accessible as a resource, is not just a purely theoretical problem in the field. It is a concrete one that has implications for forests, biological diversity, soil conditions, hydrology, and the livelihoods of those communities regardless of where they actually are.

The current chapter introduces a theoretical construct that addresses the above problem with specificity: Demographically Weakened Commons Regimes. A DWCR does not represent a failure of governance, but rather a mismatch between governance structure and population characteristics. That mismatch leaves room for institutions to collapse and ecological problems to arise. These costs, as

highlighted throughout this research paper, include decreased monitoring abilities, weaker rule enforcement, lower collective decision-making capabilities, and a range of ecological impacts including unchecked spread of invasive species, increased wildfire and landslide hazards.

A policy analysis based on Ostrom's IAD approach explains how each of these impacts stems from demographic changes: since the action contexts within which commons management occurs - monitoring, rule enforcement, and collective choice activities - depend inherently upon the presence of a community and its members. With dispersal of the community, these action contexts evolve in such ways that are beyond the scope of the current institutions to manage.

Such policy recommendations may be difficult, yet not impossible, to implement. The development of digital participation schemes, absentee membership laws, and forest guardians' initiatives is an example of one generation of adaptive tools that can be used. At an even deeper level, what is required is a reconceptualization of the underlying premise of demographic stability that forms the bedrock of the decentralized environmental governance frameworks in India. The panchayat raj institutional framework, the Joint Forest Management framework, the Shamlat management framework - all of these were developed in a context where there were stable village communities in place. This context is rapidly changing, and therefore, the governance frameworks have to change along with it.

The mountain communities of Himachal Pradesh have traditionally been societies of movement - communities that move for seasonal migration, transhumance, for movement of merchandise through mountain passes. What is novel about the current scenario is that the displacement that is taking place now is permanent, and the communities are becoming increasingly sparse. Governance by ghosts - sustaining institutions in a landscape where abandonment has become an ongoing process - becomes one of the major governance challenges in the coming decades.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/41**APPALACHIAN CULINARY: A ROUTE TO RURAL FOOD CULTURE
THROUGH THE LENS OF BARBARA KINGSOLVER'S *ANIMAL,
VEGETABLE, MIRACLE*****R. ANNALAKSHMI**Research Scholar, Department of English
Sri Meenakshi Govt. Arts College for Women
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**Abstract**

This paper explores Appalachian culinary practices as a dynamic and vital manifestation of rural food culture, by utilizing Barbara Kingsolver's groundbreaking book *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* (2007) as its main analytical lens. With its roots in the Appalachian Mountains of southern Virginia, Kingsolver's memoir of her family's continuous year-round experiment in eating locally provides a detailed, autobiographical map of how eating habits imprint community memory, ecological ethics, and cultural identity. Focusing on food studies research, cultural geography, and environmental humanities, this study puts forward a point that Appalachian culinary traditions are living systems of knowledge that negotiate the conflicts between agrarian tradition and contemporary capitalist food globalization, not glorified artifacts or outdated remains. The article highlights the importance of traditional home preservation, ancestral crop cultivation, seasonal eating, and communal food sharing as components of rural Appalachian identity. It also looks at how Kingsolver's story fits into a larger cultural discussion about slow food movements, food sovereignty, and current-day eating ethics. This study suggests that rural food culture is not peripheral but rather important to present-day discussions on sustainability, heritage, and human flourishing by defining the Appalachian kitchen as a place of political, ecological, and cultural resistance.

Keywords: Appalachian foodways, Barbara Kingsolver, agrarian tradition, Appalachian identity, food memory

Introduction: The Mountain Table as a repository of Culture

Food is never merely a means of survival. It is a set of culturally inherited gestures, seasonal rhythms, moral responsibilities, and aesthetic pleasures that communities adhere to identify themselves in space, time, and relationships. It is one of the defining elements of a particular culture. This is especially true in the Appalachian Mountains. It is a region where the underlying culinary customs represent one of the greatest and rarely studied traditions of rural American life. Appalachian cuisine encodes a whole civilization's relationship with the soil, from the smoke-

cured hams hanging in century-old springhouses to the ramps that push through frozen riverbeds every April.

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life by Barbara Kingsolver (2007) is more than just a food memoir; at its most ambitious. It is a philosophical argument in support of the human right to know the roots of food, how it is grown, and the costs associated with placing it on the table in terms of ethics, economics, and the environment. Kingsolver wasn't merely looking for a pastoral getaway after she and her family moved from Tucson, Arizona, to their farm in southwestern Virginia, nestled in the heart of the southern Appalachian Mountains. She was integrating her family into a particular food geography that was defined by seasonal climates, mountain soils, and communities with centuries-old ties to food production.

Kingsolver's year-long Appalachian food experiment serves as the organizational case study for this paper, which places it within a larger multidisciplinary discourse. Appalachian studies, cultural geography, environmental humanities, and food studies all hold the opinion that a community's eating habits disclose the most fundamental social structures. As PsycheWilliams-Forson argues, "Food is about culture, it is about history, and it is about power" (Williams-Forson 3).

In the Appalachian context, this power has always had two sides: the dominant culture's marginalization and misrepresentation of mountain food culture on the one hand, and the strength of independent living and agricultural skills on the other. The essay is organized into five sections. The first illustrates how Appalachian cuisine has evolved throughout time. The second examines Kingsolver's story as an act of ecological reorientation and culinary rediscovery. The third looks at particular Appalachian food practices that are present in both Kingsolver and more general food study, including indigenous cultivation, preservation, foraging, and communal food exchange. The fourth places Appalachian cuisine in the context of current discussions about sustainable food, food sovereignty, and consumption politics. The last section considers the Appalachian kitchen as a site of resistance and cultural memory.

Appalachian Food Culture's Historical Contours

The ecosystem of the central and southern Appalachian Mountains contributed to Indigenous, Scots-Irish, African, and English culinary traditions throughout centuries, resulting in the emergence of Appalachian foodways. Scots-Irish immigrants brought along a tradition of preserved meats, whiskey making, and flatbread; the Cherokee and other Native peoples of the area contributed fundamental knowledge of wild plants, forest mast crops, and fish; and African-descended communities, whether enslaved or free, contributed the revolutionary culinary genius that scholars like Michael Twitty have started to recover in detail (Twitty 47–62). The end product was a cuisine that was indeed fresh, thoroughly local, and both innovative and traditional.

According to historian Ronni Lundy, one of the leading chroniclers of Appalachian cuisine, the mountain table was shaped by what the land might yield in any given season: “corn in its many transformations—gritted, dried, ground, fermented—beans and greens cultivated in creek-bottom gardens, wild game and foraged plants, cured pork from the autumn hog-killing, and the orchard fruits that mountaineers dried, preserved, and fermented with remarkable ingenuity” (Lundy 18). Outsiders often misinterpret this as low-quality food, but it was not. It was an extremely sophisticated process of adaptation, a food ecosystem where waste was almost unthinkable because every component of each harvest had a specific purpose.

Appalachia was notably severely hit by the industrialization of American food during the 20th century. The food knowledge that had supported mountain communities for generations started to disintegrate when coal and timber extraction changed the region's economy and replaced subsistence farming with financial dependency. Sidney Mintz's broader statement that industrialization changed food from a "produced" to a "purchased" commodity is especially relevant to Appalachia: Local food systems' decline is inextricably linked to the breakdown of local economies and living forms (Mintz 213). These days, the fast-food chain that passes through each regional seat in Appalachia is more than just a culinary challenge; it is a sign of a deeper cultural oppression.

However, Appalachian cuisine has not just succumbed to the challenges of modernity. In the region as a whole, local fairs continue to honour the crafts of baking and preservation, gardeners keep saving seed, grandparents continue to display hundreds of jars every summer, and wild ramp gatherings continue to take place every spring. In the Appalachian context, where traditional foodways serve as silent but tenacious forms of cultural resistance, Warren Belasco's concept of "counter-cuisine"—a term he uses to describe food practices that consciously resist the mainstream food system—finds a remarkably appropriate application (Belasco 17).

When Barbara Kingsolver relocated her family to their agricultural farm in southwest Virginia, she entered this dynamic, contentious, and resilient food culture. It is possible to interpret Kingsolver's work as an attempt to connect with the food memory of the land she was caring for, to become a participant in the Appalachian foodscape rather than a visitor. The land had a long tradition of cultivation and harvest, of seasonal rhythms and ecological boundaries.

Kingsolver's Appalachian Turn: Storytelling, Environment, and Eating Ethics

In the beginning of *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, Kingsolver's family leaves Tucson, Arizona, a town which imports almost all of its food, and arrives at the Virginia farm that has been in the family's possession for many generations. From the beginning, the decision to eat only what could be farmed on their farm or

bought from nearby farms is characterized as ethical and ecological. According to Kingsolver:

We wanted to live in a place that could feed us: where the rainfall and the soils and the temperature ranges would support not just ornamental gardens but genuine crops that we'd grow for sustenance. We were tired of buying food produced from petroleum and shipped from elsewhere, and we wanted to be people who knew where their food came from (*Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* 6–7)

The passage is quite straightforward. In the rhythms of personal narrative, it conveys a critique of the industrial food system, a dedication to sustainable localism, and an almost anthropological interest in the methods of rural food production. In addition to expressing an opinion, Kingsolver is putting forth a theory of food citizenship that the remaining part of the book works to develop.

In a similar vein, Michael Pollan claims in *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, which was published a year prior to Kingsolver's memoir, that the question "What should we have for dinner? One of the most important questions that contemporary people must answer is: The way we eat reflects our deepest connection to the natural world. (Pollan 10). In the most literal sense, Kingsolver's response to this question is Appalachian: the family's diet is determined by the farm, the community, the seasonal calendar, and the mountain ecosystem. She implicitly supports the regional culinary expertise that has supported Appalachian villages for centuries by connecting herself with this region.

In *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, the farm serves as both a source of food and a place of learning for Kingsolver, her husband Steven Hopp, and their daughters. Lily and Camille either learn or retrieve the useful information that industrial food systems have destroyed. The farm provides a clear Appalachian role in education. The techniques that Appalachian food culture has maintained and passed down through the generations include growing heirloom tomato plants, butchering chickens, preserving green beans, and making cheddar cheese from raw milk, as described by Kingsolver.

Elaine Lawless, a food scholar, contends that preparing food at home is "a form of vernacular expertise—practical, embodied, and transmitted through demonstration and repetition rather than text" (Lawless 22) in her article concerning women's food knowledge in rural communities. Kingsolver's memoir incorporates just this type of information. She is recording vernacular knowledge that is in danger of being lost when she talks about the pleasing physics sensation of pressing a mason jar lid and hearing the vacuum seal "pop," or the particular sensory knowledge needed to determine when a wheel of cheese is ready to press. The inclusion of Camille's recipes at the conclusion of each chapter and Hopp's statistics sidebars on energy use, calorie mileage, and agriculture policies enhance the book's informative element. The book's multi-vocal structure highlights the cooperative, communal character of Appalachian food culture, where culinary

knowledge has always been created and passed down by households and communities collaborating across generations rather than by single experts.

Appalachian Food Practices: Heirlooms, Preservation, Foraging, and Community

Kingsolver's recurring focus on heirloom vegetables, particularly the significance of preserving seeds as a practice of cultural and ecological memory, is one of *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*'s most striking themes. The Mortgage Lifter tomato, Turkey Crow bean, and Moon and Stars watermelon—varieties produced or conserved by Appalachian gardeners over decades or even centuries—are the subject of lengthy passages in Kingsolver. She composes:

Seed saving is an act of defiance against a food system that would prefer we remain dependent on corporate suppliers. It is also an act of love—for the particular flavor of a particular tomato, for the grandmother who saved this seed before you, for the land that has been growing this plant for generations (*Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* 52)

This is not only sentimental. Crop diversification is a crucial ecological protection against disease, climate change, and monoculture failure. A tale about the Irish potato's near-extinction Kingsolver draws attention to the consequences of sacrificing genetic diversity in the name of agricultural productivity. In Appalachia, home gardeners and seed-saving groups like Seed Savers Exchange (founded by Diane Ott Whealy, who is cited favorably in Kingsolver's text) have been preserving heirloom seeds for generations. This practice is an example of ecological intelligence that the industrial food chain continuously undervalues.

In the southern Appalachians, corn, beans, and squash have been grown for more than a millennium. The Cherokee tribe of North Carolina has continuously practiced sophisticated seed conservation. According to academic Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Traditional ecological knowledge holds within it a reciprocal relationship with the land—not ownership but membership in a community of life" (Kimmerer 201). This reciprocal ethic is echoed in the heirloom seed techniques that Kingsolver records in her Appalachian landscape, connecting the kitchen garden to a more comprehensive ecological responsibility concept.

If the garden is Appalachian food culture's primary narrative, the storehouse, filled with endless rows of preserved fruits, vegetables, pickles, and preserves, is Appalachian food culture's archive. Since the community's settlement, domestic preservation techniques like canning, fermentation, drying, and curing have been essential to Appalachian cuisine culture. The need to preserve a summer's abundance through winter's shortage gave rise to this technique, which has evolved over the years into an artistic endeavor and a source of great cultural esteem.

Kingsolver writes of her family's canning season with a persistent enthusiasm which resembles a ceremony of worship:

By August we were deep in the canning life, living according to a different kind of clock—not the clock on the wall but the clock of the garden, the clock of ripeness. The tomatoes came first, then the peppers, then the corn, then the beans, each wave demanding our full attention for a few frantic days before the next one broke. We worked together in the kitchen, sweating and laughing and sometimes swearing, and at the end of each session the shelves grew a little heavier, the winter a little less frightening (*Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* 147).

As stated by food anthropologist Mary Douglas, the ‘structured, ordered’ nature of food practice—the way food preparation encodes social relationships and temporal order (Douglas 83) is aptly captured in this passage. According to Kingsolver's depiction, the canning kitchen is both a social and a culinary environment where bonds are forged and reinforced through the collective task of seasonal preservation.

Folklorist Lucy Long has written in depth about the cultural relevance of home-based preservation in Appalachia, arguing that “food preservation practices function as embodied archives—ways of storing not just food but memory, identity, and relationship” (Long 156). The jars on a rack are more than just calories; they are a reminder of the summer that is over and a hope that the winter will be tolerable. This figurative aspect of the pantry is significant in an area where food insecurity has historically presented a serious concern.

The wild untamed abundance of the mountain forest and Appalachian cuisine have always been closely linked. Since Indigenous times, ramps (*Allium tricoccum*), the fragrant wild plant that is the unofficial symbol of Appalachian Spring, have been essential to mountain foodways.

These forest foods, such as pawpaws, persimmons, elderberries, serviceberries, black walnuts, and hickory nuts, are more than just supplemental; they are manifestations of a deep ecological understanding that industrialization has gradually destroyed

The longevity of this indigenous food knowledge in her Virginia neighbourhood is celebrated in Kingsolver's memoir. She talks about neighbours who can recognize an edible plant at a distance of forty feet, who know precisely where the morel mushrooms will come out each spring. They have recipes for items that are never found in any cookbook written for a national market. She believes that this foraging expertise is refined rather than primitive. It is a result of generations of people observing with careful consideration to a specific region.

One of America's leading experts on foraging, Samuel Thayer, proposes that understanding wild foods is “an intimate cartography of place—a way of reading the landscape that is inseparable from belonging to it” (Thayer 11). The ramp hollow, pawpaw patch, and mushroom log are landmarks on an unseen map that only those with a strong local connection can interpret. This geographical aspect of foraging knowledge is distinctly Appalachian. Kingsolver describes an

ecological, social, and spiritual process of cultural integration into Appalachian food knowledge when she talks about her family's increasing mastery in this regional horticultural language.

Kingsolver's description of the local food exchanges around her family's farming life is perhaps the most remarkable Appalachian aspect of her food year. When neighbors come up with extra zucchini, the family offers goat cheese in return. A weekly event for the sharing of culinary skills, seedling supplies, and local information, the farmers' market is more than just a business transaction. The community as a whole contributes to the Thanksgiving feast, which is a symbol of communal prosperity.

One of the distinctive features of traditional Appalachian community life is the gift exchange of food. According to David Sutton's ethnography of food and memory, "food gifts are among the most powerful social currencies—they communicate care, reciprocity, and shared belonging in ways that money never can" (Sutton 42). In the Appalachian tradition, this food gift economy has conventionally functioned as a system of mutual aid in areas with limited financial resources and insufficient commercial infrastructure.

Kingsolver uses bluntly political language to describe one aspect of her food year. She makes the case that a community's food system and social fabric are inextricably linked, citing Wendell Berry's work: No amount of consumer choice can replace a culture's essential ability to create, share, and celebrate its own food (*Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* 122). This is essentially a community-scale application of the principle of food sovereignty, which holds that true democratic self-governance requires the freedom to choose one's own food system.

Appalachian Foodways and Contemporary Food Politics

One of the key principles in modern food politics is the idea of food sovereignty, which is the authority of peoples to establish their own food systems in accordance with their cultural standards and natural conditions. Food sovereignty as a theory, which was first developed in the 1990s by the international peasant movement La Via Campesina, has been applied more and more to rural communities in the United States, including Appalachian communities that are dealing with multiple challenges of cultural displacement, food desertification, and agricultural consolidation (Patel 69).

A possible perspective to comprehend *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* is as a detailed discourse on food sovereignty in the home and community. In addition to withdrawing from the industrial food system, Kingsolver's continuous year-long experiment with local eating asserts the family's right to control the parameters of their own cultural and nutritional existence. She speaks of a personal experience of food sovereignty—the fulfilment of self-determination in the area of eating—when she writes of the "profound, unnerving pleasure of knowing exactly where your food comes from, of being able to trace every ingredient in your dinner to a specific field and farmer." (*Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* 19).

This claim of food sovereignty has unique historical significance for Appalachian communities. The region's past history with resource extraction—coal, timber, and water—offers a painful backdrop for comprehending what it actually means to lose authority over one's own means of survival. Particularly applicable here is Julie Guthman's contention that alternative food movements must consider race, class, and location in order to be truly liberatory: any explanation of Appalachian food sovereignty must recognize that the ability to eat locally is not equally distributed across the region's diverse communities (Guthman 265–266).

The Slow culinary movement, started by Carlo Petrini in Italy in 1989 in reaction to the opening of a McDonald's close to Rome's Spanish Steps. This has found extraordinary resonance in Appalachia, an area whose culinary culture was practicing slow food in significant ways long before the phrase was invented. The three tenets of the Slow Food movement—good (sensory pleasure), clean (ecological sustainability), and fair (social justice)—align strongly with the ideals that have traditionally shaped Appalachian food culture (Petrini 91).

Amid various other things, Kingsolver's book is a manifesto for slow food. Its emphasis on local sourcing, seasonal eating, and the joys of cooking from scratch is exactly in line with Slow Food's philosophical tenets. The first asparagus of spring is described by Kingsolver as “thin green spears pushing through cold mud, tasting of nothing but themselves and the earth they emerged from” (*Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* 72). This is precisely the kind of sensory focus that Slow Food promotes as a method of ecological and cultural education.

There is greater depth to the relationship between Appalachian foodways and Slow Food than just theory. Many Appalachian goods, such as the Candy Roaster squash, the Old Timey Blue pea, and the Greasy Cutshort bean, are included in Slow Food USA's Ark of Taste, a database of vulnerable food products, which includes traditional varieties, breeds, and home-made dishes. These are living elements of a cuisine culture that is still produced, consumed, and celebrated throughout the region; they are not artifacts from museums.

For rural Appalachian communities, the local food movement—generally defined as the endeavour to relocalize food systems by reducing supply chains and reestablishing linkages between producers and consumers—has been especially important. Over the past 20 years, Appalachian states have seen tremendous growth in farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs, farm-to-school initiatives, and community food hubs. These measures offer small farmers both a business chance and a means of reclaiming cultural food.

With remarkable clarity, Kingsolver's description of her family's involvement in the regional agricultural economy of their Virginia town demonstrates both the economic and social facets of this movement. The farmers' market she portrays is more than just a place to buy veggies. It is a community institution that serves a variety of social purposes, such as fostering relationships between producers and consumers, sharing culinary knowledge, celebrating local and seasonal diversity,

and creating economic value that stays in the community rather than being taken advantage of by multinational companies.

The Appalachian Kitchen as Space of Memory and Resistance

Certain cuisines serve as effective anchors of local identity for the millions of Appalachians who moved away from the mountains for industrial towns during the 20th century. The Flavors of cornbread made on a cast-iron pan, shucky beans, sourwood honey, and stack cake convey an entire region and establish a sense of social connections. Kingsolver has a thorough understanding of this aspect of food culture. Her descriptions of meals are never just sensual; they are always about belonging, about the web of links that food both reflects and creates across familial connections, neighbours, land, and season.

She writes poignantly about how something more significant than hunger is triggered by the tastes of their first Appalachian harvest:

“There is a flavour in food grown close to home, eaten in season, shared with people you love, that no amount of industrial engineering can reproduce. It is the flavour of a particular place and time—a taste, literally, of where you belong” (*Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* 203).

This is not nostalgia; rather, it is what Pierre Nora would refer to as a “lieu de mémoire,” or a location of memory, but it is carried in the body's sensory experience of food rather than being physically fixed (Nora 7). According to this interpretation, the Appalachian kitchen is more than just a place to cook; it is also a place where cultural memory is preserved, passed down, and revitalized.

The gender dynamics of domestic food production must be considered in any description of Appalachian food culture. Women have long worked in canning kitchens, gardens, and smokehouses, and the food knowledge they encode has frequently been undervalued. Women were obscured by a culture that defines valuable employment as work that takes place outside the home. The devaluation of domestic food work is both a symptom and a cause of women's broader social marginalization, according to strong arguments made by feminist food academics (Allen and Sachs 23).

This gender politics is addressed in Kingsolver's narrative with tremendous transparency. She is clear about the food labour she talks about—growing, canning, cooking, and preserving. It is actual, skilled labour that requires constant focus and practical intelligence. Her choice to include her girls in this project and to proudly describe their increasing proficiency is an implied defence of the cultural and educational benefits of domestic food production. The book expresses its feminist point by example instead of argumentation when Camille's recipes, written with the assurance of a young woman who knows her way around a kitchen and a garden, are presented at the end of each chapter.

The analytical and policy assessments which Steven Hopp wrote in addition to the book supports Kingsolver's narrative. These assessments are an example of gender performance within itself, with the male voice of facts and reason balancing the

feminine voice of experience and connection. The book emphasizes seriously the entire range of knowledge and effort required to support a local food system.

The term 'resistance' has particular relevance in the context of Appalachian studies. Subtle and apparent forms of cultural self-defence have emerged in a place that has been purposefully exploited—its resources utilized, its people dismissed, and its culture disregarded. Among these protections, food culture is one of the strongest. As bell hooks describes her own Kentucky

Appalachian heritage: "Eating together, sharing food was the ritual that expressed our belonging to one another—and no amount of poverty or condescension from outsiders could take that away from us" (hooks 36).

In this perspective, Kingsolver's Appalachian food experiment can be interpreted as a way of cultural kinship—a choice to honour, appreciate, and embrace the culinary traditions and understanding of a region that has been long disregarded by the dominant culture. She is contributing to the continuous effort of Appalachian cultural affirmation when she puts emphasis on the quality and complexity of the products that her farm and community produce. She asserts that the asparagus, tomato, and hand-pressed cheese have better examples of what food can be instead of lower-quality replacements for what grocery stores provide.

Wendell Berry has written for decades about the connection between food, land, and community in rural Kentucky. Berry's impact on Kingsolver is clear and acknowledged. The intellectual foundation for Kingsolver's narrative is provided by his claim that "eating is an agricultural act"—that each food decision links the consumer to a particular set of ecological and social relationships (Berry 145). This argument has greater importance in the Appalachian context since eating locally, selecting heirloom varieties, and taking part in community food exchanges reinforce the worth and sustainability of Appalachian life in opposition to cultural pressures which have always ignored both.

Conclusion: The Mountain Table in the Twenty-First Century

In the early 21st century, Appalachian cuisine was at an important juncture. The constant challenges of food globalization, agricultural integration, local emigration, and the gradual loss of the food expertise that has supported mountain villages for generations are all on one side. On the other hand, there is a significant revival of interest in regional food systems, heritage agricultural practices, traditional artisanal food production, and the ecological and cultural qualities that Appalachian food customs have historically represented.

This sociocultural moment has been greatly influenced by Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*. She has created a story that is both an attack of the industrial food system and a celebration of the significance and potential of local food culture. This is carried out by situating her family's culinary experiment in the unique ecosystem and community of southwestern Virginia. By firmly establishing this affirmation in the Appalachian landscape, she has contributed to the increasing awareness of the mountain food traditions. Therefore, stating that

the dominant culture dismisses or disregards the old food culture as marginal or backward are actually highly specialized, environmentally wise, and culturally profound systems of knowledge from which the rest of the world can learn a great deal.

Ronni Lundy, Sidney Saylor Farr, Michael Twitty, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Wendell Berry, and other academics and practitioners of Appalachian foodways have been arguing this point for decades in various contexts. The capability of personal narrative is what Kingsolver's book offers: an account of a family that made the decision to live by these principles and discovered a more fulfilling, bonded, and fuller way of life compared to what the industrial food system had provided.

Consequently, this article has demonstrated, the Appalachian kitchen is at the centre of American culinary culture's primary discussions instead of being a secondary aspect. The mountain foodways that Kingsolver records and honours are especially vivid examples of issues related to food sovereignty, sustainable development, resilience among communities, cultural preservation, and the moral implications of consuming food in a globalized society. Appalachian food culture grows not as a treasure of the past but as a living tradition with immediate importance in relation to the food politics of the present day as the local food movement grows, seed saving, fermentation, and household preservation techniques restore cultural esteem, and traditional slow-food principles gain widespread recognition.

In the vicinity of its greatest, the mountain table has consistently been a haven of abundance, wonder, and togetherness. We restore not only a set of culinary techniques but also a set of values when we return to it—through memoir, traditional education, and the hard work of cultivating, preserving, and exchanging food. These values include the importance of being aware of where your food comes from, taking care of the soil that produces it, and distributing it generously with those around you. Appalachian values are these. Kingsolver believes that they are also human.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/42**DISPLACEMENT, MEMORY AND IDENTITY: READING INDIAN
INDENTURED LABOURERS JOURNEY THROUGH ‘THE
INDENTURED AND THEIR ROUTE: A RELENTLESS QUEST FOR
IDENTITY’****APOORVA SINGEGOL**Research Scholar, Centre for African Studies
School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi**Abstract**

The passage of the Slavery Abolition Act, 1833 by the British House of Commons marked a formal end to slavery. However, historical evidence suggests that it simultaneously paved the way for a reconstituted system of exploitation, namely the indentured labour system. Under this system, labourers entered into contractual agreements with the colonial state and were transported to distant colonies with the promise of economic opportunity. These promises, however, often devolved into conditions of hardship and coercion, particularly following the arduous crossing of the ‘Kalapani’. This article primarily engages with *The Indentured and Their Route: A Relentless Quest for Identity* by Ambassador Bhaswati Mukherjee, supplemented by relevant secondary literature like various articles and reports. Employing a qualitative methodology and textual analysis, the study interrogates key themes, including trauma and displacement, the challenges of preserving homeland memories, and the dynamics of change and continuity in the identities of Indian indentured labourers. It also theorises the above themes to frame the concept of ‘Kalapani Consciousness’, which denotes an awareness that the indentured diaspora has developed regarding their identity. It further draws upon diasporic and identity frameworks, engaging with concepts such as ‘Kalapani’, ‘Jahaji-Bhai’, and ‘Coolitude’ to deepen the analysis. The article uses Mukherjee’s argument that the routes of indenture, which underpinned a new regime of labour exploitation, are as historically significant as the Transatlantic Slave Trade. While the latter has received extensive scholarly attention and global recognition, the experiences and trajectories of Indian indentured labourers remain comparatively underexplored. By examining these neglected histories, the study underscores the need to critically document and analyse the journeys and lived realities of Indian labourers in unfamiliar colonial settings. In doing so, it positions Mukherjee’s work as an important contribution toward recovering and understanding the complex history of Indian indenture.

Keywords: Indentured, Indian, Kalapani, Identity, Displacement, Memory

Introduction

The book 'The Indentured and their Route: A Relentless Quest for Identity' is written by Ambassador Bhaswati Mukherjee, a distinguished Indian diplomat writes the story of the indentured labourers whom she calls India's lost children. It is a well-researched book and an important contribution to the literature that throws light on the untold stories and aspects and gives voice to the muted stories in the past.

The slavery system which the colonial masters had practiced was erased from the collective memories of people, until UNESCO and the African states reminded the world of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Route (Mukherjee xiii). On 25 March 2026, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution recognising the transatlantic slave trade as the "gravest crime against humanity." Proposed by Ghana, it was adopted with 123 votes, while the United Kingdom and several European nations abstained, and the United States, Israel, and Argentina voted against it. (The New Indian Express). The declaration emphasized that the legacies of slavery continue to shape present-day inequality and racism. It also marked an important step towards reclaiming forgotten histories of enslavement, displacement, and colonial exploitation.

The time has come for India to foreground the narratives of indenture and once again remind the world of the forgotten histories of earlier generations who were drawn into the brutal indenture system under the false promise of a better livelihood. Their experiences of displacement, memory, and identity remain deeply significant even today. As quoted in the book, Nobel Laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel wrote in *Night*: "An executioner always kills twice; first, with his sword, then through forgetting" (Mukherjee xiii). This sentiment equally reflects the neglected history of the indentured Indian community.

Emergence of Indenture System

The Industrial Revolution led to large-scale investments in plantation crops such as tea, coffee, sugar, and rubber across British colonies. Following the passage of the Slavery Abolition Act 1833, which came into force on 1 August 1834, more than 800,000 enslaved Africans in British colonies were legally freed. However, the Act introduced an apprenticeship system that compelled former slaves to continue working for their masters until 1838. The abolition of slavery also created a growing demand for cheap and unskilled labour on colonial plantations (Chauhan).

Initially, the British attempted to recruit labourers from African and Chinese populations to meet the growing demand for plantation workers, but these efforts proved unsuccessful. Their focus then shifted to India, which was viewed as a source of cheap labour. At the time, many Indians, particularly in the northern regions, were already facing droughts and severe socio-economic hardships. (Mahalingam 51-52). It became an opportunity for the Britishers to lure people,

no doubt many were fraudulently enticed into the recruiters' nets as well, promised milk and honey in the colonies. Trickery certainly was part and parcel of the trade (Lal 2-3). This particular recruitment was done through a new system called, 'Indenture System'.

Indenture System was a contractual labour agreement signed by the individuals agreeing to work for a specified period of time, usually three or five years, for an employer and 'who had not paid his or her passage' (Carter 39). Indentured labourers signed contracts promising fixed wages, food rations, and medical aid in exchange for plantation work. The indenture system, which began formally in 1834 and continued until its abolition in 1917, became a global colonial labour migration system across British, French, and Dutch colonies. Most Indian labourers came from impoverished regions of northern India, particularly Bihar and present-day Uttar Pradesh, while others were recruited from the Madras Presidency in the south and sent to colonies such as Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Burma, and Natal.

The first batch of Indian indentured labourers came to Mauritius in 1842. Later it was expanded to other countries: British Guiana (1838), Malaya (1844), Trinidad (1845), Jamaica (1845/44), Grenada (1856), St. Lucia (1858/1856), Natal (1860), St. Kitts (1860), St. Vincents (1860), Reunion (1861), Surinam (1873), Fiji (1879), Burma (1885), East Africa (1896), Canada (1904), Seychelles (1904) and Thailand (1910) (Mahalingam 52) (Vahed 27).

It is estimated that by the end of indentured labour migration, over one million Indians had been displaced across the world, leading to the expansion of the Indian diaspora globally. In academic discourse, these communities are often referred to as the "Old Diaspora." Today, the fourth and fifth generations of these diasporic communities are reconnecting with India and increasingly serve as important strategic and soft power assets in India's foreign policy and global presence.

Conceptualisation of Term 'Kalapani Consciousness': A Multilayered Awareness

The sea journey undertaken by indentured labourers was long, painful, and deeply traumatic, often taking nearly six months to reach distant Caribbean colonies. Along with harsh geographical conditions, migrants also endured inhumane treatment by ship captains, with little possibility of escape. This suffering led them to describe the voyage as the "crossing of the kalapani." In the diasporic context, *Kalapani* (Black Waters) referred to the forbidden sea route between India and the Americas through which indentured labourers were transported to work in sugar plantations, distinct from its association with the Cellular Jail in Port Blair (Bhardwaj and Misrahi-Barak 1).

Carter and Torabully write 'It was not uncommon, in the early years of indenture, for migrants to hurl themselves off the ship while still in the Hugli River, and cases of men lost overboard feature regularly in the ship logs (Carter and Torabully 39).

Vijay Mishra argues that the *Kalapani* has myriad connotations, encompassing a sense of separation, alienation and transgression as well as a sense of freedom, choice and collapsing caste differences. So ‘*Kalapani*’ should be considered more than just a voyage. Suparna Sengupta furthers *kalapani* studies by exploring the genealogy of the term from the ancient ideas to the colonial era constructions. She argues that the fear surrounding *kalapani* was intensified and strategically reinforced through colonial penal policies, where exile across the seas became a form of punishment and terror. Thus, *kalapani* emerged not only as a space of exile, trauma, alienation, and unbelonging, but also as a site of surveillance, transformation, and the formation of new identities.

“Kalapani Consciousness,” as conceptualised by the author, refers to a layered form of awareness that developed among the Indian indentured diaspora. It is shaped by three interrelated aspects: first, the trauma of displacement caused by indenture migration during the colonial period; second, the memories of the homeland preserved through traditions, customs, and cultural practices in distant lands; and third, an awareness of identity rooted in a sense of belonging to India and the feeling of “Indianness.” Together, these experiences create a consciousness that reflects the enduring legacy of indenture, the persistence of displacement trauma, and the continued connection of the diaspora to their Indian roots.

The three aspects of the Kalapani Consciousness are discussed below:

Displacement Trauma in Migration

Recent studies on the mental health of descendants of Indian indentured labourers in several host countries indicate a growing prevalence of mental health problems, including suicide, which has revived intergenerational memories and trauma linked to the indenture system. A review study on the mental health discourses on the descendants of the Indian indentured labourers in Suriname reveal that poverty, unemployment, education backwardness, gender discrimination and lack of proper mental health care were found to be the major causes of mental health issues (D and Kottai).

The Mauritian poet and cultural theorist Khal Toravully attempts to re-humanise the reading of the coolie by turning the lived experiences of the coolie into a transformative category: ‘*Je suis père des métamorphoses*’ (I am father of metamorphoses), he wrote in *Chair Corail, Fragments Coolies* (Coral Flesh, Coolie Fragments), one of the two foundational texts of coolitude. Toravully has argued that for the indentured the key to their collective being and the engine of their social history has to be located in the mixing that took place on the ships, in the space of the Kala Pani.

The displacement from their homeland created deep trauma among generations of Indians who are today referred to as the “old diaspora.” Many of the first indentured migrants were lured by false promises of wealth and a secure livelihood in distant colonies. Hoping to improve their lives and support their families, they

signed the agreements and embarked on the journey. Their trauma unfolded in multiple phases. The first was the painful separation from their families, villages, and homeland. The second emerged during the sea voyage, where migrants endured poor food, lack of sanitation, disease, and death. Witnessing fellow passengers die and their bodies being thrown into the sea created severe psychological trauma.

The suffering continued even after reaching the destination colonies. On arrival, migrants from different castes and social backgrounds began living and working together, gradually transcending traditional social divisions. This led to the creation of a new social world shaped by cultural transformation and hybridity. The shared experience of displacement and suffering gave rise to a collective *kalapani consciousness*—an awareness that they had undergone similar traumas and therefore needed to stand together.

Memories of the Homeland

William Safran defines diaspora as a community that has been historically dispersed yet continues to maintain a collective desire to return to the homeland. This understanding closely reflects the experiences of Indian indentured labourers, who left India with the hope of eventually returning home after earning a better livelihood. Their emotional attachment to the homeland remained strong, leading them to preserve memories of their families, villages, languages, customs, and cultural practices even in distant colonial lands.

Unlike enslaved Africans in the Black Atlantic experience, many indentured labourers carried with them sacred and cultural texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, Tulsidas' *Ramayana*, and the *Quran*. As noted by Carter and Torabully, the Coolie Museum in Mauritius houses a handwritten copy of the *Quran*, symbolising the effort to preserve cultural and spiritual identity across displacement. These were not merely material possessions, but carriers of memory, belonging, and continuity with the homeland.

Within the framework of “Kalapani Consciousness,” memory becomes a central element in shaping diasporic identity. The trauma of displacement was accompanied by a conscious effort to keep alive the memories of the homeland through religion, festivals, food, language, and everyday cultural practices. This preservation of memory created a collective awareness among indentured communities of their shared roots and experiences. Over generations, it contributed to the formation of “Little Indias” across different parts of the world, where descendants continued to negotiate their identity through remembrance, cultural continuity, and a lasting connection to India.

Identity Creation

The third aspect is of identity, the one created by the indentured labourers in the host land where later they settled down. As Stuart Hall rightly defined that the experience is one that is characterized ‘not by essence and purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of

‘identity; that lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. Therefore, Identity in diaspora is not seen, therefore as static or fixed but rather as ‘subject to the continuous play of history, culture and power’ (Hall 396).

‘Coolitude’, as given by Torabully, is presented as a non-essentialist, malleable, mosaic mode of identity construction because it signified the ‘new’ condition of being human (Mishra 25).

‘Jahaji Bhai’ and ‘Jahaji Behen’ words literally translating into ‘Ship Brother’ and ‘Ship Sister’ represented a shared experience of displacement, resilience and also forging of new structures in foreign lands. These terms highlighted the solidarity and support among the migrants who had to be together in the foreign lands and face the new struggles together (Jaidka et al. 228).

Through these understandings of diasporic identity, it can be argued that the experience of crossing the *kalapani*, enduring the traumatic sea voyage, and settling in foreign colonies created a shared sense of solidarity among indentured migrants. Bound together by displacement and suffering, the migrants gradually formed collective communities in the host societies. Although they adapted to elements of the local culture, they simultaneously sought to preserve their own traditions, values, and cultural practices carried from India, thereby sustaining a sense of “Indianness.”

Within the framework of *Kalapani Consciousness*, the preservation of rituals, festivals, religious traditions, languages, and community celebrations became important means of retaining memories of the homeland and asserting diasporic identity. At the same time, interaction with local customs produced new forms of cultural adaptation and hybridity, shaping an evolving diasporic consciousness rooted in both memory and transformation.

Thus, *Kalapani Consciousness* can be understood as a layered awareness emerging from the experiences of indenture-based diasporic communities. It is fundamentally shaped by three interconnected pillars: the trauma of displacement, the preservation of memory, and the formation of identity. These dimensions collectively reflect the continuing legacy of indenture and the enduring connection of the diaspora to their Indian roots. These themes are explored in Bhaswati Mukherjee’s *The Indentured and their Route: A Relentless Quest for Identity*, which presents a detailed analysis of the indentured journey and its long-term cultural and psychological impact.

Textual Engagement with Mukherjee

The text begins by drawing attention to the collective amnesia surrounding the history of indenture, particularly when compared to the wider recognition of the transatlantic slave trade. Bhaswati Mukherjee provides a detailed account of the socio-economic conditions in colonial India, highlighting exploitative land revenue systems, recurring droughts, and the crises that pushed many Indians into

vulnerability. She further explains that before the so-called “Great Experiment” of recruiting Indian indentured labourers began, the British had unsuccessfully attempted to employ White European labourers for plantation work. Eventually, nearly two million Indians left their homes and migrated to British plantation colonies under the indenture system. The thumbprints on the *girmits* (agreements) led to loss of their freedom and in some cases forever.

Start of Journeys: Agreements, Ships, Routes, Crossings

Bhaswati Mukherjee discusses documented evidence showing that many *Girmityas* became victims of deception, coercion, and even kidnapping by labour recruiters. Under the Immigration Ordinance of October 1881, recruiters were officially licensed to recruit emigrants on behalf of emigration agents. These recruiters employed sub-agents known as *Arkantias*, who travelled to villages and towns to enlist mainly agricultural labourers, usually men. After agreements were obtained, the recruits were kept in sub-depots and later transported by train to Kolkata, from where their overseas journey began.

In 1898, the British Indian government announced that the Protector of Emigrants and depot agents in Kolkata should ensure that potential recruits were clearly informed about the terms of the contract and the realities of plantation life. However, since most *Girmityas* were illiterate or could only read local languages, many placed their thumbprints on agreements without fully understanding the conditions. In practice, several provisions of the contracts were ignored, leading to severe exploitation of labourers on the plantations.

Treatment of Trauma: Physical and Psychological

The trauma of displacement experienced by indentured labourers was both physical and psychological. The ship journey itself left deep emotional scars on the migrants, as they travelled towards unknown destinations under harsh and uncertain conditions. The voyage across the *kalapani* was marked by malnutrition, disease, skin infections, cholera, and overcrowded unsanitary conditions within the ships, leading to high mortality rates. Mukherjee describes this journey as the beginning of an odyssey across the *kalapani*—a tragic passage into exile across the turbulent Indian Ocean. As Mukherjee gives us the data of the number of emigrants who were sent to different colonies, she also gives a recorded list of causes of non-embarkation of intending emigrants. It gives us a deeper understanding into what happened at the Calcutta port. Mukherjee refers to several reports and inquiries conducted by the British themselves that revealed the alarming mortality rates aboard indenture ships. One such inquiry by Frederic John Mouat identified the major causes of death as poor sanitary conditions on board, contaminated water taken from the Hooghly River, sudden changes in the labourers’ diet, and the negligence and inexperience of medical officers. The famous poet of Luknow, Shikohabadi wrote: ‘The prisoners’ evil fate made the water black (*kalapani*)... In the darkness of the evening of exile, they were granted the kohl of Solomon’ (Mukherjee 61). The pain of facing diseases, deaths of fellow

passengers and the arrogant racist treatment became the collective traumatic memories of crossing the *Kalapani* for those who survived.

A major source of trauma for indentured labourers emerged after reaching their destinations, where they were subjected to harsh quarantine measures due to outbreaks of diseases such as cholera on the ships. Mukherjee presents disturbing accounts from places such as Fiji, Réunion, and Suriname, where strict and often brutal quarantine regulations were enforced. In Fiji, armed guards were reportedly instructed to shoot anyone attempting to escape quarantine camps.

The experiences in Réunion were particularly horrifying. Mukherjee notes that the French colonial system viewed child labour as profitable, leading to cases where minors were kidnapped and trafficked onto ships. She recounts the tragic story of the ship *L'Auguste*, which sailed from Puducherry to French colonies, where cholera-stricken passengers were allegedly thrown overboard while still alive, and women faced sexual violence and murder during the voyage. Those who survived were labelled as “Calcuttas” or “Bengalis” and confined to harsh quarantine centres at Grand Chaloupe Bay. The French colonial authorities commonly referred to indentured labourers as *engagés*.

Mukherjee argues that the *engagés* lived an abnormal and alienated existence in unfamiliar lands. The overwhelmingly male labour population affected the psychological well-being and social behaviour of the migrants, leading to isolation, instability, and a rise in suicides. These conditions eventually compelled colonial authorities to recruit some women as domestic workers in an attempt to address the social imbalance.

Another major source of trauma for indentured labourers was the harsh treatment they endured on plantations. In Fiji, the working day typically began at 5:00 a.m. and ended at 4:00 p.m., often extending further during harvest seasons. Wages were extremely low—one shilling per day for men and nine pennies for women—and plantation owners frequently withheld payments by accusing labourers of incompetence. Such exploitation intensified the cycle of malnutrition, illness, and absenteeism among workers.

The experiences of women were even more traumatic. From the very beginning of the journey, women faced insecurity, exploitation, and violence. In some cases, they were forced into prostitution, while child marriage became increasingly common. There are also recorded instances of sexual assault against children, particularly girls. Women additionally suffered from unequal wages and discriminatory labour conditions. Although they were granted limited leave before and after childbirth, no food rations or milk were provided during this period, leading to severe malnutrition for both mothers and infants. Even breastfeeding was discouraged, as colonial authorities viewed it as reducing women's productivity on plantations.

The memories of the traumatic sea journey, the harsh plantation life, the outbreaks of cholera, and the brutal quarantine experiences described by Mukherjee continue

to haunt both the survivors of indenture and their descendants across generations. These painful experiences form an important part of *Kalapani Consciousness*, where trauma becomes a collective and inherited memory within the diasporic community. Yet, despite the scale of suffering, there exists a form of collective amnesia surrounding the history of indenture.

Memory and homeland: What is remembered and what is lost?

For many indentured labourers, the homeland gradually survived only through memory, as the promised return passage after the completion of their contracts was never fulfilled. Over time, they became permanent settlers in the colonies where they had been taken to work. Mauritius was the first British colony to receive Indian indentured labourers, and the island, referred to by migrants as “Mirchi Dwip,” became home to a large indentured population.

Within the framework of *Kalapani Consciousness*, the homeland remained a powerful source of emotional and cultural memory. Sites such as Aapravasi Ghat in Mauritius stand today as enduring symbols of the indentured experience and the migrants’ connection to their roots in India.

There are many legends cover in the oral and intangible heritage which the Indians brought with them to the island, such as the Bhojpuri language and the songs that are even today sung in Mauritius, Guyana, Suriname and all over the Caribbean. These songs recall that ‘while the days are full of work, the nights bring back memories of their mother land, India’. Bhojpuri folk culture such as saadi ke geet (wedding songs), lalna or sohar (birth songs), harparawri (invoking the rain god), janeo (wearing of sacred thread), Gopal gaari (teasing song), and jantasar (songs of griding stone), all sung by women are preserved even today in Mauritius.

Unlike Mauritius, Reunion has seen a greater erosion of culture due to the French assimilation policies and state sponsored secularism aspect followed by French. Many of the Indian origin population in Reunion can only speak French. This has cut them off from their place of origin, Mother India. The conversion from Hinduism to Catholicism was also rampant. The most important incentive was the access to free education given to the children of newly converts. In an effort to remember their past, many engages followed their Hindu rituals and customs, therefore today even though their descendants are Catholics, they continue to practice Hindu traditions and rituals. Apart from this Food has been a way to maintain their nostalgia connections. The basic Indian spices and condiments were planted.

While Reunion saw an assimilation system. In Fiji the Girmitiyas sustained the folklore and religious discourses. These included ‘Satyanaryana ki Katha’, ‘Sukh Sagar’ and verses from Bhagavad Gita. The story of Ram, his exile and return were enacted through Ramlila, and it became a source of inspiration for the lonely exiles, hoping one day they will return to their motherland.

Identity Formation

Mukerjee writes aptly how Identity, in the case of the indentured served as a saviour, a mechanism to hold on to the conflict-ridden and unsavoury present by constantly remembering the past with its language, poetry, music and religion. A sari, a dhoti, the Ramayan or a Quran became symbolic of a rapidly vanishing cultural heritage. These symbols were passed on from one generation to another to preserve the identity with which they landed.

In a context of explaining how the Europeans had insisted on assimilation of the people into their own culture which they believed to be superior, like that of France where they were successful in erasing the culture of the Indian community in reunion island at a greater extent. But such conversion attempts have failed also in some region. She mentions about how an Indian shopkeeper, Mr. Telucksing from Durban, South Africa had stated to the Wragg Commission: 'I have not suffered in my caste in any way by coming across the ocean to Natal, because I have observed all my religious ceremonies and I have done nothing to debar me from enjoying my caste privileges'.

It is also important to understand that aspects like Caste have only transformed and have not disappeared from the Indian community who went and settled outside the country. As mentioned even in the text the potential victims of the indenture system were the people coming from the tribal areas of Bihar and its hinterlands. A caste and religious breakup of the Girmitiyas who left for British Guiana on the ships of Hesperus and Whitby, revealed that 34 per cent were Dhangars or herding tribals, 8 per cent were Muslims, 5 per cent each were Rajputs and Kurmis, 4 per cent each were Bauris and Bhuiyas, and the remainder were Kshatriyas, Gowalas and Bagdis.

Indians lost a part of their identity in Reunion when the island got officially integrated into France in 1946. The French Fourth Republic, embraced the state sponsored secularism, termed laicite. The impact of this was disaster as the official records, referencing to the place of origin of the Indian indentured were all deleted. Indian nomenclature was replaced by French names. Example: Krishnan became Kitchen and Ganpathy became Canabady. Indian languages gradually became extinct, increasing the feeling of being without roots.

The descendants of indentured labourers have today transformed many former plantation colonies into vibrant and diverse postcolonial nations. As Bhaswati Mukherjee observes, they became "protagonists" of a hybrid culture, one that retained elements of India while also evolving through interaction with local societies and cultures. Over generations, this process gave rise to distinct creolised cultures visible across former plantation colonies today. As memories of the homeland gradually faded through processes of assimilation and cultural adaptation, the diaspora increasingly embraced their adopted nations as their own. Within the framework of *Kalapani Consciousness*, this reflects the transformative dimension of diasporic identity formation. While the trauma of displacement and

the memories of the homeland remained foundational, these communities also developed new collective identities shaped by hybridity, adaptation, and belonging in the host societies. Thus, *Kalapani Consciousness* is not only rooted in suffering and remembrance, but also in the creation of new cultural worlds and identities.

Today, many descendants of indenture occupy important political, social, and economic positions in their respective countries. At the same time, a large number have rediscovered and asserted their Indian roots, reaffirming cultural connections with India while continuing to negotiate their unique diasporic identities.

Conclusion

Today, the Slave Route Project has been inscribed in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register, and recent international recognition of the transatlantic slave trade as the “gravest crime against humanity” has renewed global conversations on historical injustice. In this context, it is essential to break the collective amnesia surrounding the history of indentured labour and bring these neglected stories into wider public and academic discourse. The experiences of indentured men, women, and children—marked by displacement, exploitation, violence, and suffering, must be acknowledged and remembered, giving voice to those whose histories have long remained marginalised.

The newer generations of the indentured diaspora need to develop what this paper conceptualises as *Kalapani Consciousness*, a layered awareness rooted in three interconnected dimensions. The first is the recognition of the historical trauma of displacement caused by the indenture system and the suffering associated with the *kalapani* journey. The second is the preservation of memory through oral histories, cultural practices, traditions, and the narratives passed down by ancestors across generations. The third is the awareness of identity and origin: an understanding of belonging to India while also being part of a larger global Indian diaspora, today recognised as one of the largest diasporic communities in the world.

Bhaswati Mukherjee’s *The Indentured and their Route: A Relentless Quest for Identity* powerfully traces these experiences across different plantation colonies, demonstrating that although the conditions and contexts varied from country to country, the indentured communities shared common histories of trauma, adaptation, and identity formation. The book shows how descendants of indenture continue to negotiate their Indian roots in diverse ways, shaped by local histories and cultural transformations. Ultimately, it is the intertwined experiences of displacement, memory, trauma, adaptation, and identity that have shaped the Indian indentured diaspora into what it is today.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/43**NEGOTIATING HUMANITARIANISM, SECURITISATION, AND
NATIONAL IDENTITY: ROHINGYA NARRATIVES IN INDIA AND
BANGLADESH****ASHISH KUMAR**Doctoral Research Scholar, Centre for South Asian Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India**Abstract**

When homes become graves and belonging turns into betrayal, forced migration remains the only lifeline for survival. Tragically, the Rohingyas resorted to the same in 2017 following a traumatizing history of systematic persecution, statelessness and otherization. The resulting exodus triggered what is widely regarded as the most significant refugee crisis of South Asia, second only to displacement owing to India's partition in 1947. Owing to its sheer magnitude, scale and protracted statelessness of those displaced, the crisis posed significant humanitarian and political challenges for neighboring countries, particularly Bangladesh and India. Against this backdrop, this paper analyses the political discourse vis-à-vis the refugee crisis in Bangladesh and India. Furthermore, through a qualitative analysis of political discourse, the paper examines the construction, negotiation, and instrumentalization of the refugee question within its domestic and regional political frameworks. By situating the role of political narrative in shaping state responses to the refugee crisis, the study seeks to expand the discourse on forced migration by foregrounding the political narratives that shape state responses in the South Asian context.

Keywords: Rohingya Crisis, Political Narratives, Forced Migration, Securitization, India–Bangladesh

Introduction

The South Asian region has, over the centuries, been a witness to numerous migrations and displacements. Arguably, the vast majority of these displacements and forced migrations — India's partition horror (triggered by British withdrawal), Afghans' migration to Pakistan (owing to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and its subsequent pullout in 1989), and others — have been ephemeral movements given effect predominantly by an alteration in the region's political order. Furthermore, over time, these displacements have only plateaued, as the refugees have either found a homeland in the country of their refuge or the factor triggering the displacement has ceased to exist.

The Rohingya refugee exodus, however, is contrasted vis-à-vis the above-transient migrations by its sheer perpetuity that has persisted regardless of the political tides in Myanmar. This enduring persecution and subsequent exodus of the Rohingya

have rekindled the classical debate touching upon the crucial questions concerning citizenship and statelessness in South Asia. In this context, the 2017 exodus — the biggest in the series of Rohingya exoduses — marked an inflexion point in the history of the Rohingya refugee crisis. Triggered primarily by domestic political-religious factors, the exodus altered the face of the Rohingya refugee crisis in the region. The resultant polarized political narrative, constructed far too often through a mono-chromatic security-centric framework, has framed the Rohingyas exclusively as an external threat to security and national identity.

This paper analyses the political narratives on the Rohingya refugees in India and Bangladesh. In doing so, the paper traces the anthropological profile of the Rohingyas. Furthermore, the article locates their ethno-religious position in Myanmar's political calculus to contextualize their exodus from Myanmar, often academically referred to as a "*Forgotten Crisis*" (Zaman, Anderson, and Ahmed) and a "*Slow-Burning Genocide*" (Zarni and Cowley 683).

Research Methodology

This article employs a qualitative comparative research design grounded in critical discourse analysis to examine the evolving state narratives on the Rohingya crisis in India and Bangladesh. The research, relying predominantly on primary sources — government statements, parliamentary debates, judicial pronouncements, policy documents, media reports, etc. — traces the shift in political rhetoric, discourse, and narrative in both India and Bangladesh. In doing so, the study particularly studies the post-2017 deflection in the political discourse concerning the Rohingya crisis following the military operation in Myanmar. Moreover, the article reflects upon the dominant security-centric outlook that has come to dominate the political discourse in India and Bangladesh following the 2017 mass exodus of the Rohingyas from Myanmar. Furthermore, the article highlights the instrumentality of the State-employed discursive frameworks in India and Bangladesh in the hegemonic shaping of the political discourse on the Rohingya refugees. Lastly, this interpretative study situates these political discourses, narratives and rhetorics within the broader academic discussion of national identity, regional security, citizenship and state capacity in South Asia.

Literature Review

Academic works on the Rohingya crisis can be broadly divided into two categories: ethnographic accounts of the Rohingya and policy-oriented analyses of refugee management in South Asia. Ethnographical works by Jacques P. Leider and Pamela Gutman have conducted anthropological studies of the origins of the Rohingya and traced their marginalization in Myanmar in the context of identity contestation between the Buddhist-majoritarian Bamar and the Muslim-minority Rohingyas (Leider, "History"; Gutman, *Ancient Arakan*). Aye Chan extends this anthropological examination to reflect on the emergence of a Muslim enclave in Arakan, which subsequently led to the crystallization of the Rohingya ethno-lingual identity (Chan). Building on these seminal works, anthropologists such as

Professor Nasir Uddin have offered rich ethnographic insights into the Rohingya's everyday lives, statelessness, and identity politics, and term Rohingya lives as a “sub-human life” (Uddin).

The other strand of academic work addresses the Rohingya refugee crisis and the state response in the region. In this context, Professor Ahsan Ullah discusses the historical systematic exclusion and contemporary marginalization of the Rohingya, shaped by state policies and social discrimination (Ullah 139–161). Ranabir Samaddar reflects on ad hocism in the state response to the region and highlights the absence of an institutionalized regional refugee framework in South Asia (Samaddar). Likewise, Bhupinder S. Chimni further extends this critique by situating refugee governance within broader geopolitical power relations (Chimni).

Conclusively, the existing corpus of literature highlights three critical lacunae: first, the lack of integration between ethnographic accounts of Rohingya identity formation and policy-oriented analyses of refugee governance; second, the limited engagement with regional geopolitical structures and political discourse, with insufficient attention to how dominant political narratives construct and sustain the “Rohingya crisis”; and third, the absence of a sustained theoretical framework that connects everyday lived experiences of the Rohingya with broader questions of citizenship, sovereignty, and exclusion.

Rohingyas: An Ethno-Religious Profile

The Rohingyas are an ethno-lingual Muslim minority of Myanmar, inhabiting the Rakhine (erstwhile, Arakan) province of Myanmar primarily (Leider, “The Name”). While the Rohingyas describe their ancestry and settlement in the Rakhine state as “From Time Immemorial” (Lee 13), genealogical studies of Rohingya origins trace their settlement in Arakan to migrations in the first and second millennia. Furthermore, archaeological evidence — particularly coins and inscriptions with royal names — in Sanskrit and other ancient languages such as Pali and Pyu locates the origin of the Rohingyas in close connection to the Indian Subcontinent (particularly Bengal) and Hindu religious traditions (Griffiths and École française d’Extrême-Orient 281–340). As a result of their migration from the Indian subcontinent, the Rohingyas bore racial and linguistic differences vis-à-vis the majority Bamar ethnic group, leading to the former's failure to be recognized as one of Myanmar’s acknowledged *taingyintha* — national races (Cheesman 461–483).

Moving on, Arakan’s proximity to geographical continuity with India (chiefly, Bengal) strongly influenced the region’s religious beliefs. In this context, Arakan is believed to have been influenced not by Theravada Buddhism (the state religion of Myanmar) but by the Mahayana branch of Buddhism, then popular in India (Mishra 1). Similarly, Islam in Arakan appeared soon after its introduction in Bengal (Leider, “History”). Equally important, Arakan’s location at the crossroads of many trade routes brought it into contact with several Arab sailors and Muslim

saints, who, through matrimonial ties with local women, contributed to Islam's growth as the region's dominant religion. (East Pakistan District Gazetteer 110–111)

Summatively, in light of the discussion above, it can be argued that the Rohingyas are a Bengali ethno-lingual community that settled in Arakan over the centuries from neighbouring India (predominantly Bengal) in search of fertile land and livelihood. The subsequent arrival of Islam in the region further added a religious layer to the pre-existing ethno-lingual identity. Cumulatively, the ethno-lingual identity, coupled with the religious overtone, resulted in the formation of a distinct Rohingya identity diametrically opposite to the majority Bamar national identity. Finally, as will be discussed in the following sections, the political actors (civilian and military alike) have heavily exploited the social cleavages in the ethnic composition of Myanmar to consolidate control over the reins of political power in Myanmar.

Rohingyas: A Politico-Historical View

- **Arakan: The Independent Dynasties (4BC - 1784 CE)**

Early historical accounts suggest that independent Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim kingdoms ruled Arakan. In this context, Dhanyawadi, founded circa 2666 BC and lasting till 327 CE, was recorded as the capital of several Arakan kingdoms (Alam 7). As many as 25 successive kings are recorded as having reigned in Dhanyawadi. Vesali, established in 327 CE and lasting until 818 CE, succeeded Dhanyawadi and served as the capital of Hindu dynasties ruling over Arakan during this period (Minar and Halim 121). The Chandra Dynasty (788 CE to 957 CE) was a notable dynasty that ruled over Arakan with Vesali as its capital (Yunus 20-22).

The fall of Vesali-centric kingdoms (circa 11th A.D - 1430) was followed by the rise of a series of smaller Lemro valley cities — namely, Sambawak, Pyinsa, Parein, Hkrit, Areinzara, Toungoo and Launggret (Htin 65). The most significant aspect of the period was the appearance of the ethnonym “Arakanese” (rakhaing, Rakhuin) for the first time in an inscription dated 1197 AD, which established the region's distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* the neighbouring Burmese polities and other contemporary regional powers of mainland Southeast Asia (Gutman, *Ancient Arakan* 17). The following Mrauk U dynasty (1430–1785), under several strong kings and rulers, ushered Arakan into an “age of pride and contentment” (Leider, “Arakan's Ascent” 73). The socio-economic prosperity and internal cohesion of the dynasty enabled the rulers to embark on territorial expansion while simultaneously resisting external aggression through their internal strengths (Leider, “Arakan's Ascent” 68-73).

In summation, the ancient kingdoms of Arakan had four discrete traits: Firstly, the period was marked by strong integration with India — also termed the phase of Indianization of the Arakan by some academics — due to waves of migration, trade, cultural commonalities, and so on. Secondly, the dynasties of the period have a rich account of the maritime trade, bringing in Arab merchants and thereby

establishing small-scale Muslim contact, paving the way for Islam in the region and the formation of a “proto-Rohingya” identity. Thirdly, the early Hindu rulers of Arakan allowed the unhindered propagation of all religions. Consequently, both Islam and Buddhism could spread and establish a strong presence in the region. Lastly, the expansionist encounters between the Arakan kingdoms and neighbouring Burmese rulers marked the beginning of sustained ethno-linguistic and religious contestation, ultimately shaping the long-term socio-political dynamics of Arakan and Myanmar.

- **The Burmese Rule and the Colonial Period (1784 - 1948)**

The MraU-Dynasty was brought to an end by the Burmese invasion of the Arakan in 1784. King Bodawphaya, the longest-reigning monarch of the Konbaung dynasty (r. 1782-1819), captured Arakan in 1784, thereby ending the series of independent kingdoms in Arakan and bringing the region under Burmese rule (Leider, “Politics of Integration” 186). The invading power unleashed a panoply of measures — including a change of capital, alteration in the governance pattern, and so on — to give effect to political integration between Burma and Arakan (Leider, “Politics of Integration” 189-195).

Following this, the British, through three Anglo-Burmese wars (1824-1826, 1852-1853, and 1885), established British Colonial rule (1824-1942; 1945-48) over Burma (Charney 5). The colonial power effected an absolute political reconfiguration and an economic overhaul of Arakan. The British, adopting a largely Indian pattern of politico-administrative control, divided Burma into two regions — namely, Burma-majority territories directly ruled by the British and peripheral minority areas, loosely and indirectly administered by the village headman, the lowest representative of the Crown (Guyot; Christie 18).

Moving on, the British policy of encouraging Bengali inhabitants from adjacent regions to migrate into the then-fertile valleys of Arakan as farm labourers was the most significant contribution of the British to the formation of the modern Rohingya identity (Chan 399). As a result, the colonial census records show that the Muslim population in Arakan increased from about 58,000 in 1872 to over 178,000 by 1911, eventually comprising nearly a quarter of the region’s population by 1931 (Yegar 27–29; Smith 36–37). This swelling of the Bengali migrant population in the Arakan alarmed the native Barmans, who resented the former chiefly on two counts: i) propagating anti-Burman sentiment and nationalism (Tarling 284–90), (ii) their demand to establish a separate Muslim state (Rogers 133). This antipathy of the Barmans for the Rohingyas was to spill over to the streets, with the Buddhist monks leading the demonstrations against the British and the Rohingyas (Steinberg 35). The final blow to any hopes for Rohingya-Bamar reconciliation came when during the fag end of the British rule (1945-48) when a section of the Rohingyas lobbied for North Arakan becoming a part of East Pakistan through the *Mujahid Rebellion* (1947-54) — a secessionist

demand that deepened mistrust between the state and the Rohingyas, laying the foundation for their future marginalization (Yegar 37-43).

Conclusively, the period of Burmese and British rule had several lasting impacts on the political landscape of Arakan and the ethnic equation in Myanmar. In the first place, the period brought about a loss of prestige as it marked the end of the independent Arakanese dynasties and subjected them first to Burmese rule under the Konbaung dynasty and subsequently to British colonial rule. In the second place, the British colonial experience in Burma, as Alam argues, engendered exuberant nationalism, minority–majority debate, ethnic conflicts, discontinuity in the structure of ethnic relations, and the dilution of the race (7). Lastly, the genesis of the current anti-Rohingya sentiments, fueled by demographic anxieties and cultural erosion in the native Bamar, can be traced to the period under consideration.

Rohingyas and the Post-Independence Legal Framework in Burma

The political developments in post-independence Burma commenced on a high note with the 1947 Constitution and the 1948 Union Citizenship Act. While the constitution, envisaging a broad-based and inclusive polity, granted formal equality to the Rohingyas, the Citizenship Act ensured an inclusive framework for citizenship and a sense of belonging amongst the Rohingyas (Parashar and Alam). With some key Rohingya names featuring in the AFPFL civilian government under U Nu (1948–58; 1960–62), this phase has been marked as the high point of the Rohingyas' political participation and social assimilation.

The collapse of civilian rule and the military's usurpation of political power brought about a general degradation in the conditions of the Rohingyas. Ever since, the state in Myanmar, ruled either by the military or civilian regimes, has relegated the Rohingyas to the margins of the socio-political framework of Myanmar. To begin with, the Rohingyas were excluded from the list of *taingyintha* (national races) in 1974 and, through a separate law in 1982, the onus of proving their ancestry fell on those excluded (Rhoads 39). Furthermore, recurrent military operations in Rakhine on the pretext of national security and weeding out illegal migrants have resulted in a series of mass exoduses of the Rohingyas from Rakhine — the biggest of which came in 2017 when around 740,000 Rohingyas had to flee Rakhine to take shelter in India and Bangladesh (Ahmad and Karim). Lastly, the Rohingyas emerged as the 'constitutive other' within the Buddhist-majoritarian discourse of the Bamar, facilitating the consolidation of majority identity in civilian and military regimes alike.

Rohingyas: An Analysis of Political Narratives in India and Bangladesh

The sustained outflow of the Rohingyas from Myanmar came to be known as the Rohingya refugee crisis, the primary burden of which was to be shared by India and Bangladesh. From this perspective, the Rohingya migration timeline can be broadly divided into two: pre-2017 and post-2017. As documented in the following sections, the pre-2017 period, typified by the small-scale yet sustained

outflow of the refugees, evoked a muted political response. The neighbouring states, even so reluctantly, facilitated the presence and upkeep of the refugees either through the government's humanitarian initiative or through UN-backed welfare programmes.

The post-2017 phase, in contrast, was marked by the sheer scale of migration and changed the big picture of the refugee response in the region. The states, now alarmed by the domestic demographic anxieties and resource constraints, adopted a more securitized stance, thereby subjecting the Rohingyas to a sub-human life. The following sections analyse the political narrative of the Rohingyas crisis in India and Bangladesh through a granular analysis of its meandering in the pre- and post-2017 phases, which shaped the securitisation of the state response.

- **India**

The pre-2017 Indian political discourse, on account of the meagre number of refugees, evoked a muted response from the Indian side. Even as many of the refugees held UNHCR-issued refugee cards in Delhi and other cities, India, not being a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, and there being no domestic refugee law, Rohingyas were classified as “*illegal Immigrants*” under the Foreigners Act, 1946 (Malischewski). By the mid-2000s, the estimated number of refugees was around 14,000-16,000, which swelled to 40,000 by 2017 (Barthwal-Datta and Singh 1997). As regards their settlement, the refugees settled in pockets such as Jammu, Delhi, Hyderabad, Assam, and Haryana — working in the informal economy (Nair 369). Be that as it may, barring occasional apprehensions surrounding a potential demographic change and national security threats, the crisis did not dominate the national political discourse. Resultantly, with rare deportations largely tolerant state response, this phase was marked by passive containment strategy— one in which the presence of the refugees was acknowledged, integration was avoided, and humanitarian registration was left to the UNHCR.

The year 2017 marked a watershed moment in the history of Rohingya displacement, and thus waned the accommodative stance of the state. The Ministry of Home Affairs, cognisant of the national security ramifications of the unchecked refugee presence, declared the Rohingyas as “*illegal immigrants*” and subsequently abdicated the government from any responsibility of sheltering the Rohingyas (Rao and Digumarthi 852). Furthermore, top political leadership went further to term the Rohingyas as “*termites*” — framing them as a threat to sovereignty and national integrity (Ghose et al. 275). Ever since, the Rohingyas have featured continuously as an imminent threat to the Indian socio-political framework and an unwelcome criminal element.

The Supreme Court verdict in Mohammad Salimullah v. Union of India further jeopardised the legal position of the refugees, as the Court ultimately deferred to the executive's national security concerns and allowed the deportation of Rohingyas, most notably in its 2021 order (Katrak and Kulkarni 121). The

Rohingya issue got further entangled in the broader political debates, such as the National Register of Citizens in Assam and the Citizenship Amendment Act (2019), which explicitly excluded Muslims from its scope (Sufian 572-574). The Rohingyas were, thus, projected not only as illegal but also incompatible with India's national identity. Therefore, the state's response in the post-2017 phase of the refugee crisis depicts a peculiar shift towards securitisation, politicisation and exclusion.

- **Bangladesh**

Bangladesh, the country with the highest Rohingya refugee burden, has a laudable track record of its humanitarian approach to the crisis in the pre-2017 phase. As such, following each wave of exodus in Bangladesh, the government established refugee camps by allocating government land and resources (Karin et al.). This benevolence was further extended with the recognition of the Rohingyas as "prima facie refugees" (Pittaway 83). The move allowed the refugees to access food, healthcare, primary education and some international aid. Furthermore, the government permitted vaccination drives and maternal healthcare in refugee camps — thereby acknowledging the vulnerable conditions of women and children (Feldstein et al.). To ensure a complete rehabilitation of the Rohingyas, Bangladesh signed a bilateral agreement with Myanmar for Rohingya reparations under the UNHCR's monitoring (Jalil, Jim, and Rahman).

However, as the crisis prolonged, Dhaka reframed it as a national security challenge and an economic strain, thereby deprioritizing the humanitarian angle (Ashraf). The government-imposed restrictions on the freedom of movement of the Rohingyas, thereby confining them to refugee camps. The cities set up checkpoints to ensure their containment inside the refugee area (Khatun and Kamruzzaman 12). Further compounding these repressive and restrictive measures, the state in 2019 imposed internet and mobile restrictions in camps, justified on grounds of "security" after concerns about ARSA militants operating in Cox's Bazar (Mazumdar). The final blow came with the government's decision to prohibit the Rohingyas from formal employment, higher education, and citizenship — a strategy to ensure the temporal nature of their stay in Bangladesh (Shohel et al; Sengupta).

Furthermore, the domestic political rhetoric concerning the Rohingyas became increasingly radicalized with Bangladeshi politicians typecasting the Rohingyas as a "burden" and a "security threat" (Obaidullah et al; Rahman; Guhathakurta). Rising crime rates in Cox's Bazar, Environmental Degradation and strain on host communities were some typical reasons behind calls for the repatriation of the Rohingyas to Myanmar (Islam, Siddiqua and Mohiuddin). This phase of the state's response can typically be marked by its castigation and ghettoisation of the Rohingyas for the perceived impact on sapping Bangladesh's resources and deteriorating security situation.

Conclusive and Comparative Discussion

The trajectories of political discourse in India and Bangladesh demonstrate a striking divergence between the pre- and post-2017 phases. In the pre-2017 phase, both India and Bangladesh maintained a more muted or accommodating stance. The Rohingyas, besides a few regional anxieties about demographic change and law and order situation, did not feature in the national political discourse of India and Bangladesh. As a result, the government's accommodative stance paved the way for international intervention in refugee rehabilitation through organisations such as the UNHCR. This phase of the state response to the crisis can also be regarded as apolitical, in which state actions, if any, were purely motivated by humanitarian concerns, compassion, and sympathy.

The post-2017 phase of the crisis sparked polarized political discourse, prompting a change in the government's stance in both India and Bangladesh. The rise in the number of refugees raised eyebrows in the political circles of both India and Bangladesh. The resultant approach was a mixture of politicization and securitisation of the crisis. With stringent restrictions on the movement and stay of the refugees, the quality of life in the refugee camps fell sharply. Containment measures like restrictions on the freedom of movement of the refugees, denial of integration rights, securitisation of the camps, and the controversial relocation of the Bhashan Char reflected a radical departure from earlier openness. In essence, both India and Bangladesh securitized the conflict after 2017.

In conclusion, touching upon the nuances of change in political discourse in both India and Bangladesh, it is prudent to assert that while India viewed the issue as a threat to national identity, Bangladesh identified it as a strain on national resources. This radical shift in the political narrative also reflects on the state's integrative capacity in South Asia, which is constrained by rising pressure on the resources at its disposal. Lastly, it can be averred about the Rohingyas that, stripped of their homeland and castigated in the country of their refuge, they continue to live a life of daily negotiation—caught between statelessness, uncertainty, and the persistent struggle for dignity, recognition, and belonging.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/44**ARTICULATING HOME THROUGH FOOD: CULINARY PRACTICES
IN SERVING CRAZY WITH CURRY AND THE ABUNDANCE****Ms. V. DEEPIKA**

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of food as a critical site for articulating notions of home, memory, and identity in South Asian diaspora literature, with particular reference to *Serving Crazy with Curry* and *The Abundance*. Situating the analysis within the interdisciplinary framework of Food Studies and diaspora theory, the study argues that culinary practices function as both symbolic and material expressions of belonging in contexts of migration and displacement. In *Serving Crazy with Curry*, food operates as an intimate, gendered medium through which memory, affect, and cultural continuity are preserved and transmitted. Culinary practices, often embedded within domestic spaces, enable characters to reconstruct a sense of home amid emotional and geographical dislocation. In contrast, *The Abundance* presents a more fragmented and ambivalent engagement with food, where culinary excess and dissonance reflect the instability of diasporic identity in a globalized world. Here, food does not simply restore belonging but instead foregrounds the tensions and contradictions inherent in transnational movement. By placing these texts in dialogue, the paper highlights how food simultaneously embodies nostalgia and disruption, functioning as a dynamic cultural archive that mediates between past and present, origin and relocation. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that culinary representations in diaspora narratives are not merely descriptive but are central to the ongoing articulation and reconfiguration of "home."

Keywords: Culinary Practices; Diaspora; Cultural Memory; Identity; Food Studies; South Asian Literature

Introduction

Migration, displacement, and the quest for belonging are essential themes in South Asian diasporic literature. In this regard, the idea of "home" becomes highly elastic and problematic, and, more importantly, constructed rather than geographical. In such a scenario, culinary practices become an integral aspect of

cultural practices, signifying home and providing a unique opportunity to construct identity. This paper will examine the role of food in the construction of home in Amulya Malladi's *Serving Crazy with Curry* and Amit Majmudar's *The Abundance*, using concepts from diaspora studies and Food Studies.

Specifically, the paper will use concepts from diaspora studies and Food Studies to examine the ways in which food is used as a language to articulate home and cultural memory in South Asian diasporic literature. While *Serving Crazy with Curry* offers an understanding of food as an intimate, gendered space to reconstruct home and retain cultural memory, *The Abundance* challenges this perception by presenting food as excess, disintegration, and instability in the transnational condition.

Theoretical Framework: Food, Memory, and Diaspora

The examination of food in relation to literary and cultural studies is one aspect that has been brought into the spotlight via the multi-disciplinary study known as Food Studies. According to Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, food functions as a "system of communication" that transmits social relations, cultural values, and identity (Counihan and Van Esterik 3). In the context of diaspora, the notion of food as a medium through which information can be communicated assumes more significance, since food acts as a mediator between the past and the present, between homeland and hostland, and between remembering and adapting. Diaspora, from the point of view of theoretical discourse, involves migration, movement, and reconstruction of one's sense of self away from one's geographical location. Avtar Brah considers diaspora to be a "homing desire," in which case the concept of home is not defined by territory but through cultural practices (Brah 192). Herein, the act of consuming food becomes important for diasporic populations because of its ability to allow migrants to reconnect with a sense of belonging to their native culture by creating an embodied memory through taste, smell, and texture.

The sensory aspect of memory has been widely studied by David E. Sutton, who argues that food is unique in its ability to elicit synesthetic memories, bringing together the present and the past and making the latter palpably present (Sutton 89). In the diasporic literary context, such sensory experience functions as a narrative technique employed to recreate one's sense of belonging to a particular community. In turn, such cultural practices, according to Jan Assmann, serve as an example of "cultural memory," which involves the transmission of identities from one generation to another within a collective (Assmann 62).

However, the interconnection between cuisine and identity within diasporic contexts does not merely preserve cultural traits but rather transforms them. The theory of hybridity proposed by Homi K. Bhabha offers an effective analytical tool to examine such phenomena. In particular, Bhabha proposes the concept of the "third space," where cultural identities are negotiated and reconfigured

(Bhabha 37). Within the diasporic literary context, traditional cooking practices are often adjusted to fit into a new environment, creating a hybrid identity.

The ideas about cultural identity offered by Stuart Hall provide another perspective on the subject matter. Specifically, he claims that identity is not a quality or an essence; rather, it is a "positioning" and a process, which is ever-changing and affected by different cultural, social, and historical factors (Hall 394). Consequently, foods can serve as a way of positioning oneself and communicating one's sense of belonging or lack thereof. The process of cooking or eating certain dishes, in other words, is an expression of the process of forming identity.

It is also important to consider the gendered aspects of cooking and preparing meals. As researchers working in the field of food studies observe, the kitchen can be viewed as a place where cultures continue their traditions because of the labor performed by women (Parasecoli 78). Women are the ones who preserve culinary practices of diasporic communities, and their contribution to this end is invaluable. It is also essential to admit, however, that such roles are based on power relations and gender expectations.

Finally, it is useful to consider "routes" and "roots," as described by James Clifford. While "roots" refer to heritage and ancestry, "routes" imply movement, travel, and continuous engagement in processes of cultural exchange (Clifford 251). It is within this space that the act of cooking takes place – both maintaining one's cultural roots while also being adaptable. In other words, food represents a place where processes of stability and change, remembrance, and innovation are continuously in play.

Combining all theoretical frameworks introduced above, we can draw conclusions about the key argument that underlies the current discussion. Thus, it is possible to argue that culinary practices in the context of South Asian diaspora literature represent complex cultural symbols that communicate, negotiate, and redefine the concept of home.

Culinary Memory and Gendered Spaces in *Serving Crazy with Curry*

In the case of *Serving Crazy with Curry*, culinary activities are directly related to emotions, memories, and identities, serving as an essential means for the construction of a notion of home by diasporic people. Through focusing on the ordinary lives of women, the book brings to life the importance of food in domestic settings that serve both as sites of cultural heritage and emotional experiences. By emphasizing the significance of cooking and food consumption, the author manages to create a phenomenon of "culinary memory," in which individuals' personal and historical experience finds expression.

Food in Malladi's stories serves as a tool for structuring characters and themes. Specifically, cooking is a common practice during emotional events when a person feels grief, nostalgia, stress, or even passion. It appears to be a mode of survival and expression, through which one can deal with certain circumstances and

emotions in an effective manner. Thus, when faced with the threat of cultural alienation, a person returns to the preparation of favorite dishes as a means of gaining stability. According to one story in particular, "cooking is a rhythm that steadies the mind and anchors the self" (Malladi 45).

Key in this process is the relationship between gender and culinary space. Women are the ones mostly in charge in the kitchen in *Serving Crazy with Curry*. They are seen as the ones responsible for guarding cultural knowledge and heritage. Indeed, as Parasecoli asserts, "women's domestic labor is fundamental for the perpetuation of cultural identity, especially among migrant populations" (78). Recipes in the book are passed on from generation to generation, signifying that they are more than just recipes. On the contrary, culinary practices are also portrayed as archives of memory within which cultural information is preserved. This does not mean that women are represented uncritically in *Serving Crazy with Curry*. While kitchens can be seen as spaces where culinary practices take place and creativity can thrive, they are also associated with certain expectations and restrictions. Indeed, female characters in the novel have to make sure that cultural heritage remains intact via food despite the changes they experience. This ambiguity highlights the complex position of women within diaspora. On the one hand, they are empowered because they are expected to preserve cultural traditions. However, on the other hand, they are trapped in such expectations and stereotypes.

Sensory properties of foods – taste, smell, and texture – are especially effective when triggering memories. Utilizing the concept of "embodied memory" by David Sutton, one could observe how sensory experiences may compress time and distance for the characters and help them recapture their pasts (Sutton 89). Scents, textures, and rituals associated with food preparation become mnemonic instruments capable of recreating the feeling of being at home. In this regard, food is considered an "edible archive" containing not only cultural knowledge but also affective history.

In addition, the integration of recipes into the textual structure makes it impossible to draw a clear line between fictional and real experiences. Rather than providing mere instructions, these recipes become part of the narrative and convey the story of migration and identity through them. This approach to the presentation of culinary recipes allows one to consider the text as hybrid space corresponding to the nature of hybrid identities in diaspora.

Indeed, in relation to the role of food in reconstructing home in *Serving Crazy with Curry*, we must acknowledge that this is a continuous process that involves adaptation and reinterpretation rather than a backward-looking attempt at restoring the past unchanged. It is possible for ingredients to vary, preparation techniques to change, and meanings to shift depending on the circumstances. This corresponds to Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity, which posits that cultures can be renegotiated in the "third space" of diaspora (Bhabha 37).

Thus, in the case of the novels under discussion, culinary practices become simultaneously stabilizing and innovative tools that allow characters to maintain continuity amidst displacement and adapt to change by negotiating their cultural identity in a different framework. Through focusing on food as a central element of their narratives, *Serving Crazy with Curry* manages to stress the importance of ordinary activities in defining diasporic existence. As such, the kitchen emerges as one of the crucial loci in which memory and identity take shape.

Food, Excess, and Fragmentation in The Abundance

Unlike the personal and memory-filled cuisine shown in *Serving Crazy with Curry*, the configuration of food in Amit Majmudar's *The Abundance* displays a totally distinct role of food in the lives of diasporic individuals—that of excess, displacement, and fragmentation. In this work, the use of food is not limited to being a source of nostalgia and reminiscence. Rather, food does not serve as a means of preserving cultural memory or restoring one's sense of belonging. It is a fluid element that disperses through various geographic locations in accordance with the fragmented existence of diasporic individuals.

The irony of the notion of "abundance" is evident from its context. Despite the idea of plenty and diversity associated with it, this term also conveys the sense of overwhelming excess. While diversity in food choice—ranging from many different nationalities to dishes served in various settings—is present, this abundance does not necessarily ensure a sense of identity or belonging. On the contrary, it leads to an oversaturation that results in the loss of identity. As one scene shows, "[t]here was such an abundance of flavors there, they tasted so many things that none could fully be claimed as their own" (Majmudar 112).

In this context, food no longer serves as a signifier of cultural belonging. Contrary to Malladi, whose approach is strongly linked to memory and tradition, in *The Abundance* food becomes rather a flexible signifier associated with the constant process of cultural shifting and adaptation. As stated by Stuart Hall, cultural identity can be viewed as something "constantly in process of formation" and "re-formation," which is achieved with the help of constant positioning and re-positioning (394). Thus, in *The Abundance*, food appears to be yet another aspect of life serving as a stage for positioning.

In addition, the problem of fragmented cultural identity can also be traced in the discrepancy between sensual experiences and the sense of nostalgia. Food still possesses a strong sensual component in terms of its smells, tastes, and appearance. However, unlike David Sutton, who argues that food is capable of collapsing temporal distance and bringing people back to a unified past, this ability does not operate in *The Abundance*. Eating is divorced from memory to give a feeling of displacement rather than nostalgia. The implication is that the function of food in the context of diaspora storytelling has fundamentally changed from being a vehicle for remembering to become a vehicle for alienation.

In addition, the novel brings to light the issue of commodification of food in global capitalism. Food preparation processes often occur through the intervention of markets that turn food from being part of culture into a commodity that people buy and sell. The commodification process adds to the issue of the fragmented nature of identity since cultural symbols lose their historic and emotional meaning and get commercialized to be sold and consumed elsewhere. Food becomes a matter of indifference in this process, its meanings becoming disconnected from particular cultures or individuals.

The idea of hybridity advanced by Homi Bhabha is significant for the analysis of the narrative, but the concept assumes a different perspective. Hybridity is usually linked with innovation and creativity, but in *The Abundance*, the concept is associated with instability and uncertainty. The third space that is supposed to facilitate the synthesis of cultural elements is characterized by confusion and uncertainty, with identity being perpetually disrupted. Culinary hybridity, therefore, involves adaptation as well as the absence of clear cultural identity markers.

The structure of the novel further highlights the fragmented nature of the story. Traveling from one place to another and switching between different perspectives creates the idea that no one narrative can ever claim coherence because that would mean that there is nothing beyond its boundaries, which is untrue for people experiencing diaspora. In this way, food becomes an unstable element connecting the parts of the story together and underlining how unconnected they are at the same time.

It should be noted that the depiction of food in *The Abundance* defies the notion often found in studies on diaspora that cuisine can become a symbol of reconstruction, restoration, and nostalgia. Rather than focusing on the idea that food can bring a feeling of familiarity back, the author stresses the concept of fragmentation, which is highlighted by the idea of abundance. Home becomes something that is impossible to recreate and that constantly evades the person.

However, this does not mean that the meaning of food is absent from the story. On the contrary, the meaning of food is multiple and unstable, and it depends on context. Cooking remains an important practice for shaping identity; however, this identity is only temporary and conditional. In this case, food serves as the means to express the complexity of diasporic life, rather than a continuous story of belonging.

Thus, *The Abundance* introduces an expanded discourse of culinary discourse in diasporic literature. Instead of exploring the nostalgic and conservative aspects of food, the novel examines the challenges of globalization, where identity becomes fluid and fragmented. Through depicting the abundance of dishes, *The Abundance* provides an interesting perspective on how cultural practices contribute to shaping a sense of belonging.

Routes, Roots, and the Reconstruction of Home

The notions of routes and roots offer an effective approach for discussing the function of food within the scope of both books. On the one hand, the routes are connected with mobility and displacement. On the other hand, the roots relate to cultural traditions that should be preserved. Cooking plays an important role on the border between these two poles.

As for *Serving Crazy with Curry*, there is a clear link between food and roots. The use of national cuisines and cooking techniques helps preserve connections to the homeland. Thus, cooking becomes a tool for keeping "the past alive in the present" (Malladi 67). It allows for reconstructing the idea of home rather than just remembering it.

The Abundance, in its turn, places emphasis on routes over roots. Constant mobility destroys stable identity, making food multicultural and changing. The idea of home loses its integrity. Therefore, it is impossible to reconstruct home anymore.

Notwithstanding the distinctions in how the two narratives portray their themes, what emerges clearly from both is the notion that home is not a stationary concept but one that is continually articulated. This is especially so within the context of food practices, which allow for the negotiation of relationships with the past and present.

Culinary Practices as Cultural Archive

Food as a cultural archive is another crucial concept highlighted by this study. Contrary to other conventional archival institutions that require documentation, cultural knowledge is preserved through bodily actions. Cultural significance attached to foods is inherited from one generation to another in the process of practicing culinary techniques.

The role of the archive is also quite prominent in *Serving Crazy with Curry*. Recipe preservation helps to ensure the conservation of cultural heritage. As one character observes, "each dish tells a story, each spice carries a memory" (Malladi 89). It means that through the use of food, people tell stories and maintain their cultural tradition.

Similarly, the archive plays a role in *The Abundance*; however, there is more fluidity in its understanding and application. While culinary practices include cultural meaning, they also transform. In this way, the archive becomes dynamic, changing according to the needs of the moment.

Research Gap, Purpose, and Scope for Future Study

Whereas the present scholarship in South Asian diasporic studies focuses heavily on the concepts of identity formation, displacement, and home-making, there seems to be little discussion of the culinary practice as the focal point of analysis. Culinary practices have traditionally been considered either a metaphor or a secondary issue in literary criticism. Yet, food as the main source through which one articulates their identity in diasporic contexts remains unexplored. Moreover,

there tends to be little focus on the more complex ways through which food practices might express not only nostalgia for the homeland but also fragmentation, excess, and instability in contemporary times.

This paper seeks to fill this gap in existing scholarship by taking the culinary practice as the primary framework for analyzing "home" in diasporic literary texts. Through bringing together two texts, namely *Serving Crazy with Curry* and *The Abundance*, the paper attempts not only to consider food as the means of preservation but also to explore its double function – that is, both stabilizing and destabilizing. This allows demonstrating how food is able to represent a complex experience of diasporic subjectivities.

Thus, this paper intends to achieve two objectives: firstly, it aims to add to the existing body of literature within the field of Food Studies through the demonstration of its importance in literary and diasporic studies; and secondly, by introducing the perspectives of gender, hybridity, and globalization into the discourse of South Asian diaspora cuisine, it seeks to subvert the dominant discourses which tend to view food solely in terms of nostalgia and continuity.

Furthermore, there exist numerous possibilities for further research. The culinary representation in other literary works of the South Asian diaspora could be studied, as well as in literary works belonging to other diasporas. These comparisons could help us gain better insight into the role and significance of food within the diasporic experience of South Asians, especially those who migrated in the second half of the twentieth century. Interdisciplinary approaches involving sociology, anthropology, and even media studies would enable us to examine not only representations of food but also the material and performative aspects of cuisine. In recognizing these gaps and opportunities, the current research highlights the importance of maintaining engagement with the concept of food in diaspora studies as an ongoing, complex entity, which plays an important role in helping us understand the concept of home and identity in an increasingly globalized world

Conclusion

The current paper has analyzed the place of cooking in the representation of the idea of home in diasporic South Asian literature using examples of *Serving Crazy with Curry* and *The Abundance*. It is shown that, through comparative analysis, it becomes obvious that cuisine represents a complex tool for the transmission and transformation of cultural identity.

Thus, the first work reveals how cuisine operates as a tool for reminiscing, bonding, and preserving culture, while *The Abundance* provides a more complex and ambivalent depiction of food and its role in forming transnational identity. Consequently, the two novels reveal the different sides of the importance of cuisine in relation to diasporic literature.

Therefore, by analyzing the role played by culinary practices in diasporic South Asian literature, one may see that food is an essential component that influences the process of formation of the ideas about home in the context of Diasporas.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/45**MARGINALITY, DIASPORA, AND NARRATIVE AUTHORITY IN
TAHIR SHAH'S TRAVEL NARRATIVES****Ms. DIVYASREE J. S.**

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Abstract

This paper examines the representation of marginalised voices in the travel writing of Tahir Shah, a travel writer with South Asian roots, with particular focus on the themes of identity, belief, marginality, and diaspora. Drawing on key texts such as *The Caliph's House*, *In Arabian Nights*, and *Beyond the Devil's Teeth*, the study explores how Shah engages with oral traditions, local belief systems, and culturally peripheral communities. While his narratives attempt to foreground alternative epistemologies and lived experiences often excluded from dominant discourse, they also reveal the constraints of authorial mediation. Using theoretical frameworks like diaspora theories by Stuart Hall and Avtar Brah, Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's critique of subaltern representation, and Homi K. Bhabha's notion of hybridity, the paper situates Shah's work within broader debates on cultural representation and identity formation. It argues that Shah's diasporic positionality shapes his narrative approach, producing a tension between empathy and authority, immersion and distance. The paper also demonstrates that Shah's travel writing operates within a complex space where marginalised voices are both amplified and reframed. By highlighting the ethical and representational challenges inherent in narrating "the other", this study contributes to a deeper understanding of contemporary travel writing as a site of negotiation between voice, power, and cultural interpretation.

Keywords: Marginalisation, Identity, Diaspora, Orientalism, Representation, Hybridity, Authority

Introduction

Tahir Shah, a writer with roots in the South Asia, occupies a prominent position in contemporary travel literature. As a writer of Afghan heritage born in the West, Shah's narrative voice that complicates the traditional boundaries of travel writing is characterised as diasporic. His works are not simple documentation of the Other. But they serve as a site where the traditional Western subject is dismantled through

a South Asian sensibility. In the works *The Caliph's House*, *In Arabian Nights*, and *Beyond the Devil's Teeth*, the traveller is a displaced person exploring the complexities of identity, marginality, and beliefs. These texts deal with the writer's experience with a haunted Moroccan house, Moroccan storytelling culture, and a myth-network that links India, Africa, and South America. This paper analyses these experiences through Stuart Hall's model of cultural identity as a site of being and becoming, Avtar Brah's concept of diaspora space, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of the subaltern.

Crisis of Subjectivity and Diaspora space

The foundational crisis in Shah's travel writing is the crisis of subjectivity, and this is deeply rooted in the experience of the diaspora. The theme of identity in Shah's works reflects the classic diasporic tension between the sense of belonging and non-belonging. Unlike traditional Western travel writers who have a stable sense of home, Shah's South Asian roots render him a fragmented identity. He is an Anglo-Afghan born in England, raised on the stories of a Sufi-inspired Afghan lineage, and then transplanted with his family to Casablanca. His travel writings repeatedly portray the tension between belonging and difference, home and strangeness.

In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Stuart Hall argues that diasporic identities are "those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (235). Hall also states that it is "not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture ... not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made no fundamental mark" (226). Here, it is conceived as product formed through history, memory, and representation. He also defines identity as a shared culture rooted in common origin and continuity, and identity as a constellation of differences shaped by migration, displacement, and the politics of representation. For Hall, identity is always both being and becoming. It draws on inherited traditions but is continually re-inscribed through encounters, media, and narrative.

Shah's diasporic identity creates a tension between empathy and distance. In his works *The Caliph's House* and *In Arabian Nights*, the connection he feels with the Moroccans is based on his Eastern heritage. However, he also feels distanced from them by his British upbringing and class status. In *The Caliph's House*, Shah's movement from a congested British city life to Morocco is framed as a quest for a vibrant home. However, the house itself becomes a microcosm of contested identity. Dar Khalifa has been a magnificent but ruined mansion in a backstreet in Casablanca. The house Dar Khalifa is a structure with multiple layers of history that requires a constant process of renovation. Thus, it becomes a metaphor for the diasporic self.

Besides Shah's family, three hereditary caretakers namely Osman, Hamza, and Mohamed, local contractors, and jinn, are the inhabitants of the house. All the human inhabitants of the house have competing claims about space, safety, and

spirituality. Shah's attempts to renovate and govern the house mirror Hall's insistence that cultural identity is a provisional achievement continually negotiated through practice. In *The Caliph's House*, Shah writes, "I was a man of the West with the heart of the East, caught in a storm that belonged to neither" (84). This fragmentation allows him to amplify marginalised voices by recognizing their struggle as part of his own search for belonging. Moreover, his narration of the hiring of labourers to the performance of the exorcism re-centres cultural identity on his own subjectivity rather than on the identities of the Moroccans who inhabit the same space.

In Arabian Nights extends this exploration by making storytelling as the primary site of cultural identity-making. Shah returns to Morocco after being imprisoned in Pakistan for suspicion of espionage. That experience of imprisonment is a brief reversion of the usual power dynamics between Western traveller and the other. His recovery narrative is built around the stories his father told him as a child. In the search of the Morocco's oral traditions, he listens to masons who work only at night, Sufi wise men who write for soap operas, and Tuareg guides addicted to reality TV who embody multiple identities. Hall's insight that identity is continuously produced through the play of history, language and culture is seen here where each storyteller offers a different configuration of Moroccan subjectivity. However, it is evident that Shah's narrative weaves these voices into a single, personal quest. When he declares that adapting to a new place is like adjusting to a pair of shoes. It can initially hurt but its usage is based on that person's interest in it. By this comparison, he acknowledges the experiential, evolving nature of identity.

For Shah, the search for the Arabian Nights is a search for an ancestral connection that was fractured by his family's displacement from Afghanistan. The marginalised voices he pursues are mirrors of his own fragmented self. In the narrative, the act of listening to a story becomes an act of reclaiming a lost part of the diaspora identity. Hall's concept of *différance*, the idea that identity is defined by what it is not as much as what it is, is evident in Shah's comparison of his London-based skepticism with the Moroccan acceptance of the miraculous. The crisis of the self in the text is resolved by accepting the multiplicity of the diasporic experience, where the self is a collection of stories gathered from across the globe. In *Beyond the Devil's Teeth*, Hall's model of identity as becoming takes a universal turn. Shah hears a Gond storyteller in Bombay recount an ancient legend of the Gond people and he follows the myth to India, Pakistan, East Africa, Brazil, and Patagonia. His journey across the former supercontinent Gondwanaland translates the idea that identity is dispersed, relational, and historically layered rather than fixed to one nation or soil. As he travels, Shah repeatedly reflects on the wanderers and expatriates he meets, suggesting that displacement and hybridity are not exceptional but increasingly common modes of being. The characters he meets like Wood, a detribalized musician who is not "completely

American and not quite Indian” (Shah, *Beyond the Devil’s Teeth* 43) and Oswaldo Rodríguez Oswaldo who is a Patagonian version of Danny De Vito embody the kind of rootless, improvised belonging that characterises the global expatriate and the self-willed wanderer.

He claims, in *In Arabian Nights*, that stories are a shared part of human culture. No matter where they come from, they often follow similar patterns, and the same patterns of stories can be found in various cultures across the world. This aligns with Hall’s emphasis on narrative and memory as the material from which cultural identity is constructed. His thoughts on displacement during the train journeys finally focuses in the becoming of his own self.

Avtar Brah theorizes the diaspora space as a concrete social terrain where notions of home, belonging, and exclusion are discussed. Brah, in her *Cartographies of Diaspora*, argues that diaspora space is where “multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, and negotiated” (181). It decentralizes the roles of native, immigrant, and migrant and so establishes that the diasporic individual is as much a native as the native becomes diasporic through entanglement (238-39). For Brah, home is never a neutral and stable idea. It is designed differently according to different political practices in context. In other words, it can simultaneously act as a site of safety and terror, inclusion and exclusion.

The Caliph’s House is a literary map of such a diaspora space. Shah’s purchase of Dar Khalifa brings him into a network of informal labour, local customs, and inherited spiritual beliefs that exceed the formal boundaries. Dar Khalifa is not just a place where Shah lives. It is a space where the legacy of his Afghan ancestors, his British education, and the local Moroccan traditions collide. Thus, it is a microcosm of the diaspora space. Brah also argues that the diaspora space is inhabited “not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous” (205). The marginalised voices in the text such as the women in the kitchen or the beggars at the gate are not outside Shah’s experience but they constitute the diaspora space that he inhabits. Their presence forces Shah to confront his own marginality within the Moroccan social hierarchy.

The three caretakers, who belong to the house by custom carry their own histories, fear of jinn, and economic dependencies. Thus, they function as a micro-diaspora within the house. Their insistence on rituals, sacrifices, and the need for exorcism illustrates Brah’s notion that diaspora space as “the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of ‘us’ and ‘them’, are contested” (Brah 205). Yet, Shah, the relative outsider, commands the resources of renovation and narration, and thereby, frequently reclaims the ownership of the house. This, in fact, is his attempt to confirm his authority. In this way, the house remains a shared diaspora space where symbolic and material power is unevenly given to the Anglo-Afghan owner. By the end of the narrative, the crisis of subjectivity is partially resolved by his assimilation into the Moroccan culture and

beliefs. He shifts from being a subject who possesses a house to a subject who is possessed by its stories and spirits.

Brah views diaspora space as the intersection of "genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put'" (181). In *In Arabian Nights*, diaspora space is reimagined as a storytelling network. Shah's quest to find the story in the heart of a person takes him through Moroccan medinas, deserts of Sahara, and Sufi lodges, where he collects traditional tales from distinct and eccentric characters. Many of these storytellers are illiterate, and some of them are working in global media. They occupy a liminal zone between local tradition and global modernity, between native and diasporian. Their stories circulate in oral performance, and televisual forms, creating a transnational cultural space.

The marginalised voices Shah interacts with are those who have 'stayed put' in their traditions, yet they are being impacted by the global forces of dispersion. Through Shah's interaction with the Moroccan storytellers, he brings his own history of dispersion into contact with their localized history. This creates a cartography of belonging that is common to the shared human experience of narration. The marginalised are thus brought into the centre of the global dialogue. They are presented as the keepers of the rich entity, the story.

Nevertheless, Shah's narrative structure reveals that these stories are collected and published as per the conventions of the Western travel memoir. They are shown as resources for his own self-recovery and cultural re-connection. According to Brah, the identity of the diasporic imagined community is not predetermined. It is shaped by the material realities of everyday life and the stories we share with ourselves (180). Shah presents the Moroccan storytelling culture as coherent and nostalgic to which he has returned. But, in reality, it is multifaceted, disorganised and changing.

Beyond the Devil's Teeth resonates a convergence of postcolonial, border, feminist, and diaspora thought which Brah terms as creolisation of theory. Shah's journey across the three fragments of Gondwanaland, India, Africa, and South America, traces the mythic diaspora of the Gond people, whose descendants are dispersed and marginalised. In each place, he meets communities whose stories and histories have been shaped by colonial borders, forced labour, and global capitalism. When he is in a Sudanese village or a Peruvian shanty-town, he is operating within a zone of contestation. The marginalised voices in the text are those who have been stayed put by poverty or dispersed by conflict. Shah's engagement with them is a negotiation of space and meaning. Shah challenges the traditional centre-periphery model of the travelogue by placing the marginalised as the centre of the human experience.

Challenges in Representation of the Other

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern, in the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", foregrounds the epistemic violence suffered by those who are structurally silenced. Spivak draws on Subaltern Studies to show how colonial and

postcolonial historiography reduces heterogeneous groups of peasants, women, and indigenous people erased by dominant discourses into the subaltern. Her question, “Can the subaltern speak?” (79), refers to the ways in which the voices of the marginalised are misrepresented by the dominant discourses.

The narrative of *The Caliph’s House* is built on the labour and beliefs of the subaltern caretakers. These three men, who are economically dependent on the house, fear the jinn inhabiting Dar Khalifa and insist on specific rituals, sacrifices, and exorcisms. Their belief system is neither fully accepted nor fully dismissed by Shah. Instead, it is narrated and transformed into the central plot leading to the house’s redemption. When Shah himself conducts the exorcism, he becomes the shamanic figure who is trying to reclaim the house from chaos. But he is actually re-centring the narrative on his own rationality. The perspectives of the caretakers are thus represented as the colourful, half-believed other. He does not validate it as a complex epistemic system. It is equally interesting to note that their voices appear through their rituals, fears, and demands. But they never narrate the story, and their stories always lie subordinated to Shah’s autobiographical frame.

Spivak’s critique of the native informant structure is striking in the epistemic asymmetry seen in *In Arabian Nights*. The Sufi storytellers, master masons, and Berber narrators play the role of informants whose tales are recorded, edited, and published by the Anglo-Afghan writer. They are often portrayed as eccentric, magical, or wise. These words itself are markers of exoticization. Their stories circulate primarily in local and oral media, and secondarily through Shah’s polished narrative. Thus, the indigenous storytellers become the represented and not the representative of their culture and traditions.

Shah acts as a mediator, translating their oral wisdom into a written, English-language format. While he intends to amplify these voices, he inevitably reframes them within his own transformational journey. There is a conflict in the storyteller’s power in the act of narrating the story and his becoming a catalyst for Shah’s self-discovery. Shah eases this tension by focusing on the teaching quality of the stories, where the subaltern is the master and the traveller is the student. Thus, he inverts the traditional power dynamics of the travelogue.

Beyond the Devil’s Teeth dramatizes the problem of subaltern representation on a global scale. The Gond people and their descendants, as indigenous or tribal communities are scattered by colonial and postcolonial borders. Their histories are fragmented, their land is appropriated, and their voices rarely appear in the main narratives in the world. Shah’s narrative, however, is centred on his exploration of mythical treasures, magical ceremonies, wanderers and expatriates. It does not look at the political and economic conditions of the people whose stories he records. For instance, when he recounts the stories of miners in the Danakil, their voices are filtered through his sophisticated language. As per Spivak’s theory, these voices are utilised to serve the traveller’s quest for the exotic. Shah’s narrative also exposes the limits of his own understanding. By documenting his

failures to fully understand the subaltern, Shah acknowledges that the subaltern speaks in a register that the Western-educated narrator can only partially decode. The fluidity of identity is also obvious in *Beyond the Devil's Teeth*, where Shah's journey through Africa and India becomes a psychological exploration of his own hyphenated self. This condition of not belonging to either the West or the East is what Homi K. Bhabha describes as hybridity. For Bhabha, this space is a third space of communication that "displaces the histories that constitute it and sets up new structures of authority" (53). Shah inhabits this third space which allows him to understand the marginalised with a degree of intimacy unlike the traditional travel narrator. Meanwhile, he is also bound to the linguistic and structural conventions of the Western travelogue.

Bhabha argues, in *The Location of Culture*, that cultural productive power arises in the in-between spaces, which "displace the histories that constitute it" (53). Shah himself is a hybrid subject, and his subjectivity is a site of struggle. This hybridity allows him to navigate the third space of Moroccan cafes and mountain villages with a degree of cultural fluidity. In *The Caliph's House*, the hybridity is indicated in the architecture of the mansion and the linguistic melange of French, Arabic, and English. The marginalised voices in the house do not speak from a position of pure culture but from a hybrid one. This hybridity allows for a mimicry that Bhabha describes as a double vision which "discloses the ambivalence of colonial discourse" (126). The workers mimic Shah's Western desire for progress and sabotages it with rituals to appease the Jinn, thereby asserting a localized authority that Shah cannot prevent.

In *In Arabian Nights*, the marginalised voices he encounters are themselves hybrid, existing at the crossroads of Berber, Arab, and African influences. Shah's narrative celebrates the blurring of boundaries, presenting a Morocco that is perpetually becoming rather than being, echoing Bhabha's opinion that hybridity is not the two initial moments from which a third emerges, but rather the third space that makes it possible for other positions to emerge. (211). Bhabha posits that cultural productive power arises in the liminal spaces where "the construction of a political object that is new, neither the one nor the other, alienates our expectations of liberty" (53). Shah is the embodiment of this hybridity. In *Beyond the Devil's Teeth*, Shah moves through cultural zones with a fluidity that allows him to access marginalised spaces that usually remain closed to a Western observer. Here, Shah adopts local customs or languages, but the result is not a complete assimilation. The marginalised voices he encounters inhabit this same third space who are victims of global displacement, impoverishment, and fragmentation. Shah's interaction with them creates a shared, although unequal space of hybridity. The consequence of these encounters is the realization that identity not essentially a fixed idea.

Edward Said posited that the West established a methodical practice to control and construct the Orient in political, sociological, and creative terms (3). Initially,

Shah enters Casablanca with an Orientalist gaze of the mansion as a project to be mastered through Western logic. However, the marginalised voices of his guardians resist this categorization. They represent an Oriental reality that is resistant to the linear progress of the West. When Shah attempts to impose a work schedule, he is met with a persistent "Inshallah" (God willing), which serves as a linguistic barrier against his subjective will. In this context, the marginalised voice undermines the narrator's authority and forcing him to abandon the role of the master for that of the observer.

According to Said, the Orient was created by Europeans as a realm of romance, exotic creatures, and unsettling memories that acted as a counterbalance to Western advancement (1). Initially, Shah's quest to find a singular, life-changing story could be seen as romanticization of the exotic destination. From this point of view, Casablanca becomes an Orientalist stage where the djinn and the superstitious guardians provide the Western reader with enough magical and uncivilized entities that Said identifies as key features of the Orient. However, Shah subverts the Orientalist model by using immersion to decentralise his own authority.

In Arabian Nights intensifies this pattern. In this work, the marginalised storytellers in the Jemaa el-Fnaa are presented as the true architects of reality. Shah observes, "The storytellers were the guardians of a secret world, one that didn't appear on any map" (14). By prioritizing their narratives over colonial cartography, Shah attempts to dismantle the positional superiority that Said identified as a hallmark of Western travel writing. Shah's use of *The Thousand and One Nights* explicitly places Morocco within the long-standing literary tradition of the Orient as a space of labyrinthine medinas, magical storytelling, and exotic wisdom. He writes that his father has taught him that stories are a sort of key to direct the thoughts of humans. This thought promotes the status of oral culture as the authentic, and emotional core of Morocco. It also results in the reproduction of the same Orientalist stereotype that it tries to resist. Thus, *In Arabian Nights* becomes a neo-Orientalist text wherein it speaks of openness and respect, but its narrative structure depends on the West-Orient binary.

The engagement with belief systems and oral traditions reaches its zenith in *In Arabian Nights*. In this text, Shah explores the teaching story as a legitimate form of knowledge, echoing his father Idries Shah's intellectual heritage. Shah challenges the hegemony of Western rationalism by elevating folk tales and local myths to the level of history. This directly counters Edward Said's critique of Orientalism. Said argued that Western representations of the East often distil the complexities of the Orient into a series of manageable, static tropes (9). Shah, however, attempts to present a dynamic Orient by focusing on the transformative power of storytelling. He notes in the text that stories are the flesh of human existence, whereas facts are merely the bones (Shah, *In Arabian Nights* 14). This emphasis on the lived experience of the marginalised allows Shah to amplify

voices that are typically excluded from the dominant discourse, even as he reframes them within the context of his quest.

In *Beyond the Devil's Teeth*, Shah's descriptions of mystical India and prehistoric Africa clash with the Orientalist binaries. However, Shah's position as a hyphenated subject creates a destabilizing effect. Unlike the Victorian travellers who defined themselves through a rigid contrast with the savage Other, Shah's subjectivity is weak. He explores the marginalised not to categorize, but to find a reflection of his own displaced self. Consequently, the Orient in Shah's work is a fractured mirror, where his positional superiority, as termed by Said, is constantly being undermined by the author's own sense of non-belonging.

Conclusion

Tahir Shah's travel writing occupies a contested space where the representation of marginalised voices is both enabled and constrained by the author's own positionality and the generic conventions of contemporary travelogue. In *The Caliph's House*, *In Arabian Nights*, and *Beyond the Devil's Teeth*, Shah engages with oral traditions, local belief systems, and culturally peripheral communities that challenge dominant Western-centric discourses. Drawing on the theories of Stuart Hall, Avtar Brah, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha this analysis has revealed that Shah's narratives simultaneously expand and alter the voices of the marginalised.

Shah's diasporic subjectivity is shaped by South Asian roots, British upbringing, and a multi-cultural life. It produces a narrative that is both empathetic and authoritative. On the one hand, his assertion on the value of stories, rituals, and local knowledge aligns with Hall's and Brah's model. On the other hand, the fact that marginalised subjects are narrated by the writer which is supported by Spivak's theory of representing the subaltern. This is a limitation of these works where he uses the complexities of the marginalised to project his individual quest. Shah's works act as a space where the politics of voice, power, and cultural interpretation are continually at play. His travelogues do not fully resolve the problems of representation they perform. He contributes to a deeper understanding of self as not a fixed essence to be preserved. The selected works also document his deep thoughts on the diaspora's search for a unified self in a fragmented world.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/46**TRACING THE ESTRANGED SELF: UNHOMELINESS AND THE
CRISIS OF BELONGING IN THRITY UMRIGAR'S *BOMBAY TIME*****Eva Magizha G.**Research Scholar, Department of English, Auxilium College
Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India**Dr. Kalaiselvi R.H.**Assistant Professor, Department of English, Auxilium College
Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India**Abstract**

The idea of home constitutes one of the most fundamental human attachments, serving as a site of shelter, memory, identity, and belonging. It is within this space that individual subjectivity is shaped, social bonds are established, and the sense of belonging is most firmly anchored. Home is neither a fixed nor a permanent condition. It erodes and transforms; the familiar turns foreign, and the spaces that once offered security are transformed into sites of estrangement. Drawing on Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness as a theoretical framework, this article examines the converging experiences of estrangement, unhomeliness, and the crisis of belonging in Thrity Umrigar's *Bombay Time*. The study adopts a qualitative approach, grounded in close textual analysis, to critically examine the condition of unhomeliness as it operates across character, narrative, and spatial dimensions. The study demonstrates that unhomeliness is a recurring phenomenon that has shaped the Parsi community's experiences across multiple trajectories of displacement, beginning with their exodus from Persia and resettlement in Bombay, extending to their migration to America, and culminating in the eventual return of a limited number to India. Umrigar's central characters navigate this condition in markedly distinct ways. Confronted with persistent failure, Rusi Bilimoria remains anchored to a Bombay that has long ceased to yield him solace. In an act of quiet concession, he facilitates his daughter's relocation to America, underscoring his implicit recognition of the city's progressive deterioration as a space of opportunity and possibility. Some migrating to America in pursuit of education and opportunity experience a similar sense of unhomeliness, prompting a return to the city. Others, despite prolonged residence in the city, ultimately relocate to their place of origin, privileging ancestral ties over immediate habitation. The study examines these divergent trajectories to establish that the crisis of belonging is perpetually negotiated and endured across spaces of displacement.

Keywords: Estrangement, Migration, Unhomeliness, Belonging, Displacement

Introduction

The movement of people across continents, from the earliest migrations to the mass displacements of the modern era, has been driven by persecution, opportunity, and the pursuit of prosperity. Migration is either voluntary or involuntary. Voluntary migration is the deliberate relocation of individuals from one place to another, motivated by personal agency rather than external compulsion. Involuntary migration, by contrast, is characterized by the forcible displacement of individuals and communities from their places of origin, precipitated by external forces that supersede individual will. Such displacement invariably gives rise to the emergence of communities in exile, the fragmentation of cultural identity, and a sustained sense of dislocation and estrangement.

Migration, regardless of its voluntary or involuntary nature, transcends geographical relocation, giving rise to the disruption of selfhood. As individuals navigate new environments, they grapple with questions of belonging, adaptation, and cultural negotiation, often carrying with them memories, traditions, and a sense of loss. Migration in literature foregrounds issues of identity and belonging amid experiences of movement and displacement. It entails the negotiation between past and present, as individuals navigate the challenges of an unfamiliar setting. For some migrants, the experience of migration fosters resilience, facilitating the emergence of new forms of belonging.

Literature Review

The study of migration has long held a central place in literature. Seminal works foreground the complexities of migration, demonstrating that transnational movement challenges established notions of home and identity. These studies examine the ongoing tension between memory and adaptation, positioning narratives of exile and return as integral to the shaping of both collective and individual identities. Beyond their focus on international migration, recent studies examine internal migration, social mobility, and urbanization. These shifts give rise to new experiences of estrangement and adaptation.

Robin Cohen's *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, provides a foundational framework for analysing the challenges diasporic communities encounter as they negotiate questions of home and belonging. Sara Ahmed's "Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement," foregrounds the affective dimensions of migration, offering a critical analysis of alienation and estrangement experienced in the homeland as central factors motivating mobility. Nikos Papastergiadis's *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity*, examines displacement as a central aspect of the migrant experience in a globalized world, highlighting the significant psychological and cultural effects of migration. Sadan and Pushpendra's edited volume, *Home, Belonging and Memory in Migration: Leaving and Living*, delves into the ways home, belonging, and memory are negotiated and experienced within the context of migration. While previous scholarships have offered valuable insights into the

dynamics of migration, it is important to analyse the underlying causes that gives rise to conditions of unhomeliness. This article is a study to examine the condition of unhomeliness experienced by the Parsi community in Thrity Umrigar's *Bombay Time*, using Homi K. Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness as a theoretical framework.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative approach to analyse the condition of unhomeliness as experienced by the Parsi community in Thrity Umrigar's *Bombay Time*. Through close textual analysis, the study examines the narrative's representation and negotiation of belonging, estrangement, and identity across generational and spatial boundaries. The close reading of the narrative foregrounds the themes of home, memory, exile, and identity. The study systematically identifies and annotates the character's reflection on the past, their questions of belonging, and their experiences of loss and displacement. By drawing on the broader socio-historical context of the Parsi community, the study contextualizes the experiences depicted in *Bombay Time* within a continuum of displacement, adaptation, and identity negotiation.

Historical accounts, demographic studies, and scholarly analyses of the Parsis' migration from Persia to India, their integration into Bombay's urban fabric, and their evolving status within Indian society offer critical context. This aids in comprehending the dynamics of belonging. The experiences of characters such as Rusi Bilimoria, Jimmy Kanga, and Mariam are examined with reference to secondary sources that address themes of belonging, displacement, and estrangement. The study contextualizes the narrative's exploration of unhomeliness within the lived experiences and historical trajectories of the Parsi community.

Analysis

Thrity Umrigar's *Bombay Time* is a rich tapestry of memory, displacement, and belonging, chronicling the lives of the Parsi residents of Wadia Baug as they navigate the shifting realities of contemporary Bombay. The study critically examines the condition of estrangement within one's place of origin and the host land, foregrounding the sense of unhomeliness affecting both individual and collective consciousness. The Parsi community's historical migration from Persia to India is rooted in an experience of unhomeliness, arising from religious persecution and social marginalization following the Arab conquest of Persia. Jesse S. Palsetia in *The Parsis of India: Preservation of Identity in Bombay City*, notes:

The Parsis are a community in India that trace their ancestry and religious identity to pre-Islamic, Zoroastrian Iran (pre-651 C.E.). The Parsis presently number approximately 110,000 individuals world-wide, and over 70,000 individuals in India. The Parsis are the descendants of Iranian

Zoroastrians who migrated to and settled in India in order to preserve their Zoroastrian religion. (1)

The Parsis' journey to India is a direct response to unhomeliness, as they sought to reconstruct a sense of home in the aftermath of dislocation. Their homeland is transformed from a space that provided them a sense of belonging into one marked by insecurity and estrangement. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha notes, "The unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence" (15). The Parsis' estrangement from a land central to their ancestral identity served as a principal impetus for migration.

The origin of the Parsi community's experience of unhomeliness can be traced to their migration from Persia to India, a foundational act of displacement that continues to reverberate through the lives of Wadia Baug's residents. By weaving this collective memory into the fabric of her narrative, Umrigar presents the Parsis as a community in exile, who continually negotiate their position within the broader context of Indian society. The memory of fleeing religious persecution and establishing a new home in India is both a source of communal pride and a reminder of their outsider status. In the narrative, this historical legacy is evident in the ongoing anxiety over the erosion of tradition, the loss of communal cohesion, and concerns about assimilation or invisibility within a rapidly changing city.

For Rusi Bilimoria, the memory of Bombay as a sanctuary is marked by both nostalgia and growing disillusionment. "Every day, the newspaper landed like a missile at his door" (8). Rusi's attachment to the past is emblematic of a broader crisis within the community. This crisis involves the struggle to reconcile inherited memories of belonging with the realities of contemporary uncertainty. Despite his failure in business, Rusi remains anchored to Bombay, unwilling to relinquish his deep-rooted attachment to the place that has shaped his identity. Rusi's reflection, "So many of them had lost their sons and daughters to America or England," captures the collective sense of loss and displacement experienced by the Parsi community (27). Rusi's reflection is collectively indicative of the condition of unhomeliness, experienced by the Parsi community. Rusi's condition of unhomeliness does not emerge as a result of recent economic decline or urban change. It rather echoes the historical trauma of the Parsis' displacement from Persia centuries earlier. Bhabha claims:

The recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting. (*The Location of Culture* 13)

Rusi's awareness of Bombay's declining prospects is most evident in his decision to send his daughter to the United States, acknowledging that there is "No

opportunities for her in this city” (101). This act signifies Rusi’s growing detachment from the city, alongside his quiet resignation and paternal sacrifice.

She was his one true success story. In order to help Binny, he had to kill himself, but never mind. He had stuck a knife into his own heart, but that same knife had also cut Binny’s from the misery of Bombay. (241)

The narrative also depicts the return migration of a few others, illustrating their experiences of dislocation in the host country. Jimmy Kanga, a fellow resident of Wadia Baug, relocates to America to further his education in law. This signifies his aspiration for social mobility and his pursuit for enhanced opportunities in the host land. America offers educational and professional opportunities. However, Jimmy struggles to establish himself in this new environment. Catherine MacMillan in “The Uncanny and the ‘Great Return’ from Exile: Unheimlich (Un)homecomings in Milan Kundera’s *Ignorance*,” claims:

...the uncanny “can take the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in an unfamiliar context” the very sense of feeling at home in a foreign country may provoke a sense of the uncanny in the migrant. (124)

Umrigar’s depiction of Jimmy’s return captures the complexity of unhomeliness, as moments of comfort are accompanied by a sense of loss and a continual longing to regain the stability that was once offered in the home land. Jimmy Kanga’s decision to return to Bombay after completing his studies in America is influenced by pragmatic considerations combined with affective ties to his homeland. Despite the allure and prestige conferred by Oxford, Jimmy experiences an intensified longing to return to Wadia Baug. This longing for home is observable in moments of solitude and nostalgia. It elucidates the complex nature of belonging and the difficulties inherent in sustaining connections to one’s place of origin. Umrigar demonstrates this in her portrayal of Jimmy’s affective ties to his homeland by stating that his earlier determination in occupying a prominent position within a limited sphere rather than remaining relatively inconspicuous within a larger, more competitive sphere. Accordingly, he returned to Bombay soon after his graduation. Less acknowledged is his attachment to Wadia Baug, although he is aware of its impact upon him. Oxford’s alluring architecture and cultural life failed to provide Jimmy with the everyday familiarity he associated with home (58). Instead, Jimmy is constantly reminded of his attachment and the quotidian familiarity associated with his place of origin.

Mehernosh’s return to Bombay after pursuing law parallels the experience of his father, Jimmy, and reflects the intergenerational negotiation of unhomeliness and belonging. His pursuit of opportunities for advancement outside India, reflects the aspiration for mobility that distinguish younger generations within the Parsi community. Despite the opportunities available in the host country, he ultimately returns to Wadia Baug, motivated by feelings of estrangement and a longing for the sense of belonging that he had previously experienced in his home land. Rusi regards Mehernosh’s return from America as a source of reassurance and renewed

optimism for the older generation. This response illustrates the significance attributed to the younger generation's decision to return to their place of origin rather than establish permanent residence in their country of settlement:

Rusi was delighted when Mehernosh returned from America. It felt like a victory of sorts, a body snatched from the jaws of the monster that had swallowed up so many Parsi children. (246)

The narrative highlights the significance of Mehernosh's return for the father, emphasizing their emotional resonance and the ways in which his presence reconfigures the dynamics within the household. Mehernosh's decision to relinquish the advantages associated with America in order to join his father's legal practice, is depicted as an event that holds substantial significance. Having received an American education and worked in cosmopolitan settings, Mehernosh's return to Wadia Baug highlights the significance of the earlier milieu's hold on him.

Despite his American education, despite the sophisticated circles that Mehernosh moved in, his son had learned to value his heritage, Jimmy realized. He might spend his day among combative lawyers and tight-lipped, tightfisted businessmen, but at the end of the day, he came home to the down-to-earth reality of Wadia Baug. (77)

This moment challenges conventional views of migration by suggesting that the pull of home can, at times, outweigh opportunities available elsewhere. His professional pursuits in law and business, is marked by the competitive ethos and moments of isolation often associated with contemporary urban life. However, within the familiar setting of Wadia Baug, he experiences a sense of stability and belonging.

Mehernosh's return to his home land demonstrates that his sense of belonging is forged through affective connections. Wadia Baug, distinguished by its unpretentious atmosphere, provides an escape from the unhomeliness that characterized his experiences in the United States. Umrigar depicts Jimmy's response to his son's return:

And with Mehernosh now working beside him, his joy was complete. Hard to believe that his only son had given up the lures of America to come home to practice law with his dad. (68-69)

The return of Jimmy and Mehernosh, set against ongoing migration to distant regions, highlights the sense of unhomeliness experienced in the host land. "Both father and son had bucked the trend" (57). This response reflects an acknowledgment that the condition of unhomeliness transcends geographical boundaries. The home once idealized in memory is subsequently apprehended as both a place of refuge and a space marked by unresolved tensions. In *Bombay Time*, the Kangas' experiences in unfamiliar settings fail to resolve their longing for belonging. For both Jimmy and Mehernosh, their sojourns in the United States

facilitate encounters with new possibilities, while also heightening the experience of the uncanny.

Mariam and her family's experience in the host country is characterized by an ongoing sense of displacement, accompanied by their yearning to reconnect with their ancestral homeland. Despite their material comfort and outward integration in the host country, they remain aware of the difference and impermanence that characterize their relationship to India. Mariam's assertion, "And after all, that is our original homeland," emphasizes that the need for belonging persists as an unresolved aspect of the migrant experience, irrespective of one's prolonged residence in the host country (157). Sagaya Sophia and Daryl Cressida in "The Portrayal of the slowly depleting Parsi community in Thrity Umrigar's *The Bombay Time*," critically examine the migrant condition:

Settlement in alien land makes them experience dislocation. Dislocation can be considered as a break with the old identity. They experience the sense of loneliness in an alien land feel as they face non-acceptance by the host society and also experience ethnic discrimination. (698)

Bhabha claims, "...the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world the unhomeliness—that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations" (13). Although Mariam and her family adapt to the host land, their attachment to their place of origin remains intact, accentuating a continuing sense of unhomeliness and a desire to return to their home land. The host space functions as a space of provisional settlement, which does not offer a sustained sense of belonging. This indicates that the immediacy of the present remains insufficient to displace one's affective resonance associated with the home land. Despite their economic stability, professional achievement, and social status, the family is oriented toward their home country, a condition marked by uncertainty within the host land.

Results and Discussion

The study demonstrates that the condition of unhomeliness operates as a central force shaping the experiences of belonging in *Bombay Time*. The condition of unhomeliness is not confined to individuals who migrate from their homeland; it is equally experienced by those who stay behind. For residents like Rusi, home is no longer a space of safety and continuity; instead, it is marked by anxiety, loss, and uncertainty. Rusi's failure in his business and his inability to secure a future for his daughter reflect the broader economic and social decline experienced by the Parsi community. His decision to send his daughter to America reflects the recognition that Bombay, once a land of opportunity, now offers little hope for the next generation. This act serves as both a pragmatic response to changing circumstances and a reluctant acceptance of their condition of unhomeliness in their host land.

The tension is further heightened by the generational divide, with younger Parsis like Rusi's daughter seeking opportunities abroad, and others, like Jimmy and

Mehernosh, oscillating between departure and return. In this recurring pattern, individuals depart in pursuit of new opportunities and subsequently return to their place of origin. This phenomenon challenges prevailing frameworks that conceptualize migration as a linear, one-way trajectory culminating in complete assimilation elsewhere. For Jimmy, the initial allure of the West, marked by opportunities for education and cosmopolitan experience, is eventually supplanted by a sustained feeling of estrangement and spatial dislocation.

In the narrative, moments of comfort and familiarity that Jimmy experiences in America, serves to intensify his longing for the social bonds and shared experiences that characterize the social fabric of Bombay. His eventual return is not a retreat from ambition; instead, it is an active choice to embrace the affective stability that Wadia Baug offers. This is similarly reflected in Mehernosh, who despite his American education and professional accomplishments, finds a deeper sense of fulfilment in his ancestral home. For Mehernosh, his ancestral home holds greater importance than the professional accomplishments attained elsewhere. Their experiences indicate that, for some individuals, the act of return can ameliorate tensions associated with unhomeliness by enabling the reestablishment of connections to locales that previously conferred a sense of belonging. The study demonstrates that resolving unhomeliness through return yields diverse outcomes, indicative of the variability in individual experiences. Return migration facilitates the reconstitution of belonging, as observed in the experiences of Jimmy and Mehernosh. Further, the study challenges dominant discourses on migration by foregrounding the diverse motivations underlying return. Their pursuit of belonging, irrespective of context, is marked by experiences of estrangement and nostalgia. The characters' affective ties to their former locale suggest that migration often fails to alleviate displacement, as entry into a new environment may intensify their sense of estrangement. The trajectories of Jimmy and Mehernosh Kanga indicate that the familiar milieu of Wadia Baug offers a sense of belonging and stability that was distinctly lacking during their years in America. Characters like Rusi, while remaining physically in Bombay, continue to grapple with unhomeliness as the city undergoes ongoing shifts and changes. The older generation's commitment to remaining in the home land, stands in contrasts to the younger generation's pursuit of opportunities elsewhere. This demonstrates that belonging remains dynamic, continuously shaped through negotiation, reflection, and experiences of sustained residence, movement and return. This indicates that the recurrence of unhomeliness is a persistent feature of the migrant experience. For others, such as Mariam and her family, India does not offer a sense of belonging. Instead, their orientation toward their home land continues to shape their decision-making.

These contrasting experiences illustrate the diverse ways in which unhomeliness is experienced. This indicates that the phenomenon of unhomeliness persists across varying spatial contexts. The study addresses historical memory, urban

transformation, generational change, and the ongoing search for home. It challenges the binary opposition of home and exile, demonstrating that the boundaries between the experiences of belonging and displacement are subject to ongoing negotiation.

Conclusion

The study foregrounds the migrant's ongoing pursuit of belonging and rootedness amid shifting social and spatial settings. This offers insight into an individual's negotiation of belonging as mediated by historical displacement and urban transformation. Shifting attention from physical mobility, the study conceptualizes home as an evolving construct shaped through continual negotiations between memory and aspiration. By foregrounding the Parsi experience, the study conceptualizes migration as a relational process shaped by individual and collective histories. By drawing on Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness, the study demonstrates that experiences of unhomeliness are not solely precipitated by transnational mobility. Instead, it also emerges within one's own ancestral home.

The narrative's intergenerational perspective aids in understanding the complexities of belonging. Parents and children, alongside newcomers and returnees, bring diverse aspirations, uncertainties, and affective dispositions to the ongoing negotiation of home. By analysing the characters of Rusi, Jimmy, Mehernosh, and Mariam, the study demonstrates that variables such as age, gender, and personal history serve as mediating factors in responding to urban transformation and migratory experience. The study suggests that a sense of belonging is often reestablished in spaces marked by rootedness, amid the pressures of modernity and global mobility.

Drawing on Bhabha's unhomeliness, the study reveals the persistent and cyclical nature of unhomeliness, characterizing it as a phenomenon that transcends both geographic boundaries and generational divides. This pursuit is continually reconfigured in relation to shifting social, cultural, and historical contexts. By foregrounding unhomeliness as both a territorial and cross-cultural condition, the study demonstrates the ways in which *Bombay Time* illuminates the ongoing negotiation of belonging for migrant subjects. The study critically examines experiences of displacement, memory, and the longing for home, continually mediated by historical forces, migratory trajectories, and evolving social contexts. This indicates that 'home' emerges as a relational and affective construct, shaped through ongoing experiences of belonging that extend beyond fixed geographic boundaries.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/47**ROUTES OF LABOUR: MIGRATION, WORK AND ECONOMIC
SURVIVAL IN KIM THUY'S RU****Gopika. D**Research Scholar, Department of English
Pachaiyappa's College, Chennai**Abstract**

In *Ru* (2009) by Kim Thúy, a Vietnamese immigrant moves from Saigon to a refugee camp in Malaysia and then to Quebec, Canada. The novel's concern with memory, trauma, gastronomic nostalgia and linguistic hybridity has been well studied in scholarship, but the centrality of employment as a conduit for migration and as means of economic survival has been relatively neglected. This dissertation addresses this lacuna by examining *Ru*'s portrayal of work, from physical and precarious employment to professional advancement, as an essential factor in refugee relocation and identity construction. In the same arc of economic ascension, the protagonist goes from sewing and farming to interpreting, lawyering and running a restaurant. This study argues that Thúy changes the traditional narrative of the 'American Dream' through her focus on the physical and mental costs of employment, the humiliation of receiving clothes from charity, the exhaustion of work that only sustains one's existence and the constant anxiety that even professional success cannot dispel. The paper draws on Vinh Nguyen's (2013) notion of 'refugee gratitude' and theories of migrant work to show that employment is not only about economic necessity but also about the space for dignity, negotiation and for the painstaking repair of a fractured self. This reading underlines the physical and daily actions that ensure economic survival and links the shattered vignettes of Thúy's work, and stresses the diverse channels of employment from sewing, harvesting, interpreting, cooking and practising law. The article claims that *Ru* offers a unique feminist and refugee viewpoint on work as discipline, as emancipation and as a process of mourning and healing.

Keywords: refugee labour, economic migration, Vietnamese diaspora, precarious work, resettlement, Kim Thúy

Introduction

Kim Thúy's *Ru* is a novel of 144 brilliant vignettes that trace the path of a young Vietnamese immigrant from the fall of Saigon to a refugee camp in Malaysia and then to Quebec, Canada. The novel represents employment – from precarious physical labour to professional mobility as a key tool for refugee resettlement and identity construction. The protagonist's transition from sewing and harvesting to interpreting, lawyering, and cooking defies traditional 'American Dream' notions of easy upward mobility. The novel suggests, as a response, a labour-centred

survival that does not obliterate the physical, emotional and psychic consequences of labour. The *Ru* produces specific immigrant subjectivity not because of its triumphal economic success but because of an authentic, corporeal engagement with the difficult, sometimes hidden labour that makes survival possible.

Theoretical Framework: Refugee Labour, Gratitude, and Precarity

From Quebec, my mother sent money to Uncle Two's sons so they could get away by boat as we had done. After the first wave of boat people in the late 1970s, it no longer made sense to send girls to sea because encounters with pirates had become inevitable, a ritual of the journey, an inescapable injury. So only the two older boys set out on the fugitives' bus. They were arrested during the journey. Their father, my uncle, my king, had denounced them (Thúy 61).

This brief passage condenses the gendered logic of forced migration. The mother's remittances—her hard-earned Canadian wages, produced through the sexual division of labour that shapes her work in Quebec (sewing, picking vegetables, caring for others)—are distributed along gendered lines to male relatives. In the framework of forced migration studies,

...sexual division of labour...the presence or absence of spatial restrictions to public space and mobility for women... [and] gendered inequalities in the sexual distribution of wealth [are global factors] that pu[sh] many women to migrate in order to ensure survival for themselves and their families (Ball).

Yet *Ru* reveals a more painful corollary specific to conditions of forced displacement. The phrase "it no longer made sense to send girls to sea" encodes a brutal calculus: under conditions of forced migration, the journey itself has become a site of ritualised sexual violence. Pirate rape is not an accident or aberration but "a ritual of the journey, an inescapable injury". Within forced migration regimes, spatial restrictions for women are not merely cultural or traditional; under conditions of state collapse and lawlessness, they become lethal. The sea, which for boys represents freedom and escape, has become for girls a space of predictable violation from which survival requires immobility.

This reveals a central paradox of forced migration: for some bodies, movement is more dangerous than stasis. The mother's choice to send only the boys is not abandonment but a tragic calculation within a system where the forcibly displaced female body is hypervisible as a target of violence. Even in escape, the gendered body determines who gets to flee and who must remain. Forced migration theory often assumes that displacement is universally traumatic but that movement itself is a necessary condition of survival. *Ru* challenges this assumption by showing that for young women, the very conditions of forced flight—the overcrowded boat, the lawless sea, the predatory pirate—can make immobility the only viable form of protection.

The passage ends with an even darker turn: their father, my uncle, my king, had denounced them. The mother's remittances enable flight; the father's denunciation

ensures capture. Between these two parental acts—one of tragic care, one of self-preservation—Thúy stages the collapse of kinship under the pressures of forced migration. Displacement contexts not only tear families apart through external forces but also through internal betrayals. The father's denunciation of his sons represents the extreme end of a continuum of violence that forced migration inflicts on familial bonds.

The girls who never board the boat remain unnamed. Their story is not told. That silence is the novel's final, devastating testimony to the gendered costs of forced migration. In the official records of refugee resettlement, these girls do not appear. They are not counted as the 'boat people'. They remain invisible and immobile and are left behind. Their survival is not a success story. It is a wound that forced migration regimes cannot name.

Routes of Labour: From Precarity to Profession

The protagonist's labour trajectory in *RU* can be traced chronologically, moving from survival labour to professional mobility—a movement that Thúy consistently complicates. As Buchanan argues,

The operational plasticity of precarity as a theoretical concept of literary and cultural analysis allows for emerging synthesis with other modes of methodological enquiry, such as subaltern, feminist, postcolonial... studies, which... address issues framed by familiar categories of analysis, such as race, class, or gender, in areas of research that explore unequal power relations (Schmidt-Haberkamp et al. 7-8).

The protagonist's experience in *Ru* exemplifies precisely this synthesis. Her precarious labour cannot be reduced to class alone; it is simultaneously gendered (sewing, cooking, caring), racialised (the Vietnamese refugee body marked by donated clothing and conditional belongings), and postcolonial (the boat journey from a former French colony to Quebec).

The journey itself constitutes a form of labour: the physical endurance of four days on a cramped fishing boat with 147 people and the exhausting labour of waiting at the Malaysian refugee camp, where the old self is stripped away. Upon arrival in Quebec, the protagonist enters the precarious economy of survival work. She does piecework in a small room, bent over a machine with the fabric piling up like snow. She picks vegetables alongside other refugees, their backs bent, hands stained green, moving in wordless solidarity from one row to the next. Donated clothing—the too-large sweater, the too-short pants, the mismatched colours—marks her body as a charity case, dependent, and less than autonomous. Her work as an interpreter represents a transition from manual to linguistic labour but brings exhaustion: she translates for doctors, social workers, and judges, learning to say in French what cannot be said in Vietnamese and carrying stories that no one thanks her for carrying.

Her trajectory from interpreter to law student to practising lawyer appears to exemplify Canadian multiculturalism's promise: the refugee who achieves

professional success through hard work and education. Yet Thúy refuses uncomplicated triumph. The narrator still worries about money, still checks her bank account too often, and still wakes some nights certain she has lost everything. The critique of the American Dream extends beyond the protagonist's own persistent anxiety to encompass the moral cost of success itself. The narrator recalls that

My father tracked down Monsieur Girard thirty years later. He no longer lived in the same house, his wife had left him, and his daughter was on sabbatical in search of a purpose, a life. When my father brought me this news, I almost felt guilty. I wondered if we hadn't unintentionally stolen Monsieur Girard's American dream by having wanted it too badly (Thúy 79).

Here, the refugee's success is shadowed not only by her own precarity but also by the wreckage left in its wake. The American Dream, Thúy suggests, is not a ladder that lifts everyone. It is a limited resource, and one family's ascent may require another's fall. The novel closes with the protagonist opening a restaurant—a return to the culinary labour of her grandmother, a deliberate choice rather than a fall from professional grace. The restaurant could fail, she notes, but the cooking itself—the chopping, the stirring, the tasting—cannot fail. That is hers. In this final gesture, Thúy revalues the feminised, reproductive labour of cooking as a site of dignity and autonomy, independent of economic outcomes. The protagonist may never fully escape precarity—the restaurant could fail, the bank account could empty, and the nightmares could return—but the labour itself—the embodied practice of chopping, stirring, and tasting— becomes its own reward. This is the novel's final answer to the American Dream: not success, but the autonomy to choose one's labour, and the dignity of performing it on one's own terms.

Fragmentary Form and the Poetics of Labour

The 144 vignettes in *Ru* are not merely numbered or a simple aesthetic decision but a formal mimicry of precarious employment itself. Precarious work is divided into separate, isolated activities – each shift, each seam, and each row of veggies demanding focus and effort, followed by insufficient rest. The vignette works similarly. Each brief passage challenges the reader to pay close attention, to do interpretative work, and to be left in a space of white. Reading *Ru*, like precarious work, is tiring and discontinuous, needing regular reorientation. The novel's repetitions, its recurrence to the same pictures, the same scenes, and the same phrases, parallel the repetitious structure of survival work. The seamstress stitches and stitches, each one the same, each one needed. The veggie picker stoops and heaves, stoops. The vignettes repeat because survival work repeats. Thúy makes this connection explicit: 'I sewed a thousand stitches. Each stitch was the same. Each stitch was different. The fabric grew under my hands, not quickly, but steadily. This is how you survive: one stitch, then another, then another.'

The white space between vignettes is not absence but presence—the space of rest, of breath, and of what cannot be said. The grateful refugee narrative is full, leaving no room for silence. *Ru*'s white spaces are refusals of this fullness, insinuations that some labours—the labour of trauma, of exhaustion, of grief—cannot be rendered transparent. The white space is where the unspeakable resides, respected rather than erased. This formal choice finds theoretical grounding in

Postcolonial narratology, which asks, 'Taking into account the particular context of war and taking trauma into consideration as a form of language, is it possible to speak of trauma narratology?' If so, do the elements enumerated by Prince carry different meanings in a war narrative? What about language? If trauma is by its own merit a language by which the victim bears witness, can it therefore help but create the category of war or trauma narratology? (Rebeiz)

Ru answers in the affirmative. The novel's white spaces are not voids but the formal signature of trauma's language—a speech that cannot be rendered transparent and that requires silence as its syntax and fragmentation as its grammar. What is contained in these white spaces? Among the silences are the stories of those who could not be integrated into the grateful refugee narrative. The narrator recalls:

Most of those children of GIs became orphans, homeless, and ostracised not only because of their mothers' profession but also because of their fathers. They were the hidden side of the war. Thirty years after the last GI had left, the United States went back to Vietnam in place of their soldiers to rehabilitate those damaged children. The government provided them with a completely new identity to erase their tarnished one. A number of those children now had, for the first time, an address, a residence, a full life. Some, though, were unable to adapt to such wealth. (Thúy 89)

These children— orphaned, homeless, ostracised, unable to adapt—have no place in the triumphant American Dream narrative. Their stories do not fit the script of refugee gratitude. They reside instead in the white spaces between *Ru*'s vignettes: present but not narrated, witnessed but not explained, mourned but not resolved. Thúy's formal innovation allows these experiences to remain unspeakable, resisting the violence of a narrative that claims to fully understand them. The white space is not a failure of storytelling. It is the only ethical response to stories that cannot be told.

Feminist Labour and Refugee Body

A feminist interpretation of *Ru* shows how the novel addresses types of labour that are typically hidden inside capitalist structures. Thúy's *Ru* performs a simultaneous literary intervention, as feminist postcolonial theory has pursued a double project: to racialise mainstream feminist theory and to incorporate feminist concerns into conceptualisations of colonialism and postcolonialism (Lewis and

Mills 3 & 4). The novel racialises labour analysis by positioning the body of a Vietnamese refugee woman—her sewing hands, her aching back, her translating voice—and infuses the postcolonial story of the Vietnamese diaspora in Canada with feminist concerns about productive and reproductive labour.

Feminist labour studies have long made a distinction between productive labour (work that creates products and services for exchange) and reproductive labour (work that maintains and reproduces the labour force, including childcare, cooking, cleaning, and caregiving). *Ru* refuses to privilege one form of labour over the other. The protagonist's work as a lawyer and restaurateur is visibly productive labour, legible within capitalist frameworks of value. But her work as a seamstress—sewing in cramped conditions, by hand, for piecework wages—exists in a grey zone between productive and reproductive labour, often feminised and devalued. The mother's trajectory exemplifies this grey zone. The narrator recalls:

My mother waged her first battles later, without sorrow. 'She went to work for the first time at the age of thirty-four, first as a cleaning lady, then at jobs in plants, factories, and restaurants.' Before, in the life that she had lost, she was the eldest daughter of her prefect father. All she did was settle arguments between the French-food chef and the Vietnamese-food chef in the family courtyard. (Thúy 13)

The mother's labour is framed as warfare – 'waged her first battles' – not as passive endurance but as active struggle. Her pre-migration labour, settling arguments between chefs, was skilled but unrecognised within capitalist frameworks. Her post-migration labour as a cleaning lady and factory worker is visible but undervalued. Thúy refuses to mourn this trajectory as mere loss. Instead, she presents the mother's labour as dignity in motion: from the family courtyard to the factory floor, still fighting, still surviving, 'without sorrow'.

Moreover, the novel attends to forms of labour that are not wage labour at all: the labour of waiting in the refugee camp, the labour of learning a new language, and not only the job of translating words but entire cultural worlds. By making visible these often-invisible forms of work, Thúy stages a feminist intervention in how we understand refugee resettlement. Labour is not only what appears on a resume or a tax form; it is the daily, embodied work of surviving displacement and building a new life. The protagonist's body is central to this analysis. Her hands sew, pick, chop, and type. Her back aches from bending over a sewing machine and over vegetable rows. Her voice translates, argues, persuades, and tells stories. The refugee body in *Ru* is not a passive victim of trauma but an active agent of survival—tired, yes, and ashamed sometimes, but also capable of dignity, of solidarity, and of building a life one task at a time.

This feminist labour reading also illuminates the gendered dimensions of the 'American Dream' narrative that the novel complicates. The protagonist's success is measured not only by professional achievement but also by her ability to

transform feminised, invisible labour (sewing, cooking, caring) into visible, valued labour (lawyering, restaurateuring). Yet the novel refuses to completely abandon the former. The restaurant, after all, returns the protagonist to the kitchen—a traditionally feminised space—but on her own terms, as owner and creator rather than as an invisible worker. The mother's trajectory from the family courtyard to the cleaning job to the factory to the restaurant and the protagonist's return to the kitchen at the novel's close together constitute Thù's feminist revaluation of labour: not escape from feminised work but its transformation into a site of autonomy and meaning.

Resisting Closure: Labour as a Continuous Negotiation Ru's ending does not provide a sense of triumphal arrival to the reader. The protagonist has become successful in his work, opened a restaurant, and settled down in Quebec. But the novel's ending vignettes are not celebratory but contemplative, acknowledging that surviving is not a destination but a practice in progress. This reluctance to close is crucial to the novel's portrayal of labour. Work in Ru is not a ladder that, once ascended, places the refugee in a stable, secure position. Instead, it is an ongoing negotiation—with tiredness, humiliation, thankfulness, and the persistent precarity that characterises even the most successful refugee lives. The eatery the protagonist could fall under. She may lose it all. The boat still rocks in her nightmares.

This ongoing precariousness is not presented as tragedy but as the condition of refugee existence—the condition, perhaps, of all existence but intensified and made visible by displacement. The novel's fragmented form, with its refusal of linear progression and narrative closure, mirrors this condition. There is no concluding vignette that answers all questions, no moment when the protagonist says she has finally arrived. Instead, the novel ends with a return to the kitchen, to chopping, stirring, and tasting—to labour as the ground of being, not as a means to an end. This refusal of closure also resists the gratitude script that demands refugees present their stories as successful integration narratives. As critics of neoliberalism argue,

Neoliberalism is an ideology and politics buoyed by the spirit of market fundamentalism that subordinates the art of democratic politics to the rapacious laws of a market economy that expands its reach to include all aspects of social life within the dictates and values of a market-driven society. (Levin 8)

The gratitude script is a manifestation of this neoliberal logic. It measures the refugee's worth by market outcomes—the law degree, the restaurant, and the bank account—while rendering invisible the exhaustion, shame, and persistent precarity that accompany survival. Ru resists this script by refusing triumphant closure, insisting instead on the ongoingness of struggle. The hidden costs of integration are nowhere more evident than in the narrator's language labour. Her mother demanded:

My mother wanted me to talk and to learn French as fast as possible, and English too, because my mother tongue had become not exactly insufficient, but useless. Starting in my second year in Quebec, she sent me to a military garrison of Anglophone cadets. It was a way that I could learn English for free,' she told me. But she was wrong; it wasn't free. I paid for it dearly. There were around forty cadets, all of them tall, bursting with energy and, above all, teenagers. They took themselves seriously when inspecting in minute detail the fold of a collar, the angle of a beret, and the shine of a boot. (Thúy 19)

The mother's logic is neoliberal: efficiency, cost-benefit, and free education. But the narrator knows otherwise. The cost is not monetary. It is the humiliation of having one's 'mother tongue' declared 'useless'. It is the violence of military discipline—the inspection of the collar, the beret, and the boots. It is the exhaustion of performing belonging among forty tall, energetic teenagers where the narrator is small, foreign, and out of place. This is the 'dearly' paid cost of integration that the gratitude script erases.

By refusing to end triumphantly, Thúy insists on the ongoingness of struggle, on the persistence of loss alongside gain, on the unceasing labour of survival. The protagonist is not a success story of the model minority, though she is a woman who sews and picks and translates and studies and cooks, who is exhausted and grateful and ashamed and proud, sometimes all at once. This complexity—this refusal to resolve into a single, coherent narrative—is the novel's greatest contribution to refugee literature.

Conclusion

Ru is a unique literary intervention into discourses of refugee migration, labour and economic survival, in which Kim Thúy intervenes beyond the border between the human and the non-human. The story systematically deconstructs simplistic 'American Dream' tales, focusing on the physical, mental, and psychic tolls of work—from the mother's metamorphosis from the prefect's daughter to the cleaning lady to the narrator's 'dearly paid' language labour. In the protagonist's journey from sewing and harvesting to lawyering and cooking, *Ru* promotes a labour-centred survival that does not eliminate tiredness, guilt, and precarity. The fragmentary style of the novel, with its repetitions and white spaces, reflects the discontinuous character of this precarious work, emphasising that some facets of refugee experience must be left unspoken. Ultimately *Ru* redefines refugee success not as liberation from tiredness of effort but as the constant activity of seeking dignity within work—one stitch, one vegetable, one client, or one meal at a time. In the face of displacement and the pressure to perform grateful silence, the novel affirms that the most ethical stance is to refuse forgetting and to find meaning in the embodied practices of survival.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/48**FROM REMEMBERED PASTS TO IMAGINED HOMES: DIASPORA,
CREATIVE MEMORY, AND NOSTALGIA IN *THE SHADOW LINES*
AND *THE NAMESAKE*****NANDITABA KISHORSINH CHUDASAMA**Research Scholar, Maharaja Krishnakumarsinhji Bhavnagar University,
Bhavnagar, Gujarat, India**Abstract**

Diaspora, a key aspect of today's global culture, creates complex negotiations of identity, memory, and belonging. This work provides a comparative reading of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, analyzing these two novels' use of Creative Memory and Nostalgia to define the concept of "home". Ghosh's novel explores the connection between memory and imagination; whereas the connection is used to create an imaginary homeland in both works, it serves different purposes in each. Using Salman Rushdie's idea of "Imaginary Homelands" and Svetlana Boym's distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia, this analysis takes a comparative and interpretive approach grounded in postcolonial and memory studies. Ghosh uses memory as a political idea to challenge national borders and engage in a reflective process regarding his fragmented past. Lahiri, on the other hand, contrasts her first-generation characters' desire for cultural continuity (restorative) with the second generation's attempts to reconcile their American identity with their Indian heritage. Both authors show that "home" is not just a place, but rather a dynamic reconstruction influenced by memory and diasporic consciousness. As such, they provide a positive perspective on Diaspora as a source of cultural innovation, transformation, and renewal.

Keywords: Diaspora, creative memory, nostalgia, imaginary homelands, belonging.

Introduction

Traditionally, the concept of "Home" was thought to be a fixed point on a map, an established ground with an unchanging history for migrants and immigrants who have settled in new lands, however, globalization and transnational migration challenge this spatial logic. The migrant cannot consider "Home" to be a place they will one day return to instead Home becomes a creative project that must be constructed out of fragmented memories. This Research Paper investigates the "Positive" dimensions of this displacement beyond the tragic tale of the Migrant. We will investigate how Memory functions as a Generative Force. The Research Paper examines two works by two authors: Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines*, and Jhumpa Lahiri's *Namesake*. Based upon the theoretical lens of Salman Rushdie's

Imaginary Homelands (1991), and Svetlana Boym's Reflective Nostalgia (2001) we find that the Stereoscopic Vision of the diasporic experience transforms the broken mirrors of their pasts into a vibrant hybrid present.

Although the movement of people within Diaspora Studies is typically defined by the trauma of post-colonial identity and displacement, as Stuart Hall so eloquently stated, cultural identity is not an essence, it is a positioning. Hall defines identity as always in the process of becoming as much as being. Both *The Shadow Lines*, and *The Namesake* demonstrate that identity is not destroyed while traveling between Calcutta, London, and New York rather identity is redefined through what Avtar Brah calls Diaspora Space. According to Brah, diaspora space is where the indigenous meet the migrant, a location of contestation and redefinition of belonging. In Ghosh's work this diaspora space is represented in the cartography of the mind when the narrator remembers a London he has never seen. In Lahiri's work this diaspora space is located in the ritualistic spaces of her characters' homes when the Bengali annaprasan ceremony is practiced within the framework of American suburban life.

The construction of a new home based upon the concept of Hybridity and the Third Space (Bhabha) has been the basis of my research. Bhabha views the "in-between", or the place where two cultures meet as the most effective location for cultural meaning to exist. The migrant's ability to produce the identity that will define them occurs at this point. While Home, Exile, and Belonging are commonly examined within the paradigm of loss, Rushdie's term Imaginary Homelands illustrates how the partial nature of a migrant's memories may represent a benefit. Since migrants do not have access to the real homeland, they are able to create an imaginary version of it which can be more emotionally evocative and mentally complex than its real counterpart. Here, Svetlana Boym's definitions become relevant. In contrast to Restorative Nostalgia which seeks to recreate a lost era and reduce the historical divide, Reflective Nostalgia acknowledges and celebrates the void; utilizing irony and imagination to construct a home that is located in the imagination and the heart.

This paper ultimately presents the argument that the characters found in *The Shadow Lines* and *The Namesake* illustrate a transition from experiencing pain due to exile to having the power to imagine a different form of home. The narrator of *The Shadow Lines* discovers that borders are simply shadows that may be traversed with the aid of the imagination, whereas the characters found in *The Namesake* eventually feel connected to their hybridized experiences rather than either experience individually. Synthesizing the above theories, I believe that the diaspora represents not a state of homelessness but a state of multi-homeliness. The transformation of a remembered past into an imaginative home via creative memory proves that the fractured vision of the migrant does not symbolize brokenness but instead represents an extraordinary source of creative abundance.

This act of re-mem-bering has been most vividly illustrated in Salman Rushdie's essay titled *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), written as a migrant himself. He describes the view of an old country from the perspective of a diasporic writer as looking into a fractured mirror. The image reflected back is imperfect, fragmented and contains many missing pieces. However, instead of viewing this condition negatively, he views it positively. Rushdie suggests that the partial gaze of the outside observer, warped by time and space, creates freedom within memory. As such, it frees the imagination from the obligation to accurately reflect reality. Rather than creating accurate images of India in the reader's minds, the diasporic writer can create "India of the Mind," fictionalized versions of India with the ability to select those aspects that are important and meaningful to them. Selective remembering is not an act of erasure, but rather acts as a means of empowerment. It provides the writer with the opportunity to critique both the lost homeland and the new home in which she/he currently resides. We can see this same phenomenon occurring in both Ghosh's and Lahiri's writing.

Beginning with the "diasporic imaginary" of Vijay Mishra (1996), which is the manner in which all displaced communities consciously or unconsciously come to envision themselves as being in perpetual exile. Mishra develops this idea from the works of Lacan and Žižek, and argues that the "homeland" becomes a form of fantasy: a story that a community will tell itself about what once was so that it can again feel whole. According to Mishra, such homelands are "created from a position of distance in order to compensate for a loss produced by an unbearable trauma." Practically speaking, therefore, many of the characters found in Ghosh and Lahiri's fiction construct their "homes" through ritual, narrative, and metaphorical expressions of physical place e.g., the infinite repetition of Tulsistyle household forms found throughout their generations.

In terms of the lived experiences and public memories of the diaspora, Georgina Portelli (2016) provides another dimension to the above-mentioned discussions. Through her research on diaspora exhibitions, Portelli illustrates how artifacts and individuals' narratives are always being "reworked," "discarded," or "forged anew" (p. 2); thus themes of departure, memory, nostalgia, and return are common emotional threads that allow individuals to create hybridized identities in multiple countries. In addition to exploring how some people are nostalgic for their childhoods, Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) offers another interesting perspective on this topic. Boym argues that there are two ways of being nostalgic; both types of nostalgia have different meanings. In his 2002 review, Peter Fritzsche summarized Boym's view of nostalgia well when he said that "nostalgia is both a sentiment of loss and displacement and the romance of one's own fantasy" (p. 128).

Boym labels the first type of nostalgia restorative. Restorative nostalgia attempts to restore the past to its former state with all things in place as they were supposed to be. A restorative model will always seek after an absolute truth. It represents

the idea of creating a perfect and static home. Defiant nostalgia is another name for restorative nostalgia in Michalinos Zembylas' 2014 research with Greek-Cypriot teachers. Defiant nostalgia is a strong rejection of losing the pre-1974 homeland. Children who had never lived in the homeland were given postmemory representations of the homeland by their parents. Boym compares "reflective" and "restorative" forms of nostalgia. She believes that "reflective" nostalgia can do much more good. Unlike restorative nostalgia, reflective nostalgia dwells on lostness and trauma but does not try to eliminate or deny them. As Fritzsche has noted, reflective nostalgia "cherish fragments, departures, and ruins," accepting that there will always be displacement from one's home (Fritzsche, 2002, p. 129; Zembylas, 2014, p. 10), and as such recognizes that we are unable to restore the past because time passes and our memories are imperfect. Instead of viewing these nostalgic longings as static they "temporalize space." In turn, reflective nostalgia creates a means of creative and sometimes counter-narrative expression. For example, Rushdie described reflective nostalgia as the driving force behind his own "Imaginary Homelands." A cracked mirror may indicate an incomplete image but it is this cracked mirror that allows for new hybridized storylines.

Reflective nostalgia generates the most meaningful expressions of belonging in all three works studied here. *The Shadow Lines*' narrator by Ghosh constructs both London and Dhaka out of remnants and fissures. Gogol and the other children in *The Lowland* create their identities through irony and selectivity to reflect on the discontinuities that define their lives. Zembylas has identified two forms of unrooted/ambivalent nostalgia (unattached/ free-floating) that allow the writer to capture the fluidity of loss and sadness but also open up possibilities for authentic reflection (Zembylas, 2014, pp. 13-15). The interweaving of Rushdie's shattered mirror, Mishra's imagined diaspora, Portelli's lived memories, and Boym's nostalgic reflection offer a multidimensional analytical framework. Both Ghosh and Lahiri's narratives are characterized by fragmented belongings that will never be totally regained. Rather, they will be creatively assembled through imaginative identity quests to create hybrid identities where one feels "at home" in multiple ways.

The narrator grew up in Calcutta, but London felt like home many years before he ever set foot in it. In fact, he could describe London's streets, London's weather, and London's smells just as easily as he could those of Calcutta. "Although I had never been to London," he says in Ghosh, "I had come to know the city as well as I knew Calcutta" (20). The result was an example of Salman Rushdie's "imaginary homeland", created by putting together the pieces of a shattered mirror. The spaces or voids did not detract from the image; rather, they allowed for it. In Rabbi's recent article about the novel, she labels this method of storytelling memory as a narrative strategy which disrupts the traditional sequential nature of historical accounts. Maps and textbooks depict events as cause-and-effect relationships with specific dates.

Tridib is the silent teacher for the young narrator. Tridib teaches through action not by teaching he shows him how to see. "You can't get where you want to go without having the eyes to see it," he says (Ghosh 20) Tridib's eyes are the eyes of someone who sees through stories, and has learned to pay close attention to people's memories; he doesn't have the same eyes as a tourist or a passport holder. Tridib has lived only as a child in London and still he can tell his version of the city so clearly that the narrator believes they have walked those streets. Tridib shares a way of existing not knowledge, an imagination is a better form of traveling than any plane ticket could ever be. Sen argues that Tridib represents a transcultural space in his thesis on borders and national identity in this novel. He does not think about the two spaces here and there; self and other. Rather he exists in the places of transition between those two ideas. When he speaks to the narrator about London he is not creating a static picture he is encouraging the young man to create that picture with him. That is also what Boym means by reflective nostalgia cherishing pieces not attempting to recreate a whole.

Tha'mma, however, represents a stark contrast. She is the most ardent supporter of the concept of a nation state. Born in Dhaka, Tha'mma is displaced to Calcutta at partition. Throughout her entire life, she bears the scar of having lost a home land where her nationality is no longer recognized. "Where is the difference, then?" she asks, upon learning that the line separating India and Pakistan is invisible from the sky. "All that bloodshed and division...what was it all for--if we don't get some sort of continuity?" (Ghosh, p. 151). In the strictest definition of Boym's term, Tha'mma is seeking to restore the past. She wishes for the past to be restored exactly as it was, complete with clearly defined borders and a place to call home. Years later when Tha'mma eventually returns to Dhaka, she is disappointed. The streets look different; the house is not the same; even the air feels foreign. The physical border that she had placed so much faith in has deceived her. The tragic tale of Tha'mma could have been told better by Peeter's essay on the theme of belonging/migration. As a result of the ideology of the nation-state being unable to fit itself around the disordered nature of living beings, Tha'mma becomes forever homeless within her own country. By comparison, the narrator has never believed that the physical would mirror or represent his internalized version of what a place should feel like.

The narrative's polyphony, as opposed to Tha'mma's monologue, permits multiple voices to be heard. That includes those of Tridib, Ila, Robi, and the Prices in London. Through their combined voice, "home" is no longer a singular place on a map, but rather a dialogue across borders. The mirror motif, which recurs throughout the novel (London mirrors Calcutta, and Dhaka mirrors London), reminds us that all here contain within themselves there. The narrator's inventive cartography accepts this fact; Tha'mma's desire for restoration does not. The *Shadow Lines* does not simply criticize borders, it provides an alternate means of existing alongside them. Through illustrating how memory can be the true

cartographer, Ghosh illustrates that one's sense of belonging has nothing to do with a passport or birth certificate.

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) makes the ordinary places of home such as kitchens, name tags, family traditions, battlegrounds of "where does one belong?" for the generations and countries involved. Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* uses memory to reshape national borders; Lahiri, however, zoomed in the viewfinder to the personal geography of the Ganguli household. Domestic life here is the actual location of diaspora; it is the location where first generation parents like Ashoke and Ashima try to recreate Calcutta in Boston and where their American born son Gogol learns there is no home that is simply handed down. *The Namesake* shows readers that hybrid identities are not just theoretical constructs but rather messy realities based upon what people prepare to eat, what names they give their children and what they choose to remember. Using Boym's *Reflective Nostalgia*, Rushdie's *Broken-Mirror Imagination*, and Mishra's *Diasporic Imaginary* the novel illustrates how acts at home can create from a traumatic displacement a generative third space where fragments of two worlds are sewn together into something new and sustainable.

Ashima Ganguli moves to Cambridge with a heavy heart as a reluctant bride. She has left behind the crowded streets of Calcutta and the familiar rhythms of Bengali life along with the support system provided by her large extended family. In early pages of the book, Lahiri describes Ashim's sense of disorientation: The apartment felt colder than she had ever experienced before. The food tasted strange. And, when she gave birth to Gogol in an American Hospital by herself, a solitary experience completely outside of her cultural norms Ashima experienced this as a failure of tradition. As Ashima recalls thinking about her parents being in the same room, she had never seen her parents in the same room (Lahiri, 4). She was nostalgic for a time when all Bengali women returned to their family homes for child births. The nature of her yearning was restorative in the sense described by Boym she wanted the past recreated identically to its former self including every ritual, smell, and feeling of safety of her childhood home.

But as years go by, Ashima's nostalgia changes. Her loss (her husband) causes her to see that Calcutta cannot be recreated. Rather than trying to regain something unattainable, she creates a life for herself in the very location where she had previously opposed. She teaches children of Americans how to speak Bengali, has parties where she serves samosa and American pie together, and ultimately divides her time between Boston and India without considering which was going to "feel" like home. In this sense Ashima is working through reflective nostalgia; Ashima understands the value of fragments and not whole. One of the scholars writes about the realization that "home" is anywhere she has created a life; this represents the quiet victory of the immigrant who no longer fights against the difference between "there" and "here," but instead lives within it.

Lahiri uses the Names and foods to represent the most important symbolic representations of Hybrid Identity. Gogol's Name, which was assigned to him when he was born due to a crazy mix up while his mother was in the hospital, would become the ultimate symbol of Second-Generation Displacement. To Gogol, it would serve as an embarrassing relic of his parents' Bengali World, reminding him on a daily basis that he didn't quite fit in America. He rejected it; He changed his name to Nikhil believing that having an American Sounding first name would allow him to fly under the radar and assimilate seamlessly into Mainstream America. However, the name Gogol would haunt him for many years. It would carry the burden of his Father's Survival Story and their Family History as Immigrants. Only after his Father passed away did Gogol find solace reading the works of Russian author Nikolai Gogol. Reading Gogol's Works gave him insight into the fact that, much like Identities, Names are Never Chosen Cleanly. They are often Handed Down, Sometimes Awkwardly, and Must Be Lived With. Ashima is attempting to replicate the flavors of her childhood in Bengal, using ingredients available "here" (the U.S.) to help bring back memories of "there." The resulting snack is neither strictly American, nor exclusively Indian, but rather a new hybrid product that satisfies both of those cultures and serves as a meal for her children in their Boston kitchen. These acts of domestic ritual become a form of survival for the second generation allowing them to connect with pieces of their past while avoiding being overwhelmed by the weight of all that has come before. The emotional arc of the book revolves around Gogol's journey from rejecting his name and heritage to accepting it. As a young man Gogol does not want anything to do with his Bengali roots dating American girls, studying architecture and trying to create a clean slate free of history. However the name Gogol continues to follow him emerging unexpectedly at key times reminding him that his identity can't be shed like an old jacket. A major turning point occurs when his father dies. In reading some of Nikolai Gogol's stories Gogol begins to see his name as something positive. His name becomes a connection to his fathers ability to survive, to the car crash which created his name's significance, and ultimately to the broader experience of migration and survival which defined his families' history.

The Namesake represents the "positive acceptance" of fractured identity which Boym finds appealing, and in which Mishra's diasporic imagination creates room. Gogol does not have a neat conclusion. He does not become all Indian or all American at once. Rather, he learns how to inhabit the hyphen (the connecting element) that binds both his names and both worlds together. As he packs up his parent's house at the end of the novel, Gogol is holding the volume of Gogol's short stories. It is a small yet meaningful act: he has stopped fleeing his name. With this decision he personifies reflective nostalgia, turning what may be seen as loss into possibilities of creativity. To him, the shattered glass of the diasporic experience no longer seems defective; it now seems the most accurate way of

viewing himself. In Lahiri's view, there are no illusions about hybridity. She depicts the downsides of Gogol's loneliness, Ashima's quiet pain, the long stretches of silence between generations. However, she also portrays the benefits of hybridity, a domestic setting in which Rice Krispies can evoke a sense of home, in which a Russian name can provide stability to an American existence, and in which one can create their own sense of belonging.

Diaspora scholars have traditionally conceptualized the migration experience using frameworks of exile, alienation and irrevocable loss. As such, many analysts of Jhumpa Lahiri's works have analyzed her protagonists, i.e., Gogol in *The Namesake* and Bela in *The Lowland*, as representative of intergenerational trauma and cultural disorientation; suspended between two worlds, carrying unspoken histories and fragmented selves (Rani and Yadav, 2024). Likewise, studies of Amitav Ghosh, with their focus on the pain of Partition and the yearning for lost homelands, portray diaspora as a state of being forever displaced (Macwan, 2014), echoing Reis' (2004) "classic" diaspora model of trauma/displacement/idealized past (seen in Jewish or Armenian diaspora models). These perspectives may inadvertently reduce the diasporic condition to victimhood while ignoring the potential creativity born out of rupture.

Both *The Shadow Lines* and *The Namesake* initially frame themselves in terms of this traditional view, but they also move beyond it, presenting an affirmative representation. Based on Reis' distinctions between classic/exilic/tragic Diasporas and contemporary/hybrid/opportunity-driven Diasporas and based on Prinz's (2019) Identity Economics approach, both works illustrate how reflective nostalgia enables agency out of fragmentation. Protagonists are not simply passive recipients of history but are instead creators of complex layers of reality. Memory serves as architectural material but does so in different ways. For example, Ghosh memory is spatial/temporal. The narrator's "imagined" London and Dhaka are constructed through Tridib's stories, photographs and the silences inherent in official accounts. Thus borders become "shadows", illusory constructs that personal recollections can redefine. This form of creative cartography displaces national narratives and converts traumatic partition memories into a borderless sense of belonging.

In both novels, the "Tragic Migrant," a mythological figure associated with the concept of a homeland lost forever, is rejected. Imaginary homelands are not fantasies or imperfect representations of some idealized past, but rather multi-layered realities that enhance human experiences (the broken mirror as gain according to Rushdie). Reflective Nostalgia (Boym), as a form of agency. Historical memory facilitates transcultural spaces (Sen, 2019). Personal memories facilitate the reinvention of families. The characters move out of classical diasporic circumstances of trauma and exile (Reis), into a present-day condition of hybrid creativity and productive belonging. According to Prinz, migrants have to find their way between adapting economically and negotiating culturally and

therefore develop third spaces that support instead of fragmenting the self. As such, this comparative analysis addresses an omission in prior scholarship. Prior scholarship has emphasized negative aspects (such as exile and rootlessness). By providing a positive representation of migration as a means of achieving belonging through negotiations based on intimacy, while Ghosh demonstrates how large historical projects can be used to reimagine old and new Diasporas, this comparative analysis provides grounding for the broader argument. Ultimately, both novels demonstrate that diaspora is not simply a state of loss; it is also a process of creating enriched hybrid selves, the central tenet of the diasporic imaginary (Mishra). Therefore, ultimately, these novels demonstrate that imaginary homelands are not escapist fantasy but rather complex imaginative realities that enable us to belong in ways that we can understand on our own human terms.

Conclusion

The previous analysis of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* together with Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, show us that loss is not a requirement of the diaspora. Rather, reflective nostalgia, as described by Svetlana Boym, serves as the principal driving force behind a positive experience of diaspora. When restorative nostalgia causes individuals to remain frozen in a nostalgically-idealized yet unattainable past Tha'mma returns to her former home in a changed Dhaka with anger or Ashima begins to desire an identical replica of Calcutta reflective nostalgia focuses on the imaginative distance between "here" and "there." Reflective nostalgia turns separation/fragmentation into empowerment. The narrator in *The Shadow Lines* does not mourn the lost map of undivided India/Bengal; instead, he creates an alternative version of it via Tridib's storytelling, transforming what are officially defined as boundaries into "shadow lines" that memory may travel across freely. Likewise, Gogol's path toward becoming one with his family and heritage in *The Namesake* transitions from seeing his name as a signifier of alienation to viewing it as a connector to his father's legacy, while Ashima's moment of making Rice Krispies becomes an example of innovative hybridity rather than nostalgia for a perceived lack. In both cases, creative memory (Mishra; Portelli), along with the diasporic imagination, enables the transformation of traumatic experiences into multiple forms of connection. This conclusion specifically addresses Michele Reis's differentiation between classical and contemporary Diasporas. Classical diasporic models rely upon notions of exile and victimhood and have been most commonly studied within the context of Ghosh and Lahiri. However, the two novels clearly transition into Reis' notion of a "contemporary" diaspora characterized by globalization and opportunities that create hybrid identities. Aloys Prinz's identity economics provides insight into how this process works. Migrants weigh their options relative to potential economic benefits versus maintaining their cultural identity and often select the

middle ground represented by the reflective reconstruction of a new identity. As such, they do not lose their sense of place; they expand it.

Salman Rushdie's "Broken Mirror" metaphor best exemplifies this Gift. The migrant's strangeness or double vision, their ability to see two worlds simultaneously and partially, is neither a deficit nor a detriment to literature; it represents the greatest advantage to literature. The fragments seen by some become greater truths when looked at with the eyes of a migrant. The protagonists of these selected works demonstrate that imaginative homelands represent not merely comforting illusions; they are complex and living realities portable, inclusive and productive. As the world continues to become more interconnected, imaginative homelands will be the most authentic expression of connection. These imaginative homelands also remind us that diaspora can be a positively conditioned state (as long as it is supported by reflexive nostalgia and creative memory), one which enlarges the self, expands literature, and re-imagines home as whatever place the mind and heart choose to reside.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/49**TRANSCREATION BEYOND TRANSLATION: CULTURAL
HYBRIDITY AND REIMAGINING OF ENGLISH TEXTS IN
BOLLYWOOD CINEMA****HIMANSHI LALJIBHAI PARMAR**Research Scholar, Department of English
Maharaja Krishnakumarsinhji Bhavnagar University
Bhavnagar, Gujarat, India**Abstract**

This paper focuses on the idea of transcreation to understand how Bollywood changes English literary texts when turning them into Hindi films. Instead of looking at translation only as a shift from one language to another, this study treats transcreation as a broader process where language, culture, emotions, and meanings are all reshaped together. When a text moves from English to Hindi cinema, it does not just change words, but also its cultural references, character behaviour, social habits, settings, religious elements, and even its overall themes. The paper studies *Dil Bechara*, based on *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green, and *Haider*, inspired by *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare. Both films are analysed separately through the lens of transcreation to see how their original English contexts are transformed into Indian ones. In *Dil Bechara*, the story shifts from a more individual-focused culture to one that highlights family, emotional closeness, and Indian ways of dealing with love and illness. In *Haider*, the transformation is deeper, as the story is placed in Kashmir, where political conflict, location, and cultural tensions reshape the meaning of the original play. The paper argues that what Bollywood does goes beyond simple translation. It recreates the story in a new cultural form so that it connects better with Indian audiences. Through transcreation, the original text becomes a starting point, and the film becomes a new, culturally rooted work in its own right.

Keywords: Transcreation, Translation, Cultural Hybridity, Bollywood Cinema, Indian Context, Films.

1. Introduction

Stories do not stay in one place. They move from one language to another, from one culture to another, and sometimes from a book into a film. When this happens, the story does not remain exactly the same. It changes. It adjusts itself. It takes on new meanings. This becomes very clear when English literary texts are turned into Hindi films in Bollywood. At first, this might look like a simple case of translation. But if we look closely, it is much more than that.

Translation is usually understood as the process of changing words from one language into another while trying to keep the meaning the same. This idea works

well in many situations. However, it becomes limited when we talk about cinema. Films do not depend only on words. They use images, music, body language, silence, and emotion to tell a story. Because of this, a film cannot simply “translate” a book. It has to recreate it in a new form.

This is where the idea of transcreation becomes important. Transcreation allows more freedom than translation. It does not focus only on words. Instead, it pays attention to how meaning is shaped by culture, emotions, and everyday life. When a story moves from an English context to an Indian one, many things need to change. The way people speak, the way they express emotions, their relationships, their beliefs, and even their surroundings can be very different. If these elements are not adjusted, the story may feel distant or unnatural to the audience.

In the context of Bollywood, this process of change is very common. Hindi films are deeply connected to Indian culture and audience expectations. They often include strong family bonds, emotional expression, music, and social values that reflect everyday life in India. Because of this, when a story comes from a different cultural background, it cannot be presented in the same way. It needs to be reshaped so that it feels familiar and meaningful to the viewers.

This reshaping is not random. It is a thoughtful process. Filmmakers make choices about what to keep, what to change, and what to add. Sometimes the changes are small, such as adjusting dialogues or settings. At other times, the changes are much bigger. The entire meaning of the story may shift because of a new cultural or political context. This shows that the original text is not simply copied. It becomes a base on which a new version is built.

The idea of transcreation helps us understand this better. It suggests that the goal is not to remain fully faithful to the original text. Instead, the goal is to create something that works well in the new context. The story should feel real and relatable to the audience watching it. In this sense, transcreation is both creative and practical. It respects the original work, but it also allows space for change.

This paper looks at two Bollywood films that clearly show how this process works: *Dil Bechara* and *Haider*. *Dil Bechara* is based on *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green. The original story is set in a Western context and focuses on individual experiences of love and illness. In the Hindi film, the same story is told in a different way. More importance is given to family, emotional closeness, and shared experiences. The characters behave in ways that feel more natural within Indian society.

On the other hand, *Haider* is inspired by *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare. This film takes a much deeper step in transformation. It places the story in Kashmir, a region with its own political tensions and social realities. Because of this shift, the meaning of the story also changes. Themes like revenge and betrayal are still present, but they are now connected to issues like conflict, identity, and power. The setting itself becomes an important part of the narrative.

These two films show that transcreation can happen in different ways. Sometimes it focuses on emotional and cultural adjustment. Sometimes it involves a complete rethinking of the story's context. In both cases, the result is not a copy of the original text. It is a new work that stands on its own.

This paper aims to study how these changes happen and why they matter. It looks at how Bollywood adapts stories in a way that connects with Indian audiences. It also tries to understand what happens to the original meaning during this process. Instead of judging whether a film is "faithful" to its source, the focus here is on how effectively it communicates in its new setting.

2. Transcreation beyond Translation: Origin, Concept and Development

The term *transcreation* may sound modern, but the idea behind it has been around for quite some time. It comes from two familiar words "translation" and "creation." As Daniel Pedersen explains in *Managing Transcreation Projects: An Ethnographic Study*, transcreation is not just about transferring a message from one language to another. It is about doing that while also keeping the feeling, style, and cultural meaning of the original text alive. In simple terms, it is a translation with creativity and cultural awareness added to it.

In traditional translation, the main goal is often accuracy. Translators try to stay close to the original words and structure. They focus on grammar, vocabulary, and correctness. This approach works well in many cases, especially when the content is technical or factual. It does not always work when the text carries emotions, cultural references, or artistic expression. A literal translation may be correct, but it might feel flat or disconnected in the new language.

This is where transcreation takes a different path. Instead of focusing only on linguistic accuracy, it tries to recreate the same emotional effect in the target language. The idea is simple but powerful: the audience reading or watching the translated version should feel what the original audience felt. To achieve this, the translator or rather, the transcreator, may change words, expressions, or even certain elements of the text. The focus shifts from "What does the text say?" to "How does the text make people feel?" The below graph explains it well;



The concept of transcreation has interesting roots in different parts of the world, especially in India and Brazil. According to Minako O'Hagan and Carmen

Mangiron in their work *Game Localization: Translating for the Global Digital Entertainment Industry*, the term began to take shape around the mid-20th century. Both India and Brazil developed their own ways of understanding it, and these perspectives are quite different from each other.

In the Indian context, transcreation is often seen as a gentle and natural blending of the original and the new. Purushottama Lal, one of the key figures in this field, used the term in his essay *Transcreation: Two Essays* (1972). Even earlier, in 1964, he wrote about translating Sanskrit texts and suggested that a translator should not act like a mechanical converter of words. Instead, the translator should become a “transcreator”—someone who revises, reshapes, and sometimes even reimagines the text.

A well-known example that supports this idea is the retelling of the *Ramayana*. When Tulsidas rewrote the story in local languages, he did not simply translate it word for word from Sanskrit. He changed it to suit the cultural and emotional needs of his audience. The language became simpler, the tone became more devotional, and the story felt closer to everyday life. Because of these changes, many scholars, including Purushottama Lal, see it as an act of transcreation rather than translation.

Lal later returned to this idea in his work *Transcreation: Seven Essays on the Art of Transcreation* (1996), where he discussed how this concept becomes even more important in postcolonial contexts. In such settings, language is not just a tool of communication; it is also tied to identity, history, and power. Transcreation allows writers and translators to reshape texts in ways that reflect their own cultural voice. The Brazilian perspective on transcreation, however, is quite different and more radical. Haroldo de Campos, discussed by David Jackson in *Transcreation without Borders*, used a striking metaphor. He compared transcreation to a “blood transfusion.” This suggests that the new text is not just influenced by the original—it is given new life through transformation.

In Brazil, transcreation is sometimes described using the idea of “cultural cannibalism.” This may sound harsh, but it has an interesting meaning. It suggests that the target culture absorbs elements of the foreign text, breaks them down, and then recreates them in its own way. The final result may look very different from the original, but it carries its essence in a transformed form. This approach openly accepts change and sees it as a creative strength rather than a problem.

Over time, the term *transcreation* gained wider recognition. It was even included in the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Contemporary English* in 1996 as part of Indian English vocabulary. This shows how strongly the concept is connected to Indian literary and translation practices. Scholars often use the image of a banyan tree to describe the Indian approach. Like the tree, which grows by spreading its roots and branches, transcreation develops slowly and naturally, adapting itself to new surroundings.

This idea stands in contrast to the Brazilian model, which is more forceful and transformative. While the Indian version focuses on harmony and continuity, the Brazilian version highlights disruption and reinvention. Both approaches agree on one thing: translation is not just about words. It is about meaning, culture, and creativity.

Today, transcreation is often seen as a form of creative translation. Some scholars even say that every good translation involves a degree of transcreation. Still, it is important to note that the two are not exactly the same. Translation usually aims to stay close to the original, while transcreation allows more freedom to change and adapt.

In recent years, the idea of transcreation has expanded into new areas. Practices like fansubbing, fandubbing, and crowdsourced translation have challenged traditional ideas about who can translate and how translation should be done. These developments have also raised questions about ethics, authorship, and creativity. One of the main debates continues to be about how much freedom a translator should have.

In the end, the difference between translation and transcreation comes down to creativity. Translation tries to preserve meaning as it is, while transcreation reshapes meaning so that it can live in a new cultural space. Both are important, but transcreation becomes especially useful when stories cross not just languages, but entire cultural worlds.

3. Case Study I: Dil Bechara and Transcreation

Dil Bechara (2020), directed by Mukesh Chhabra, is inspired by *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green. On the surface, both tell the story of a young girl living with cancer who falls in love. But when we move from the novel to the film, it becomes clear that the story has not simply been translated. It has been reworked, reshaped, and gently rebuilt within a new cultural space. What we see here is not translation in the strict sense, but transcreation—a process where the original story becomes a starting point, and a new version grows out of it.

In the novel, Hazel Grace lives in an American setting where life feels more private and inward. Much of her experience is shaped by her own thoughts. She reflects a lot on life, death, and what it means to exist. Her emotions are often quiet and controlled. Even her relationship with Augustus grows through conversations and shared reflections. The world around her is present, but it does not press in too much.

When the story becomes *Dil Bechara*, this emotional world changes. Kizie Basu does not live in isolation. She is surrounded—by her family, by her neighbourhood, by constant interaction. Her life feels more shared than private. Her illness is not just her own burden; it becomes something that affects and involves everyone around her. This shift feels natural in the Indian context, where personal struggles are rarely kept entirely personal. They lived together.

Religion is one of the clearest places where this shift can be seen. In the novel, Hazel attends a cancer support group that meets in a church. The setting is very specific—a stone-walled Episcopal church shaped like a cross. The group leader, Patrick, speaks in strongly Christian terms. He tells the group that they are sitting in the “sacred heart of Christ.” Faith, in this space, is direct and clearly named.

In *Dil Bechara*, this entire atmosphere is quietly changed. The Christian setting disappears, and in its place, we see a Bengali household with its own cultural and spiritual surroundings. There are hints of Indian belief systems, including references to Goddess Durga. The shift is not loud or forced. It happens naturally, almost without drawing attention to itself. The idea of faith is still there, but it now speaks in a language that feels closer to Indian life. This is exactly how transcreation works—it keeps the emotional idea but changes the way it is expressed.

The characters themselves also begin to feel different as the story moves into a new space. In the novel, Hazel enjoys watching *America’s Next Top Model*. This detail grounds her in a particular kind of Western teenage life. It shows her interests, her habits, and her cultural environment. But Kizie Basu is imagined differently. She is deeply connected to Bollywood. She dreams of becoming an actress. This dream is not just added for entertainment—it reflects how cinema holds a special place in Indian culture.

The film even creates a moment where Kizie and Manny make their own short film with the help of friends. They become creators in their own small world. This scene does not exist in the novel, yet it fits perfectly in the film. It adds warmth, humour, and a sense of community. More importantly, it shows how the story has been allowed to grow in a new direction instead of staying tied to the original.

Family relationships also shift in subtle but important ways. In both the novel and the film, the protagonist’s parents are supportive and caring. But the emotional focus is different. In the novel, Hazel’s mother stands out strongly. Her fear, her constant care, and her emotional presence are deeply felt. The relationship between mother and daughter is explored with great detail.

In *Dil Bechara*, the family is still there, but the attention moves elsewhere. The film places more weight on the love story between Kizie and Manny. Their relationship becomes the emotional centre. This is very much in line with Bollywood storytelling, where romance often takes the front seat. Because of this, the mother-daughter bond, though present, does not unfold with the same depth as in the novel. Instead, the film focuses more on moments that create emotional impact for the audience—especially through love, loss, and visible suffering.

Another noticeable change lies in how the protagonist’s desires are portrayed. Hazel, in the novel, has a slightly rebellious side. She talks about wanting to get a fake ID, go to clubs, drink vodka, and try things that are considered part of a “normal” teenage life in her context. These details make her feel real and relatable within her world.

Kizie Basu, on the other hand, is imagined differently. She comes across as more composed and mature. The film does not show her engaging in such activities. This change reflects social expectations within Indian culture, especially in mainstream cinema. Female characters are often shaped in ways that align with accepted norms. As a result, Kizie's character becomes someone who fits more comfortably within these boundaries.

The tone of the story also shifts as it moves from page to screen. The novel carries a quiet kind of humour. Hazel's voice is thoughtful, sometimes ironic, and often introspective. The emotions build slowly. In the film, emotions are more visible. They are expressed through dialogue, through gestures, through silence, and most importantly, through music. Songs add another layer to the storytelling. They guide the audience's feelings and make the experience more intense and immediate.

Even the way illness is presented changes. In the novel, cancer is something Hazel thinks about deeply. It is tied to her fears, her questions, and her understanding of life. In the film, while these elements are still present, the focus shifts slightly. The illness becomes something that is felt more openly. It is shared through emotional scenes, through relationships, and through moments designed to connect strongly with the audience.

All these changes, when seen together, show a clear movement from translation to transcreation. The story is not copied; it is reimagined. The original narrative provides the base, but the film builds something new on top of it. It adjusts culture, reshapes characters, and reworks emotions so that the story can live in a different environment.

In the end, *Dil Bechara* stands as its own story. It carries the heart of *The Fault in Our Stars*, but it speaks in a different voice. It belongs to a different world. This is what makes transcreation powerful. It allows a story to travel, not by staying the same, but by changing in ways that make it meaningful in a new cultural space.

4. Case Study II: Haider and Transcreation

Haider (2014), directed by Vishal Bhardwaj, is inspired by *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare. At first, both the play and the film seem to follow the same basic story—a son trying to understand his father's death and struggling with the idea of revenge. But as the story moves from Elizabethan England to Kashmir in the 1990s, it changes in deep and meaningful ways. This is not just adaptation. It is a clear example of transcreation, where the story is reshaped to suit a different cultural, social, and political environment.

In *Hamlet*, the story belongs to a royal setting. It revolves around kings, queens, and the idea of power within a palace. The conflict is mostly personal, even though it has political consequences. Hamlet's struggle is mainly internal. He thinks, doubts, and questions before taking action. His famous line, "To be or not to be," reflects this inner conflict about life and death.

When we come to *Haider*, the world is completely different. The story is set in Kashmir during a time of insurgency, military presence, and fear. Here, power is not limited to a royal family. It exists in the hands of the state, the military, and different political groups. The disappearance of Haider's father, Hilaal Meer, is not just a family matter. It reflects a real issue faced by many people during that time—enforced disappearances.

The line "*Hum hain ki hum nahin*" (Are we even alive, or not?) captures this condition very well. It is not just Haider's question. It represents the confusion and pain of an entire society. This shows how the film takes Hamlet's personal question and turns it into a larger, political one.

One of the strongest examples of transcreation is how the "ghost" in *Hamlet* is changed. In the play, the ghost of Hamlet's father appears and tells him about the murder. This creates a sense of mystery and doubt. But in *Haider*, there are no ghosts. Instead, there is Roohdaar, a man who has lived through the same experience. He tells Haider the truth about what happened in the detention camp. This change makes the story more realistic and connected to Indian socio-political conditions. Indian audiences are more likely to relate to stories based on real events rather than supernatural elements, especially in serious films. By replacing the ghost with a real witness, the film grounds the story in reality. This is a clear example of how transcreation works—it keeps the purpose of the scene but changes its form to suit the audience.

At the same time, the film also adapts the story to Indian cultural values. Indian culture often places strong importance on family relationships, emotional expression, and moral choices. In *Haider*, these elements are very visible. The relationship between Haider and his mother, Ghazala, is central to the story. Their bond is intense, emotional, and sometimes uncomfortable. This reflects the way family ties are deeply felt and expressed in Indian society.

Ghazala is not just a version of Gertrude from *Hamlet*. She is a much more active and emotionally complex character. She sings, laughs, loves, and suffers. Her final act sacrificing herself shows the depth of her character. Her dialogue, "*Inteqaam se sirf inteqaam paida hota hai*" (Revenge only leads to more revenge), brings a moral message that fits strongly within Indian storytelling traditions. Indian narratives often focus on the consequences of actions and the importance of breaking cycles of violence. This is different from *Hamlet*, where revenge is completed despite its tragic cost.

Another important cultural shift can be seen in the use of music and performance. In *Hamlet*, the "play within a play" is used by Hamlet to reveal the truth. It is a quiet and clever strategy. In *Haider*, this idea is transformed into the song "Bismil." This is not just a performance—it is a dramatic public expression of truth.

Through lyrics, dance, and visual storytelling, Haider exposes Khurram's betrayal. The line "*Yeh saazish hai ya dhokha?*" (Is this a conspiracy or betrayal?) directly

questions the situation. This scene shows how Indian cinema uses music not just for entertainment, but as a powerful storytelling tool. It connects emotionally with the audience and makes the message stronger and more immediate.

The theme of madness also changes in a culturally meaningful way. In *Hamlet*, madness is partly an act and partly a psychological state. Hamlet pretends to be mad, but he is also genuinely troubled. In *Haider*, madness feels more like a response to trauma and injustice. Haider's behaviour, his anger, his protests, his emotional breakdowns reflect the pressure of living in a conflict zone.

His line, "*Main paagal hoon... lekin sach bolta hoon*" (I am mad... but I speak the truth), shows how madness becomes a way of expressing truth in a society where speaking openly can be dangerous. This idea connects strongly with Indian political realities, where art and expression often become forms of resistance.

The character of Arshia also reflects cultural and situational changes. Like Ophelia, she is caught between love and family. But in *Haider*, her situation is shaped by the conflict around her. Her father is a police officer, and Haider is seen as a threat. When she loses both, she cannot cope. Her death is not just about personal heartbreak. It reflects the emotional damage caused by political violence. This makes her character more grounded in reality. Indian audiences can relate to such conflicts because they reflect real-life struggles between duty, love, and identity.

The ending of *Haider* is perhaps the strongest example of transcreation. In *Hamlet*, the story ends with revenge and death. Almost all major characters die, and the cycle of violence is completed. In *Haider*, the ending takes a different path. Haider chooses not to kill Khurram. He walks away.

This decision reflects a moral shift. Indian storytelling often values forgiveness, reflection, and the idea of breaking negative cycles as it is well said in Indian culture that 'क्षमा वीरस्य भूषणम्' (Forgiveness is the ornament of the brave). By choosing not to take revenge, Haider shows growth. He learns from his mother's words. This ending feels more in line with the cultural belief that violence should not be the final answer.

When we look at all these elements together—the political setting, the emotional relationships, the use of music, the transformation of characters, and the moral ending—it becomes clear that *Haider* is deeply rooted in Indian culture and reality. It does not try to copy *Hamlet*. Instead, it transcreates it so that it speaks to Indian audiences.

This is what makes *Haider* a strong example of transcreation. It keeps the core themes of Hamlet—revenge, betrayal, and moral conflict—but changes the way these themes are expressed. It brings in Indian values, political realities, and cultural forms to create something new.

In the end, *Haider* is not just a film based on a play. It is a story that belongs to its own context. It shows how a classic text can travel across time and space and still

remain meaningful. But it does so by changing, adapting, and growing. That is the true power of transcreation.

5. Conclusion

This paper set out to examine how Bollywood adaptations move beyond the limits of translation and enter the space of transcreation. Through the close reading of *Dil Bechara* and *Haider*, it becomes clear that the movement from English literary texts to Hindi cinema is not a simple shift of language. It is a deeper process in which stories are reshaped, recontextualised, and culturally grounded so that they can speak meaningfully to Indian audiences.

In *Dil Bechara*, the transformation works at an emotional and cultural level. The narrative shifts from an individual-centred Western perspective to a more collective and family-oriented Indian context. Changes in religion, lifestyle, character behaviour, and emotional expression show how the story is carefully localised. The film does not just retell *The Fault in Our Stars*; it rebuilds it in a way that reflects Indian values, especially the importance of relationships, shared suffering, and emotional openness.

On the other hand, *Haider* presents a much deeper form of transcreation by placing Hamlet within the political realities of Kashmir. Here, the transformation goes beyond culture and enters the realm of political reinterpretation. Themes of revenge, betrayal, and moral conflict are not removed but reshaped through the lens of insurgency, identity, and power. The film shows how a classical text can be made relevant in a completely different socio-political context while still retaining its core essence.

Together, these case studies demonstrate that transcreation allows stories to travel across cultures without losing their impact. Instead of focusing on fidelity to the original, Bollywood adaptations prioritise connection with the audience. They create new meanings while carrying forward the spirit of the source text.

In conclusion, transcreation emerges as a dynamic and necessary practice in a globalised world. It highlights that meaning is not fixed but flexible, shaped by culture, context, and experience. Bollywood cinema, through such adaptations, does not simply borrow stories, it reimagines them, giving them a new life within Indian cultural reality.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/50**MIGRATION AND ECONOMIC SURVIVAL AMONG TRIBAL
COMMUNITIES IN SOUTHERN TAMIL NADU****E. SUBASH**

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Abstract

The present research paper focuses on studying the phenomenon of labour migration among tribal populations residing in the Southern parts of Tamil Nadu with special emphasis on tribes such as Kani, Palliyan, Malasar, Muthuvan who live in the hilly regions of the Western Ghats. These tribes traditionally rely upon forests for their sustenance but are currently witnessing economic vulnerabilities owing to various reasons such as deforestation, environmental degradation, limited access to natural resources, and growth of development projects. These changes in the social milieu have resulted in many families among the tribes to find alternate ways of earning their livelihood through migrating to urban cities, plantations, construction sites, etc. This research paper will focus on the socio-economic and cultural aspects of labour migration among tribal communities, which has not only been used as an instrument for securing their livelihoods but is also responsible for bringing about transformations in their way of life. For instance, migration among tribes has led to the emergence of new identities, restructuring of traditional family units, and redefining the concept of kinship ties. The study aims at examining the push and pull factors behind migration along with the challenges faced by migrant workers.

Keywords: Tribal Migration, Economic Survival, Labour Mobility, Southern Tamil Nadu, Indigenous Communities, Western Ghats.

Introduction

Migration has emerged as one of the most crucial socio-economic phenomena among tribal groups in India. In the southern part of Tamil Nadu, tribal communities residing in the Western Ghats and nearby hilly areas have historically relied on forests, shifting agriculture, hunting, gathering, and small-scale farming for their livelihoods. However, factors such as environmental degradation, government forest policies, resource commercialization, poverty, limited job prospects, and developmental initiatives have gradually altered their traditional ways of making a living. As a result, numerous tribal communities have been pushed into seasonal, temporary, and distress-driven migration. The tribal populations of Southern Tamil Nadu, including the Kani, Palliyan, Malasar, Muthuvan, and others, have historically fostered a strong bond with the forests

and ecological environments of the Western Ghats. Their traditional economy was self-sufficient and intricately linked to nature. However, in recent years, modernization and state involvement have disrupted their economic frameworks. Many tribal families now seek work in plantations, construction sites, agricultural fields, urban areas, and nearby towns in pursuit of livelihood opportunities. Migration among tribal groups is distinct from general migration trends as it is primarily driven by the need for survival. Tribal migration is not simply a relocation from one geographical area to another; it signifies a socio-cultural shift influenced by economic instability and ecological displacement. The migration experience impacts family dynamics, traditional jobs, cultural identity, language, health, education, and community cohesion. Southern Tamil Nadu offers a unique backdrop for examining tribal migration due to its ecologically sensitive hilly regions, including the Agasthiyamalai ranges, Kalakkad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve, Palani Hills, Varushanadu Hills, and the forests of Theni and Tirunelveli districts. These regions are home to tribal communities that are increasingly burdened by economic pressures stemming from restricted forest access, dwindling natural resources, and limited availability of development programs. This article explores the reasons, trends, and effects of migration among tribal communities in Southern Tamil Nadu. It also investigates how migration serves as a means of economic survival while simultaneously presenting social and cultural challenges for indigenous groups.

Historical Background of Tribal Communities in Southern Tamil Nadu

The tribal populations of Southern Tamil Nadu have traditionally resided in remote forested and hilly areas. Their homes were typically located in ecologically diverse settings where forests supplied food, shelter, medicine, and means of survival. The Western Ghats acted as a natural barrier, enabling these communities to maintain their traditional ways of life for many generations. Among the notable tribal groups in Southern Tamil Nadu are the Kani tribes from the Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari districts, the Palliyan tribes found in the Theni and Dindigul regions, the Malasar communities of the Anamalai hills, and the Muthuvan settlements along the border with Kerala. These groups have historically engaged in hunting, gathering, honey harvesting, herbal medicine practices, and shifting cultivation. The Kani tribe, residing in the Agasthiyamalai area, has fostered a close bond with the forests and medicinal plants. Their livelihood was based on minor forest products, subsistence farming, and traditional ecological wisdom. Previous research indicates that the Kani were once semi-nomadic before gradually establishing themselves in forest villages. In a similar vein, the Palliyan tribe historically thrived as hunter-gatherers in the Palani and Varushanadu hills, relying heavily on forest resources like honey, wild tubers, medicinal herbs, and non-timber forest goods. Many Palliyan s initially resided in caves and rock shelters until modern settlement policies promoted more permanent living arrangements. The introduction of colonial forest management represented a

significant change in the history of these tribes. British forest regulations-imposed restrictions on shifting cultivation and hunting, while commercial plantations encroached upon forested areas. Following Independence, laws aimed at wildlife conservation and regulations for reserve forests further curtailed tribal access to forest resources. As a result, numerous tribal communities began to transition from self-sustaining forest economies to systems dependent on wage labour.

Causes of Migration among Tribal Communities

Migration among tribal communities in Southern Tamil Nadu is primarily influenced by economic difficulties, environmental shifts, and the gradual erosion of traditional livelihood systems. For centuries, tribal groups such as the Kani, Palliyan, and Malasar relied on forests for sustenance, medicinal resources, shelter, and employment opportunities. Their means of livelihood were intricately linked to hunting, gathering, shifting cultivation, honey harvesting, and the collection of minor forest products. However, due to stringent forest regulations, wildlife conservation initiatives, and the expansion of protected forest areas, access to forest resources for these tribes has become increasingly limited. Consequently, numerous tribal families find it challenging to maintain their traditional occupations and are forced to migrate in search of alternative employment options. Poverty and unemployment significantly contribute to tribal migration as well. The majority of tribal settlements in Southern Tamil Nadu are situated in isolated hill regions where access to education, healthcare, transportation, and job opportunities is severely restricted. Agriculture in these areas is predominantly reliant on rainfall and is seasonal, leading to unpredictable income. During times of drought, crop failures, or agricultural off-seasons, tribal individuals often migrate temporarily to nearby towns, plantations, and agricultural areas to work as wage labourers. Many take up construction work, plantation labour, road work, and daily wage jobs to support their families. Environmental degradation and climate change exacerbate migration issues. Deforestation, soil erosion, erratic rainfall patterns, and diminishing forest resources have undermined traditional tribal economies. Furthermore, developmental projects such as dams, roads, tourism initiatives, and wildlife sanctuaries have displaced numerous tribal communities from their ancestral lands. The educational aspirations and exposure to modern society also motivate younger tribal members to migrate towards urban areas in search of improved living conditions and economic opportunities. Thus, migration among these communities continues to be a pressing issue.

Patterns of Tribal Migration

Moving around has become part of daily life for many tribal groups in southern Tamil Nadu, shaped by shifts in jobs, nature's demands, and changes within their own societies. Not driven by city-style ambitions like factory work or climbing career ladders, these movements stem more from survival needs and unstable incomes. Groups such as the Kani, Palliyan, Malasar, and Muthuvan, living across

the Western Ghats, shift locations based on what work appears each season, how the land responds, and what their families must meet at home. Their movement tells a story - how old ways persist even when new pressures reshape every step forward. When crops fail, some families begin moving. Work vanishes at home so they head elsewhere often just across district lines - for temporary jobs. These trips often last a couple of months before everyone returns. In places like Tirunelveli hills or Theni's slopes, people know this rhythm well. Once harvests shrink, hands are needed on plantations growing coffee, sometimes rubber, even cardamom fields further down south. After wages are earned, paths turn back toward familiar villages. Some people help gather crops, build roads, work in brick factories, or take on jobs tied to building projects. When money gets tight, moving temporarily helps tribal families earn extra cash. What keeps them going often comes down to timing and need. Back and forth they go - tribal workers moving often between ancestral villages and job sites. Not quite permanent, yet not one-time either; ties to home stay strong even when days are spent earning elsewhere. Roads have gotten better, buses more frequent, making these trips easier than before. Jobs pop up in small cities or on farms just a few hours' away, pulling people out seasonally. Some head toward Tirunelveli, others board transport heading to Madurai, Nagercoil, or spots across the border in Kerala. Earnings come from short-term work, but roots remain buried deep in village soil. Movement repeats every few months, almost like rhythm rather than change. Demand for hands to plant, harvest, build keeps the flow steady year after year. Starting fresh somewhere doesn't mean letting go of where you came from. Workers move back and forth because staying put often brings too much risk when jobs at home keep disappearing. Because of this rhythm, many families hold on to traditions even while earning cash elsewhere. Moving between places like this helps whole communities stay afloat when work near them feels unreliable. Some young people from tribal groups move away for good, drawn by city jobs and better daily life. They head toward towns or manufacturing areas instead of staying near ancestral lands. Factory floors, house cleaning, building sites, or restaurant shifts become their new routines. Over time, these individuals settle into neighbourhoods far from home, forming lasting roots elsewhere. More and more, those with schooling choose cities, seeing office or trade work as a stronger path than gathering or farming in forests. Still, stepping fully into mainstream society can dull old ways - speech fades, customs slip, belonging blurs. Out in the hills, tribal movement toward plantations shapes life for many in southern Tamil Nadu. Work on green slopes - growing tea, coffee, rubber, spices - has long drawn people from these communities into Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Forest roots make such jobs feel familiar, one reason workers end up here, ready for tough days under sun and rain. Whole households shift for months at a time, settling into basic homes built near fields. Pay comes each week, true, yet it hardly covers what's needed when shelters leak, clinics stay far away, and rules ignore their voices. Migration tied to

family units shows up in specific tribal communities. Whole families sometimes move at once when money troubles hit hard or jobs vanish back home. Kids often stop going to school because of these moves, and village bonds start to fray. Moving for work now includes more women and children, especially on farms or plantations. When mothers take part in such movement, it points to deeper financial strain and the reality that many hands are needed to earn enough. Most tribal youth now move away chasing learning and better jobs. Access to schools grows, state support expands, contact with city life deepens these push choices toward new paths. Moving for college or work marks a shift, not escape. Unlike forced moves long seen, this path links to growth, to climbing up. Yet swapping forest homes for concrete streets pulls at who they feel they are. Familiar ways fade when surrounded by noise, speed, different rules. Belonging blurs once textbooks replace storytelling nights. Old rhythms lose ground as buses replace walking trails. Nowhere is the struggle clearer than here, where movement defines life for many tribal families across southern Tamil Nadu. Driven by shrinking forests rather than choice, people shift homes in cycles - some brief, some lasting years, others never returning. Work on plantations pulls them one way; lack of jobs at home pushes another. Hard times force motion, yet each journey alters old ways bit by bit. Life adapts around money needs, yes - but songs fade, rituals loosen, ties stretch thin. What once held groups together now shifts under pressure from outside forces. Moving isn't just about work anymore - it changes who they are.

Social Consequences of Migration

Out here, movement between villages among tribal groups in southern Tamil Nadu reshapes daily life more than most notice. Not money alone drives people away - pressures build slowly until leaving feels like the only path forward. These shifts pull at old ways of living, tugging hard on how families stay together, how kids learn, even who takes care of whom when sickness comes around. Tied closely to forest lands for generations, groups like the Kani, Palliyan, Malasar, and Muthuvan once lived within rhythms set by nature and shared routines. Now, work found far from home slips into centre stage, changing who holds responsibility, how time gets spent, what values get passed down. With each person departing for jobs elsewhere, pieces of tradition thin out, barely noticed until they're faint echoes. Leaving home for jobs often pulls families apart, weakening how communities stick together. Held together by shared daily tasks, village life once cantered on farming, gathering food from woods, hunting, and taking part in group ceremonies. Work far away now breaks that rhythm - many young men head out each year, returning only after months. Left behind, women tend households, kids go to school or help out, elders watch over what remains. Life keeps moving, but the old ways fade when too many are gone for long stretches. When people split off, it hits how closely families stay tied, chipping away at old ways neighbours used to lean on each other. Sometimes a whole kin group moves as one, leaving

homes empty for stretches, which tangles up familiar bonds back home. On the move, tribal kids face tough breaks in learning. When families shift constantly - work here, home there - school gets patchy. Missing class becomes normal during harvest or construction seasons. Without steady income or fixed homes, parents struggle to keep education on track. Learning gaps grow when life stays unsettled. Low literacy rates stick around in many tribal groups, mainly due to uneven access to learning. When school gets interrupted, it locks in hardship - kids start working young jobs instead of building futures. Missing out on education means fewer chances to move forward, economically or socially. Migration slowly wears away at tribal ways of life. Unique languages, passed down through speech instead of writing, begin fading. Rituals once central to community bonding now happen less often. Folk songs and dances lose their place when surroundings change. Healing methods rooted in nature get replaced by modern alternatives. Moving into city spaces means constant contact with different people. This closeness speeds up shifts in how things are done. Language use bends toward what's common around them. Clothing styles shift to match new settings. Eating patterns follow suit, shaped by availability rather than heritage. Adapting becomes a quiet necessity. Children raised near urban centres rarely hold on to ancestral routines. Knowledge tied to land and forest slips further from reach. Nowhere is the fade more clear than in how kids from tribal areas start acting like everyone else. Slowly, the old ways - spoken word, native tongues - are slipping away across many villages. What once held people together now gets replaced by city habits, new labels, different names. Young ones tie themselves to wider crowds instead of roots that go deep in soil and story. Leaving home for work chips away at old ways of knowing nature within tribal groups. From elders' voices to youth ears, secrets about healing herbs, woods, survival hunts, yet balanced earth care once flowed without written notes. Yet off they go - youth chasing daily pay - missing chances to soak up ancestral skills. Little by little, deep-rooted understanding slips through fingers like dry soil. Fading traditions weaken who people feel themselves to be while dimming time-tested insights into living gently with land. Out on the edges of cities, tribal people moving for work face unfair treatment just because they come from poor villages. Plantation jobs, building sites, farm fields - these places hire many migrants but offer harsh routines instead of fair pay. Without enough money, clean living spaces vanish along with medical care, toilets, even basic rights under law slip away. Being looked down upon becomes normal when your accent or skin marks you as different by birth. Not knowing how systems work leaves gaps that bosses, agents, or local fixers quickly fill - for a price always paid by the worker. Out on the edge, women who move for work face higher risks of abuse at jobsites, unfair treatment because of their gender, poor safety standards. Because of these shifts, whole tribal groups can land in rigid hierarchies - where being left out becomes routine, along with constant unease. Now women take on jobs far from home, once rare in tribal life. Farming, gathering from forests, and

chores used to share time equally between women and men. As more people leave, their work shifts toward paid tasks - fields, tea estates, building sites call them. When husbands or sons move away, mothers and sisters hold things together inside the home, often without help. Out here, earning income helps women keep households going, yet it piles on stress too. Juggling paid work along with tending to family stretches many thin, especially when life feels heavy already. Living far from home brings serious health challenges. Crowded work camps become homes for many tribal people who move for jobs. No clean water flows through those places, toilets rarely function well either. Weak diets mix with unsafe job sites, sickness spreads fast that way. Hard physical effort wears down bodies over time, pain lingers longer than expected. Women and kids carry extra burdens when clinics stay out of reach. Sickness sticks around where care feels like a distant thought. Out here, moving away shifts how tribal young people see their place in the world. Seeing city ways up close reshapes what they expect from school, jobs, family ties, even daily routines. Wage work now draws more interest than relying on forests for a living. Life in towns opens new doors, yet it tugs at old loyalties. Caught between ancestral roots and today's pressures, belonging feels less clear. Migration is changing how tribal societies live across southern Tamil Nadu. Though it brings needed income for many families, it also pulls households apart, weakens traditions, interrupts schooling, opens doors to unfair treatment, plus pushes people toward the edges of society. Looking ahead, lasting effects demand rules that guard native culture while offering stable work and safety nets for these groups.

Economic Survival among Tribal Communities

Economic survival among tribal communities in Southern Tamil Nadu is closely connected with their struggle to adapt to changing environmental, social, and economic conditions. Traditionally, tribal groups such as the Kani, Palliyan, Malasar, and Muthuvan depended heavily upon forests and natural resources for their livelihood. Hunting, gathering, honey collection, shifting cultivation, fishing, and the collection of minor forest produce formed the basis of their subsistence economy. These traditional occupations provided food security and economic self-sufficiency within tribal settlements. However, in recent decades, restrictions on forest access, environmental degradation, commercialization of natural resources, and developmental interventions have weakened these indigenous economic systems. As a result, tribal communities have been forced to develop new strategies for economic survival. One of the most important survival strategies adopted by tribal communities is wage labour migration. Due to the decline of traditional forest-based occupations, many tribal families migrate seasonally or temporarily to plantations, agricultural fields, construction sites, and urban centres in search of employment. The wages earned through migration play a crucial role in supporting household economies. Tribal labour centres commonly work in tea, coffee, rubber, and cardamom plantations in Tamil Nadu and Kerala,

where employment opportunities are available throughout the year. Others engage in road construction, brick kiln work, daily wage labour, and small-scale industrial employment. Although the wages are often low and working conditions difficult, migration provides immediate cash income necessary for food, healthcare, education, and debt repayment. Agriculture also remains an important component of tribal economic survival. Many tribal communities practice small-scale cultivation of millets, tapioca, banana, pulses, and vegetables in hill regions. However, agriculture in these areas is largely rain-fed and vulnerable to climatic uncertainty. Irregular rainfall, drought, soil erosion, and lack of irrigation facilities frequently reduce agricultural productivity. Consequently, agricultural income alone is insufficient to sustain tribal households throughout the year. This economic instability increases dependence on wage labour and seasonal migration. The collection and sale of minor forest produce continue to contribute to tribal livelihoods despite increasing forest restrictions. Honey, medicinal plants, bamboo, wild fruits, resins, and firewood provide supplementary income for many tribal families. Among the Kani tribes of the Agasthiyamalai region, traditional knowledge of medicinal plants has historically supported both healthcare and livelihood practices. However, declining forest access and environmental degradation have reduced the economic importance of forest produce in recent years. Economic survival among tribal communities is also shaped by poverty and indebtedness. Many tribal households borrow money from local moneylenders, traders, or labour contractors to meet expenses related to healthcare, marriages, cultivation, and emergencies. Debt often forces tribal labourers into exploitative wage arrangements where they receive low wages under difficult conditions. In some cases, labour contractors advance money to tribal families before migration, creating economic dependency and limiting their bargaining power. Women play a vital role in tribal economic survival. Tribal women actively participate in agricultural work, plantation labour, forest collection, and household management. In many communities, women contribute equally to family income through wage labour and the sale of forest products. Self-help groups and small-scale income-generating activities have provided some economic opportunities for tribal women in recent years. Nevertheless, women continue to face challenges such as wage inequality, physical hardship, and limited access to healthcare and education. Government welfare programs have attempted to strengthen tribal economic conditions through employment schemes, housing assistance, educational support, and livelihood development initiatives. Programs such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), Tribal Sub-Plan projects, and forest rights legislation have provided limited economic support in certain tribal regions. However, lack of awareness, administrative delays, and inadequate implementation often reduce the effectiveness of these schemes. In recent years, modernization and market integration have significantly influenced tribal economic systems. Increased

interaction with urban society has created new consumption patterns and financial needs among tribal populations. Younger tribal generations increasingly seek modern education and non-traditional employment opportunities in towns and cities. While such changes may improve income levels, they also contribute to the gradual decline of traditional tribal occupations and indigenous knowledge systems. Thus, economic survival among tribal communities in Southern Tamil Nadu represents a continuous process of adaptation to changing socio-economic realities. Migration, wage labour, agriculture, forest produce collection, and government assistance collectively form the basis of tribal livelihood strategies. Despite persistent poverty, environmental challenges, and social marginalization, tribal communities continue to develop diverse survival mechanisms to sustain their households and preserve their existence in an increasingly modernized world.

Contemporary Challenge

Tribal communities in Southern Tamil Nadu face several contemporary challenges that threaten their economic stability, cultural identity, and social well-being. One of the major challenges is the decline of traditional livelihoods due to restrictions on forest access and environmental degradation. Forest conservation policies, wildlife sanctuaries, and developmental projects have reduced tribal dependence on hunting, gathering, honey collection, and shifting cultivation. As a result, many tribal families are increasingly dependent on wage labour and migration for survival. Poverty and unemployment continue to remain serious concerns among tribal populations. Most tribal settlements are located in remote hill regions where employment opportunities, educational facilities, healthcare services, and transportation infrastructure are limited. Agricultural activities are mostly rain-fed and vulnerable to climate change, irregular rainfall, and soil erosion. These conditions frequently lead to crop failure and seasonal unemployment, compelling tribal people to migrate in search of work. Another significant challenge is land alienation and displacement. Development projects such as dams, roads, tourism expansion, and commercial plantations have displaced several tribal communities from their ancestral lands. Loss of land weakens traditional economic systems and increases dependency on external labour markets. Tribal migrants often face exploitation, low wages, unsafe working conditions, and social discrimination in urban and plantation sectors. Cultural erosion is also becoming increasingly visible among tribal communities. Migration and interaction with mainstream society have influenced tribal languages, customs, dress patterns, and traditional knowledge systems. Younger generations are gradually moving away from indigenous practices and forest-based lifestyles. This has contributed to the decline of oral traditions, ecological knowledge, and tribal identity. Health and education remain additional concerns. Poor sanitation, malnutrition, lack of healthcare facilities, and educational interruptions among migrant children continue to affect tribal development. Although government welfare schemes exist, inadequate implementation and limited awareness often reduce their

effectiveness. Therefore, tribal communities continue to face multiple socio-economic and cultural challenges in the contemporary period.

Conclusion

Migration among tribal communities in Southern Tamil Nadu has become an important strategy for economic survival in the contemporary period. Tribal groups such as the Kani, Palliyan, Malasar, and Muthuvan traditionally depended upon forests, shifting cultivation, hunting, gathering, and the collection of minor forest produce for their livelihood. However, environmental degradation, restrictions on forest access, poverty, unemployment, and developmental interventions have significantly weakened these traditional economic systems. As a result, many tribal families are increasingly compelled to migrate in search of wage employment and better livelihood opportunities. Seasonal and temporary migration is common among tribal populations residing in the Western Ghats regions of Tirunelveli, Theni, Dindugal and Kanyakumari districts. Tribal labourers frequently migrate to plantations, agricultural fields, construction sites, and nearby urban centres where they work as daily wage labourers. The income earned through migration supports household expenses such as food, healthcare, education, and debt repayment. Thus, migration has become closely linked with economic survival and livelihood security among tribal communities. Despite its economic benefits, migration also creates several social and cultural challenges. Family separation, educational disruption among children, poor working conditions, exploitation by labour contractors, and the gradual decline of traditional tribal culture are some of the major consequences associated with migration. In addition, the loss of traditional ecological knowledge and weakening of indigenous identity have become serious concerns in recent years. Therefore, sustainable livelihood opportunities, effective implementation of tribal welfare schemes, and protection of forest rights are essential for improving the socio-economic conditions of tribal communities in Southern Tamil Nadu.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/51**THE UNHURRIED WITNESS: SLOW TRAVEL, POSTCOLONIAL ETHICS, AND FEMALE MOBILITY IN DERVLA MURPHY'S TRAVELOGUES****Ms. GEETHU JOHNY**Research Scholar, Department of English & Centre for Research
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St. Teresa's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam, India**Abstract**

Slow travel provides an alternative relationship to the world at a time when travelling is more and more influenced by speed, efficiency and the demand to stay on the move. It is not about the geographical area covered, but the attention given to details and the presence. This paper reads Dervla Murphy as one of the most significant literary voices through which the ethics of slow travel can be understood. From *Full Tilt: Ireland to India with a Bicycle* to *A Month by the Sea: Encounters in Gaza*, the wanderings of Murphy demonstrate that there is no need to plan travel in terms of spectacle, convenience, or consumption. Her writing returns travel to the bodily reality of movement, to prolonged exposure, and to the difficult, uneven relations that emerge when one remains close to the ground. Applying the ideas of Michel de Certeau, Barbara Adam, Sara Ahmed, and Rosi Braidotti, the present paper suggests that the work of Murphy unites the slow, feminist mobility, postcolonial care, and environmental restraint in a manner that seems incredibly timely. It also resorts to discard studies to reveal how her travel writing observes the material residues of tourism, development and political violence. What emerges from her work is not simply another form of travel writing, but another way of imagining the moral possibilities of travel.

Keywords: Dervla Murphy, slow travel, feminist mobility, sustainable travel, discard studies

Introduction

There is something enduringly unsettling about the image of Dervla Murphy riding out of Ireland in 1963 on a bicycle, bound for India. She travelled alone, without the buffers that usually make travel legible as leisure, and without trying to turn the world into a series of consumable scenes. That is part of what still makes *Full Tilt: Ireland to India with a Bicycle* so arresting. This is a difficult trip, but what remains is not the stamina of the trip. The quality of attention is what makes it possible in the journey. Murphy does not go about places to master them or package them. She moves at a pace slow enough to be shaped by the places

through which she travels. Murphy quotes John Ruskin to emphasize the importance of slowness: "All travelling becomes in exact proportion to its rapidity" (*Where the Indus is Young* 24).

The roots of this orientation reach back further than any discourse on slow travel. As a child, Murphy recalled the moment she realised that if she cycled "long enough" she "could get to India", and it was the simplicity of the idea that "enchanted" her: travel that was "alone, independent and needing very little money" (*Wheels within Wheels* 154). What slow travel theorists would later describe as an ethical alternative to speed culture, Murphy had already absorbed as a child's instinct, not as a manifesto, but as a disposition. Murphy resists that tradition, though she never feels the need to declare that she is resisting it.

The nature of travel is gendered, classed, racialized, and geopolitical. The reason why Murphy fits in these conversations is that it is her work that continues to open into the theories. Her journeys were disruptive to the conventional thinking of how women could move and she did it without making the journey into a self-myth. Such a disruption can be seen in *Tibetan Foothold*, Murphy's memoir of her stint with Tibetan refugees in Dharamsala, and her first publication after *Full Tilt*. She was not a reporter, or a worker for a charity, or an official, just a woman on a bicycle. But once she reached Dharamsala, she found herself doing the work that was at hand for her: teaching, nursing, helping, speaking for others where needed. By contemporary standards, she was extraordinary: she was alone, unsponsored, not endorsed and in the treacherous land of post-partition India.

This paper reads Murphy's travel writing as a form of ethical witnessing. Her work does not concur with the accelerated temporality of tourism and creates space to a more challenging type of encounter: one that is based on attention, inconvenience, dependency and political consciousness. To delve into that, this paper unites slow travel theory, feminist mobility studies, postcolonial criticism, and discard studies. This is not an attempt to confine Murphy within a single framework. It is to demonstrate why her writing continues to hold value even when mobility as such has become one of the most characteristic contradictions of the current.

Slow Travel as Orientation

The idea of slow travel emerged from a broader dissatisfaction with speed culture. As the slow movement gathered momentum (particularly following the more familiar advent of Slow Food), travel began to be reimagined in those terms as well. Slowness, here, is not merely the time that it takes or the fact that a train is preferred to a plane. It is about a shift in orientation. Murphy had been practising this long before the discourse around it became recognisable. She did not proclaim her practice in manifestos, did not come in the modern language of ethical tourism. It was a cultivation, a character, an economics, and a principle. She was suspicious of systematic tourism, and had little patience with the sort of comfort which insulated travellers off against the rest of the world. This orientation is visible from the very opening of her journey. When early conditions forced her off course,

Murphy noted that her "disappointment was acute," but having "set out to enjoy myself by seeing the world, not to make or break any record," she adjusted readily, finding that the deviation led to "quite a few interesting adventures" (*Full Tilt* 16). The record is beside the point. The encounter is everything. This is also the case in *Where the Indus is Young*. Murphy is winter travelling with her six-year-old daughter, Rachel, in Baltistan and the trip is frequently delayed by the snow, closed passes, illness, and the sheer physical effort involved. Such events would be a traveller's nightmare. In Murphy's narrative, they are the means by which she comes to know the place. She can't go, and so she stays. At times she remains in the same house for several days, during which she might observe what a more fleeting traveller might miss: the daily drudgery of housework, the subtle codes of hospitality, and the ingenious adaptations that help people survive at high altitudes in winter. Rachel renders the journey even slower. Children can't just be pushed to keep up with a parent's will and so Murphy's journey is constrained by Rachel's capacities, too. The journey proceeds by another time, not the clockwork time of schedules and itineraries, but the temporal irregularity of fatigue, the weather, illness, dependency and chance. In this way, the Baltistani chapters enact Barbara Adam's point that time is not experienced as a linear, measurable progression. It is complex, discontinuous and often heteronomous.

Barbara Adam's idea of timescapes helps clarify what Murphy is doing in her writing. Adam contrasts the stratified and discontinuous time of lived experience with the abstract time of modern systems - a time that is measured, controlled and disciplined. This second, abstract kind of time is especially visible in modern tourism, and in particular with its industrial form. It includes in its grammar the itinerary, the booking, the schedule, the transfer. Murphy's journeys unfold within a very different temporal logic. They are shaped by exhaustion, road conditions, hospitality, political interruption, illness, weather, and accident.

This can also be understood through de Certeau's distinction between strategies and tactics. Space is strategic and is organised upwards. It is part of systems, institutions and structures that are aimed at regulating movement. Tactical movement is improvised from within those very constraints. It is part of the group that is not in control of the terrain and has to negotiate the terrain step by step. Murphy travels tactically. She is not going along pre-approved paths. She adjusts, miscalculates, waits, rewrites and goes on. Her routes are discovered through experience rather than simply followed. This becomes even clearer through de Certeau's idea of walking as a spatial practice. For de Certeau, movement does not merely pass through a space already mapped by power; it produces a lived relation to place from below. This is precisely how Murphy's journeys operate. Roads, villages, checkpoints, lodgings, pauses are not measured by the itinerary, but are spaces that are produced legible through bodily movement, uncertainty and repetitive negotiation. In *The Waiting Land*, Murphy's description of Nepal in the midst of foreign-aided, accelerated modernisation, this mode of travel starts to

take on a more explicit political dimension. She walks through places where new roads are being constructed as part of foreign aid projects, but she prefers the older footpaths they replace. This is not simply nostalgia. It is a decision about how to occupy a space. Walking, she must ask for directions, rely on others, accept hospitality, be attentive to the ground, and adapt herself to the rhythms of the city. On the road, she can go fast, be efficient and stand apart. Here de Certeau's distinction between "space organised" and "lived space" is relevant. The road is the space of a strategic organisation; the footpath is the space of use. Thus, Murphy's use of the footpath is not a romanticising of poverty or the "pre-modern". It is her way of remaining within a mode of travel where interaction is important, where travel is undertaken in relation to people and place, rather than in relation to speed.

Feminist Mobility and Embodied Travel

In the middle of the 20th century, a woman travelling alone was a curiosity. Independent travel, particularly between countries and outside of institutional power, was considered as a masculine attribute. Her work is potent in this respect in that she does not construct a rhetoric of heroic exception over herself. She does not insist continually on her courage. She simply keeps on walking. Something of this gives her ambulation its power. It is more an embodied than a performative assertion of territory. Her walks assert that women do not need to be granted permission to move in space even when it has been arranged to suggest that they should. This unsentimental pragmatism is true for even her most intimate travels. Travelling with her daughter Rachel, Murphy resolved early that "one role had to be given precedence: otherwise, the whole experience will be flawed, for both of us, by my inner conflicts," choosing to frame the journey as "Rachel's apprenticeship to serious travelling" (*On a Shoestring to Coorg* 13).

Cynthia Enloe's work on gender and international politics helps illuminate the conditions within which Murphy moves and writes. Travel is never simply a matter of moving between two points. It is entangled in the suppositions concerning vulnerability, access, labour and legitimacy. Murphy goes through landscapes that are characterized by patriarchy, colonial legacies, unequal economies of safety and exposure. She is at once privileged and precarious. Her passport opens certain doors; her gender closes others. It is particularly in those places where her writing does not attempt to iron out those contradictions where it becomes particularly interesting. In *Full Tilt*, this is evident in the episode in which Murphy is shot at in Afghanistan. She recounts the incident with almost disheartening concision: there's the event, the injury, the healing and then back on the road. But the episode is more reflective than action-packed. Murphy is alone in a world with masculine rules, guns and distrust and the peril she encounters is inextricable from her womanhood. At the same time, this allows her to go where men might not. Almost immediately, she is welcomed into women's spaces, offered food and drink and domestic intimacy, and granted access to interiors that

are rarely seen in male travel writing. "To the scores of individuals and families in every country on my route whose boundless hospitality taught me that for all the horrible chaos of the contemporary political scene this world is full of kindness" (13). This is where Cynthia Enloe's analysis of women's movement comes in handy. Movement is not freedom: it is also visibility and invisibility, vulnerability and intimacy. Murphy is not just endangered, but also favoured with access. Her writing at its best captures both.

Sara Ahmed's reflections on strangerhood are also useful here. The creation of strangerhood is done via norms of belonging. Murphy is constantly turned into a stranger, but not necessarily in a similar manner. At other times she is identified by nationality, sometimes by race, sometimes by gender, sometimes by just the sheer strangeness of the mode of her travelling. What is interesting is that she does not want to be the spectacle as a stranger. She does not wish foreignness to turn into a play. Instead, she attempts to lead as normal a life as is possible to the daily terms of the places she traverses.

Rosi Braidotti's figure of the nomadic subject is equally helpful here. This is not to suggest that Murphy is a nomad in any simple or romantic sense. Rather, her writing resists fixed categories. She is not an adventurer in the more traditional sense, not an activist, not readily assimilated into the liberal feminist discourse, nor is she easily assimilated to the ancient colonial traveller. Her work is mobile both in the identity and geographical realms. Braidotti's nomadic subject is not simply a figure who moves geographically; it names a subjectivity that refuses settled and authoritative identities Murphy matters here because she unsettles the usual roles available to the woman traveller. She does not turn her foreignness into a performance, and she does not settle comfortably into any fixed identity: tourist, helper, observer, outsider. She moves through these positions, but never quite belongs to them. A moment in *Tibetan Foothold* makes this clear. When she reaches a Tibetan road camp where no one speaks English, she writes: "There is no English speaker in this camp, but the language barrier has long since gone crashing and we're all the best of friends on a system of smiles and gestures" (156). There is no institution arranging the encounter, no interpreter, no official aid-worker role, no tourist script. What remains is simpler, and more exposed: bodily presence, patience, and the willingness to meet others without mastery. This is close to what Braidotti's nomadic subject suggests: not a fixed self-moving across fixed cultures, but a self being formed in the uncertainty of encounter itself.

This is important as Murphy does not have a programmatic feminism. It is not so stated in declaration as it is in practice. The politics is entrenched in the mundane particularity of bodily movement: in which she slumbers, in which she is observed, in which she feels insecure, in which forms of hospitality are open to her, in which she perseveres nonetheless. It is precisely this groundedness that gives her writing its authority. It is where she writes, and it all makes the difference.

Travelling as Postcolonial Witness

Murphy travelled through decades of turmoil. The historical context to much of her work is decolonisation, war, dictatorship, economic reorganization, forced displacement, and lopsided development. She was not a journalist, but her writing frequently captures these pressures in a manner that is not typically captured in more formal political accounts. Part of the reason is that she moves slowly, and partly because she comes back. She records not only events, but also shifts in atmosphere, infrastructure, habit, and material condition.

Homi Bhabha's idea of the third space is useful here, not in the sense that Murphy theorizes about hybridity per se, but because her text tends to occupy such an uneasy space. She is never fully inside the places she describes, nor comfortably outside them. Her encounters are marked by proximity, misunderstanding, affection, irritation, dependence, and misrecognition. They do not settle into easy solidarity, but neither do they remain abstractly distant. This incompleteness is the main aspect of the moral texture of her work.

The criticism of Orientalism by Edward Said cannot be escaped in any literature of a Western woman of literary writing across the non-western world. Murphy is not immune to that history, and there are some of her older works in which such older influences are evident. This is most evident in *Full Tilt*, in the early sections on Iran and Pakistan. At times, Murphy speaks with the certainty of an older brand of ethnography, speaking in general terms about communities, and at times reducing people she encounters to stereotypes. This is not the main thrust of the book, but it is there, and we shouldn't ignore it.

Recognising this does not detract from the argument that Murphy gradually shifts away from colonial ways of writing about travel. It makes that argument stronger. Her more recent focus on history, policy and power relations is significant because these less mature ways of knowing still persist. Murphy's development, then, is not only a question of changing subjects or refining a style. It is also a slow change in the ethics of perception: in how she looks at others, and in what she comes to understand that act of looking to mean. Nonetheless, it would be insufficient to stop the analysis at that point. Again and again, Murphy moves beyond surface description toward political causation. She cares about who is in power, who gains, who loses and why things appear as they do. Pain in her books is hardly ever ornamental. It is associated with systems.

Murphy's Irish background complicates her European privilege, although it does not cancel it out. Ireland's own experience of colonial rule seems to leave her with a deep suspicion of official power and imperial confidence, and this gives her writing a different tone from the more settled assumptions of much Western travel writing. She still travels with the advantages of a Western passport and position, but she is seldom comfortable inside that privilege.

In *The Waiting Land*, Murphy does not easily fit into Western tropes of the Himalayas. She does not romanticise the Nepali communities she encounters,

turning them into innocent innocents, and she does not infantilise them. Rather, she is more ambivalent. She is critical of the Nepalese monarchy, and its policies of disenfranchisement, but she is also frustrated by the Western aid agencies who arrive talking about progress. She is aware of the ineptitude, wastefulness and the oddity of the intervention. She is genuine about the times when she feels unable to understand her hosts, or when they don't understand her. It doesn't seem like an exercise in self-consciousness. It is more like someone trying to be eye-witness, and trying not to sweep the scene clean. Something similar happens in *Tibetan Foothold*. The Tibetans Murphy writes about are not made to stand for exile, suffering, courage, or spiritual wisdom in any simple way. They remain particular people. They argue, surprise her, disappoint her, and sometimes disturb the expectations she has brought with her. In that sense, Bhabha's idea of 'the third space' is not just a theory being applied from outside. It is already there in the texture of these encounters: in the misunderstandings, the awkward closeness, the partial knowledge, and the fact that cross-cultural contact never quite settles into certainty.

Meanwhile, the stance by Murphy does not lack in contradiction. She is free in her movements, which most of the people she writes about are not. Crossing boundaries and then returning home can be done by her. Others cannot. That imbalance never goes away and it must not be ironed. The merit of her work is that it does not tend to make the discomfort in any way palatable; it does not transform it into a tedious sentimental language of human relations. This is the reason why her writing is ethically serious. It is not founded on innocence; it poses the question of rethinking movement without assuming that inequality is over.

Ecological Consciousness and Discard Studies

Before ecology became a commonplace topic of discussion, Murphy had already started observing environmental harm. She is not a policy expert who writes and she seldom uses technical language, but her observations are precise. She observes garbage where once was used substances, roads eroding traditional lifestyles, contaminated atmosphere, clogged scenery, and the accumulation of the rubble of civilization. The weight of these observations is that they are seldom singled out. She notices patterns. She recollects how things were in places.

This is where discard studies become useful. There is no such thing as waste. It shows the distribution of value, labour and even disposability by a society. It informs us of what is considered as waste and who will be left to live with the residues. Murphy's travel writing is especially alert to this kind of evidence. Denial, waste, rubbish, sewage, industrial effluent, tourist rubbish: these are not ornament of her books. They are indicators of change in structure. She is especially attentive to small material substitutions through which larger changes become visible. In *Where the Indus is Young*, Murphy is alert to the small material changes taking place in Baltistani village life. Chinese-made goods start appearing in a region where, until then, people had depended largely on things made locally,

repaired, when possible, reused, or absorbed back into ordinary domestic life. What she notices is not simply the disappearance of an older culture. It is something more concrete, and in some ways more disturbing: the arrival of waste in a landscape that had produced very little of it. A community that valued nearly everything has to cope with the residues of imported consumerism: packaging, cans, cracked objects, materials that can't be re-used or recycled. Murphy is not making a sermon. She describes the things themselves, from where they arrive, to what they are made of, to what remains after their first use. Compared to the older practices of repair and reuse, these imports are, in a sense, anomalous, orphaned. Susan Strasser is useful here because she treats waste as a clue rather than a residue. What is thrown away can expose the habits of a society, the limits of its economy, and the values it silently carries. In Murphy's Baltistan, discarded things begin to matter in precisely this way. They register, almost unobtrusively, the entry of a remote mountain world into larger circuits of trade, dependence, and uneven change.

Ecological catastrophe is inseparable and political in *A Month by the Sea*. Gaza is not only a site of war, but a site of war as a backdrop of everyday life. Circumstances are not polluted water, debris, sewage failure, overpopulation and infrastructure failure. They are made circumstances. Murphy knows that the environmental damage in this instance cannot be divorced from siege, occupation and politics. Murphy is clear on how the environmental destruction in Gaza is brought about. The coastal aquifer is failing, due to over-extraction and seawater infiltration. And even this is not a natural or isolated crisis, because the inputs for water treatment and repair are restricted or prohibited. Feces flow into the oceans not because we haven't learned to control our own feces, but because the facilities that would allow proper treatment are not constructed or maintained. She sees the same with schools. Kids are studying in ruined schools, but improvements can't be made because construction materials are classified as illegal or dangerous. "The level of contamination is high enough to penetrate eggshells" (34). The effect is a strange, low-level kind of damage: not always spectacular, not always apparent in any given photograph, but always there. This is close to what Rob Nixon describes as slow violence in practice: a violence that is planned, allowed to build and kept just out of view because it does not come all at once. Damage in water, in buildings, in disease, in the ordinary practices of everyday life. For Murphy, ecology is not an addition to the siege. The siege affects the environment, too. It extends damage, and prevents repair.

"By June 2011, Gazan rockets had killed a total of 23 Israelis and one Thai farm labourer. In 22 days, Cast Lead killed more than 1,400 Gazans" (36). The disproportion is not used for rhetorical effect. Murphy presents it as part of the record. This is the unhurried witness at work: staying long enough to notice the numbers, and honest enough to give them plainly. Rob Nixon's idea of slow violence strongly resonates with this aspect of her work. Murphy observes the

harm that has been built up, quietly: contaminated water, ruined soil, mechanisms that are slowly eroded, lives that are exhausted by attrition. This style of writing in particular fits her since she does not make use of the dramatic event alone. Her movement alone has an ecological connotation as well. This is no slogan of air travel, but it is a refusal of speed that is not coupled with consequence, which is what Murphy is resisting. She is not showing herself to be exemplary in the simplest way. Her practice, however, raises an inquiry which has been made more difficult to suppress.

The Narrative Ethics of the Unhurried Witness

With Murphy, slowness is not only a matter of transport; it is also a matter of prose. Her style of writing is so simple that it can be confused with plainness. Ornament is very scanty, self-praise very meagre, and there is very little relish in the way of turning the traveller into a hero. She does not exaggerate discomfort, fear, illness, boredom, and loneliness. "I must confess that to-night, after my first day in the camp, I'm feeling as depressed as anyone could be among these jolly Tibetans" (*Tibetan Foothold* 29). The honesty is unmistakable, but the self-mocking phrase "among these jolly Tibetans" prevents the moment from slipping into self-pity. Murphy admits the feeling, then immediately holds it a little away from herself. That is what her restraint looks like in practice: not a refusal to feel, but a refusal to let feeling take over the account. This matters because it keeps the attention where Murphy usually wants it to remain, on the world around her rather than on the drama of her own response.

In *Full Tilt*, Murphy's reference to the sexual assault she survives in Yugoslavia is almost shockingly brief. It takes up less than three lines. She states the facts, her reaction, and then moves on. There is no dwelling on the incident, no dramatising it, no appeal to the reader's sympathy. In another sort of travel narrative, this incident might be the focus of a chapter on women's vulnerability and danger travelling alone. Instead, Murphy declines that option. She notes it and then moves on. That might not mean that she is denying her experience or avoiding her feelings. It seems rather more like her writing practice. It is her experience, but she doesn't let the novel revolve around it. Even when personal violence breaks into the journey, her attention does not collapse inward. It returns, almost stubbornly, to the places, people, and political conditions she is trying to understand.

The same restraint appears in *Tibetan Foothold*. Murphy mentions her own illness and exhaustion while working among Tibetan refugees, but only in passing. The reader is told that she was unwell, but not invited into an extended account of her discomfort. The focus remains elsewhere: on the refugees themselves, their displacement, labour, humour, hardship, and endurance. This restraint is not incidental. Across Murphy's work, it becomes part of her practice of ethical witnessing. She is present in the text, but she does not make herself the centre of it. Such tonal restraint is important. It prevents experience to become performance.

More important, she turns her gaze outwards. Her books are not organized with the people as local colour. They argue and complain, feed her, mistrust her, laugh with her, and surprise her. They are not there just to light up the development of the traveller. The grain of ordinary life is of interest to Murphy: kitchens, roads, conversations, routines, improvised economies, passing moods. This is why her books are lived in and not edited.

Slow travel changes the scale at which the world is perceived. It changes the appearance of what can be seen, and the way in which it can be seen. When one is on a bicycle he or she will see the road differently compared to when he or she is in a closed vehicle. This is not an abstract preference for Murphy but something felt in the body. She wrote that "at any season a walk or a cycle aroused almost unbearable delight" (*Wheels within Wheels* 259), a response so visceral it resists the language of tourism entirely. Speed forecloses this. Slowness is what makes the world available to the senses. Strolling, waiting, dependency, use of local transportation, lingering beyond the optimum time: all these alleviate perception. Smells, shades, the sounds of hospitality, trifling nuisance, snatches of overheard conversation, all these, start to count. That type of intimacy is rife in the writing of Murphy.

Conclusion

Dervla Murphy is important now as she makes us consider travel in a time when the ability to move around is so mundane and so contaminated. Her work draws attention to the ecological harm tied to tourism, the inequalities that determine who get to travel and under what conditions and the overwhelming urge to transform other locations into consumable content. She offers neither innocence nor escape. And what she provides is more difficult than that.

The theoretical frameworks brought together in this paper; de Certeau, Adam, Ahmed, Braidotti and discard studies assist in explaining various aspects of the work of Murphy, yet none of these paradigms encompasses all of it. The most interesting thing is how ethical she is. Her journeys, her style, her voice and her ethical scruple all seem to develop out of this refusal: refusal of speed as of value, refusal of distance as of innocence, refusal of travel as of property.

The image that comes to mind here is fittingly from one of Murphy's lesser-known books rather than her great journeys. At the end of *The Waiting Land*, she sits on a hill in Nepal watching an international road being constructed. Higher up the hillside the old path continues to be used, tended, inhabited. Murphy doesn't make the scene about the clash between modernity and the old ways. She is too attentive for that. It is not a case of displacing the road and idealising the path. There is a road and a path and she leaves the tension between them unresolved. It is very similar to how she typically writes travel. She stays in a place for long enough for there to be no quick fix. She does not immediately translate what she sees into a point. Meaning takes time to accumulate, through small details: a road next to a footpath, the fear of the weather, how to use waste, how to repair, how to entertain.

Over time this patience is the subject of many of her strongest arguments. In a world of travel that can be rushed, commercialised, exploitative and unsustainable, Murphy's art of slow looking continues to be important.

Murphy doesn't want to sweep these contradictions away. She leaves them be, messy. Rather, her writing is preoccupied with the question of how to travel without whizzing through places, without believing one has the right to possess them, and without forgetting the responsibilities that might accompany being given to others. She doesn't have an easy answer to this question. Perhaps that's a strength.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/52**JOURNEY TO LOST HOMES: PARTITIONED MEMORIES,
DISPLACED BELONGINGS, TRAUMA AND MEMORY IN MARINA
WHEELER'S *THE LOST HOMESTEAD*****HARLEEN KAUR**Research Scholar, Department of English
Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, India**Abstract**

The 1947 Partition of India displaced over 14 million people, etching borders not just on maps but into the psyche of families like Marina Wheeler's Anglo-Indian lineage. In *The Lost Homestead* (2020), Wheeler chronicles her pilgrimage to the family's forsaken Lahore bungalow, confronting the spectral remnants of a pre-Partition idyll. This paper interrogates how partitioned memories manifest through displaced belongings, positioning Wheeler's memoir as a critical intervention in South Asian diaspora studies. Employing Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory alongside Liisa Malkki's theorization of refugee "purification" of space, Wheeler's narrative acts as a material archive of trauma. Mnemonic objects—such as a tarnished silver *thali* inherited from her grandmother, sepia-toned photographs of Lahore's bustling streets, and the bungalow's crumbling verandas—serve as haptic bridges to lost homes. These artifacts disrupt the teleology of exile, revealing borders as porous membranes where personal loss intersects collective violence. Wheeler's hybrid Anglo-Indian vantage further complicates Partition historiography, foregrounding interstitial identities often eclipsed by Hindu-Muslim polarities.

Ultimately, the memoir enacts a "journey to lost homes" that transforms trauma into tentative reclamation. By tracing routes of return through roots of materiality, Wheeler underscores the resilience of remembered homes amid diaspora. This study advocates for object-oriented approaches in memory studies to illuminate underrepresented Partition narratives.

Keywords: Partitioned Memories, Displaced Belongings, Lost Homes, Diaspora, Postmemory

Historical Context of Partition Trauma

The Partition of India in 1947 remains one of the largest and most traumatic mass migrations of the twentieth century: over fourteen million people were uprooted and up to two million were killed amid widespread violence, loss, and displacement. The creation of the India–Pakistan border did more than redraw territory; it fractured identities, disrupted notions of home, and transformed collective memories. As Yasmin Khan argues in *The Great Partition*, Partition was not a singular event but a series of overlapping human catastrophes whose

consequences ripple through subsequent generations (5). Consequently, life-writing has emerged as a vital mode for accessing the emotional and experiential dimensions of Partition that official histories often elide.

A persistent theme in Partition literature is the transmission of trauma across generations. Meenakshi Malhotra's review of Shuchi Kapila's work on postmemory highlights the figure of the "hinge generation" — those one or two generations removed from the event — who inherit trauma through family narratives, enforced silences, and fragmented storytelling. This intergenerational burden is central to Marina Wheeler's memoir, which reconstructs family history from fragments, recollections, and inherited memories of displacement. As reviewers note, Partition remains embedded in parental, familial, and collective memory, demonstrating how traumatic pasts continue to shape identity long after the events that produced them (Malhotra).

Scholars continue to debate Partition's causes — from the hurried administrative exit of the British to deep-seated communal and provincial tensions (Wheeler 15; Khan 22; Chatterji 45). Personal histories give these macro-level arguments affective force: Wheeler's account of her mother Dip Singh's lost Sargodha home, and her family's attribution of responsibility to leaders like Jinnah, exemplifies how political decisions translated into intimate loss (Wheeler 36). In *The Lost Homestead: My Mother, Partition and the Punjab*, Wheeler blends archival research, oral testimony, and memoir to trace her maternal ancestry and to explore how Partition's rupture continued to shape her mother's world (Wheeler). Rather than treating 1947 as a closed historical moment, Wheeler frames its ongoing effects through Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory," the mediated transmission of traumatic knowledge across generations (Hirsch 5).

Partition's rupture was accompanied by extreme violence that imprinted itself on collective consciousness. The demarcation of borders precipitated communal massacres, abductions, and mass flight; scholars such as Urvashi Butalia and Ian Talbot interpret this violence as bound to anxieties around nationalism, religion, and territorial identity (Butalia 3; Talbot and Singh 2). Wheeler's memoir invokes specific atrocities — for example, the Sheikhupura killings and the burning of Sikhs in ice factories after alleged betrayals by boundary forces — and recounts her family's flight from Rawalpindi, illustrating how these events enter family memory as unerasable ruptures (Wheeler 130; Wheeler 115). Such episodes feed into postmemory: descendants inherit not only stories but also affects and silences that condition identity and belonging (Hirsch 33; Uttamchandani 42). Thus, the violence of 1947 did not end with the political settlement; its legacies persist in familial consciousness and diasporic narratives.

This paper argues that *The Lost Homestead* stages a "journey to lost homes" through displaced belongings, mnemonic objects, and affective landscapes. By mobilizing theories of postmemory, trauma, and material culture, Wheeler's narrative reframes personal loss as a critique of dominant Partition

historiographies and highlights the enduring role of memory in shaping diasporic identity.

Partition, Historiography, and the Turn to Memory

Despite decades of historical inquiry, the causes, meanings, and consequences of the Partition of India remain intensely debated. The event resists a single, unified interpretation because it emerged from a complex intersection of colonial policies, communal politics, regional aspirations, and nationalist negotiations. Wheeler herself notes that the historical “backdrop” to personal narratives is “highly contested” (15). Scholars offer divergent readings: Joya Chatterji emphasizes regional dynamics, while Ayesha Jalal interprets the demand for Pakistan as a strategic bargaining tool rather than an inevitable outcome (Chatterji 45; Jalal 112). These perspectives reveal the fragmentation of historical consensus.

In contrast to macro-historical debates, memory studies foreground lived experience. Urvashi Butalia argues that Partition histories reside not only in archives but in “what is remembered, felt, and transmitted within families” (12). Gyanendra Pandey conceptualizes Partition as a “moral event” that resists closure (4). Wheeler’s memoir aligns with this “memory turn” by privileging intimate narratives over political grand narratives. Her inquiry—“What... do the younger generation... think of all this?”—signals a shift from historical causation to intergenerational impact (Wheeler 8). The text thus participates in what may be termed counter-archival life-writing, in which domestic memory challenges official historiography.

The Lost Homestead enters this historiographical landscape not through macro-political analysis but through the intimate register of personal trauma, exploring how Partition’s violence and displacement left indelible marks on survivors and their descendants. Contemporary scholarship argues that remembering Partition extends beyond eyewitness testimony to include diasporic and inherited forms of remembrance. Scholars such as Jasmine Hornabrook, Clelia Clini, Paul Nataraj, and Emily Keightley observe that practices of remembering Partition contribute to the construction of diasporic identity and belonging (Hornabrook et al.). This framework fits Wheeler’s memoir: her return to ancestral spaces becomes an exploration of belonging across borders and generations.

The urgency of preserving Partition testimony is compounded by the passing of first-generation survivors—an anxiety Butalia articulates in *The Other Side of Silence* (19). Beyond preservation, Partition constitutes what Dominick LaCapra terms a “founding trauma” of the subcontinent, a foundational rupture that continues to shape national and personal identities across India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (123). Scholars argue that the subcontinent must continually return to this event through deliberate acts of “avowal,” in which the traumatic past is neither repressed nor re-enacted but acknowledged, interrogated, and ethically engaged in historical writing and public memory (LaCapra 11–12). Such avowal entails not only recording oral histories and autobiographical narratives—

exemplified by contemporary digital archives and testimonial projects—but also confronting how Partition’s violence, displacement, and silences are replayed in communal politics, border-making, and cultural representations across generations (Butalia 19; Bhalla; Kapila).

Postmemory in Wheeler’s Narrative

Hirsch defines postmemory as the second-generation’s inheritance of trauma through stories, images, and behaviors—so vivid that it “feels like” personal memory (Hirsch 5, 29). Wheeler’s memoir enacts this process: she reconstructs her mother Dip’s Punjab childhood from faded photographs, family testimonies, and material relics from Sargodha, a quest prompted in part by viewing the film *Viceroy’s House*, which revealed British political machinations around Partition (Wheeler 1). Her central question—“What do the younger generation think?”—marks a shift from historical causation to affective history, foregrounding how trauma is lived and felt rather than only recorded (8).

Family connections deepen this postmemorial engagement. Wheeler’s ties to Khushwant Singh (her uncle through Dip’s marriage) and Ujjal Singh provide access to Sikh-perspectives on Partition, and she regrets not interviewing Khushwant before his death—missed insights that would have enriched her understanding of Sikh experiences (Wheeler 89, 108). This omission underscores how postmemory is shaped by both what is transmitted and what is lost through silence.

That silence is crystallized in Papa-ji Gurmukh Singh’s edict—“Never speak of what we lost”—which enforces a repressive postmemory by mandating selective forgetting. This injunction diminishes his stature from Unionist patriarch to diminished refugee, transforming political agency into private loss (Wheeler 130). Hirsch describes this dynamic as “postforgetting,” in which silence itself transmits trauma and shrinks personal and collective histories (33). Wheeler’s project breaks this seventy-year silence: through returns to Lahore and the recovery of sensory details—jasmine-scented longings, homestead orchards—she transforms inherited absence into tangible reclamation (Wheeler 150). In doing so, the memoir not only narrates postmemory but actively produces it, converting familial silence into an ethical act of remembering and reclaiming a lost world.

Postmemory and Intergenerational Trauma

Central to Wheeler’s narrative is the affective transmission of trauma across generations, articulated through Hirsch’s concept of postmemory. Wheeler does not merely recount her mother’s past; she inhabits it through imaginative reconstruction. This is evident when she reflects on her own inquiry into inherited history: “*What, I wondered, do the younger generation of my Indian family think of all this?*” (Wheeler 8). This question marks the transition from historical curiosity to emotional inheritance, demonstrating how Partition persists as a living force within familial consciousness.

Dip Singh's recollections are marked by both presence and absence—what is told and what is withheld. The silence imposed by Papa-ji— "*we were never to speak about what they had lost*" (Wheeler 150)—reveals how trauma is managed through repression. Yet, this silence paradoxically intensifies memory. As Wheeler later uncovers, what remains unspoken returns through fragments of longing: "*she missed the small things... the scent of jasmine, the feel of the garden, the rhythms of a life left behind*" (152). Such sensory recollections illustrate how trauma survives not only in narrative but in affective residues.

Moreover, Wheeler explicitly acknowledges the intergenerational burden of Partition when she notes that bitterness was "*passed down the generations*" (15). This aligns with Hirsch's assertion that postmemory is so deeply internalized that it "seems to constitute memory in its own right" (29). Wheeler's narrative thus becomes an embodiment of inherited trauma, where memory is not experienced directly but lived through emotional proximity.

Displaced Belongings as Mnemonic Objects

Wheeler's memoir foregrounds objects as crucial mediators of memory, transforming material remnants into vessels of historical continuity. The retrieval of family artifacts from across the border underscores the fragmented nature of post-Partition inheritance. As Wheeler recounts, despite efforts to recover belongings from Sargodha, "Dip doesn't think anything of real monetary value was ever retrieved" (142). This statement is significant not because of economic loss, but because it highlights the irretrievability of emotional and cultural value. The objects that do survive—documents, photographs, medals—function as symbolic anchors of identity. Wheeler describes these relics as remnants of a life that cannot be restored but can be remembered. In one poignant moment, the lost home itself is reduced to memory: "the Sargodha homestead... the garden and its fruit trees, indeed their whole life, was lost" (Wheeler 116). The accumulation of details—house, garden, trees—emphasizes the totality of loss while simultaneously preserving it through language. Dip's family did not merely lose a house in Sargodha; they lost an entire ecosystem of belonging—the social hierarchies, cultural practices, linguistic textures, and spatial familiarity that constituted their world.

These displaced belongings disrupt the finality of exile. Rather than signifying closure, they create what may be called a "material afterlife" of Partition. The persistence of such objects resonates with Aanchal Malhotra's argument that objects become "repositories of memory" (120). In Wheeler's narrative, they serve as tactile connections to a homeland that no longer exists geographically but survives emotionally, turning fragments into active sites of remembrance and identity work.

Gendered Memory and Feminine Genealogies

Partition scholarship has increasingly emphasized the role of women as custodians of memory, arguing that domestic and intimate histories preserved by women are

often excluded from official nationalist narratives. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin contend that women serve as primary transmitters of family memory, preserving the everyday textures of loss—food, rituals, domestic routines—that state-centered histories overlook (3–4). Urvashi Butalia, in her landmark oral history, similarly shows how women’s testimonies recover silenced experiences of violence, abduction, and recovery, making visible the gendered dimensions of Partition trauma (3). Wheeler’s memoir aligns with this perspective by foregrounding maternal voices and centering the transmission of memory along feminine genealogies. Dip Singh’s memories—of home, loss, and displacement—are conveyed not through grand political declarations but through everyday details: the taste of specific dishes, the rhythm of household rituals, the spatial familiarity of rooms and courtyards. These intimate narratives transform private experience into historical testimony, revealing how Partition’s violence is inscribed in the domestic sphere.

This gendered mode of remembering resonates with Hirsch’s observation that postmemory frequently operates within mother–daughter relationships, where trauma is transmitted through affective proximity, storytelling, and embodied practices (22). Wendy Brown notes that memory work often restores agency to marginalized subjects by re-signifying loss as a site of political and ethical engagement (118), and Wheeler’s project exemplifies this: her mother’s private recollections become the basis for public historical reckoning. In *The Lost Homestead*, the mother–daughter bond becomes the primary conduit for inherited trauma: Wheeler’s quest to recover her mother’s lost world is driven by filial empathy and a desire to understand the emotional legacy passed down through Dip’s silence and fragments of recollection. The memoir thus functions as a form of feminist historiography, reconstructing Partition through intimate, gendered perspectives that challenge the public–private divide and recover the labor of women as historians of their own lives.

Moreover, Wheeler’s narrative highlights how women’s memories often carry the burden of what is unsaid. The silences imposed by patriarchal authority—such as Papa-ji’s injunction never to speak of what was lost—are frequently mediated and negotiated by women, who hold both the memories and the emotional work of managing them. Aanchal Malhotra’s work on material culture and memory reinforces this point: she argues that objects and domestic practices become “repositories of memory” that women inherit and transmit, even when official records erase them (Malhotra 120). In this sense, feminine genealogies become sites of both repression and resistance: they preserve trauma through inherited longings and sensory residues, but they also enable acts of reclamation. Women’s everyday practices—cooking, caring, preserving photographs—become forms of archival work that resist erasure.

Wheeler’s returns to Lahore and Sargodha, guided by her mother’s fragmented memories, exemplify this dual movement. By transforming her mother’s private

recollections into public narrative, Wheeler not only recovers a lost homestead but also reclaims the authority of women's testimony as a legitimate form of historical knowledge. This aligns with Elisabeth Bronfen's argument that women's mourning and memory are often tied to domestic spaces, and that the labor of mourning becomes a form of cultural production (215).

In addition, scholars of South Asian women's memory such as Jasodhara Bagchi and Tanika Sarkar have shown how gendered narratives of Partition contest nationalist heroics and reveal the intimate costs of communal violence (Bagchi 45; Sarkar 78). Meenakshi Malhotra's review of Shuchi Kapila's work further highlights the "hinge generation"—those one or two generations removed from the event—who inherit trauma through familial memory, silence, and storytelling, often through feminine lines (Malhotra). Wheeler's memoir exemplifies this hinge-generation dynamic: her own identity is shaped by the inherited burdens carried by her mother and grandmother, and her narrative becomes a site where feminine genealogies of memory are made visible and audible.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality reminds us that gender cannot be understood in isolation from other axes of power such as race, class, and caste (1241). In the Indian context, this has been productively extended by Dalit-feminist scholars such as Bama and Yadav, who argue that lower-caste women experience Partition and displacement differently from upper-caste women, as their struggles are shaped by both caste oppression and gendered violence (Bama 12; Yadav 46).

In Wheeler's memoir, the primary female figures—Dip Singh (the Indian mother) and Charles Wheeler's British family (the British side of the household)—are both upper-class women whose access to safe passage, property, and education insulates them from the most brutal forms of displacement. Their "lost homes" are bungalows, not refugee tents, and their return to Lahore and Sargodha is a privileged journey made possible by travel documents, financial resources, and institutional networks. In contrast, Butalia's *the Other Side of Silence* documents the experiences of women who lose everything—family, land, and dignity—often without the possibility of return (163). By juxtaposing Wheeler's narrative with Butalia's, one can better see how feminine genealogies in Partition memory are deeply stratified along caste and class lines. Wheeler's text foregrounds the memory-work of elite, caste-privileged women, while subaltern-feminist scholarship such as Butalia's and Dalit-feminist work draw attention to the burdens borne by lower-caste women whose lives were transformed by Partition in ways that are often invisible in bourgeois-centric memoirs (Butalia 20; Bama 12). In this way, the paper retains its feminist intervention while also acknowledging that "feminine genealogies" are not monolithic but are fractured by caste, class, and religious location.

Methodology: Reading Life-Writing as Literary and Historiographical Text

The Lost Homestead acts as both a literary text and a historiographical artifact, a method that aligns with contemporary approaches to life-writing in Partition studies. Gyanendra Pandey distinguishes between “official” and “intimate” histories, arguing that the latter must be read critically for their narrative strategies even as they provide affective access to traumatic pasts (4). In Wheeler’s memoir, the narrative is neither pure testimony nor transparent documentation; it is a constructed account shaped by selection, memory gaps, and her own political and ethical positioning. To read it solely as a historical source would be to ignore the art of narration; to read it only as literature, however, would be to occlude its function as a memory-archive.

Therefore, I adopt a dual methodology:

- **Literary analysis**, attending to narrative voice, structure, and the use of material culture (e.g., photographs, talis, domestic spaces) as symbolic devices;
- **Historiographical analysis**, assessing how Wheeler’s account engages with and sometimes contests official Partition histories, state archives, and other testimonial projects (Butalia 19; Pandey 5).

This approach reflects the broader “memory turn” in Partition scholarship, in which scholars such as Shuchi Kapila argue that life-writing and oral histories are not merely “supplements” to formal history but modes of knowledge that re-shape how we understand the event itself (3). In other words, Wheeler’s memoir is treated as a truth-functional narrative that must be read for both its affective power and its discursive construction, a method now widely accepted in postmemory studies (Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory* 109).

Anglo-Indian Hybridity, Mimicry, and Colonial Belonging

Wheeler’s position as an Anglo-Indian diasporic subject offers a rich entry into postcolonial debates on hybridity and mimicry. Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, argues that colonial encounters produce “hybrid” identities in what he calls the “third space,” a liminal zone where the binary opposition between colonizer and colonized breaks down and new, ambivalent forms of identity emerge (112–114). In this space, colonized subjects are encouraged to mimic the culture of the colonizer, not as a straightforward imitation but as a distorted, partial reproduction that both legitimizes colonial authority and subtly undermines it (Bhabha 85–86). Wheeler’s family history epitomizes such hybridity: her mother Dip is a Punjabi Sikh-Unionist aristocrat, while her father Charles is a British BBC journalist, and their marriage produces a British-Indian lawyer and public figure whose life traverses India, Pakistan, and the UK.

This hybridity is not merely geopolitical but also affective and classed. Dip’s family, as Unionist elites, occupy a privileged position in the colonial-and-postcolonial hierarchy, owning land and property in Sargodha while negotiating both colonial authority and the emerging nationalist-Muslim demand

for Pakistan. Her later marriage to Charles Wheeler introduces a second layer of mimicry: the adoption of English manners, education, and lifestyle, which enables social mobility in both British India and post-imperial Britain. In Bhabha's terms, such mimicry is "almost the same, but not quite," a partial reproduction of the colonizer's culture that never fully erases the differences of religion, region, and caste (86–87). In Wheeler's memoir, that ambivalence surfaces in the recurring tension between Dip's Punjabi roots and her Anglo-Indian daughter's British-professional habitus, as well as in the textual ambivalence over political figures like Jinnah and the nationalist project.

Anya Jahanara Kabir, drawing on Bhabha's ideas, reminds us that South Asian diasporic identity is often "anchored in the interstices of colonial and postcolonial histories," where the subject is neither fully "Indian" nor fully "British" (Kabir, *Partition and Postmemory* 178). Wheeler's narrative, in this light, becomes a case of postcolonial mimicry turned into memoir: she writes from within the British state apparatus—legal and political—while narrating a family history that is deeply embedded in the trauma of Partition and the loss of a Punjabi Sikh-elite home. This double positioning complicates the usual Partition dichotomy of Hindu-Muslim binaries, instead foregrounding a hybrid, classed, and gendered subjectivity that is at once insider and outsider to both nations.

Liisa Malkki's Purification and Spatial Theory

Liisa Malkki's notion of the "purification" of space offers a powerful lens for reading Partition as a rite that separates the chaos of intermixed communities into a newly imagined national order (Malkki, "National Geographic" 123; Malkki, *Purity and Exile* 67). In this frame, refugees are not only displaced but spatially reordered: their bodies and movements are disciplined within camps and post-Partition resettlements so that contaminated, heterogeneous zones are segregated into "proper" national territories (Malkki, *Purity and Exile* 85). Applying this to Marina Wheeler's account of her Punjabi Sikh ancestors, the Sargodha haveli—once a lush, paradisiacal homestead—becomes a liminal relic, caught between the utopian colonial-era ideal and the post-Partition landscape of loss and incompleteness (Wheeler 116; 89). The haveli no longer functions as a lived home but as a spectral trace, embodying what Victor Turner calls liminality: a threshold space suspended between the past and an irrecoverable future (97).

Kasauli's colonial bungalows similarly acquire the status of *lieux de mémoire*—sites of memory that crystallize exclusion and social hierarchy (Nora 7; Nora, "Between Memory and History" 8). Preserved yet half-abandoned, these bungalows mark the colonial elite's spatial segregation in the hills, while their contemporary neglect and elite reconversion into holiday homes underscore who is now included or excluded from the town's social geography (Nora 7; "Once upon a time in Kasauli" n. pag.). In post-Partition Punjab, this pattern of spatial purification loops back into new cycles of violence: the late-1980s militancy and Operation Blue Star re-enact Partition-era logics by re-mapping the region as a

site of religious-national purification, where the Akal Takht and the Golden Temple complex become both sacred centre and contested territory (Pandey 89). Stockpiled bombs and rumours of attack transform everyday homes into makeshift fortresses, echoing 1947, when domestic spaces were turned into sites of defence and siege (Pandey 89; Bhalla “Digital Histories of Partition” n. pag.).

Material Postmemory: Objects, Practices and Topographies

Recent scholarship in memory studies has begun to theorize how postmemory operates not only through narratives and images, but also through material traces and spatial configurations. Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory” originally focuses on the intergenerational transmission of traumatic memory via family stories, photographs, and behaviors (106–7). In South Asian contexts, this notion has been extended into what may be called “material postmemory,” in which inherited objects, embodied practices, and affective topographies become non-linguistic archives of loss. In this expanded frame, “material postmemory” does not simply illustrate trauma; it reshapes the temporal and sensorial relation to the past, as subsequent generations inhabit that history affectively and spatially rather than merely “knowing” it.

At the most concrete level, inherited objects function as haptic vessels of memory. In Wheeler’s memoir, the silver thali, sepia photographs of Lahore streets, and the Lahore-bungalow’s crumbling verandas become what Aanchal Malhotra calls “repositories of memory,” encoding both absence and affective continuity (120). Such objects are not neutral; they carry the weight of class and intimacy, as many of Wheeler’s relics come from an elite, Unionist-Sikh household. In this way, the material dimension of postmemory is never fully “transparent” but always mediated by social position. As Malhotra argues, everyday objects—“from a thali to a Nimco electric switch” (190)—turn into mnemonic anchors, preserving the texture of a life that cannot be restored but can be tactilely re-experienced. Wheeler’s thali, the taste of inherited Punjabi recipes, and the sensory recollection of Lahore’s jasmine-scented air thus become sites where postmemory becomes embodied, not just textual.

A second layer of material postmemory is embodied practice. Hirsch notes that postmemory is often “shaped by imaginative investment, projection, and creation” rather than direct recall (107), and this imaginative work is frequently enacted through routine, domestic practices. In Wheeler’s text, the act of cooking, walking ancestral streets, and narrating family stories take on the quality of performative memory-work. Women, in particular, become the custodians of these practices—preserving recipes, oral anecdotes, and rituals that sustain the family’s emotional relation to the past (Menon and Bhasin 4; Butalia 20). These embodied practices differ from the “high culture” of written history: they are affective, iterative, and often gendered, making them ideal vessels for postmemory’s transmission across generations.

The third, and more spatial, register of material postmemory is topography—the affective geography of lost homes and contested landscapes. Nalini Ambady Kabir, in *Partition and Postmemory: Affective Geography and the South Asian Diaspora*, argues that landscapes are not neutral backdrops but “charged topographies” that evoke displacement and continuity (178). In Wheeler’s narrative, the Sargodha homestead, the Lahore bungalow, and the Unionist-haveli in the Punjab acquire the status of *lieux de mémoire*, as Pierre Nora in “Between Memory and History” defines those—sites where memory crystallizes around specific spaces (8). These sites are not merely nostalgic; they are sites of political struggle and communal re-mapping). When Wheeler walks the Lahore streets or reconstructs the Sargodha gardens in language, she participates in what Kabir calls “affective geography,” turning the terrain of memory into a site of negotiation rather than detachment.

Conclusion

Marina Wheeler’s *The Lost Homestead* transcends conventional memoir to become a powerful exploration of memory, trauma, and identity. Through postmemory, displaced belongings, and affective landscapes, the text reconstructs a lost homeland within narrative space. By engaging with scholars such as Hirsch, Butalia and Pandey, this paper has demonstrated how Wheeler’s memoir contributes to Partition studies by foregrounding intergenerational memory and material culture. The “journey to lost homes” is not merely a return to the past but an ongoing process of remembrance and reconstruction.

Ultimately, *The Lost Homestead* reveals that Partition persists not only in history but in memory’s evolving archive. The lost home survives—not as a physical space—but as an enduring presence in narrative, identity, and imagination.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/53**HOMES OF MEMORY: MIGRATION, DISPLACEMENT, AND THE RECONSTITUTION OF IDENTITY IN SOUTH ASIAN DIASPORA****SOBIA**Research scholar, Department of Art Education,
Faculty of Fine arts, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India**Abstract**

Migration is not a recent or isolated phenomenon but a constant and constitutive part of human history, going back to the beginning of human evolution when human communities moved in search of sustenance, water and shelter. This ecological migration continues to present day in the guise of conflict, political, economic and environmental adversity, Migration has remained one of the most persistent and defining condition of human existence. This paper begins by placing migration in this long historical continuum, emphasizing its persistence as a necessity and compulsion that has characterized human societies. In South Asia, migration takes on a complicated and emotive terrain, particularly when considered within the context of the Partition of India, a pivotal moment in history that triggered one of the world's largest forced displacements. The Partition, apart from causing mass displacement, also had a significant impact on the socio-economic, political and cultural landscape, leaving deep and lasting scars on individual and collective lives. This research shifts the attention from macro-narratives to lived histories and lived experiences as vital sites of analysis for migration. It suggests that the effects of displacement cannot be understood solely through official sources but with the help of memories, stories, experiences that make up a "lived archive". From peasants who were displaced from their ancestral homes to families who carried pieces of their old homes with them, these narratives highlight the human faces of migration. Moreover, the paper examines how these experiences are passed down from one generation to the next, shaping identities and belonging for those who have never been displaced themselves. Central to this paper is role of memory as a primary means by which displaced people re-engage with and "re-claim" their lost homes. But memory is not conceived of as a fixed or objective archive of the past, but rather as a partial, subjective and often disjointed act of reconstruction. Through literary analysis of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, the paper illustrates how individual memory is intertwined with national history to create narratives that blur the boundaries between individual and collective experiences, and expose the fluidity of both. Similarly, the paper considers the artworks of artists like Satish Gujral and Krishen Khanna, BC sanyal and PN mago whose artistic interventions deal with issues of displacement, trauma, and identity, translating subjective experiences into visual narratives.

By bringing together literary narratives and visual art practices, this paper suggests that the concept of "home" in the context of Diaspora is not static or unilateral but is constantly being reimagined through memory, narrative, and art. These homes of memory are fragmentary and partial (as well as imagined), but they are also crucial for the reconstitution of identity and community. Ultimately, the paper reflects on migration not as a historical occurrence but as an ongoing process that continually reframes the idea of home, turning it into interplay of memory, loss and creative reconstitution.

Keywords: Migration, South Asian Diaspora, Partition of India, Histories, Memory, Displacement, Identity

1. INTRODUCTION

Migration is one of the most enduring realities of human civilization. Migration is a fact of human civilization. Whether during the early nomadic communities moving across continents in a search for food and water or by the mass migration during the modern geopolitical upheavals, the migration of people across geographical and political boundaries has had a profound impact on human culture, societies and experience. This isn't an unusual, isolated, or marginalized event, but migration is part of the historical continuum and is closely tied to factors like trade, conquest, colonialism and climate change.

Migration has great emotional and political significance in South Asia. This is evident in the partition of India in 1947, which split the subcontinent on religious grounds, and led to the formation of two independent states: India and Pakistan. This caused almost 15 million people to cross the border twice, a Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. It was the biggest and one of the most poignant forced migrations in history. In response to this displacement, the violence, damage and disintegration resulted in wounds that have not been mended after generations.

The paper examines the macro-level analyses and lived experiences of the displaced people and communities, beyond the broad-scale analyses of migration, which focus on data, policy frameworks and geopolitical narratives. It is an argument that official historical accounts, no matter how crucial, do not provide an adequate understanding of the full scope of the human consequences of displacement. The 'living records' – the repository of memories, stories, personal evidence and artistic expression that enables displaced people to preserve, communicate with, and communicate their experiences over time are also important. The paper studies the macro-level analyses and living experiences of displaced individuals and communities, moving beyond the broad-scale analyses of migration focused on data, policy frameworks, and geopolitical narratives. It argues that official historical records, no matter how essential, are not sufficient to understand the full human dimensions of displacement. Equally important is the 'living records' the repository of memories, stories, personal evidence, and artistic

expressions through which displaced people preserve, communicate with their experiences, and communicate them over time.

The paper is divided into six parts. Following this introduction, the second section contextualizes migration within a long historical continuity, with particular attention on the partition of India. The third section examines the concept of 'living records' and the role of memory in displacement. The fourth volume presents a literary analysis of *Midnight's Children*, considering the relationship between memory and national history. The fifth section examines the work of Satish Gujral, Krishen Khanna, B. C. Sanyal, P. N. Mago and Nalini s Malani's selected artefacts as visual records of displacement, focusing specifically on specific artifacts and their formal artistic strategies. Ultimately, this research paper ends with the concept of 'homes of memory' and the ongoing process of migrant identity-building.

2. MIGRATION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: FROM ECOLOGICAL NECESSITY TO FORCED DISPLACEMENT

The history of human migration itself coexists with the history of humanity. Archeological and anthropological evidence indicates that *Homo sapiens* emerged from Africa about sixty thousand years ago and gradually spread to every habitable region of the earth. These early migrations were motivated by ecological needs the search for food, water, and shelter, and in this sense were neither voluntary nor arising out of any political pressure, but an essential condition for human survival and survival.

As human societies became more complex, migration became more intimately associated with power. The rise of empires, the expansion of trade networks, and the violence of colonial conquests all of these gave rise to the movement of large-scale people, whether voluntary or forcefully. Slavery, indentures, and forced relocation of people were extremely cruel types of migration that ruthlessly separated individuals and communities from their original habitats. For example, the world of the Indian Ocean was constantly connected by the voluntary and compulsive migrations of merchants, pilgrims, laborers, and soldiers long before the advent of European imperialism.

The twentieth century gave rise to new forms and unprecedented levels of forced displacement. Two world wars, the colonization of Asia and Africa, and the spread of ethnic and religious nationalisms, led to millions of refugees. The partition of India unfolds as one of the most decisive tragedies of this era. This hastily organized division by the British colonial administration and the newly formed governments of India and Pakistan was associated with extraordinary communal violence. An estimated ten to two million people died, while about one and a fifteen million people were displaced from their ancestral homes. The effects of partition were not limited to the then chaos of 1947. The resulting displacement reorganized the social, cultural, economic and political scenarios of the two nations. Communities that had been living together for centuries fell apart. Cities,

towns, and villages changed when populations fled or were evicted. Its impact on personal life the loss of homes, land, livelihoods, neighbors, and a sense of belonging was boundless. This human and psychological impact of division is the main theme of this research paper.

Even today, migration defines our world. Climate change, economic inequality, political persecution and armed conflict force millions of people to leave their homes every year. So the experiences of the people displaced by the partition are not only historical evidence, but also deeply linked to contemporary global concerns. Understanding how displaced communities suffered loss, preserved memories, and rebuilt their identity provides us with an important approach to understanding and dealing with the current global displacement crisis.

3. THE LIVED ARCHIVE: MEMORY, STORIES, AND DISPLACED EXPERIENCE

The major historiography of the partition has long privileged official details such as government records, political speeches, census figures, and the testimony of influential political figures. While these sources are essential, they are inevitably partial, as they often exclude the voices, experiences, and attitudes of ordinary people especially women, poor, and minority and marginalized communities. Over the past few decades, oral historians, anthropologists, cultural theorists and others have turned increasingly toward the use of oral sources to augment official documents and material that may be referred to as 'living archive': the collective memory, stories and experiences of individuals who first experienced displacement.

In this context, memory is not considered to be a transparent or completely reliable record of the past. Rather, it is understood as a partial, subjective, and often scattered process of reconstruction. Theorists of memory such as Paul Connerton, Jan Assmann, and Aleida Assmann have emphasized that memory is always built through language, social contexts, and the needs and concerns of the present. In particular, splitting memories are affected by trauma: they are fragmented, suggestive, and sometimes contradictory, with silence and absences being as meaningful as the expressed statement.

But memory is another essential asset. For displaced communities, it turns into a way to keep alive the relationships with homes that were previously lost and to hold up a cultural identity, as well as a means to make sense of experiences which are not always captured by the dominant, authoritative narrative. The testimonies of the survivors of the partition, the peasants who left their ancestral land, the families who took the broken parts of their old life with them across the new boundaries, and the women who faced extraordinary violence form an invaluable record of human experiences. These stories render the event as a person, as a human being, and thus restore the individual to the collective experience of displacement.

The most important aspect of this living record is its interred generational transmission. The memories and narratives of partition are not limited to those who directly experienced displacement; they reach for generations to come, are reinvented and imagined in new forms. These are generations who have never crossed the border nor seen the places their parents and grandparents describe. This memory-movement shapes a sense of identity and belonging in complex ways, and creates a situation that theorists have called 'post-memory'—a connection to the past that is deeply felt, even if it is not directly experienced.

The concept of 'post-memory', developed by literary witch Marianne Hirsch in the context of the children of Holocaust survivors, is highly relevant in the South Asian migrant context. Children and grandchildren of families affected by the division often cherish vivid imaginations of places they have never been; they feel deep nostalgia for motherlands where they have never lived, and build their identity that is deeply affected by ancestral displacement.

4. LITERARY IMAGININGS: SALMAN RUSHDIE'S MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN AND THE INTERSECTION OF MEMORY AND HISTORY

Literature has long served a vital medium for understanding and expressing experiences associated with displacement, loss, and the search for belonging. Among the South Asian literary works associated with these themes, *Midnight's Children* is probably considered the most well-known and widely analyzed work. Awarded the Booker Prize and later the Booker of Bookers, the novel communicates in a very imaginative manner with the legacies of partition and Indian independence through its storyteller Salim Sinai and the interconnected stories of the Indian nation itself.

This novel by Salman Rushdie is built around the incredible memories of its narrator, whose memories associated with family history are clearly self-conscious, partial and mixed with imagination. Salim himself admits that his memory is metaphorical and flawed rather than the literal truth, and he records as much historical facts as he tells himself stories. This narrative strategy expresses the same memory on a formal level that this paper is presenting: understanding memory not as reproduction but as reconstruction i.e., as a process of meaning-building influenced by present needs and desires.

The depiction of division is particularly important in the novel. Rushdie presents the division not as a clear historical dividing line, but as a wound that continues to hemorrhage to the present and also affects the lives of those who were born after division, as much as to those who directly experienced it. The novel's magical realism blurring the boundaries between the real and the fiction, blending the personal and the political together illustrates of how historical trauma affects and distorts ordinary experiences. Memory in this novel is not a reliable record, but a creative and sometimes disappointing attempt to understand history, a history that seems to transcend the limits of human understanding.

Particularly important are the connection between individual memory and collective national history among the novel's central concerns. Salim's personal narrative is clearly linked to the narrative of the Indian nation: he is born at midnight of independence and his fate is symbolically tied to the fate of the country. This close relationship between the individual and the nation highlights how individual identities are constructed by broad historical forces, and national history itself, on the other hand, is built on the experiences and subjections of millions of individuals.

Rushdie's novel thus exemplifies the same type of analysis that this paper advocates: focusing on how broad historical phenomena such as division, freedom, and communal violence are lived and understood at the subtle level of personal memories and experiences. The novel invites readers to rethink the boundaries between the individual and the community, history and memory, and the real and the fiction. In doing so, it becomes an excellent example of the cultural role that literature can play helping communities understand, process, and pass on the legacies of displacement to future generations.

5. VISUAL REGISTERS OF DISPLACEMENT: GUJRAL, KHANNA, SANYAL, MAGO, AND MALANI

If literature offers one mode of processing and representing the experience of displacement, visual art offers another one that operates through image, form, texture, and material rather than language alone, and that can capture dimensions of experience that words cannot fully convey. In the context of the Partition and its long aftermath, a number of significant Indian and diasporic artists responded to displacement and trauma through their practice, translating subjective experiences of loss, rupture, and longing into visual narratives of enduring power. This section offers close readings of specific artworks by five major figures: Satish Gujral, Krishen Khanna, B.C. Sanyal, P.N. Mago, and Nalini Malani. Each artist developed a distinctive visual language for engaging with the experience of forced migration, and taken together, they constitute a rich and varied visual archive of displacement.

5.1 Satish Gujral: Expressionism, Rupture, and the Fragmented Self

Satish Gujral (born 1925, Jhelum — died 2020) was born in what is now Pakistan and the experience of partition the violent displacement of his family, his own deafness due to an accident in childhood, and the collective suffering had a profound and lasting effect on his artistic vision. His earliest artworks, created in the 1950s and 1960s, were deeply influenced by the Expressionist tradition, in which grief and trauma were visualized through distorted shapes, intense colors, and fiery drawings.

His mural-work *Agony* (around 1951), which he made soon after returning to India after completing studies under Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros in Mexico, is considered one of the most direct and sharp responses presented by any Indian artist to the partition. The work depicts a group of human figures

agonizing with pain Entangled limbs, faces disfigured in pain, and bodies clinging to each other, which create an atmosphere of suffocation and unease throughout the creation. Painted in sombre earth tones punctuated by streaks of blood-red and ash-grey, the mural refuses any aestheticisation of suffering, insisting on its raw corporeality. The influence of Mexican mural art is evident in this its broad scale, social commitment, and a bold portrayal of historical violence, but Gujral adapted it through his personal experiences of division. As a result, this work is endowed with very intense emotional vigor.

His series of oil paintings in the late 1950s, depicting desolate landscapes and solitary human figures, continues this experience of loss and displacement. The human figure in these paintings is often seen alone in a vast and nostalgic environment, where the empty space does not indicate a spiritual flourishing but of abandonment and loneliness. The repeated paintings and textures on the surface of the paintings create a feeling of struggle, accumulation, and constant effort—like a formless being created. This process symbolizes the effort of the displaced man himself in which he tries to build a new home and a new identity from broken fragments.

As Gujral's artistic life developed, he worked in various mediums such as sculpture, ceramics, mosaics and architecture with amazing versatility. In particular, his architectural design of the Belgian Embassy in New Delhi (1980–1983) is counted among the masterpieces of Indian post-modern architecture. But even in his later works, the thread of displacement and the search for belonging was constantly present. His statues, made of bronze and terracotta, return to the repeatedly struggling and constricted human body, as if the human body itself had become a place where historical trauma is still etched today.

Gujral's entire art journey can be read as a detailed reflection on the lifelong process of living the lost home within oneself that is, being built by a place that one can no longer fully acquire or re-inhabit. In this sense, his art directly participates in the concept of what this research paper calls 'homes of memory'.

5.2 Krishen Khanna: Longing, Community, and the Itinerant Figure

Krishen Khanna (born 1925, Layalpur — now Faisalabad, Pakistan) lived the partition as a young man and wrote and spoke with great clarity and sensitivity about the experience of displacement and its lasting effects on his identity and art. While intense expressionism is apparent in Satish Gujral's art, Khanna's style is recognized for its warm, earthy colors, fluid figurative drawing, and a deeply sad poetry that permeates even his crowded urban paintings. His paintings repeatedly return to themes such as longing, transience, and the burden of memory a world that is extremely vibrant in colour and form, but has become a past forever in its emotional perception.

Khanna is particularly famous for his "Bandwala" series nomadic brass-band musicians who appear everywhere at Indian weddings, funerals and processions. Bandwall: No. 3 (1981) and many subsequent works show these patterns in

dense and pressing composition, where musicians' uniform bodies are next to each other, their instruments are raised, but their faces are often folded or hidden under hats. In these paintings, there is a simultaneous feeling of both celebration and melancholy: music symbolizes celebration, but the musicians themselves reflect a sense of fatigue and displacement, as if they are going through a world where they are not entirely their own.

The "Bandwala" series has been widely seen as an allegorical expression of migrant and displaced life. These are characters that carry their culture their music, their identity with them everywhere; they offer "appropriation" to others, while being on the margins themselves, in constant travel, never completely stable. This experience is deeply connected with the tragedy of partition: the displaced person also walks like a bandit in a world that does not fully accept it, and carries his legacy together as a gift and a burden. Khanna himself admitted that the band was a symbol of social and existential displacement for him.

His early works, which were formed in the 1950s and 1960s soon after the partition, are more directly involved with the themes of breakage and damage. These paintings show rickshaw drivers, market traders and crowded urban scenes, painted in bold, light flattened forms. These show the influence of Paul Cézanne on the one hand, and the Bengal modernist tradition on the other. In these works, the city is not a "home", but a place of struggle and survival—a place where people pass by but not fully settled. This sense of temporary residence—being present in a place but not rooted in it—is one of the most distinctive features of Khanna's vision.

In his later years, Khanna also created an important panorama based on the Bible's "Good Samaritan" story. He used this narrative as a medium to consider compassion, suffering, and moral responsibility. Although these paintings are inspired by the Christian symbolic tradition, they are deeply linked to the experience of partition: they raise the question of what it means to witness someone else's suffering—to accept or ignore, to help, or abandon. This moral dimension further enriches Khanna's thinking of displacement, where his art goes beyond personal experience to broader questions of collective responsibility and ethical evidence.

5.3 B.C. Sanyal: Social Realism and the Dignity of Displacement

Bhabesh Chandra Sanyal (1902–2003), who is universally known as B. C. Sanyal, was one of the towering figures in twentieth-century Indian art—an artist, teacher and institution-maker, who had a profound influence on the development of modern Indian art. Born in Dhaka, undivided Bengal, Sanyal trained at the Lahore School of Art and later became a central member of the Progressive Artists Group. The group wanted to take Indian art beyond the

boundaries of the Bengal school and academic tradition towards a more socially engaged modernization.

The partition also forced Sanyal, like millions of others, to rebuild his life. He came to Delhi, where he was instrumental in the establishment of the Delhi Polytechnic's Faculty of Fine Arts an institution that became one of the most important centers of arts education in independent India. His commitment to building cultural institutions for the displaced and reorganized nation was a constructive dialogue with the displacement itself; it was an attempt to build new "houses" for artistic practice after loss.

In his art, Sanyal took a socially realistic approach in depicting displacement. His style was based on the expression of human figures influenced by Indian and Western modernist traditions. His paintings on displaced people and refugees especially those of the 1940s and 1950s are full of sympathetic directness. The figures in his paintings are presented with the utmost sensitivity and uniqueness; their faces and bodies are witnesses of pain, but are not limited to simply the symbol of the "victim". In works such as the *Refugees* (c. 1947–1950), groups of displaced people are depicted in extremely plain and sparse combinations, where the human figure itself carries the full weight of the historical tragedy. There are no decorative elements in these paintings; their formal simplicity reflects the displacement and depity of their subjects.

Sanyal's sculpture also connects with themes of human insecurity and patience. Their bronze statues often small in size and emotionally intimate evide a deep sense of innerness, as if the statue's constricted form symbolizes the sadness and memory hidden within itself. These statues, combined with his paintings, create a visible language of dignified suffering a language that emphasizes the entire humanity of displaced people, without making their experience emotional or dramatic.

His contribution as a teacher and institution-builder should also be understood as his artistic response to displacement. The establishment of the institutions he contributed to gave the coming generations of Indian artists an opportunity to develop rigorous training and their artistic identity. Thus, Sanyal participated in the reconstruction of the cultural community that had broken up due to division. The institutions they developed actually became new "homes" not geographical, but cultural; not static, but dynamic; not certain, but constantly being renovated through the creative energy of its members.

5.4 P.N. Mago: Gender, Silence, and the Invisible Wound

Pran Nath Mago (1913–1995) was a painter and art teacher whose divisional art focussed specifically on sexual experiences how women experienced the violent displacement of 1947 differently, and the sexual silences that covered the most painful dimensions of the tragedy for a long time. Mago trained at the Mayo

School of Art in Lahore and later taught at the Delhi College of Art, where he became a respected figure of the freedom-post-Indian art world.

Mago's paintings of the Partition period occupy an important and underappreciated place in the visual archive of displacement. Her major works include the Refugee Camp (circa 1947–1950), the Mourners, Rumours and Mourners, and many paintings based on displaced women. These paintings show a restrained emotional intensity, which is different from the expressionist energy of Satish Gujral or the poetic melancholy of Krishen Khanna. Mago's shapes often appear fixed and inward; their gazes are slanted or turned elsewhere. These paintings are a visual form of the mental shyness caused by trauma and the silent pain of female experience, which history often ignored.

The significance of this gender vision is profound. The abduction, rape, and murder of hundreds of thousands of women- and by the forced 'recoveries' of abducted women by governments on both sides of the border, which often compounded rather than alleviated their trauma. Official histories have long presented this side either suppressed or underrated. The testimonies of the affected women were often confined to private spheres. The art of Mago gives a visual tone to this repressed experience and creates a record of the pain that was overcome by authoritative history.

His structural style also emphasizes this theme. Many partition-based paintings show women in narrow and confined spaces – tents, temporary shelters, or the edges of large scenery. This visual structure itself expresses the marginalization of their experiences. The use of light in these paintings is extremely dim; the color scheme is made of muted earthy palette, as if suffering has dimmed the world's brightness. Yet the women of Mago are not only passive victims; they show patience, a vigilant power of waiting and survival, which only protects their art from the "aestheticisation of victimization".

Combined with evidence compiled by oral historians such as Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon, Mago's paintings become an important part of the "gender counter-archive" of the division. Her art complements and enriches written history and urges that the complexity of women's experiences of displacement be fully recognized.

5.5 Nalini Malani: Myth, Memory, and the Multimedia Archaeology of Displacement

Nalini Malani (born 1946, Karachi) holds a unique and most important place in the art tradition associated with Indian contemporary art and visual experiences of division. Malani, who was born in Karachi a few weeks before partition, was displaced from Kolkata in her infancy with her family. The division of 1947 thus became the basic sensory memory of his life and art, which profoundly influenced his multifaceted and experimental artistic practice over the last seven decades. Unlike other artists, Malani developed a multimedia art-language, combining painting, installation, video, and performance together. His art works

simultaneously at many levels of time, memory, history and identity. Sir J.J. After training in the School of Art and study in Paris, she made paintings based on the female-body and gender politics in the 1970s. By the 1980s, her work was linked to broader historical and political themes such as division, communal violence, and oppression of women in political circumstances. Among his most famous and ambitious works, *Unity in Diversity* (1990) is particularly notable. It was a video and shadow-play installation, which he made in the context of the increasing communal tense conditions before the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and the Babri Masjid demolition. In this installation, he projected fragmented paintings taken from Hindu and Islamic visual traditions, photographic memories of partition and his paintings on the walls. As a result, a changing visual world was created in which the boundaries of religious identity, history and individual-collective memory are constantly blurred. This structure itself becomes a visual form of the process of displacement and reconstruction memories come, climb over each other, disappear, and then return to new f Malani has portrayed the division from an extremely specific, multi-layered and feminist perspective, which sets her apart from other artists working on the division. While many artists presented the tragedy of 1947 through scenes of direct violence, displacement and refugee life, Malani saw the partition not just as a historical event but as a constant living psychological and cultural memory, affecting people's identity for generations. Through video installation, shadow play, reverse glass painting, projection, and mythical symbols, he developed a visual language in which memories are broken, connected, and constantly changing. Her works *Unity in Diversity* (1990) and *In Search of Vanished Blood* (2012) combine history, myth, and contemporary politics to show that communal violence, displacement, and misogyny are deeply intertwined. In contrast to traditional divisional depictions, Malani focuses specifically on women's experiences and shows that the most profound impact of political and community violence is often on the female body. By linking mythical characters such as Sita, Cassandra, and Medea with refugee women, they link the tragedy of partition to the wider structure of repeated sexual and communal violence in human history. The ever-changing images and interchanging images in his art indicate that the memory of division is never static; it is constantly reconstructed and re-experienced in individual and collective consciousness. Another important aspect of Malani's art is the politics of "witnessing" and memory. Being displaced to in infancy themselves stands in the position between direct experience and "post memory"—the memory that is, through family narratives and generations. It is this intermediate situation that gives them the opportunity

to discover how historical trauma is transmitted and transformed between generations.

Where Satish Gujral sees the displacement as an expressionist of physical pain, Krishen Khanna forms it in the sad journeys of band members, B.C. Sanyal portrays the collective dignity through social realism, and Pran Nath Mago brings out the suppressed witnesses of misogyny while Malani places the division in the wider framework of myth, feminism, and historical violence. Their art establishes that violence against women in conditions of displacement is no exception, but a structural reality of power and community violence.

Malani has also gained great honour at the international level. She received major honors such as the Praemium Imperiale (2017) and the Princess of Asturias Award for the Arts (2019). Their art has provided a new vision to understand the South Asian experience of division and displacement on a global scale, where local history connects to the wider experience of humanity displacement, memory, loss, and self-reconstruction.

6. Homes of Memory: Diaspora, Identity, and Creative Reconstitution

The analysis in the preceding sections makes it clear that the concept of 'home' in the diasporic context is neither simple nor static. For the people displaced by partition and their future generations, the home is no longer a fixed geographical location, but rather a complex and multi-layered structure made up of memories, legends, fantasies, and creative expressions. In the language of this paper, it is a "home of memory" a house that does not exist on a map, but in the inner consciousness of the individual and the community.

These houses of memory are naturally fragmented and incomplete. They are made up of unfulfilled memories, family tales, old photographs, objects, smells, flavors, and other sensory experiences. The more they are remembered, the more imaginary they are. And yet they are not therefore without significance or function. In contrast, they play a very important role in rebuilding the identity of displaced people. These give them a sense of continuity, belonging, and self-realization, especially in situations where all of these elements are violently broken.

The literary and artistic works analyzed in this paper do not merely depict this process, but they actively participate in it. Salman Rushdie's novel creates a reader's house in which the experiences of partition can be understood and made meaningful. Similarly, Satish Gujral, Krishen Khanna, B.C. The paintings and installations of Sanyal, Pran Nath Mago and Nalini Malani create visible homes where the suffering and struggle of the displaced people takes shape and recognition. In this sense, these cultural creations are not only individual creation, but also community-building processes they create shared imaginative places in which migrant identity can be expressed and accepted.

The formal artistic strategies adopted by these artists are also very important. Gujral's expressionist fragmentation style, the poeticism of displacement inherent in Khanna's nomadic forms, Sanyal's socialistic sense of dignity, Mago's vision focused on sexual silence, and Malani's multimedia structure made of mythical and historical layers all different aesthetic attempts to shape an experience that is not directly depicted. These together indicate that the visual archive is not a uniform or stable tradition, but an area full of variations and differences, where the question of how, for whom, and for what purpose the displacement should be presented.

It is also important that the homes of memory keep changing over time and generations. The memories of the first generation that have a direct experience of division differ from the memories of their children and grandchildren, as later generations know the past through stories, recollections, and artistic presentations rather than direct experience. Yet this makes their relationship with the past no less real. Rather, it shows that the process of cultural memory and identity-building is continuous and dynamic; constantly reorganizing according to changing circumstances and needs. Nalini Malani, for whom the split is both a family heritage and a historical fantasy together, presents a highly influential example of the dynamism of this "postmemory".

Finally, it is also necessary that the houses of memory should not be seen only as a place of loss and mourning. They can also become sources of creative energy and cultural vibrancy. The experience of displacement in the South Asian context has given rise to an extremely rich tradition of literature, visual arts, music and other cultural manifestations, which evidence of man's creative ability even in difficult conditions. Thus, migration and displacement, despite all their misery and disintegration, have also proved to be creative they became the criteria in which new forms of identity, community and cultural expression were created.

7. Conclusion

This paper has argued that migration, and particularly the forced displacement associated with the Partition of India, must be understood not only through the lens of official history but through the lived experiences, memories, and creative productions of those who have been displaced. It has proposed the concept of the 'lived archive' as a supplement to conventional historical sources, and has examined how memory, literature, and visual art function as modes of engaging with and processing the experience of displacement.

Through a reading of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and close analyses of specific works by Satish Gujral, Krishen Khanna, B.C. Sanyal, P.N. Mago, and Nalini Malani, the paper has shown how individual memory and collective history are inextricably intertwined, and how cultural production can serve as a vital means of negotiating identity and belonging in the aftermath of displacement. Each artist has developed a distinctive visual language for engaging with displacement — from Gujral's expressionist intensity and Khanna's lyrical

itinerancy, to Sanyal's social realist humanism, Mago's attention to gendered silence, and Malani's multimedia archaeology of myth and memory. Together, they constitute a visual archive of Partition that is as indispensable as any written record.

The concept of 'homes of memory' has been proposed to capture the way in which the diasporic imagination reconstructs, through narrative and art, the homes that have been physically lost. These homes are neither stable nor complete; they are continually remade through the ongoing work of memory, storytelling, and creative practice. They are, in this sense, not destinations but processes not place of arrival but acts of imagination, performed and reperformed across generations. Ultimately, the paper suggests that migration is not simply a historical event but an ongoing process one that continues to shape identities, communities, and cultural forms across generations. The concept of home, in this context, is not a fixed destination or a stable location, but a dynamic and creative process of reconstitution, ceaselessly reimagined through memory, loss, and artistic invention. To understand migration fully, therefore, is to attend not only to the movement of bodies across borders, but to the movement of memories, stories, and images that make those journeys meaningful.

As the global crisis of displacement intensifies in the twenty-first century, the insights offered by South Asian diasporic literature and art have a relevance that extends far beyond their immediate context. They remind us that behind every statistic is a human being carrying a home of memory, and that understanding and honouring those homes is an ethical as much as an intellectual imperative. The work of artists like Nalini Malani, who have spent careers translating this imperative into visual form, offers not only testimony to the past but models for how art might continue to respond to the crises of the present.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/54**GUSTATORY MEMORY AND DIASPORIC BECOMING: FOOD, HABITUS AND THE THIRD SPACE IN *THE NAMESAKE*****JAYPREETHI. M**Research Scholar, Department of English
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Bharathidasan University**Abstract**

This paper examines the epistemic and affective role of food in shaping diasporic subjectivity in *The Namesake*, arguing that culinary practices function as a dynamic site where memory, identity, and belonging are continually negotiated. Moving beyond a purely cultural reading of food, the study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that draws on phenomenology, sociology, and postcolonial theory to conceptualize food as an embodied and performative practice. It foregrounds the notion of gustatory memory, wherein taste and smell operate as sensory modalities that enable the re-experiencing of homeland, collapsing temporal and spatial distance through the lived body. Engaging Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus, the paper further explores how culinary practices persist as internalized dispositions, allowing cultural continuity to endure within the diasporic condition, often beneath conscious articulation. At the same time, the study situates diasporic cuisine within Homi K. Bhabha's framework of hybridity and the "Third Space," demonstrating how food becomes a site of cultural negotiation where meanings are neither fixed nor original but continuously produced through processes of adaptation and translation. In doing so, the paper reconceptualizes "home" not as a stable geographical entity but as a fluid, processual construct that is enacted through everyday culinary practices. Ultimately, it argues that food in *The Namesake* operates as a critical medium of diasporic becoming, wherein embodied memory, habitual practice, and hybrid identity converge to reconfigure the experience of displacement.

Keywords: Diaspora, Gustatory Memory, Habitus, Hybridity and Third Space.

Introduction

The experience of diaspora is fundamentally marked by dislocation, not merely in the geographic sense but in the ontological, cultural, and affective dimensions of existence. Migration disrupts the continuity of lived space, displacing individuals from familiar socio-cultural environments and re-situating them within new and often alien contexts. Within such conditions of estrangement, the question of how identity, memory, and belonging are sustained assumes critical importance. In *The Namesake*, this question is not addressed solely through overt markers of culture such as language, ritual, or tradition, but rather through the quotidian and material

practice of food. Culinary practices emerge as a subtle yet powerful medium through which diasporic subjects negotiate the tensions between loss and continuity, estrangement and familiarity, fixity and transformation. This paper proposes that food in the novel operates not merely as a cultural signifier but as a complex epistemic and phenomenological site wherein diasporic becoming is continuously articulated.

To conceptualize this dynamic, it is necessary to move beyond reductive readings of food as a symbol of nostalgia or ethnic identity and instead situate it within a broader theoretical framework that integrates phenomenology, sociology, and postcolonial thought. At the level of lived experience, food engages the senses in a manner that precedes and exceeds linguistic articulation. Drawing on the phenomenological insights of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, perception is understood as fundamentally embodied, wherein the body functions not as a passive object but as the primary site of knowing the world. Within this framework, taste and smell acquire a privileged status as modes of perception that are intimately tied to memory and affect. Unlike visual or textual representations, which mediate experience through distance and abstraction, gustatory sensations operate through immediacy and intimacy, collapsing the boundaries between subject and object, past and present. In the diasporic context of *The Namesake*, such sensory experiences enable a reactivation of the homeland that is not merely representational but experiential. The act of tasting thus becomes an act of remembering, not in the sense of cognitive recall but as a re-embodiment of lived history.

This phenomenological understanding of food as an embodied archive of memory is further enriched by engaging with the sociological concept of habitus as theorized by Pierre Bourdieu. Habitus refers to the system of durable, transposable dispositions that structure perception, thought, and action, often operating beneath the level of conscious awareness. Culinary practices, within this framework, can be understood as manifestations of habitus, wherein cultural norms and values are inscribed onto the body through repetitive, everyday actions. In the diasporic condition, the persistence of such practices acquires particular significance, as it enables a form of continuity that is not dependent on geographic proximity. In *The Namesake*, the preparation and consumption of food are not always deliberate acts of cultural preservation; rather, they are habitual enactments through which identity is sustained and reproduced. At the same time, habitus is not static but adaptive, capable of responding to new social and material conditions. The modification of recipes, the substitution of ingredients, and the incorporation of new culinary influences all point to the dynamic nature of habitus, which negotiates between continuity and change in the context of migration.

While phenomenology and habitus together account for the embodied and habitual dimensions of food, they must be supplemented by a postcolonial understanding of cultural identity as inherently unstable and relational. The diasporic subject

does not simply carry an intact cultural identity from one place to another; rather, identity is reconstituted through processes of translation, negotiation, and transformation. This insight is central to the work of Homi K. Bhabha, whose concept of hybridity and the “Third Space” provides a critical framework for analyzing the cultural dynamics of diaspora. The Third Space is not a physical location but a conceptual site where the binary oppositions of self and other, home and host, tradition and modernity are destabilized, giving rise to new and hybrid forms of identity. In the context of *The Namesake*, the kitchen can be read as such a space, where Bengali culinary traditions intersect with American influences, producing forms that are neither entirely original nor wholly assimilated. This hybridity challenges essentialist notions of culture and foregrounds the processual nature of identity, wherein meaning is constantly produced and re-produced through interaction.

The notion of identity as process is further elaborated through the work of Stuart Hall, who conceptualizes identity not as a fixed essence but as a continuous “becoming.” For Hall, cultural identity is not something that one simply possesses; it is something that is constructed through representation, practice, and discourse. In the diasporic context, this construction is particularly complex, as individuals must navigate multiple cultural frameworks and negotiate competing demands of belonging. Food, in this regard, becomes a crucial site where such negotiations are enacted. The shifting culinary preferences of characters across generations in *The Namesake* reflect broader processes of identity formation, wherein the relationship to food mirrors the evolving relationship to culture, community, and selfhood. The act of eating, therefore, is not merely biological but deeply symbolic, encoding within it the tensions and possibilities of diasporic existence.

In addition to its role in shaping identity, food also plays a central role in the reconstitution of “home,” a concept that is itself profoundly destabilized in the context of migration. Traditional understandings of home as a fixed, bounded, and geographically located space are rendered inadequate in the face of diasporic mobility. Instead, home must be reimagined as a fluid and processual construct, constituted through practices, relationships, and affects. The philosophical reflections of Gaston Bachelard on the poetics of space offer valuable insights in this regard, particularly in their emphasis on the intimate and experiential dimensions of dwelling. For Bachelard, spaces such as the kitchen are not merely functional but imbued with emotional and imaginative significance, serving as sites where memory and identity are nurtured. In *The Namesake*, the kitchen emerges as a locus of such intimate spatiality, where the lost homeland is not simply recalled but re-enacted through culinary practice.

This reconstitution of home is further theorized through the concept of “diaspora space” articulated by Avtar Brah, which emphasizes the relational and intersectional nature of belonging. Diaspora space is not limited to migrants alone but encompasses the interactions between migrants and non-migrants, between

histories of displacement and settlement. Within this space, food operates as a medium of connection and differentiation, bringing individuals together while also marking boundaries of identity and culture. Communal meals, festive gatherings, and shared culinary practices in *The Namesake* thus become acts of spatial production, through which a sense of belonging is collectively forged.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that the diasporic condition is not solely characterized by creativity and hybridity but also by loss, rupture, and longing. The reflections of Edward Said on exile underscore the irreducible sense of displacement that accompanies migration, a condition in which the original home remains permanently inaccessible. Within this framework, food can be understood as a form of “culinary compensation,” a means of mitigating the pain of loss without fully overcoming it. The flavors of the homeland, while evocative, are never entirely replicable, and the act of cooking becomes a negotiation between presence and absence, authenticity and adaptation.

By bringing together these diverse theoretical perspectives, this paper seeks to articulate a comprehensive understanding of food as a critical site of diasporic experience in *The Namesake*. It argues that culinary practices operate at the intersection of embodiment, habit, and hybridity, enabling diasporic subjects to navigate the complexities of memory, identity, and belonging. Through the lens of gustatory memory, habitus, and the Third Space, the paper demonstrates that food is not merely a reflection of culture but an active agent in the ongoing process of diasporic becoming. In doing so, it foregrounds the significance of everyday practices in shaping the philosophical and experiential dimensions of migration, suggesting that the most profound articulations of identity often reside not in grand narratives but in the intimate and repetitive acts of cooking and eating.

Gustatory Memory and the Phenomenology of Taste

The relationship between food and memory in *The Namesake* can be most productively understood through a phenomenological framework that foregrounds the primacy of the body as the site of perception and meaning-making. Rather than approaching memory as a purely cognitive or representational faculty, this section argues that memory is fundamentally embodied, emerging through sensory engagements that collapse the distinction between past and present. Within this context, taste and smell acquire a privileged epistemic status, functioning as modalities through which the diasporic subject re-experiences the lost homeland. The concept of gustatory memory thus enables a rethinking of diaspora not only as a condition of spatial displacement but as a sensory and affective reconfiguration of lived experience.

Drawing on the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, perception is not an abstract or detached act but is rooted in the lived body (*corps vécu*), which serves as the primary medium through which the world is encountered. For Merleau-Ponty, the body is not merely an object among other objects; it is the very condition of possibility for perception, a site where subject and world are

intertwined. Taste, in this framework, is not simply the passive reception of sensory data but an active, interpretive engagement that is shaped by prior experiences, cultural conditioning, and affective associations. In diasporic contexts, this embodied nature of perception becomes particularly significant, as sensory experiences such as taste and smell function as conduits through which memory is not merely recalled but reactivated in the present.

In *The Namesake*, Ashima's culinary practices exemplify this phenomenological dimension of memory. Her attempts to recreate familiar Bengali dishes in an American setting are not simply acts of nostalgic longing but instances of what may be termed sensory re-inscription, wherein the past is brought into the present through the medium of taste. The improvised mixture she prepares in the early stages of her migration, combining available American ingredients to approximate the flavor of a traditional Bengali snack, illustrates how taste operates as a site of negotiation between absence and presence. The resulting dish is neither an exact replica nor a complete departure; rather, it exists in a liminal space where memory is both preserved and transformed. What is significant here is not the authenticity of the dish in a culinary sense, but its capacity to evoke a sensory experience that reconnects the subject to a displaced cultural and emotional landscape.

This process can be further illuminated by considering the temporal structure of gustatory memory. Unlike linear, chronological memory, which situates the past as something irretrievably distant, sensory memory operates through a form of temporal collapse, wherein past and present coexist within the immediacy of bodily experience. The act of tasting thus disrupts the linear progression of time, enabling a momentary suspension of diasporic dislocation. In this sense, food functions as what may be described as a mnemonic bridge, facilitating a form of temporal simultaneity in which the homeland is not simply remembered but experientially reconstituted. The diasporic subject, through the act of eating, inhabits multiple temporalities at once, navigating the tension between here and there, now and then.

Such an understanding of gustatory memory also necessitates an engagement with the affective dimensions of sensory experience. Taste is not a neutral or purely physiological phenomenon; it is deeply intertwined with emotion, carrying with it associations of comfort, longing, intimacy, and loss. In *The Namesake*, the preparation and consumption of food are often imbued with affective intensity, serving as moments of emotional anchoring within the otherwise disorienting experience of migration. The kitchen, as the primary site of culinary practice, becomes a space where these affective resonances are cultivated and sustained. It is within this intimate space that the diasporic subject negotiates the complexities of belonging, drawing on sensory memory to construct a sense of continuity amidst rupture.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that gustatory memory is not a transparent or unmediated access to the past. The sensory reactivation of memory

is always shaped by the conditions of the present, including the availability of ingredients, the constraints of the host environment, and the transformations of personal and cultural identity. As such, the act of recreating traditional dishes in a diasporic context inevitably involves processes of adaptation and translation, which in turn alter the sensory experience itself. The flavor produced in the diaspora are not identical to those of the homeland; they are marked by difference, by the traces of displacement that inflect the very act of tasting. This suggests that gustatory memory operates not as a faithful reproduction of the past but as a reconstruction, one that is mediated by the contingencies of diasporic life.

This tension between continuity and transformation is central to the phenomenology of taste in the novel. On the one hand, food serves as a means of preserving cultural memory, enabling the diasporic subject to maintain a connection to the homeland. On the other hand, the inevitable modifications of culinary practice introduce elements of change that reflect the evolving nature of identity in the diaspora. Taste, in this sense, becomes a site of both stability and flux, anchoring the subject in a shared cultural past while simultaneously opening up possibilities for new forms of belonging. The sensory experience of food thus encapsulates the paradox of diaspora itself: the simultaneous presence of attachment and detachment, continuity and rupture.

Moreover, the phenomenological approach to gustatory memory allows for a reconsideration of the relationship between individual and collective memory. While taste is experienced at the level of the individual body, it is also deeply embedded within social and cultural contexts. The flavor that evokes memory are not purely personal but are shaped by collective histories, traditions, and practices. In *The Namesake*, communal meals and shared culinary rituals play a crucial role in reinforcing this collective dimension of memory. Through the repetition of these practices, diasporic communities create a shared sensory vocabulary that sustains a sense of belonging across spatial and temporal divides. Gustatory memory, therefore, operates at the intersection of the personal and the collective, linking individual to broader cultural narratives.

In engaging with these dynamics, it is also useful to consider the limits of language in articulating sensory experience. Taste and smell often resist precise verbal description, operating in a domain that exceeds linguistic representation. This ineffability underscores the significance of the body as a site of knowledge, suggesting that certain forms of understanding are accessible only through sensory engagement. In the context of diaspora, where linguistic and cultural translation often introduces gaps and discontinuities, the immediacy of gustatory experience offers an alternative mode of connection that bypasses the limitations of language. Food, in this sense, becomes a non-discursive medium through which memory and identity are expressed and sustained.

Ultimately, the concept of gustatory memory, when situated within a phenomenological framework, reveals the depth and complexity of food as a site

of diasporic experience in *The Namesake*. It demonstrates that the act of tasting is not merely a biological necessity but a profoundly meaningful practice that engages the body, memory, and culture in intricate ways. By collapsing temporal and spatial distances, taste enables the diasporic subject to inhabit multiple worlds simultaneously, reconfiguring the experience of displacement into one of embodied continuity. At the same time, the transformations inherent in diasporic culinary practice highlight the dynamic and processual nature of memory itself, suggesting that the past is not simply preserved but continually reinterpreted through the lens of the present. In this way, gustatory memory emerges as a central mechanism through which the complexities of diasporic identity are both experienced and articulated.

Habitus and the Continuity of Cultural Practice

The persistence of culinary practices in *The Namesake* can be most rigorously theorized through the concept of habitus, as articulated by Pierre Bourdieu. If gustatory memory foregrounds the sensory and affective reactivation of the past, habitus explains the structural continuity of culture through embodied, routine practices that endure across spatial dislocation. In the diasporic condition, where geographic rupture threatens the coherence of cultural identity, habitus functions as a generative principle that enables continuity without requiring conscious preservation. Culinary practice, in this sense, becomes an exemplary site where the durability, adaptability, and tacit transmission of cultural forms are enacted. Bourdieu conceptualizes habitus as a system of durable and transposable dispositions, internalized through socialization and sedimented within the body. These dispositions shape perception, action, and taste, not as rigid rules but as flexible tendencies that guide behavior in a manner that appears natural and self-evident. Importantly, habitus operates below the level of explicit consciousness; it is not something individuals deliberately choose but something they embody. Within this framework, everyday practices—such as cooking, eating, and serving food—are not merely functional activities but structured expressions of deeply ingrained cultural logics. In *The Namesake*, the persistence of Bengali culinary practices in a foreign environment illustrates how habitus enables culture to be carried within the body, rather than being dependent on external structures or institutions.

Ashima's culinary routines provide a particularly illuminating instance of habitus in operation. Her preparation of traditional Bengali meals in the United States is not consistently framed as a deliberate effort to preserve cultural identity; rather, it emerges as an almost instinctive continuation of practices learned and internalized in her formative years. The gestures of cooking—the selection of spices, the sequencing of preparation, the rhythms of the kitchen—are performed with a familiarity that exceeds conscious reflection. This embodied knowledge exemplifies what Bourdieu describes as the “practical sense”, a form of know-how that is neither formally codified nor explicitly articulated but is nonetheless highly

structured and meaningful. In this sense, culinary practice becomes a mode of cultural reproduction that operates through the body, ensuring continuity even in the absence of the original social context.

At the same time, habitus must not be understood as static or immutable. One of its defining features is its capacity for adaptation, which allows it to respond to changing circumstances while retaining its underlying structure. In the diasporic context of *The Namesake*, this adaptability becomes particularly evident in the ways culinary practices are modified to accommodate the constraints of the host environment. The substitution of ingredients, the incorporation of locally available produce, and the gradual integration of American food habits into daily life all point to the dynamic nature of habitus. These modifications do not signify a loss of authenticity but rather demonstrate the transposability of habitus, its ability to generate new practices that are consistent with existing dispositions while responding to new conditions.

This adaptive dimension of habitus also underscores the relational nature of cultural identity in diaspora. Rather than being preserved in a pure or unaltered form, identity is continually reconstituted through interaction with the host culture. Culinary practice becomes a key site of this interaction, where elements of Bengali and American food cultures intersect and influence one another. However, this process is not symmetrical; the inherited dispositions of habitus shape the terms of engagement, guiding which elements are incorporated and how they are integrated. In this way, habitus mediates between continuity and change, enabling diasporic subjects to navigate the complexities of cultural negotiation without losing a sense of coherence.

The generational dimension of habitus further complicates this dynamic. While the first generation embodies a habitus formed within the cultural context of the homeland, subsequent generations develop dispositions that are shaped by the hybrid environment of the diaspora. In *The Namesake*, this is evident in the differing relationships to food exhibited by Ashima and Gogol. For Ashima, culinary practices are deeply ingrained and closely tied to her sense of self, whereas for Gogol, they are less central and often subject to negotiation and reinterpretation. This divergence highlights the temporal dimension of habitus, wherein dispositions are not only shaped by past experiences but also reconfigured through ongoing socialization in new contexts. The transmission of habitus across generations is thus neither seamless nor uniform; it involves processes of adaptation, resistance, and transformation that reflect the evolving nature of diasporic identity.

Moreover, the concept of habitus allows for a nuanced understanding of the relationship between individual agency and structural constraint. While habitus shapes behavior in ways that appear automatic, it does not entirely determine action. Instead, it provides a framework within which individuals navigate their social world, allowing for a degree of improvisation and creativity. In the culinary

practices depicted in *The Namesake*, this interplay between structure and agency is evident in the ways characters modify traditional recipes or experiment with new forms of cuisine. These acts of adaptation are not random but are guided by the dispositions of habitus, which orient the subject towards certain possibilities while excluding others. Culinary practice thus becomes a site where the constraints of tradition and the possibilities of innovation are negotiated in a continuous and dynamic process.

The embodied nature of habitus also has significant implications for understanding the affective dimensions of food in the diasporic context. Because habitus is inscribed within the body, it carries with it not only cultural knowledge but also emotional attachments. The comfort derived from familiar foods, the sense of unease associated with unfamiliar tastes, and the ambivalence that accompanies hybrid culinary practices can all be understood as manifestations of the affective investments embedded within habitus. In *The Namesake*, these affective dimensions are particularly evident in moments where food serves as a source of solace or connection, as well as in instances where it highlights the distance between different cultural orientations. The persistence of culinary practices thus reflects not only the continuity of culture but also the endurance of emotional ties that bind the diasporic subject to the homeland.

Furthermore, habitus operates not only at the level of individual practice but also within the broader social field, shaping patterns of interaction and community formation. Shared culinary practices, communal meals, and festive gatherings in *The Namesake* function as collective expressions of habitus, reinforcing a sense of belonging among diasporic subjects. These practices create a structured social space in which cultural norms are reproduced and transmitted, enabling the maintenance of a collective identity despite geographic dispersion. At the same time, they also serve as sites of negotiation, where differences in generational perspectives and degrees of assimilation are articulated and contested.

In this regard, habitus intersects with broader postcolonial concerns regarding hybridity and the negotiation of identity in the diaspora. While Bourdieu's framework provides a sociological account of continuity and adaptation, it can be productively read alongside postcolonial theories that emphasize the instability and fluidity of cultural identity. The culinary practices in *The Namesake* exemplify this intersection, as they simultaneously reproduce inherited dispositions and generate new forms of cultural expression. Habitus, therefore, does not simply preserve the past; it actively participates in the production of new identities that are shaped by the conditions of diaspora.

Ultimately, the concept of habitus offers a powerful lens through which to understand the continuity of cultural practice in *The Namesake*. It reveals that the persistence of culinary traditions is not solely the result of conscious effort but is rooted in the embodied dispositions that structure everyday life. At the same time, it highlights the dynamic and adaptive nature of these practices, demonstrating

how they evolve in response to new contexts while retaining a sense of continuity. By situating food within the framework of habitus, this section underscores the importance of everyday practices in sustaining cultural identity, suggesting that the most enduring forms of continuity are those that are lived, enacted, and embodied rather than explicitly articulated.

Hybridity, Third Space and the Reconstitution of Home

The question of how “home” is reimagined within diasporic conditions in *The Namesake* can be most productively approached through the theoretical framework of hybridity and the “Third Space,” as articulated by Homi K. Bhabha. While the preceding sections have foregrounded the embodied and habitual dimensions of culinary practice, this section extends the analysis by situating food within a postcolonial epistemology of cultural negotiation, wherein identity and belonging are constituted not through continuity alone but through processes of translation, ambivalence, and transformation. In this context, food emerges as a critical site where the binary oppositions that structure diasporic experience—home and host, tradition and modernity, origin and adaptation—are destabilized and reconfigured.

Bhabha’s concept of hybridity challenges essentialist notions of culture as fixed, coherent, and bounded. Instead, culture is understood as performative and contingent, produced through encounters that unsettle the authority of origins. The “Third Space” is the locus of this production, a liminal and interstitial domain where meaning is neither inherited nor imposed but negotiated in the act of articulation. It is within this space that new forms of identity emerge, marked by ambivalence and multiplicity rather than purity or stability. In *The Namesake*, the kitchen can be read as an exemplary Third Space, where Bengali culinary traditions are neither preserved in their original form nor wholly assimilated into American norms, but are instead reconstituted through ongoing processes of adaptation and reinterpretation.

The culinary practices depicted in the novel thus resist a binary logic of authenticity versus assimilation. The substitution of ingredients, the modification of recipes, and the incorporation of elements from the host culture do not simply indicate a loss of cultural integrity; rather, they exemplify the productive instability of hybridity. Food, in this sense, becomes a medium through which diasporic subjects engage in what may be termed cultural translation, a process that involves not the faithful reproduction of an original but the creation of something new that bears the traces of multiple influences. The resulting culinary forms are hybrid not because they mix discrete elements in a superficial manner, but because they emerge from the very condition of in-betweenness that defines diasporic existence.

This hybridity is not without its tensions. As Bhabha emphasizes, the Third Space is characterized by ambivalence, a simultaneous attraction to and repulsion from both the culture of origin and the host culture. In *The Namesake*, this ambivalence

is particularly evident in the generational dynamics that shape the characters' relationships to food. For the first generation, culinary practices often function as a means of preserving a connection to the homeland, even as they are inevitably altered by the conditions of migration. For the second generation, however, food becomes a site of negotiation, where inherited traditions are both embraced and resisted. The differing culinary preferences and practices of characters such as Gogol reflect this ambivalence, revealing the complexities of identity formation within the diasporic context.

To further elucidate this dynamic, it is useful to bring into conversation the work of Stuart Hall, whose conceptualization of identity as "becoming" complements Bhabha's emphasis on hybridity. For Hall, cultural identity is not a fixed essence rooted in a singular origin but a positionality that is continuously constructed through representation and practice. In this sense, identity is always in process, shaped by historical contingencies and relational contexts. The hybrid culinary practices in *The Namesake* exemplify this processual nature of identity, as they reflect the ongoing negotiation between past and present, self and other. Food thus becomes a site where identity is not merely expressed but actively produced, through acts of cooking, eating, and sharing that articulate the shifting contours of diasporic belonging.

The implications of hybridity extend beyond the domain of identity to encompass the reconstitution of "home" itself. In the context of diaspora, home cannot be understood as a stable, geographically bounded entity; rather, it is a fluid and relational construct, produced through everyday practices and affective investments. The culinary practices in *The Namesake* play a central role in this process, as they transform domestic spaces into sites of cultural and emotional significance. The kitchen, in particular, emerges as a locus of what may be termed spatial re-inscription, where the lost homeland is not simply remembered but re-enacted through the preparation and consumption of food.

This re-inscription of space can be further illuminated through the philosophical reflections of Gaston Bachelard, whose notion of the "poetics of space" emphasizes the intimate and imaginative dimensions of dwelling. For Bachelard, spaces such as the house—and by extension, the kitchen—are not merely physical structures but repositories of memory and affect, imbued with symbolic meaning through lived experience. In *The Namesake*, the kitchen functions as such a space, where the sensory and affective dimensions of culinary practice converge to produce a sense of familiarity and belonging. Through the repetitive acts of cooking and eating, the diasporic subject inhabits a space that is both here and elsewhere, anchored in the present yet infused with the presence of the past.

At the same time, the reconstitution of home through culinary practice must be understood within the broader framework of diaspora as a condition of both connection and disjunction. The concept of "diaspora space," as articulated by Avtar Brah, provides a useful lens for analyzing this complexity. Diaspora space

is not limited to the experiences of migrants alone but encompasses the intersections of different histories, identities, and power relations that shape the social field. Within this space, food operates as a medium of both inclusion and differentiation, bringing individuals together while also marking the boundaries of cultural identity. Communal meals and shared culinary rituals in *The Namesake* thus function as acts of spatial production, through which a sense of collective belonging is forged even as differences are negotiated.

However, it is important to recognize that the reconstitution of home in the Third Space is not a seamless or unproblematic process. The hybridity that characterizes diasporic life is accompanied by a persistent sense of in-betweenness, a condition in which the subject is never fully at home in either the culture of origin or the host culture. This condition resonates with the reflections of Edward Said on exile, which emphasize the enduring sense of displacement and loss that underlies the diasporic experience. In this context, culinary practices can be seen as both enabling and limiting: they provide a means of reconstructing a sense of home, yet they also underscore the impossibility of fully recovering what has been lost. The flavor of the homeland, while evocative, are always mediated by the conditions of the present, marked by difference and distance.

The ambivalence inherent in hybridity thus extends to the very notion of home, which emerges as a site of both attachment and estrangement. The diasporic subject, through culinary practice, inhabits a space that is simultaneously familiar and foreign, stable and unstable. This paradox is not a deficiency but a defining feature of diasporic existence, reflecting the complex interplay of memory, identity, and space. Food, in this context, becomes a medium through which this interplay is enacted, a site where the contradictions of diaspora are both experienced and negotiated.

Ultimately, the framework of hybridity and the Third Space provide a powerful means of understanding the reconstitution of home in *The Namesake*. It reveals that home is not a pre-existing entity that is simply transported across borders but a processual construct, continually produced through acts of cultural translation and negotiation. Culinary practices, as everyday yet deeply meaningful activities, play a central role in this process, enabling diasporic subjects to navigate the complexities of belonging in a world marked by movement and change. By situating food within this theoretical framework, this section underscores its significance not only as a marker of cultural identity but as an active agent in the ongoing reimagining of home in the diaspora.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to demonstrate that food in *The Namesake* is not merely a cultural marker or a nostalgic symbol of homeland, but a complex and dynamic medium through which diasporic existence is both experienced and articulated. By bringing together phenomenology, sociology, and postcolonial theory, the study has traced how culinary practices function at the intersection of

embodiment, habit, and hybridity, enabling a nuanced understanding of how memory, identity, and belonging are negotiated within conditions of displacement. What emerges from this interdisciplinary engagement is a reconfiguration of food as a critical epistemic and affective site, one that reveals the depth and complexity of diasporic becoming.

The analysis began by foregrounding the concept of gustatory memory, situating it within a phenomenological framework informed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In doing so, it challenged the conventional privileging of cognitive and representational models of memory, proposing instead that memory is fundamentally embodied and sensory. Taste and smell, as immediate and intimate modes of perception, enable the diasporic subject to re-experience the homeland in ways that transcend the limitations of language and representation. The act of tasting becomes an act of temporal and spatial convergence, collapsing the distance between past and present, here and elsewhere. However, this reactivation of memory is not a simple retrieval of an unaltered past; it is mediated by the contingencies of the present, shaped by the availability of ingredients, the conditions of migration, and the transformations of identity. Gustatory memory, therefore, emerges as both a site of continuity and a site of transformation, embodying the paradoxical nature of diaspora itself.

Building on this phenomenological foundation, the paper then turned to the concept of habitus, as theorized by Pierre Bourdieu, to account for the persistence of culinary practices across spatial dislocation. Habitus, as a system of internalized dispositions, provides a powerful framework for understanding how cultural practices are reproduced through everyday actions that operate below the level of conscious awareness. In *The Namesake*, the continuity of Bengali culinary traditions in the diasporic context is not solely the result of deliberate preservation but is rooted in the embodied routines and practical knowledge that constitute habitus. At the same time, the adaptive capacity of habitus allows for the modification of these practices in response to new environments, highlighting the dynamic interplay between continuity and change. Culinary practice thus becomes a site where the durability of cultural forms is maintained even as they are transformed, reflecting the flexible yet structured nature of habitus.

The discussion of hybridity and the Third Space, drawing on the work of Homi K. Bhabha, further expanded this analysis by situating culinary practices within a postcolonial framework of cultural negotiation. Hybridity, as conceptualized by Bhabha, disrupts the binary logic of origin and assimilation, revealing identity as a process of ongoing articulation within an in-between space. In the context of the novel, the kitchen emerges as a Third Space where Bengali and American culinary practices intersect, producing hybrid forms that resist notions of authenticity and purity. This hybridity is marked by ambivalence, reflecting the tensions inherent in diasporic identity, particularly across generational lines. The integration of Stuart Hall's notion of identity as "becoming" further underscores the processual

nature of this transformation, highlighting how food serves as a medium through which identity is continually constructed and reconstructed.

Central to this analysis is the reconceptualization of home as a fluid and processual construct rather than a fixed geographical entity. Drawing on the philosophical insights of Gaston Bachelard and the concept of diaspora space articulated by Avtar Brah, the paper has argued that home is produced through everyday practices and affective investments, rather than simply inherited or remembered. Culinary practices play a crucial role in this process, transforming domestic spaces into sites of cultural and emotional significance. Through the repetitive acts of cooking and eating, the diasporic subject re-inscribes the lost homeland within the present, creating a sense of familiarity and belonging that transcends geographic boundaries. At the same time, these practices are embedded within a broader social field that includes interactions between different cultural groups, highlighting the relational nature of diaspora space.

However, the reconstitution of home through culinary practice must also be understood in relation to the enduring sense of loss and displacement that characterizes the diasporic condition. The reflections of Edward Said on exile remind us that the original home remains irretrievably distant, and that the experience of diaspora is marked by a fundamental sense of in-betweenness. Food, in this context, functions as both a means of connection and a reminder of absence. The flavor of the homeland, while evocative, are never entirely replicable, and the act of cooking becomes a negotiation between presence and absence, authenticity and adaptation. This ambivalence is not a limitation but a defining feature of diasporic life, reflecting the complex interplay of memory, identity, and space.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives reveal that food in *The Namesake* operates as a multivalent and generative site, where the contradictions and possibilities of diaspora are enacted. It is through the embodied experience of taste, the habitual repetition of culinary practices, and the hybrid negotiation of cultural forms that diasporic subjects navigate the challenges of displacement and belonging. Food, therefore, is not simply a reflection of identity but an active agent in its formation, a medium through which the self is continuously articulated in relation to both past and present, self and other.

In advancing this argument, the paper also points to the broader significance of everyday practices in literary and cultural analysis. By focusing on the seemingly mundane act of cooking and eating, it reveals the profound philosophical and cultural processes that underlie the construction of identity and belonging. This emphasis on the everyday aligns with a growing body of scholarship that seeks to move beyond grand narratives and abstract theorization, attending instead to the lived experiences through which meaning is produced and sustained. In this sense, the study contributes to a reorientation of diaspora studies, foregrounding the importance of material and sensory practices in shaping the contours of diasporic life.

Ultimately, the analysis underscores that diaspora is not merely a condition of loss or fragmentation, but a dynamic and ongoing process of becoming, in which new forms of identity and belonging are continually forged. Food, as a site of embodied memory, habitual practice, and cultural negotiation, plays a central role in this process, enabling diasporic subjects to inhabit the tensions of displacement in creative and meaningful ways. The culinary practices depicted in *The Namesake* thus offer a powerful lens through which to understand the complexities of diaspora, revealing how the most intimate and everyday acts can serve as the foundation for profound cultural and philosophical transformations.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/55**MALICIOUS AMPLIFICATION OF EXPEDIENCY AND
TECHNOCRACY IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *ORYX AND CRAKE*****P. ARUN**Research Scholar in English
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**Abstract**

The environment in the modern era is endangered due to human greed and selfishness. Natural resources have been overused, and the devastation of the ecosystem has gone unnoticed. Margaret Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake* is set toward the end of the twenty-first century, when a disastrous global pandemic has killed the majority of the world's population, leaving only a small number of isolated survivors. To explain how the worldwide catastrophe occurred, the narrative alternates between the post-apocalyptic present and the pre-apocalyptic past. It depicts a highly envisioned apocalyptic society that serves as a potent ecocritical warning about the perils of corporate power abuse, unchecked research, and environmental disaster. This dystopia is especially relevant from an ecocritical standpoint because it is based on actual scientific developments and environmental problems. The futuristic planet depicts a filthy, infertile, polluted, ecologically destroyed, and totally changed environment. Themes like anthropocentrism, environmental Armageddon, genetic engineering, economic exploitation of nature, and ecofeminism are masterfully woven throughout this dystopian story when viewed from an ecocritical lens. The relationship between humans and the environment has been severely damaged by the anthropocentric future that science and technology anticipate. Atwood used science fiction to draw attention to current themes, such as the moral implications of genetic research and the perils of corporate power. In the process, *Oryx and Crake* demonstrate a troubling logic that might quickly turn our current situation into a catastrophe in the future. This paper explores the dangers of technological advancement when individuals use societal opportunities and corporate power, ultimately leading to ecological disaster.

Keywords: Scientific ambition, Technocracy, Speculative fiction, Expediency, Genetic engineering, Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO)

The term "literature" encompasses both written and spoken works. Poetry, theatre, fiction, nonfiction and occasionally song and journalism are all considered forms of literature. The word literature comes from the Latin word "literatura," which means "writing created with letters." The expression has long been used to characterise visionary poetry and prose works that are notable for their apparent artistic brilliance as well as the authors' intentions.

"Canadian Literature in English" refers to works created in what is now Canada or by Canadians living overseas. Canada is well-known for its sporting events, friendliness and diversity. In addition to all of these notable achievements, Canada has produced a number of exceptional writers. Canada is well-known for its variety, hospitality, and sporting activities.

Margaret Atwood, a poet, novelist, storyteller, essayist, and environmental campaigner, is among Canada's greatest living writers. Her writings have won several literary awards in the US, Europe, and Canada, including the Arthur C. Clarke Award, the Booker Prize, and the Governor General's Award three times. Atwood's popularity matches her critical acclaim; her books are consistently best-sellers, and her works have been made into well-known films and TV series.

Born in Ottawa, Atwood graduated from the University of Toronto's Victoria College with a BA and Radcliffe College with an MA. She became well-known as a poet in the 1960s because of her works "Double Persephone" (1961), which received the E.J. Pratt Medal and "The Circle Game" (1964), which earned a Governor General's award. *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013), Atwood's later trilogy of technological dystopia and environmental catastrophes, are all hinted to in *The Handmaid's Tale*, her most well-known early book.

Oryx and Crake, *The Year of the Flood*, and *MaddAddam* are the three books in a trilogy that depict a planet in hazardous environmental conditions. In her review of *Oryx and Crake* in the New York Times, American literary critic Michiko Kakutani wrote, "Once again, she conjures up a dystopia, where trends that started way back in the twentieth century have metastasised into deeply sinister phenomena." "Atwood imagines a drastic revision of the human species that will purge humankind of all of our negative traits," said Susan M. Squier, a writer for Science. "In *Oryx and Crake* readers will find a powerful meditation on how education that separates scientific and aesthetic ways of knowing produces ignorance and a wounded world," Squier added.

First published by McClelland & Stewart in 2003, *Oryx and Crake* was nominated for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction in 2003 as well as the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2004. *Oryx and Crake* opens the MaddAddam trilogy, which is followed by *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013).

Oryx and Crake is a timeless tale of love and an intriguing look into the future. Through the viewpoints and memories of a protagonist who could be the last survivor of the event, Atwood depicts a plague-induced catastrophe in the near future. Before a virus wiped out humanity, Snowman was known as Jimmy. He is now struggling to survive in a world where he could be the last human, lamenting the death of Crake, his closest friend and the beautiful but elusive Oryx that they both loved. With the aid of the green-eyed Children of Crake, he travels across the verdant wilderness that was once a magnificent metropolis until powerful businesses launched an unrestrained genetic engineering campaign.

Although its exact definition is debatable, technocracy is a type of governance or a strategy for political action that prioritises knowledge. One description centers on decision-making, characterising technocracy as expert rule as opposed to democracy as popular government. Another focuses on decision-making processes rather than rulers, emphasising the importance of instrumental rationality, scientific evidence and technological expertise. In a broader sense, technocracy is the belief that expert-driven reasoning and specialised knowledge, rather than popular will or inherited entitlement, are the primary sources of democratic legitimacy. In its most literal definition, technocracy refers to the application of technocratic ideas to all major governmental functions.

Expediency is the trait of being useful, advantageous, or practical for a certain goal, frequently putting short-term outcomes ahead of morals, principles, or long-term effects. This term, which is frequently used in economic or political situations, refers to acting more conveniently or advantageously than morally or justly, deciding on what is now most effective rather than what is morally right. Often refers to choosing the simplest or most beneficial route to accomplish a task. In biology, an opportunist organism is a species that, because of its behavioural flexibility, can either swiftly seize advantageous conditions when they occur or survive and flourish in a range of settings and feed itself from a number of diverse food sources. For instance, certain species may postpone reproduction or become dormant until circumstances permit them to develop and procreate. In microbiology, the capacity of a normally non-pathogenic microorganism to function as a pathogen under specific circumstances is referred to as opportunism. Only when the host organism's natural defences, resistance, or immune system are compromised may opportunistic microorganisms—such as bacteria, viruses, fungi and protozoa—cause illness.

A nation's progress depends on science, which also plays a significant role in government by providing the data and evidence required to influence operations and policy. It guarantees that the government is resilient to shocks and crises and prepared to seize new technological possibilities. Science is often portrayed as a noble and ethical endeavour. However, it is important to keep in mind that although knowledge and potential have good implications, they are not inherently advantageous. The boundary between advancing science and behaving like God is quite thin. The pursuit of science and technology can have fatal results if societal effects are neglected.

Humans have altered animals via breeding for thousands of years. Corn, cattle and even dogs have been bred for certain traits over millennia. However, in the last several decades, technological advancements have made it possible for scientists to directly alter the DNA of microbes, plants and mammals. A genetically modified organism (GMO) is a living being whose DNA has been altered through genetic engineering. The majority of genetically modified animals are created especially for use in research institutions. These animals serve as "models" for

research on gene function and its connection to health and illness. On the other hand, certain animals that have undergone genetic modification are raised for human consumption.

An organism is frequently altered by genetic engineering in ways that are not present in the natural world. Genes from different creatures are often inserted into live organisms by scientists. This increases the risk that some genetically modified foods will cause unanticipated allergic reactions. The potential for foreign DNA from genetically modified plants and animals to contaminate non-GMO plants and animals is another problem.

The term "speculative fiction" refers to a literary "super genre" that includes a variety of fiction genres with speculative aspects that are based on hypothesis and do not really exist. Robert Heinlein coined the term "speculative fiction" in 1947. These days, stories set in planets other than our own are called speculative fiction.

Speculative fiction, according to Margaret Atwood, is writing that explores a society's untapped potential. Her preferred term for her own works is "speculative fiction," which she describes as Earth-based works that include elements that are now in use, such as genetic engineering.

A crazy researcher tries to create his own genetically altered species to take the place of humans in Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake*. It depicts the Crakers, a genetically modified race of quasi-humans that live in an environmentally devastated North American environment. For example, the Crakers' skin cells have been modified to protect them from UV rays and insects, and their DNA has been changed to remove their potential for sexual jealousy.

The novel follows Snowman, a survivor of a devastating gene illness that affects the whole world, as he fights for his life on a daily basis and takes care of the Crakers, a new race of bioengineered posthumans. Through flashbacks, Snowman reveals his pre-apocalyptic life as Jimmy, best friend and unintentional partner to Crake, the genius behind both the plague and Crakers, by returning to the bioengineering facility where he used to work in order to scavenge for supplies. Seemingly alone in the world, Snowman attempts to remember odd phrases he ever knew. Atwood writes:

"Valance. Norn. Serendipity. Pibroch. Lubricious. When they've gone out of his head, these words, they'll be gone, everywhere, forever. As if they had never been." (*Oryx and Crake* 78)

The flashbacks are set in "compounds," walled communities for the affluent that are isolated from the outside world and referred to as "Pleeblands." The novel's post-apocalyptic section is set somewhere near the interior coast of New England. Jimmy resides in an environmentally deteriorated location in the pre-apocalyptic Earth. The compound where he and his parents reside has tall walls and no access to the surrounding areas. He talks about the recollections, particularly the bonfire with the enormous pile of sheep, pigs, and cows. He is reminded of the backyard BBQ by the overpowering scent of flesh. On the day he experiences global

warming, he senses a high temperature. Jimmy's father maps genetic resources as a genographer. As part of Operation Immortality, he works for many "organInc farms" (25). His actions are enigmatic. He creates a multi-organizer called Pigoon in addition to his professional work (25). The Pigoon project aims to cultivate human tissue organs. Jimmy's father's discoveries are not natural, amiable. However, Sharon, Jimmy's mother, never condones her husband's non-scientific actions. As a result of her separation from nature, she gradually descends into sadness. Their neighbourhood gradually takes on the atmosphere of a metropolis. The natural life of plants and animals has changed due to the arid environment. The residents of Compound despise living there.

Compound people did not go the cities unless they had to, and then never alone. They called the cities the pleeblands. Despite the fingerprint identify cards now carried by everyone, public security in the pleeblands was leaky: there were people cruising around in those places who could forge anything and who might be anybody, not to mention the loose change-the addicts, the muggers, the paupers, the craziers. So, it was best for everyone at OrganInc farms to live all in one place, with foolproof procedures. (27)

A thorough description of people's existence in a repressed society is provided in the novel. Their style of life is not conducive to the environment. Their homes, referred to as "Modules" (30), resemble modern flat living. They are unable to connect with nature in any way. They build restaurants, retail centers, kid-friendly playgrounds and man-made pools. They try to imitate an organic existence in an unscientific manner and have little interaction with residents of neighbouring villages or cities. The image of Compound illustrates how drastically the world has changed. Jimmy's existence serves as a metaphor for the current invasion of large businesses and the environmental problems they bring about. Jimmy's mother opposes modern business culture, but his father represents it.

The genetically modified pigeons are actually not meant for food. When climate change alters the environment, people start to eat the meat of pigeons, by ignoring the fact that they are bioforms manufactured by cooperates. In the twenty-first century, people's addiction towards junk foods is also satirically presented here. "Three blocks along he stops: seven pigeons have materialized from nowhere. They are staring at him, ears forward" (313).

The most hazardous consequence of climate change is global warming. People and other living things are impacted by the heat as the average temperature rises. Snowman is a victim of everyone's abuse of the natural world. While he slept, he conveys his need for calm temperatures by dreaming about floating in a chilly swimming pool. In addition to discussing climate change and its impacts on the planet, the novel describes how it alters human nature. Crake, Snowman's friend, is responsible for all of these advancements. In order to get revenge on a corrupted

society and its institutions, Crake acts against nature. He believes that the planet will be a better place once humans are gone and has no compassion for the suffering of others. He proposes various rational solutions to the world's problems and promotes scientific progress through a number of breakthroughs. He discovered medications to stop sickness. Since most of the discoveries are not ecologically friendly, they have a detrimental effect on the ecosystem. All of Oryx's and Crake's climatic issues stem from Crake's antihuman behaviour. He has had a detrimental influence on Crake's children.

Crake made the bones of the children of Crake out of the coral on the beach, and then he made their flesh out of a mango. But the Children of Oryx hatched out of an egg, a giant egg laid by Oryx herself. Actually, she laid two eggs: one full of animals and birds and fish, and the Children of Crake had already been created by then, and they had eaten up all the words because they were hungry, and so there were no words left over when the second egg hatched out. And that is why the animals can't talk. (96)

In order to raise readers' awareness of how human activity is causing climate change, Atwood tells a fictional backstory. In the world depicted in *Oryx and Crake*, excessive consumerism and environmental carelessness cause the ecology to completely collapse. Atwood offers several fictional individuals and their incredible life experiences. In his post-apocalyptic life, Snowman witnesses the destruction of the ecosystem both now and in the past. Nowadays, individuals strive to become Crakers—people without illnesses and problems in life. People will have to endure a stifling existence among the problems caused by global warming, and life will be pitiful. The children of Crake in *Oryx and Crake*, Snowman, and the Crakers are most afraid of sunshine. They reside on a beach where the water level is rising. All of them are shown as the results of human activity in the pre-apocalyptic Earth.

Every aspect of life is impacted by bioengineering, especially gene splicing, which is a central problem in the narrative. The creation of new species like "pigoons" (made to harvest organs), "wolvogs" (a cross between wolves and dogs, intended for security), and "rakunks" (a cross between skunk and raccoon, intended as a pet, without the disadvantages of both species) as well as products like "ChickieNobs" (artificially grown chicken without a brain that continuously produces chicken wings as long as nutrients are introduced) are the primary motivators.

Crake, the insane scientist, creates "floor models" (367) in an attempt to improve humanity. He feels that mankind is fundamentally flawed and that bioengineering is necessary to preserve the planet. A race of submissive, uncomplicated individuals that don't have to worry about things like ageing, jealousy, religion, war, or death is his answer. They are polygamous, vegetarians, capable of

recycling their own excrement, have mating cycles, are adapted to harsh settings and possess communal healing skills.

It focuses on bioengineering as the primary area of future development in terms of ecology, science and economics. It introduces a variety of bioengineering applications, from simple commodities of posthuman existence to pharmaceutical, medicinal, cosmetic and agricultural uses. As both Chung-Hao Ku and Danette DiMarco note, *Oryx and Crake* addresses the idea of homo faber from the viewpoint of a techno-cultural society, leaving Crake as "a product of the capitalist machinery" (Ku 119), who "works his tools" to produce marketable goods that only "fulfil emotional desires" (DiMarco 176) rather than to improve life for all humanity.

Crake's cynical or mad uprising opposes the commercialisation of human ingenuity and technology, and it is in opposition to this that he unleashes the disease that wipes off humanity for the sake of posthumanity. Technology that facilitates a globalised society is driven by economic pressures that largely favour those with more financial means while denying benefits to others who cannot buy them.

This argument is used by *Oryx and Crake* to disprove the notion that globalisation creates an international community of equals. This is evident in Atwood's portrayal of the differences in living conditions and health between communities in corporate compounds, where a variety of research projects are carried out and communities in the pleeblands, where people who have no intellectual interest in science reside. Atwood's erection of physical barriers between the rich and the poor exacerbates a wider issue in our globalised culture, which is reflected in the enormous differences between the two groups. By presenting a world where these technologies are exclusive to the wealthy and powerful, Atwood refutes the notion that a multitude of technologies would lead to a wonderful and cohesive community.

In Atwood's novel, the compounds control how the planet is run, not the people or the government. Without any visible government control or noncorporate social action, the companies create and market food, medicine and entertainment. They develop themselves to the point where they are vying for global supremacy and are, in a way, their own nations. Under corporate management, these companies are shielded from public inspection by a network of professional mercenaries known as CorpSeCorps men. Jimmy, the main character, whose father works in a complex, tries to justify this military presence in a non-governmental organization by explaining in business jargon that "when there [is] so much at stake, there [is] no telling what the other side might resort to" (27).

In order to make corporate-produced food appealing, food production for the global marketplace also depends on the spread of global myths. Crake's school, Watson-Crick, is crucial to the growth of a new industry: international trade in food. Watson-Crick students have discovered a method to produce only the parts,

leading to "a three-week improvement on the most efficient low-light, high-density chicken farming operations so far devised" (203), while other businesses have produced fast-maturing chicks. These so-called ChickieNobs are "large bulblike object[s] that seemed to be covered with stippled whitish-yellow skin," but they don't resemble the birds they say they are modelled after. Twenty thick, fleshy tubes emerged from it, each with a developing bulb at the end (202).

In her article "Feminist Epistemology after Postmodernism," Rosie Braidotti dissects the operations of powerful bio-powers, or companies that profit from genetics and biology. Braidotti asserts that:

"Bio-power has already turned into a form of bio-piracy in that it aims at exploiting the generative powers of women, animals, plants, genes and cells. The self-replicating vitality of living matter is targeted for consumption and commercial exploitation" (70)

Watson-Crick biology students use abilities that were formerly exclusive to natural animals by taking use of the ability to create animal parts and redistributing them to phoney organisms. The original species are no longer helpful to humans and the need to breed animals for sustenance has been abolished.

The same argument holds that workers at the OrganInc and HealthWyzer facilities are thieves of human generative abilities. Scientists employ pigeons in both compounds to create human genetic material in non-human animals. OrganInc Farms aims to "grow an assortment of fool proof human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig-host organs that would transplant smoothly and avoid rejection" (23), therefore excluding people from the organ-growing process. In an effort to "grow a young, plump skin cell that would eat up the worn cells in the skins of those on whom it was planted" (55), HealthWyzer researchers are using pigeons to study regenerative skin cells. Rather of being human genetic material acquired from animals, these chemically produced organs and implantable skin cells are sold as human replacement parts. The worldwide market is persuaded to purchase human body part simulators through "glossy and discreetly worded" (23) brochures and enticing names like "NooSkins for Olds," (55).

One of the unending promises of youth is Oryx and Crake's new reality. Through product marketing, the global economy has created an ideal person to aspire to. This myth is used by the capitalist complex to create demand for its products on the grounds that no

well-to-do and once-young, once-beautiful woman or man, cranked up on hormonal supplements and shot full of vitamins but hampered by the unforgiving mirror, wouldn't sell their house, their gated retirement villa, their kids, and their soul to get a second kick at the sexual can. (55)

The ideal person is youthful, in good health, and has enough money to stay that way for years, if not forever. This is a result of "new bio-technologies of 'Life,'" such as "the widespread phenomenon of traffic in organs and body-parts; and the growing industry of genetic engineering and farming of living tissues and cells"

(Braidotti, 2007, 70–71). *Oryx and Crake* envision a future for the current attempts to manipulate nature in our planet. In Atwood's novel, technology defeats nature so that a new nature may replace it and be bought in a system of capitalist globalisation.

The ultimate winners are the businesses themselves, even though wealthy academics make money by tricking the public into accepting the idea of humanity that large corporations promote. Because of capitalism globalisation, the rich have access to ideas, cuisines, technologies and treatments that the poor will never have. Businesses will satisfy the demands they instill in society in exchange for a charge, establishing a cycle of desire and satisfaction through commerce that leads to ever-increasing riches for companies and ever-increasing desires to be embodied by people and satisfied by scientists. Atwood's analysis of the effects of globalisation via capitalism and her prediction of what will happen if global capitalism is allowed unchecked may be found in *Oryx and Crake*'s never-ending cycle of corporate wealth and human transformation.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/56**REMEMBERING HOMELAND THROUGH LOSS, GRIEF AND
TRAUMA: A DIASPORIC ANALYSIS OF THE SELECT STORIES OF
ROMESH GUNESKERA'S *MONKFISH MOON*****Ms. JEMIMA JOSHUIN T.**Research Scholar, Sri Meenakshi Government Arts College for Women
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**Dr. G. ARUL SELVI MARIYA**Associate Professor, Sri Meenakshi Government Arts College for Women
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**Abstract**

Gunesekera's *Monkfish Moon*, a collection of nine short stories explains the tumultuous circumstances of Sri Lanka since its independence. The social unrest, psychological conflict and violence have become an everyday scenario to its citizens causing them to helplessly flee from the nation for the sake of survival. The paper focuses on the strained relationships of the people and the painful memories that haunt them even when they live abroad from their homeland. The themes of loss and exile can be seen throughout the collection. The longing to rebuild Sri Lanka as it was before take root in the characters despite the political turmoil. The political unrest will be elaborated in detail with the backdrop of the scenic beauty of the nation. The paper also delves deep into the transnational trauma, hybridity, fractured relationship and intergenerational trauma. The reverberation of brutality haunts the characters and restrict them to live their present. The dynamics of relationship between the Sinhalese and the Tamilians and their political history will also be discussed in detail.

Keywords: Diaspora, Trauma, Civil unrest, Sinhalese, Hybridity.**Introduction**

Conceptually 'diaspora' refers to the dispersal of people across the globe from one geographical location to the other either due to threat to their existence or for the prospect of better opportunities. Initially the term diaspora was used to denote the Jews who migrated after the Babylonian exile, later the term is used to explicate the migration that took place due to political and civil unrest that imperil the survival of the individuals across the world. It also encompasses forced migration after colonization, slavery and mass migration. Displacement from one's homeland makes the individuals homeless as they face a new set of challenges to feel belonged in the place they have migrated to. Robin Cohen, in his book *The Global Diaspora* lists down the four phases of diaspora and how the term has evolved from the Jewish context to a popular jargon that can be used for any migration. This first phase he mentions falls between 1960 and 1970 when the

term was used in its original sense to mean the Jewish community's migration from their homeland to various parts of the world. It also confines its implication to any forced migration where people are uprooted from their homeland and planted in a foreign place which they should consider as their adopted home in a geographical context. The second phase ranges from 1980 to 1989 which marks the beginning of using the term as a 'metaphorical designation'. The term is observed through a sociological perspective and it included people of different categories like refugees, ethnic minorities, individuals in exile, immigrants and racial minorities. The third phase involves a modern context as studies related to migration and globalisation began to emerge, diaspora became multidimensional to analyse. Challenges like identity crisis, yearning for homeland, assimilation are researched under diaspora. The fourth phase denotes the postmodern period when migration happens predominantly for prospects of economic prosperity and comfort.

The diasporic theorist, Safran in his *Diaspora in modern societies: Myths of homeland and return* initially formulated six features of diaspora. These features were too restraining and particular to the traditional concept of diaspora. Later Cohen added other features and consolidated the features of diaspora that was initially promulgated by Safran. These characteristics act as foundation to the various researches on diaspora since the 1990s. According to him the terminology 'diaspora' often refers to dispersion from an emotionally attached homeland to two or more foreign nations. The scattering is often triggered by unfortunate events such as civil war, political unrest, slave trade and others. While most of the migration takes place as result of traumatic events, some dispersal happens for the purpose of trade and ambitions pertaining career and economy. However, the individuals who enter the foreign land often have a collective memory that glorifies their homeland in relation to its tradition, culture, history of the location, and other achievements. The individuals feel a civic commitment to hold on to their ancestral memories and feel indebted to restore and maintain what is lost during the traumatic event that displaced them to the foreign land. They often wish to return to their homeland which proves to be unsuccessful but gain a collective approval from the other diasporic characters in the adopted land. Because of the fractured relationship from the homeland, their rootlessness prohibits them to adapt their adopted land as their homeland. The collective identity is built strongly as the individuals share the same history of displacement. The individuals have trouble to assimilate with their hosts as they are not accepted and are in persistent insecurity to anticipate other calamities that may befall upon them. The individuals find solidarity and empathy among the others who descended from their homeland and they live in the foreign land if their adopted land is welcoming of their ethnic pluralism. These features of diaspora can be seen and analysed in the individuals who fled from their homeland and is displaced in a foreign land. These

characteristics are seminal to any diasporic analysis as additional arguments can also be seen in select circumstances.

Diasporic literature, being a wide genre provides profound personal experiences of the individuals who have migrated from one's homeland to another. Though most of the diasporic works of fiction are written by authors who have migrated, it gives a first-person narrative of the struggles faced by the immigrants. Diasporic literature throws light on the struggles of displacement, cultural hybridity, identity crisis, loss, nostalgia, assimilation, acculturation, isolation, alienation, rootlessness, importance of pluralism and the need for dual identity. Diasporic literature often involves words from the language that the characters of diaspora feel comfortable with. The English novels have words from Hindi, Sinhalese, Tamil, Marathi and other mother tongues of the characters to bring out that their home has not changed even when they live abroad. Diasporic Literatures expounds the complexities of living between two separate nations but not belonging to any. It explores the diverse experiences of the individuals in their adopted foreign land according to the opportunities they grab for their survival. Literary theories such as acculturation, assimilation, double consciousness, hybridity, unhomeliness and diasporic space can be incorporated to the literary texts to understand the intricacies of the characters that undergo migration. These themes are not particular to diaspora alone but are mutual to the African American literature as well because of their history of forced migration under the name of slave trade.

While diaspora is universally faced by individuals, Srilankan diaspora is specific to its own brutal realities and gruesome experiences. It is often contrasted with the rich cultural heritage and scenic location that it has with the violence that led to deaths of many innocent lives. Most of the Srilankan literary texts describe the picturesque geographical location of Srilanka and mourn for the war-torn state that affects the individuals throughout their lives and even gets passed on to the next generations. The Srilankan civilian unrest began in 1983 and it lasted till 2009. Since their independence from the Britishers in 1948, the Sinhalese took hold of their majority in government, education and various other government schemes leaving the Tamils as a minority in their nation. During the colonial period under British rule, the Tamils received better education as the schools run by missionaries were located in the areas where majority of the Tamils resided. They had better opportunities at work and government jobs as well. The sudden and sharp change when the Sinhalese government took dominance affected the prospects of the Tamils by making them a minority in their own nation. The ethnic tensions began to emerge when the Sinhalese government announced the Citizenship Acts in 1948 to 1949 which snatched the rights of the Indian Tamils who worked in tea plantations to vote and they were also denied of citizenship. In 1956, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike declared the 'Sinhala Only Act' under which Sinhala was made the official language. The Tamil speakers are repudiated in their respective jobs because of the language they speak. This incident became a

catalyst to the ethnic tensions that completely changed the history of Srilanka. The Standardisation Policies of the 1970s further marginalised the Tamil community making it harder for the students to enter the universities for education. The rise of Tamil Nationalism is fuelled by marginalisation of the Tamil communities. The Tamil political leaders demanded equal rights, opportunities and regional autonomy. The leaders necessitated the need for separate places in Srilanka especially the northern and eastern coast to be occupied by the Tamils as they were already predominantly inhabited by them calling it the Tamil Eelam. Since none of their requests were meted out and the marginalisation continued, the Tamil militancy emerged. The Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam also known as LTTE founded by Velupillai Prabakaran used bombing, assassinations and suicide attacks against the Sinhalese to express their demand of an autonomous Tamil area and to show resistance to their acts that oppress and marginalise the Tamils. The attacks began in the July of 1983 and it is often referred to as the Black July. Almost thirteen Srilankan soldiers were killed at Jaffna. As a reaction to this attack, the Sinhalese attacked the Tamils. Many houses were burnt; Women were raped and thousands of Tamils were killed and held hostages. This led to the Eelam War that happened in four phases between 1983 and 2009 until Velupillai Prabakaran was killed on 18th May, 2009. Assassination of Rajiv Gandhi also took place during the third phase of War as India had to interfere for the lives of the Indian Tamils who resided in Srilanka. Mass displacement from Srilanka took place as a result of the political unrest. The war produced deep psychological trauma, fragmented family relations, fractured identity, grief, loss and prolonged social unrest which further affected both the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The war produced literatures that unveil the realities of the war torn Srilanka, the intricacies of fractured familial relationships, diaspora, exile, memory and ethnic conflicts. It also explains the devastating effects of war and how it changed the dynamics of Srilankan harmony endlessly. Writers like Shyam Selvadurai, Michael Ondaatje and Romesh Gunesekera hail from Srilanka and live abroad. Their works have explored the themes of diaspora, exile, psychological consequences of war and displacement, grief, nostalgia, memory and exile.

Romesh Gunesekera, the author of eight novels was born in Srilanka in 1954. He grew up in Srilanka and Philippines and has later migrated to London in 1971. His works include *Monkfish Moon*, *Reef*, *The Sandglass*, *Heaven's Edge*, *The Match*, *The Prisoner of Paradise*, *Noon Tide Toll*, and *Suncatcher*. He is the recipient of various awards including the Srilankan Ranjana, Booker Prize, Guardian Fiction Prize, Yorkshire Post First Work Prize and he is a fellow of the prestigious Royal Society of Literature in 2004. He was a judge for the International Booker Prize 2024. The select work and the foremost work of Romesh Gunesekera, *Monkfish Moon* is a collection of nine stories that narrate the ethnic, political tensions in Srilanka and the fragility of human relationships that surround it. The author is

awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Regional Prize in 1993 and has been the finalist for David Higham Prize in 1992. It has been named a 'New York Times Notable Book' for 1993. Nisid Hajari in the *Voice Literary Supplement* Acclaims *Monkfish Moon* that it "Strikes the reader like a hammer blow... (the) subtly erotic prose animates Srilanka's luxuriance, veined with menace..." Suzanne Berne in *New York Times Book Review* praises that, "The most startling aspect of this evocative book is distinct one tale proves from another. These sad, spare stories illustrate the shocking fragility of the whole modern world. Natasha Walters in *Vogue* calls the book to be "full of uncertain sadness of exiles and dreamers... Gunesekera's characters become memorable emblems of solitude and despair... (His) prose pulses with precision, without stridency or showiness".

Loss, Grief and Trauma are the quintessential themes to any diasporic fiction and the short stories of Romesh Gunesekera explicate the same. Among the collection of nine stories in *Monkfish Moon*, the present study uses three stories that revolve around the ethnic political unrest and diaspora to analyse the complexities of war torn Srilanka and its predicaments among human relationships. The study throws light on the characteristic fetters of diaspora that can be traced in the characters of the select short stories. It delves deep into the concept of Unhomeliness that leads to transnational trauma, fragmented relationships, fractured identity and hybridity and. The story 'Ullswater' revolves around Ranjit, his father and his father's brother. Ranjit lives in London while his father and his mother stay in Srilanka. The story is narrated through the memory of Ranjit's uncle, Seneka who visits Ranjit in London. They sit by the Ullswater, the second largest glacial lake in England's Lake District. The story explores the sharp distinction between both the brothers. Ranjit's father married his mother, Sonia and indulges himself into his books for a major portion of his life. Even though he lives in Srilanka, he is thrilled to live in England. He reads the books by the English authors and lives in his own world amidst the tensions that prevailed in Srilanka. Ranjit's Uncle visits Ranjit and shares his experiences with his brother as Ranjit feels that he does not know his father well.

The story 'Batik' explores the strained relationship between a Tamil husband, Tiru and Sinhala Wife, Nalini. The story begins with describing the harmony between the two individuals as they mend the house they live in London. They work together and give heed to each other's opinions and criticism to mend and paint their new home. Though the tension between the Sinhalese and Tamils prevailed even before their wedding, it did not affect their relationship but as the violence against the Tamils outgrew, Tiru becomes extremely engulfed to see, observe and collect every incident he could to know more about it. This created an emotional and physical vacuum in the marital relationship. The story unearths the complexities of emotional dependency to the homeland and to a particular ethnic group even after reaching a foreign land. The story 'Storm Petrel' revolves around two characters, CK and the narrator himself. CK yearns to return to Srilanka

before the political unrest that happened in 1983. Though he frequently visits Srilanka from London, he returns to London every time for financial reasons. Unlike the other stories where diaspora took place in characters after the unrest in Srilanka, CK and the narrator reach England after the independence and before the civil unrest for better prospects of opportunities at work. However, they could not return to relish the life they had imagined and longed for, as the war has totally changed course of history in its entirety.

One of the main features of diaspora is the Bhabha's concept of 'unhomeliness'. Unhomeliness refers to the inability to feel at home in a foreign land. The feeling of estrangement in foreign land being a home and a homeland becoming a foreign land led to unhomeliness. To feel at home the individuals should assimilate with their host countries and the host countries should be tolerant of cultural pluralism. Homi Bhabha in his essay, *The World and the Home* defines the term 'unhomeliness' as

...estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place. To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social and the public spheres (141).

Unhomeliness can also mean disoriented in a society where the individuals have lost the sense of belonging and the sense of home. While unhomeliness is particular to the concept of diaspora in migrants, it can also be felt by individuals who live disoriented and disillusioned in their own homeland. The predicament of unhomeliness leads to transnational trauma, intergenerational trauma, assimilation and hybridity.

Transnational trauma is common to diaspora as the roots of the immigrants stay loyal to their homeland. The emotional and cultural wounds transcend borders and affect the individuals inhibiting them to focus on their life abroad. It happens due to migration and emotional immobility from a particular geographical location. The individuals experience cultural and ethnic ties to their homeland which prohibit them from redirecting their life in the foreign land. The individuals are often trapped in their past or the memories of their homeland that consists of wars, conflicts and other unfortunate incidents that affect them across borders. In the short story 'Batik' the strained relationship between the husband and wife is captured intricately to demonstrate the strained relationship between any Sinhalese and Tamilian. Tiru and Nalini build their house to make it a home. They complement each other as their union turns into a family of three. Tiru possess mastery over joinery and Nalini loves the smell of paint. They mend their new house in a new foreign and try to make it their home. However, with the news of the civil war in Srilanka and the massacre of Tamils, their relationship is distressed. "In the first few days they felt helpless: too far away to do anything and yet implicated by every brutal act they heard about". Tiru is overwhelmed with watching the news about the brutality of the Tamils while Nalini had to

remain in her loneliness. It affects their relationship even while living many miles away from their homeland.

Their familial bond is a miniscule that represent entire Srilanka as it consists of both the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Tiru is reminded of his sister who is stuck in Srilanka but was planning to move to Canada. When Tiru could see his sister being helpless and crying, Nalini could only imagine which shows the intensity of Tiru's emotional ties to his ethnic group and their suffering. Since Nalini is Sinhalese, she could sympathise with Tiru but is unable to understand the nuances of his obsession over watching the news and the eventual trauma in doing so. Nalini is also a representation of the entire Sinhalese population who meant no harm for the Tamils but were helpless when they were brutally attacked. While Nalini is carrying Tiru's baby, Tiru is unaware of Nalini's pregnancy and even when she discloses her pregnancy Tiru is overwhelmed with events in Jaffna and is indifferent towards Nalini. The narrator says,

While he was dressing for work, she asked him, 'Do you know what's happening?' 'What? In Jaffna, or here?' 'I'm pregnant.' He pushed a newspaper across to her. 'Now they are talking of bombing?' 'I'm pregnant!' she said again stretching the word and reaching to touch him, but he flinched and drew back.

The emotional weight of the brutality faced by his fellow Tamilians and the prospect of his sister being there under attack weigh him more. He could not be completely happy for his baby. Tiru also carries the subconscious anger towards the Sinhala chauvinists and displaces his anger towards his wife who is also one. The displacement of anger distresses their relationship and created an emotional distance between them

The story 'Storm Petrel' also talks about transnational trauma. As CK and the narrator yearn to return back to their homeland before the civil unrest, it is unknown to the readers whether CK actually returned to Srilanka. The story mentions the vibrant atmosphere of Srilanka and its importance in tourism. CK longs to open a guest house on East Coast as life back at his homeland felt liberating than the desk job at his company in London. Together they dream of having Srilankan foods by the nearby small hotels in the East Coast. The plot records their conversation as two months before the beginning of the civil war. While CK narrates his dream to open a guest house on the beach, Srilanka's prosperity in 1982 is spectacular to witness.

But in just two months the whole island would be engulfed in flames: the East Coast like the North would become a blazing battleground. Mined and strafed and bombed and pulverized, CK's beach, the dry-zone scrub land—disputed mother earth—would be dug up, exploded and exhumed.

The transnational trauma not only affects the individuals mentally but they suffer as they cannot return to their homeland. They are stuck in between their homeland and their adopted land and could not belong in either place. The emotional

embrace that the characters feel while discussing about their home is brought to a standstill and their dreams of returning to Srilanka as they have idealised is thwarted.

Intergenerational Trauma is another aspect that can be traced in 'Ullswater'. After the independence of Srilanka from the Britishers in 1948, the civil unrest began to emerge. However, the Britishers left a trail of their contribution to the Srilankan through missionary schools. Ranjit's father read books by English authors. He is extremely intelligent and lives in his own world inside his books. Though he lives in Srilanka, he belonged to Britain emotionally. He feels disillusioned to stay back in Srilanka and realises that he does not belong there. The realisation that he is in a place where he does not belong affects him and he alienates himself from his family. Seneka, Ranjit's uncle says "While I measured each day's news against our goal of self-government he compared new verse, fresh as apples from England, to the Lake Poets he'd committed to memory." This trauma of not being able to be in Britain is somehow forced upon his son Ranjit. Ranjit lives in Britain uprooted from Srilanka. Though it was safe for him to escape the ethnic riots physically, he feels homeless as he does not know his father well enough to know his intentions.

The fractured relationship between father and son is described in the story. The emotional displacement of father to be in Britain instead of Srilanka and the physical displacement of the son in Britain instead of Srilanka creates a rift in their relationship. Ranjit tries to understand his father better through his uncle who is the only bridge between his father and him and between Britain and Srilanka. The father is trapped in his bitterness to exist in Srilanka while the Son is engulfed in loneliness and rootlessness. Though the story clearly states that Ranjit has found a wife and has children in Britain, he wishes to know more about his father but he could not due to the physical displacement. The emotions of his father run parallel to the social unrest in Srilanka. Before the civil war, he is lively and at peace with himself. Though he is obsessed with his books, he is not cold and alcoholic. The realisation that he cannot escape Srilanka torments him to alienate himself from his own family after the civil war has begun. By the time he dies he is filled with despair for his own life. He has become an alcoholic and he is disillusioned with his own life. He does not feel at home in his own homeland as he emotionally belongs in Britain. By the end of the story, Ranjit questions his uncle to know about what his father wanted. Ranjit's mobilisation from Srilanka to London is the manifestation of Ranjit's father's dreams.

Bhabha's concept of 'hybridity' can also be analysed in the select short stories of Gunasekera. The term refers to the merging of the two cultures or in other words the assimilation of an individual who is a migrant to the culture of their adopted land to make it their home. The individuals who move abroad experience an emotional void as they assimilate among the traditions and practices of their adopted land. The habits and the attitudes of the adopted land become a part of

their identity around the void of leaving their homeland and its tradition. Bhabha in his *Location of Culture* introduces the term and explains that an individual adapts to the new culture but never fully abandons their homeland and therefore the individual exists in both the places at once. DuBoisian 'double consciousness' is particular to African Americans but is similar to hybridity. The African Americans adopt the ways of the whites to get adapted but does not fully belong in both the places. The novel *Sag Harbor* by Colson Whitehead analyses the different modes of assimilation that the protagonist Benji undergoes to belong in his white public school. He loses a part of his black identity to be accepted by his white classmates. The characteristics of his white identity become a part of his identity which is questioned when he is with his black friends at Sag Harbor. The colored individuals adapt to the white world only to be questioned by the blacks of their authenticity. Characters like Benji belong to both the sects of people: blacks in skin and whites in attitude. However, they don't feel welcomed in both spaces. Similarly, hybridity can be seen in the characters of the select short stories.

The short stories 'Storm Petrel' and 'Batik' take place around the same time. CK in 'Storm Petrel' mentions Srilankan houses to have thatched roofs but in 'Batik' the couple repair their house which had wallpapers and their kitchen had numerous shelves. Assimilation takes place at a certain level to feel belonged. However, Nalini cooks chicken following the recipe of Tiru. Though both of them have their own differences, they accommodate to each other's differences and assimilate to the needs of the foreign land as well. Food plays a major role in the lives of the individuals who have migrated abroad. In 'Storm Petrel' CK dreams of having 'thosai' in a local shop in Srilanka. They yearn for the food from their homeland and adults continue to cook their food to feel at home abroad. Assimilation plays a vital role in the character of Ranjit and his father. Though Ranjit's father is disillusioned with Britain, he remains in Srilanka till he dies. The dress and the drinking habits of them both can be juxtaposed to analyse how the son and father are related by blood but are distant by distance and culture. Ranjit's father wears a Sarong and drinks liquor that is available in Srilanka. Ranjit wears a suit and drinks English beer which is very bitter that Seneka feels he would go numb. While both the characters feel estrangement in the place they live in, it will be challenging for them to adapt to the ways of their emotional homeland.

The stories taken for analysis are rich in description about Srilanka and are poignant to unearth the realities of the characters' trauma. However, the titles of each story require an in-depth examination to unveil the significance of it. The story, 'Ullswater' represents a steady water stream that is still. It also represents the emotional exile of Ranjit as he is estranged and alone in London. The story describes his father being interested in the Lake District, but Ranjit being in Lake District feels emotionally distant and away from his homeland. The Ullswater denotes stability as its flow is stable, certain and silent. Though Ranjit's life is equally stable and unaffected by the ethnic riots in Srilanka, his loneliness and

nostalgia create an emptiness that bothers him to know more about his roots back in Srilanka.

The story 'Batik' revolves around the fragmented relationship between Tiru and Nalini. The term 'batik' refers to a fabric dyeing method using layered patterns and designs which have cracks. Nalini throws a cup which had sparkling water and it breaks. The cup had maroon and gold colored image which signify the colour of the Srilankan flag. Due to the persistent outbreak of civil war, Srilanka has lost its landscape and harmony among its people. Being a minuscule of Srilanka, Tiru and Nalini connect with each other from their fractured relationship like batik art which has broken lines. The cup breaks into innumerable pieces like the unsaid trauma of both the sects of individuals: the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The story represents the solidarity of the people of Srilanka amidst the political and ethnic unrest.

The title 'Storm Petrel' denotes a water bird that wanders with uncertainty. CK is the Storm Petrel in the story as he wanders from London to Srilanka and Srilanka to India and then to London. CK is caught in between London and Srilanka, unable to belong in both the places. Though he wishes to return to Srilanka and plans to open a guest house on the eastern coast, he is uncertain about when he will return. He is caught with uncertainty. Though he has lived many years in London, he doesn't belong there as it restricts his Sri Lankan identity and he cannot enter Sri Lanka because of the civil unrest. He is stuck unable to belong anywhere. Thus, the characters in the short stories remember Sri Lanka through the loss of human lives, loss of their identity, grief for the lost loved ones, grief for the memories from their homeland, trauma because of the civil war and fractured relationships. They continue to live in the foreign land and try to take the political unrest as an undertow and attempt to redirect their lives for the better by remembering their homelands that gave them warmth and comfort.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/57**IMPERFECT VICTIMS: POLITICS OF APPEAL AND
PARRHESIASTIC AGENCY IN MOHAMMED EL-KURD'S *RIFQA*****ZIKRA MIR**Research Scholar, Department of English,
Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India**Abstract**

In 2021, Palestinian poet, writer and journalist published his collection of poetry based on the Palestinian resistance and liberation movement, under the title *Rifqa*, after his grandmother, Rifqa El-Kurd. Rifqa was displaced during the 1948 Nakba or 'catastrophe' and after recreating life from scratch, she lost her home in Sheikh Jarrah in 2009. El-Kurd documents his grandmother's as well as his own struggles throughout the tumultuous history of Palestine. He derives his purpose behind the collection, taking inspiration from the pioneer of Palestinian resistance literature, Ghassan Kanafani. He acknowledges his duty as a literary agent to write for the autonomy of his people, who are not often offered a platform in the global arena. In the Afterword of his collection El-Kurd states his realization—the need for Palestinian narrative to break itself free from the politics of appeal in order to achieve true autonomy. This theory is later developed in the book he published in 2025, *Perfect Victims*. He claims that to break away from traditional perfect victim trope Palestinians need to embrace "anti-appeal"—a way of voicing one's narratives and truth in an unapologetic, agentic manner, free of colonial rhetoric. The concept of unhindered, unapologetic truth is further discussed using the theory of parrhesia developed by Michel Foucault in the late 20th century. This paper studies El-Kurd's poems from *Rifqa* applying dual lens of politics of appeal and Foucault's theory of parrhesia to argue that resistance poetry caters as a site of agency and autonomy for Palestinians, offering them a space to embrace their truth.

Keywords: Politics of Appeal, Anti-Appeal, Resistance Poetry, Dehumanization, Parrhesia

Introduction

"There isn't a cause more crucial" (El-Kurd, *Rifqa* 95)

Writes Palestinian poet, writer and journalist Mohammed El-Kurd in the Afterword of his debut poetry collection *Rifqa*. The politically charged poetry of El-Kurd stands as a defining work during the present humanitarian crisis in Palestine as it integrates personal struggles of displacement and dispossession with the collective trauma of Nakba and its after-effects. In 2009, during the invasion of his house in Sheikh Jarrah by Israeli settlers, 11-year-old El-Kurd was forced to advocate for his rights in broken English. In 2013, he appeared in Julia

Bacha and Rabekah Wingert-Jabi's "My Neighborhood," a documentary based on said invasion (Rizkallah 2018). From an early age, El-Kurd became familiar with the continuing suffering and dehumanization of Palestinians owing to Israeli grand narratives supported by mainstream media as well as the need for his people to "appealing" for sympathy from the world (El-Kurd, *Perfect Victims* 28). This later became the subject of his book, *Perfect Victims*, where he presents a strong critique of the politics of appeal and gives the theory of anti-appeal, trying to reclaim autonomous subject-hood beyond the confining discourse of victimhood. Since his story echoed the story of Rifqa El-Kurd, his grandmother who lost her home during the 1948 Nakba, she became a powerful presence in his poetry, inspiring a poignant genealogy of Palestinian survival and resilience rooted in her memory where she personifies both the land as well as the undying spirit of resistance of its people ("#275 – Winter 2024 > on Rifqa by Mohammed El-Kurd, Nameera Bajwa"). Following the path of Ghassan Kanafani, the pioneer of resistance literature and theory, El-Kurd endeavors to create a safe space for Palestinian sovereignty and identity, demanding dignity and justice in the face of colonial erasure.

This paper delves into the concept of 'Parrhesia,' defined by Michel Foucault as 'speaking truth to power' and how El-Kurd adopts it to disrupt the constraints imposed by the oppressors ("Techniques of the Parrhesiastic Games"). These constraints are defined under the umbrella term of "politics of appeal" in his book *Perfect Victims* (El-Kurd 22). El-Kurd employs an unapologetic, direct yet conversely intimate voice in his poetry, challenging the dominant narratives and fostering a literary space where Palestinian stories can exist under their own agency. The coalescence of anger and pain with humor and satire resonates with the poet's critique of the way Palestinians need to present themselves as 'grievable' to be deemed worthy of empathy. The poems in *Rifqa* illustrate the hinderances caused by colonizer-appeasement and how by assuming a parrhesiastic role one can confront the oppressive structures and advocate without resorting to "rhetorical gymnastics" to seek permission for legitimacy (MANAL AL-BARAKATI). It also attempts to contextualize El-Kurd's poetry in the larger discourse of Palestinian resistance literature as defined by Ghassan Kanafani, the purpose of which is not only to document but instigate resistance and unite masses around a collective vision of liberation (munirahwh). By analyzing the poems in *Rifqa* through these lenses, this research will illuminate El-Kurd's endeavor to re-conceptualize resistance poetry, emphasizing the political and moral obligations of a poet to enable a liberated and autonomous space for the Palestinian narrative.

Theoretical Framework

Resistance Literature

I go to war in a book.

(El-Kurd 2021, 13)

Among many influential thinkers and writers, one of the prominent names in shaping El-Kurd's philosophy is Ghassan Kanafani. In an article for Mondoweiss, El-Kurd writes, "[Kanafani] intimately understood how our enemies have never ceased weaponizing the arts as "a crucial and indivisible part of [their] liberation movement." This is an artist's obligation in the larger scheme of things—to "transform oneself into a vessel for the collective" ("What Role Does Culture Play in Palestinian Liberation?"). In other words, he believes that it is inevitable for a Palestinian, artist or otherwise, to end up advocating for his people possibly against either or both of their wishes, and at such a time a that individual should set aside personal agendas and work towards the fulfillment of the collective agendas of their people.

Kanafani defined resistance literature, especially poetry as a direct weapon in the face of colonization, due to its capacity to persist independently regardless of publication. Palestinian literature according to him has always prevailed despite all the tragedies, sanctions and bans—even during the worst catastrophe in its history, literature of the land not only survived but thrived into a new category, literature of the exile. What once was driven from emotions of suffering and loss soon evolved into a genre rooted in defiance and valor. This new plethora of literature that emerged from the land of the oppressed challenged the oppressor and "put [them] face to face with the staunch and fearless spirit of the fighters." The key characteristics of resistance poetry thus are its ability to challenge dominant narratives, often ridiculing the oppressors and their subjugating acts with "bitter irony" (munirahwh).

"Palestinians have long fought with poetry" (El-Kurd, *Rifqa* 2021) says Randa Jarrar in praise of *Rifqa* and its poet. Continuing the legacy of Kanafani, El-Kurd composes poetry that is both elegiac and defiant, echoing the unconquerable spirit of a Palestinian artist. The direct and evocative lexicon of *Rifqa* compliments the urgency of its message—rejecting the trope of perfect victimhood, designed and forced by the West; instead, embracing his imperfect individuality and creating a safe space for his people to resist and exist unapologetically.

Politics of Appeal

In *Perfect Victims*, El-Kurd writes, "For our martyrs to matter, they need to have lived as spectacular people or endured a spectacularly violent death" (El-Kurd 11). There is an unsaid yet obvious need for Palestinians to fit a certain mould to be worthy of acknowledgment for their victimhood, and of sympathy for their tragedy. El-Kurd, through his poetry and later through this book, reflects on this critical issue and defines the core elements of what he calls "politics of appeal" (El-Kurd, *Perfect Victims*, 24). A Palestinian citizen essentially needs to perform victimhood in a pre-defined sanitized manner that is deemed acceptable by the oppressors and their supporters to qualify for their sympathy. Another way is of course to have lived a life so exceptionally noble and influential, untainted by even

an ounce of violence; influential being the keyword, since those who were unknown in life will certainly remain unknown in death, no matter how brutal.

The colonizer's language commands that we qualify him [Palestinian man] for mourning before mourning, that we wash him of his sins—his geography, religion, color, sex, and affiliations—and exclude him from the ranks of the fighters and fight to exhibit his exceptionalism. (El-Kurd, *Perfect Victims* 44-45)

This model demands the victim to be passive, submissive, and subdued and expects them to frame their suffering in a palatable, non-threatening way, without showing any signs of autonomy, agency or rage, for these are the prohibited emotions for Palestinians. El-Kurd offers a counter-narrative of anti-appeal—a form of political discourse that rejects this model by refusing to seek permission and perform perfect victimhood for global audiences. It aims to reinvigorate national dignity unhinged from external validation and demands restorative justice for uncomfortable truths. *Rifqa* is a testimony of anti-appeal, a collection of poetry that addresses the urgent issue of justice for Palestinians by asking the right questions, free from 'rhetorical gymnastics' and confronting Israeli systematic brutality head-on. He illustrates this need by recounting the story of Adam Ayyad, a 15-year-old boy killed in Dheisheh refugee camp by Israeli forces on the grounds of violence

...the question was, *Did he really throw a Molotov cocktail at the soldiers?* ...When instead the question should have been, *Why are Israeli troops in Bethlehem in the first place? Why was Adam Ayyad born in a refugee camp? Why is "Molotov" in the headline of a story about soldiers killing a boy? So what if he throws a Molotov cocktail? Who wouldn't?* (El-Kurd, *Perfect Victims* 40)

The poems in *Rifqa* presents an unapologetic articulation of Palestinian oppression, suffering and resistance rooted in personal as well as collective memory of Nakba, reclaiming narrative autonomy—a bold proclamation that Palestinian experiences are inherently valuable and worthy of being witnessed, regardless of global acceptability.

Parrhesia

In the early 1990s, Michel Foucault revived the ancient Greek term 'Parrhesia' in a series of lectures titled "Discourse and Truth: The Problematicization of Parrhesia" to investigate the use of parrhesia or "free speech" to analyze the changing trajectory of truth-teller or 'Parrhesiastes' in the broader discourse of power and knowledge. Foucault traces the evolution of parrhesia by diving into its five core elements: frankness, truth, risk, criticism and duty. He posits that parrhesia, etymologically, translates "to say everything," making frankness an innate feature of the concept. However, this does not mean that any information divulged frankly is parrhesia, for parrhesiastic qualification, the utterance must be true—true for the speaker and true in the objective sense—both are not mutually

exclusive. Foucault goes on to distinguish parrhesia further by adding the aspect of risk behind the act—he contends that in committing the truth-telling act, the speaker must be at substantial risk, for instance, from the authorities. The reason behind this is connected with the critical nature of the truth; a parrhesiastes tells the uncomfortable truth that is usually not universally accepted or openly acknowledged. The last feature specifies the motive behind parrhesia—duty; a parrhesiastes’ need to engage in the act of truth-telling must derive from a sense of duty; whether social, political, moral or personal. To summarize plainly, for the purposes of this research, parrhesia is a courageous act of truth-telling for the greater good, despite the risk of repercussions from those in power (“Techniques of the Parrhesiastic Games”).

To analyze the poems in *Rifqa* through the lens of Foucault’s theory of parrhesia; the five defining elements can be integrated with El-Kurd’s theory of anti-appeal to establish *Rifqa* as a site of Palestinian agency and autonomy, bridging the gap between art and activism. Through his poetry, El-Kurd fearlessly speaks the truth despite the stigma around Palestinian activism, transforming *Rifqa* into a parrhesiastic act of confronting the oppressors through unapologetic testimony and refusing to be silenced or sanitized.

Rifqa

In the afterword of his poetry collection *Rifqa*, Muhammed El-Kurd writes “...although this book isn’t an attempt to free Palestine, its central thesis is that Palestine in its historical entirety, must be liberated by any means necessary” (El-Kurd 94). In 2021, twenty-two-year-old El-Kurd published his first collection of poetry dedicated to his grandmother, Rifqa El-Kurd, who is a central figure in his poetry as well as in his life. The purpose of his poetry is clear to El-Kurd—in ‘Laugh’ he writes “Poems won’t build a house,” there is a limit to poetry’s scope, it may not be a mode of survival in the worldly sense of the word, but it is survival, nonetheless (El-Kurd 46). Poetry holds the power to communicate, validate and record the truth.

“...the standard, across industries, is to dehumanize the Palestinian” (El-Kurd, *Perfect Victims* 13). El-Kurd’s poems deal with important and urgent issues embedded in the dehumanization of Palestinians in the global arena. Instead of falling prey to the rhetoric and undertaking the task of re-humanizing the Palestinian, El-Kurd poses a simple question—why is there a need to re-humanize someone who is inherently and undoubtedly a human? This is the core philosophy connecting the poems in *Rifqa*—from repurposing the news headline to take control of the narrative in “Who Lives in Sheikh Jarrah,” to cursing anyone who is too uncomfortable to hear the truth with “drink the sea!” in “This is Why We Dance,” to candidly calling the oppressors “virus” in “Smuggling Bethlehem” and so on.

Though he dedicated his collection to his grandmother, Rifqa, there are multiple women present in his poetry including his poet mother, Maysoon Abu Dweih El-

Kurd as well as countless other women, who have either existed in real life—for instance, the fifteen-year-old girl who made headlines for being killed for attacking an Israeli soldier; or those who represent an idea—for instance the three women in the poem titled “Three Women,” each representing the state of Arab women in USA, Jerusalem and Gaza, with the degree of their hardship varying with location, but never ending entirely. Despite women being at the centre of his inspiration, El-Kurd highlights the importance of talking about men in both his poetry and in *Perfect Victims*

“A Palestinian man cannot just die,” writes El-Kurd in the Afterword of *Rifqa* (El-Kurd 94). In mainstream media, a Palestinian man almost exclusively falls under either of the two categories—victim or villain/terrorist (El-Kurd, *Perfect Victims* 21). For qualifying under the first category, El-Kurd writes “...he must be in a wheelchair or developmentally delayed, a medical professional, or noticeably elderly at the very least.” (El-Kurd, *Rifqa* 94) The latter category needs no qualifiers, villainy is inherent to Palestinian men.

Rooted in the memory and reality of the continuing Nakba and in the need to take control of the narrative, *Rifqa* provides a fresh perspective on the performance of victimhood under the politics of appeal, creating a site of resistance where every Palestinian is given space to exist freely and imperfectly.

Politics of Appeal

In the Afterword of the *Rifqa*, El-Kurd writes, “I realize now that a poetry book formed as a didactic tool became one whose merit relies on negating the politics of appeal” (El-Kurd 93). The critique is present in every poem—the entire collection and its tone is a testament of this parrhesiastic need to speak bluntly, free of rhetorical gymnastics; but this paper will discuss a selection of poems that reflect this concept most evidently.

El-Kurd begins many poems with either a corresponding news or incident, a dedication to an artist who has inspired the poem or a quote or verse from related literature. However, sometimes, the names that occur in italics at the top are left unexplained. One such poem is “This is Why We Dance,” dedicated to Carmel Hilal. The title of the poems suggests the significance of dance, more specifically the jovial parts of life. The poem deals with the sensitive concept of diaspora guilt, “sometimes dipping my bread in indulgence/ knowing a child is breadless, in Khan Yunis,”—Palestinians are often besieged with diaspora guilt, especially those in first-world nations like the US, amidst constant news and photographs of famine and drought from ‘back home.’ The poem goes on to embrace anti-appeal and the rejection of perfect victimhood, as the poet, distraught with guilt and generational trauma, comes across someone asking about Palestine for the purpose of small talk. In the verse “If you ask me where I am from it’s not a one-word answer,” the poet reveals how people only superficially interested in knowing about Palestine often gets too uncomfortable when Palestinians actually start speaking the truth (El-Kurd 7). This theme reappears more prominently in the poem titled “Why Do

You Speak of the Nakba at the Party?” where the poet speaks in a direct and unapologetic tone, addressing his fellow Palestinians (or supporters) confronting them sarcastically on the need to discuss Nakba with its perpetrators, “Why are you explaining the morning to a rooster?” (El-Kurd 69)

The poem “This Is Why We Dance” also deals with the perfect victim trope—

My father told me: “Anger is a luxury we cannot afford.”

Be composed, calm, still—laugh when they ask you,

smile when they talk, answer them,

educate them. (El-Kurd 7)

Palestinian children are taught to present themselves as calm, composed individuals, whereas on the other hand the oppressor gets away with anything. The poet states that Palestinians with a voice are fundamentally dangerous, so, they dance. This theme is continued in the poem “Laugh,” where El-Kurd engages with his identity and duty as a poet and the influence his new home-city, Atlanta on his poetry. The poem ends with his grandmother’s lesson “...if we don’t laugh, we cry...” the lines echo Kanafani’s argument surrounding the importance of humor and joy and its integral role in resistance literature (El-Kurd 46).

Another poem that illustrates anti-appeal is “Elderly Woman Falls Asleep on My Shoulder,” where El-Kurd narrates an encounter between a “blond” soldier and an elderly woman at a checkpoint, “The soldier, accented and unhebrew, asks what’s in the bag/*Figs, bitch. What else you want to know?*” The lines juxtapose anger, defiance, and humor exemplifying perfectly Palestinian disobedience and rejection of the perfect victim trope or ‘anti-appeal’ (El-Kurd 39).

As stated earlier, the entire collection of El-Kurd’s poetry is centered on anti-appeal, however, taken individually, each poem deals with a branch or subsidiary of politics of appeal. The subsidiaries covered in this paper are—dehumanization and the ‘defanged’ Palestinian in media (El-Kurd 55). The poem “No Moses in Siege” is an emotionally charged composition inspired by the killing of four boys by Israeli naval fire. The boys were between the ages of nine and fourteen and were killed for playing soccer on the beach in Gaza. The poem exposes the condition Palestinian children are subject to and the helplessness of Palestinians like himself, when they come across news of children being killed as collateral damage whereas nowhere in the rest of the world such dehumanization would be tolerated. He asks at the end of the poem, “What do you say to children for whom the Red Sea doesn’t part?”—how are Palestinians expected to console the children for whom there is no divine intervention, for whom the world does not feel empathy? (El-Kurd 31) A similar theme is dealt with in “Fifteen-Year-Old Girl Killed for Attempting to Kill a Soldier (with a Nail File)” —the bitterly satirical title follows the tradition of Kanafani of incorporating humor with tragedy. The poem is inspired by a real incident where a teenage Palestinian girl was killed by an armed soldier supposedly for grabbing a knife for self defense, which, as later discovered, was a nail file. The poem tells the reality of Israeli justice system

which allows the killing of a scared and unarmed child based on ‘context’ (El-Kurd 29-30). This echoes the “even if, even if, even if” that appears in the beginning of *Perfect Victims* in large font—El-Kurd explains this as a reiteration of leaving ‘context’ out of context when talking about human rights in Palestine (El-Kurd). Nothing, no context, can justify the killing of children and the dehumanization faced by Palestinians on a daily basis. “Context: they want cats /declawed, they want knocked doors/ unanswered, they want the other cheek” (El-Kurd 29-30). El-Kurd discusses not only the dehumanization of Palestinian children by the oppressors, but the passive dehumanization of children by supporters, family members etc. In the poem “Boy Sells Gum at Qalandiyah,” the poet comes across an eight-year-old boy selling gum in the streets to earn barely enough to feed his family. He blames the oppressors for the kind of life children are forced to live in Palestine, “The boy is eight, which is twenty-two for Americans” furthermore he blames the people who are sympathetic to the boy but does nothing substantial to help him—a woman preaches him about the power of pen over a sword, forgetting that art and poetry are important but cannot sustain life. Another well-wisher, a photographer offers to “build a museum in his torture” while the boy, mature beyond years and familiar with false promises, asks him to pay him first. El-Kurd adds himself to the list of empathists—as he genuinely advises the boy “*you shouldn’t be outside during the fire*” oblivious of his duties to his family since there aren’t many men left to take care of their families in places like Qalandiyah, only little boys (El-Kurd 34-35). Addressing dehumanization of Palestinian citizens is an integral part of resistance literature, however, El-Kurd proposes the need for Palestinians and its supporters to stop re-humanizing the dehumanized victim and address the issue of dehumanization occurring in the first place. He writes in the Afterword of *Rifqa* “I no longer feel the responsibility to give humans eyes for humanity” (El-Kurd 94). The duty of resistance poets is not to embellish victims to appease the global audiences but to evoke empathy and acceptance of the imperfect human being.

The second subsidiary studied in this research is how Palestinians are represented in global media. The poem “Things I Cannot Say” is based on the candid confession of a US soldier to killing Afghans for sport. This was documented and published in Guardian in 2011. The poem is a powerful message the poet wants to leave for his children—the future generation of Palestine. He asks the readers to tell his children the truth about the American grand narrative of who are the terrorists and who are the saviors based on appearance, geography and religion. To tell the truth about how soldiers have the rights to decide life and death whereas the brown man is stripped of his rights to exist. The power of the poem lies in its courage to name names and to hold mirror to the world, exposing their complicity in the dehumanization of a people. In another poem titled “Autobiography,” he addresses his personal experiences with performing for sympathy to the media. He recounts how he and his twin sister were like regular children until the world

told them they were Palestinian children. “I was not a victim until the world told me so” writes El-Kurd as he goes on to state how the “world,” rather its spokespersons, made him smaller and smaller until all his innocence was lost and he grew up a tried adult before age. He was programmed to present himself in an acceptable manner before the media until he identified the problem and gave up apologizing for his existence. In the end of the poem, he merely yearns for a normal life, free from PTSD and anti-depressants (El-Kurd 50). While “Autobiography” had the tone of reminiscing the past and yearning for a better future, “Kroger” adopts a stronger tone when addressing the feigned ignorance of media. In the poem El-Kurd recalls an interview, shedding light on uninformed and evasive questions journalists typically ask and how tired Palestinian spokespersons are of such questions; “Thing is, I couldn’t care less/ Say *evict*/ & I’ll still say *theft*.” His frustration is rooted in the fact that nowhere in the rest of the world are poets subjected to questions that Palestinian poets are subjected to; and despite his duty as an informed citizen of the world, sometimes as a poet he wants to be acknowledged for his poetry (El-Kurd 47-49).

Parrhesia

From a parrhesiastic point of view, a resistance poet is never free from his moral and social obligations towards humanity. “I have seen Palestine dwindle in size and spirit like a decaying loved one. I refuse to wait in the wreck”—writes El-Kurd in the Afterword of *Rifqa* (El-Kurd 95). The allusion to this sense of duty is present perpetually in the poetry of *Rifqa*. In “Things I Cannot Say” he puts the facts out for future generations letting them know the reality of this world where officials committing war crimes, soldiers killing civilians for sport, European colonizers engaging in “uniformed terrorism” are all immune from criticism and accountability (El-Kurd 32-33). The sense of duty, which is the fifth core element of the theory of parrhesia, as defined by Foucault, is juxtaposed with the rejection of politics of appeal in multiple poems that include either in the main text or in footnotes actual incidents and names of victims of the Zionist regime. He writes “Poetry was an itch to contextualize, to inform, to hinge severed limbs onto the people to whom they once belonged, to allow those people nuance” (El-Kurd 93). In the poem “Who Lives in Sheikh Jarrah?” El-Kurd articulates very clearly who is to blame for the condition of Palestine—the use of terms like “jewish state” (a small ‘j’ in the word Jewish may symbolize the poet refusing importance to the oppressor), “Israeli bulldozers,” “Israeli courts” is an act of courageous defiance, elemental in resistance poetry. The title of the poem is taken from a 2010 article from New York Times with the same title, which was later taken down following strong criticism from the right-wing Americans and Jewish forums that accused it of having sympathetic tone towards Palestinian claims in Sheikh Jarrah. El-Kurd attempts to answer this by taking control of the narrative—he includes a news headline, filling in words in font similar to handwriting and alters it completely.

To quote the lines, italics are used instead of a different font to indicate the information El-Kurd altered

“Colonialism in Jerusalem killed the peace”

The act of adding words to an existing news headline reiterates the stance of El-Kurd as a resistance poet—the purpose of poetry is to tell the truth that would otherwise be censored. An aspect that stands out in his poetry is the inclusion of dates and highly specific details of political and colonial incidents. Resistance poetry, despite being born with the same agenda, often uses rhetorical language to address serious issues without being censored for speaking the uncomfortable truth. What makes El-Kurd’s verses parrhesiastic is their embracing of direct speech, without embellishments and innuendos, to preach their truth. In the same poem, El-Kurd writes “the Palestinians/ in Sheikh Jarrah/ were originally expelled in/ 1948...”—the verse, if studied in isolation, reads like a line from historical prose (El-Kurd 3). This style of adding actual historical dates and details is evident in multiple poems from the collection—in the titular poem “Rifqa,” he writes “The morning of a red-skied May 1948/ could’ve been today” to reiterate the ongoing Nakba (El-Kurd 17); in “Small Talk” her answers an ignorant white lady asking “How far is Palestine?” By saying including multiple aspects of the ground reality of military occupation

...It’s a fifteen-hour plane ride away,
a dozen unresolved UN resolutions away, a few history lessons
away, a hundred and
some military checkpoints away, too much G4S-provided asphyxiation.
(El-Kurd 54)

The poem “Martyrs” calls out the former US president by name, “Biden/ livid at the Palestinians once more.” The courage to blame the president of the most powerful nation of the world by adding his name in plain text is rooted in the desperation Palestinians feel during this time of turmoil as they keep adopting new ways to speak their truth to power (El-Kurd 71). In the poem titled, “Crows,” the quote of Malcolm X reads “*If you’re not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed and loving the people who are doing the oppressing*” (El-Kurd 73). It is the sad reality of present times that in the search for truth, it is better for one to approach the poets than the journalists. The poem expresses the corruption in mainstream journalism that has become another business venture of those in power. The poet promises to confront the people—who warp his truth and decide his fate, with words more powerful than any weapon

“I’ll hold my words to one of the men’s heads.
and he’ll tremble as I press against his temple and say,
Say it.
Say it
Say my name without spitting. (El-Kurd 73)

Continuing the tradition of naming former US presidents who have been complicit in the war against Palestine, El-Kurd names his poem “Bush” where he expresses his pride at the incident where an Iraqi journalist attacked then President George W Bush with a shoe on his head. The poem tells the imbalanced trauma narrative in the West where an Iraq veteran’s PTSD is legitimized yet an Iraqi civilian or a Palestinian is considered immune from trauma and its effects

Iraq veteran cites his fear of fireworks.

They think they’re the only ones

with PTSD. We’re literate

in peeling off our own skin to sleep. (El-Kurd 83)

Following the tradition of Ghassan Kanafani, El-Kurd has created a collection that not only document the history and suffering of his people but creates a liberated space for Palestinian autonomy. The last poem in the collection is “Sheikh Jarrah Is Burning”—the ominous title suggests urgency; the need to take serious action in the fight for liberation. The poem opens with Ibrahim Mohammed Saleh’s quote “*If “Israel” is venom in a snake’s fang our youth have defanged the snake*” (El-Kurd 87). This echoes El-Kurd’s statement from his article in Mondoweiss where he recalls his talk with Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the British Labour Party

I wanted him to talk to me about sanctions, sanctions, and more sanctions.

Instead, I was surprised to hear him speak about the promises of my generation, the young Palestinians who sing and write poems and make films, who, to him, seemed to be the inevitable future of Palestinian advocacy. (“What Role Does Culture Play in Palestinian Liberation?”)

This further leads to the discussion of the poet’s obligation in the political climate of the present day. The last poem resonates this idea of youth being the biggest weapon Palestine possesses. The poem goes on to engage with various uncomfortable incidents—introducing the readers to skunk water, a foul-smelling concoction created by the Israeli army to spray on to subdue Palestinian protesters without causing serious harm; talking about real people suffering real injuries and even death at the hands of Israeli forces yet failing to make their way into news; and the cops confiscating balloons and arresting “broomsticks and donkeys.” El-Kurd composes in a factual tone—writing small straightforward sentences, to draw focus away from the visuals and towards the purpose behind the poem—speaking the truth. He writes unapologetically, spitting facts, including full names of not only the victims but the villain. “A dozen Kyle Rittenhouses patrol my street. Cowards if not for/ their M-16s” (El-Kurd 88). Kyle Rittenhouse is an American man who became famous for shooting three men in Kenosha, Wisconsin, where he went during the riots that followed by the death of Jacob Blake, a black man, shot by police. At the time Rittenhouse was just seventeen. He killed two of the three men he shot and was acquitted in the trial where he pleaded self-defense (Ledewitz et al.).

The poem is a testament to Palestinian defiance and El-Kurd's uninterrupted parrhesiastic truth. He ends the poem on a hopeful note where he states that the youth of Palestine reaffirm his belief that decolonization is not merely an abstract theory—it is the final truth, the last stage of colonization, and though it has not yet become a reality in Palestine, witnessing the unbeatable resilience and unconquerable spirit of Palestinian youth, he is optimistic regarding the future of his people.

Conclusion

Dedicated to and composed around his grandmother, the poems in *Rifqa* illustrate the theme of resilience and resistance in the face of unthinkable trauma and loss that has been continuing since the 1948 Nakba. El-Kurd's poetry traces the evolution of Palestinians resistance rooted in the memory of his grandmother's displacement from Haifa in 1948 and his own displacement from Sheikh Jarrah in 2009. The Palestinian fight for liberation is a perpetual endeavor. The youth of Palestine does not need to learn it; they are born into it. El-Kurd was born on the fiftieth anniversary of Nakba, May 15th, 1998 and many of his poems are composed around this fact, from which he derives the purpose of his life: dedicating his life and efforts towards the liberation of Palestine.

“What's a pen to a rifle?” (El-Kurd, *Rifqa* 34)

Often overwhelmed by the worsening conditions in Palestine, many poets resort to questioning their contribution and role in the political context. In an article for Mondoweiss, El-Kurd relates his viewpoint to Raeda Taha, a Palestinian actor and playwright, that reciting poetry at the military barrier will not burn the barrier down; to which her reply became a revelation for the poet

“[Liberation] is a matter of accumulation. Anything that has been done and is being done now for the cause will not go in vain. It is an accumulation of so many small victories that will lead us somewhere one day. I don't agree with you that a poem will not liberate, or a song will not liberate, or a play will not liberate. All of these, plus so many other things, will move something along the years. We are building on what we have done since 1948, and even before that.” (El-Kurd, “What Role Does Culture Play in Palestinian Liberation?”)

It is the obligation of a Palestinian artist, poet, writer, or any literary agent to contribute as much as they can to the resistance and the liberation movement, so is the obligation of the physical fighters, the academics and the medics, and so on. As a literary agent, El-Kurd makes poetry his tool to contribute to the fight. He attacks the grand narrative created by the oppressors and broadcasted by mainstream media that turned Palestinians into a myth of terrorists, and existing at the opposite end of the spectrum are the Zionists and the West, people on the ‘right side’ of history. Another myth that was created around the Palestinians, often fueled unintentionally by their supporters, is the myth of these creatures that are born with the power to withstand unimaginable amount of oppression and

suffering and still stay hopeful and self-composed in front of the world. El-Kurd debates that both these myths are equally harmful for Palestinians and the urgent need today is for Palestinians to recreate their own image, rooted in resistance, to counter the mythical image created for them. To achieve this, Palestinians need to reject the politics of appeal which requires them to perform the role of a perfect victim in front of the global audiences and to voice their truth, however uncomfortable for the oppressors and their followers.

Reading *Rifqa* from the dual lens of anti-appeal and parrhesia, unveils the purpose of El-Kurd's poetic style and lexicon—he aims to pioneer a new chapter in the discourse of Palestinian resistance poetry, one which is less apologetic, more courageous and parrhesiastic. Following the philosophical lessons he learnt from his grandmother, he creates a new site for Palestinian autonomy, inspiring new voices to narrate their own truth in their own agency.

*No matter how deep it drowns,
The truth always washes ashore.*” (El-Kurd, *Rifqa* 23)

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/58**BEYOND LOSING LAND: COLONIAL DISPOSSESSION AND
INDIGENOUS IDENTITY IN LEE MARACLE'S RAVENSONG AND
LINDA HOGAN'S SOLAR STORMS****S. VIJAYA VASUKI,**

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Abstract

This research paper primarily analyses how colonial power affects people and their environment, while also showcasing the indigenous people's traditional way of living with the land as an alternative healing path. It examines how *Ravensong* and *Solar Storms*, the realistic novels, align perfectly with Fanon's idea of Decolonisation and focuses on the significance of colonial opposition and the establishment of indigenous identity. In both literary texts, the protagonist go against the colonial power to restore their cultural identity. Through the narratives of Linda Hogan and Lee Maracle, it is clearly evident that the process of colonisation leads to human alienation from nature, breakdown of the spiritual-environmental balance and intergenerational trauma. Lee Maracle's *Ravensong* portrays a young, aspiring, and good-spirited Stacey who is constantly negotiating to fit into the colonial world. Furthermore, the text emphasises a strong environmental consciousness rooted in the indigenous cultural system and their resistance to ecological and cultural destruction. Her character is well-crafted and projected as an epitome of self-healing and self-reclaiming. On the other hand, Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* offers an impactful outlook on native identity, environmental responsibility and the emotional bond between native people and their lands. Through the transformative journey of Angela, the powerful protagonist, the novel delved into the loss of connection with their ancestral land in the face of colonisation and societal challenges. Her writings also stress the silent agitation of native communities against their colonial dispossession. Both literary works not only present colonial dispossession as the mere loss of land but also reveal the impact of colonial policies on communal relationships, cultural beliefs, and strong societal structures.

Keywords: Decolonisation, Environmental Consciousness, Identity Crisis, Colonial Oppression and Resistance.

Indigenous Literature mirrors the socio-cultural issues of contemporary society. It also explores the wider universal themes such as identity, race, gender, class, politics, and the impact of technological advancement. In addition, it questions the norms and values of the standard society. Apart from other literature, this makes

the readers aware of their perceptions and judgments towards the uncomfortable truth related to human life. The literature better aids people in comprehending the complexities of the contemporary world by unravelling the new path of seeing it. The main core of this literature is to analyse people's lives, culture and their experiences towards the colonial world. By doing so, it enables the native people to nurture their empathy and understanding across differences.

There is always an acceptable link between Canadian Literature and indigenous writings, but Canadian Literature projects its own way of Canadian diversity and its complex history. Both the literature in general stresses the major ideologies like identity, the natural world, and multiculturalism, all filtered through their own lenses. As the literature emerges, the early themes broadened to include women's rights, problems of immigrant life, environmental issues, relations with Indigenous communities, and a continuing search for identity and values. This shift in writing reflects how literature manifests the real society's struggles, assimilation and adoption over time. In addition, this literature focuses on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people and their unique background, language and culture.

From an Indigenous perspective, Canadian Literature is not just a national tradition; it is also a contested space shaped by colonization, resistance, and survivance. Many Indigenous scholars and writers argue that Indigenous literatures should not be treated as merely a branch of "Canadian" writing, because that can repeat settler claims over Indigenous identity and land. The Canadian literary institutions give more concern to the marginalised indigenous voices and consider them through colonial frameworks. Therefore, both Indigenous and Native writers mostly write back against the stereotypes formed by the imperial powers and recover the language, ceremonies and community knowledge of the tribes. These writers aimed for inclusion in the national canon through their narrative and the recognition of indigenous artistic sovereignty.

Lee Maracle is one of the well-known Sto: lo writers, cultural critics, and activists. She wrote novels, poetry, autobiography, and creative non-fiction that take up many of the difficult, often controversial issues. She played a major role in shaping Canadian Literature, using her strong, unapologetic voice to confront colonialism and its ongoing effects. As an Indigenous writer, she explored the complexity of identity, the damage caused by colonial rule, and the everyday struggles of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Through her stories, Maracle challenged dominant narratives, made space for marginalised voices, and offered sharp insights into how culture, power, and resistance are intertwined. Her work has left a lasting mark on Canadian writing, urging readers to face uncomfortable truths and to see the country's many histories and identities with greater honesty and care.

In addition to that, Maracle's literary production stresses how colonisation and cultural assimilation have a significant impact on colonised families. She also examines how the intergenerational pain greatly influences personal identity

formation, and her narration always centres around the resilience of marginalised people. She mainly focuses on the cultural practices and oral tradition as a means of reviving identity and healing.

However, Linda K. Hogan is an aspiring native American poet, academician, playwright, novelist and environmentalist. She notably served as the Chickasaw Nation's writer in residence. Her writings created a great influence on Native literature and empowered native women. She proudly tried different genres, including nonfiction essays for environmental organisations, which regard the Native American true spirit towards their ecology. On the whole, her literary productions have always been the voices for the voiceless.

Frantz Fanon was a Martinique-born psychiatrist, philosopher, and revolutionary whose work is mainly regarded for postcolonial studies, critical race theory, and anti-colonial liberation struggles. He is best known for analysing the cultural impacts of colonization and his belief that dismantling colonialism requires forceful and revolutionary action. In both Linda Hogan's *Solar storms* and Lee Maracle's *Ravensong*, the transition of colonized people from passive subjects to active revolutionaries perfectly aligns with Frantz Fanon's decolonization theory. Fanon argues that true liberation is never peacefully granted by the colonizer; it must be seized through a confrontational shift in consciousness.

Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* shows how the native people lose themselves when they have been detached from their own land and culture. The story revolves around a young mixed-blood woman who connects with her homeland and ancestors, especially with her biological mother, so that she can reclaim her identity and tribal land. This concept of going back to the roots and establishing human dignity goes well with Frantz Fanon, who is one of the important intellectuals.

"There was a silence so deep it seemed that all things prepared for what would follow, then and for years to come, the year you returned to us, the years when the rest of us would be gone when the land itself would tremble in fear of drowning" (Hogan, *Solar Storms* 13)

Fanon supported not only the trauma of post independent world but also the emotional detachment of the people in general. He very much struggled for the rights of humans and their basic desire for freedom, particularly under colonial rule. He not only examined the political aspects but also the demeaning act of the colonisers. He primarily highlighted the oppression of black men and women in the colonial aspect. His research advocated for the establishment of human dignity and ethical commitment. His core theory prioritises equal moral respect for all irrespective of race, place and community, which promotes social justice.

He also argues that the decolonization is not only about preserving human dignity but also includes the deformation of the colonized psyche. He strongly suggests that liberating people aids in healing both the material and emotional dominance. Decolonisation highlights the colonial domination shaped not only by those who

are in power but also by the thinking process of the people in general. Colonialism is the system of conquest, control and domination. The settlers and the Europeans captured the native territories, extracted minerals, imposed their own laws and reordered the societal values of the people. This was justified in the name of colonization and the colonized people were regarded as powerless and incapable of self-rule. Therefore, decolonisation evolved as a movement of rejection of colonial logical ideas and their structures. It mainly advocated that the colonial people have the dignity to rule themselves and are capable of defining their future. As a result, postcolonial theorists like Fanon underscored that political independence not only put an end to imperial rule.

Fanon's theory also emphasises the emotional impact of the colonizers. In most of the scenario, colonial domination teaches the colonized to see themselves through the eyes of the colonizer. This creates internalized inferiority, self-doubt, and alienation. In both novels, the main characters struggled to be accepted by the world and remained uncertain about how to frame and shape their identities.

This paper highlights the two main concepts of Frantz Fanon, one of which is decolonisation, which occurs only when the oppressed people refuse to remain passive victims. Instead, they choose to be active servers who fight for their own revival. The other one is the mental trauma of the people caused by colonial oppression. As Fanon stated in *Solar Storms*, the protagonist Angela healed herself by resisting the colonial violence of the colonisers. She has never been a passive victim against the process of modernisation, colonialism and environmental destruction. Through defiance against the power of colonisers, she could rebuild herself from the generational pain. Angela's self-exploration and her stand for her community led her toward a reclaimed sense of belonging.

The central features of Fanon's theory include colonial violence, holding back and emotional trauma of the oppressed people. Natives in *Solar Storms* always have a way to connect with their communal group and recollect communal strength within the context of social groups, which offers a framework for reconstructing their indigenous identity.

“Sometimes Now, I see the island as it was then, how the vines indoors grew red that autumn and fell to the floor, and how I swept them away. Those hungry, reaching vines that wanted to turn everything back to its origins-walls, doors, a ladder-back chair, even a woman's life. They wanted it all and reclaim the Island for themselves” (Hogan, *Solar Storms* 73)

As, Fanon suggests, decolonisation begins with the act of violence and is maintained through the consistent control over the colonisers. His theory also explains the power politics asserted between the colonisers and the colonised. In *Solar Storms*, the construction of a hydroelectric dam in Indigenous land is considered to be one of the forms of violence because for natives, their land is everything to them. They always share a sacred bond with the land and

environment. This modernisation impacted and silenced them at one point in time. The natives decided to withstand this to protect their land and cultural identity. This aligns with Fanon's view that colonial dispossession divides people, seizes land and restricts the indigenous way of life.

"The devastation and ruin had fallen over the land fell over the people, too. Most were too broken to fight the building of the dams, the moving of waters and that perhaps had been the intention all along" (Hogan, *Solar Storms* 226)

The process of decolonisation relies on those who value actions more than just words. Fanon never supported the local elites who don't really work for real change in the system. He argues for the real revival of the ordinary people, especially women and elders of the native land. In *Solar Storms*, it isn't the powerful people who lead, instead, women like Bush, Agnes and other community members fight for their whole land, identity and dignity. Their vibrant voices on the river express Fanon's notion that real freedom is attained only when people voice out emotionally for their own land, cultural practices and survival. This also demonstrates their rootedness against any forms of oppression. They very well knew the protest against the dams and river diversions was their only hope. Those who protested were the ones who could still believe they might survive as a people.

"There is no map to show where to step, no guide to tell us how to see. But maybe, as Dora-Rouge once said, maps are only masks over the face of God and we are the lost ones; it is not that the ways are lost from us but that we are lost from them. But ways are patient and await our return." (Hogan, *Solar Storms* 346)

For Fanon, decolonisation is all about healing and reshaping the shared culture after colonisation. In *Solar Storms*, the protagonist Angela's reunion with the ancestral land and biological mother is the main aspect of her healing. This reconnection with her own native people, cultural rituals and the oral stories aided her to mould her new self that is not defined by the trauma caused by colonisers. The text not only highlights the fighting not just for the land but also for the restoration of everything they deserve as the native humans. This includes both the physical and emotional striving of the natives for spiritual healing. The whole narration is the outer revolution of the colonised people for the inner self-repair.

"It took more than a year before the building of the dams ceased and Tulik did not live long enough to see us win. He would have liked that, even though so much change had already fallen on the land. It was too late for the Child River, for the Caribou, the fish, and even for our own children, but we had to believe, true or not, that our belated victory was the end of something" (Hogan, *Solar Storms* 344)

The trajectory of the three powerful characters such as Angel, Anges and Bush in the novel stands for the emotional and cultural development moving through

their own land that holds everything for them. For these women, land is the repository of their own cultural knowledge and values. Their resistance against the environmental crisis fortified that their identity and emotional tie with the land are inseparable.

“I know now, are everything. And when Bush and I returned to Adam’s Rib, I knew we walked into another day of creation, a beginning. Perhaps my own return began long ago, in a times before I was born, when I was held inside the bodies of my ancestors. What a fine savagery we had then, in the dark stirrings of first life, long before the notion of civilization. We knew the language of earth, water, and trees. We knew the rich darkness of creation. For ten thousand years, we spoke with the animals and they spoke with us” (Hogan, *Solar Storms* 334)

The native people always have the courage and spirit to go against any power that disturbs their ecosystem. These people strongly believe in the sacredness of God’s creation and its great ability to sustain human life. Through their deep trust in nature and their spiritual relationship with the land, they challenge and decolonise colonial power structures.

“I understood this water to be the source, the origin of all the land. I saw the land in its fullness, even the trees that had been twisted by wind and dwarfed in poor soil. Everything has become strengthened by desperate and hungry needs, and by the tracts of running water. Like m, it was native land and it had survived. The Indian people would be happy with the dame, with the fact that water would do what it wanted and in its own way. What water didn’t accomplish, they would” (Hogan, *Solar Storms* 224)

In *Ravensong*, the violence starts with the white refusal to treat Indigenous people who the epidemic has diseased. In a twist of irony, the colonisers are the ones who brought and spread the flu. They went to the extent of having the medicine for themselves and letting the indigenous people die instead of safeguarding them. This clearly portrays how the indigenous people are denied their basic human rights. The settlers not only took their land and histories but also their lives, which fits Fanon’s concept of colonial rule that grabs everything from the colonised and treats their lives as worth less.

“Under the shabby arguments about hospitals being full and doctors already overworked lay an unspoken assumption: white folks were more deserving of medical care. There is a hierarchy to care. In some odd way, Stacey could not figure out how this assumption was connected to their very view of the nature of their authority”. (Maracle, *Ravensong* 58)

Stacey, the protagonist, is stuck between the tensions of both the coloniser and the colonised world. She felt the emotional weight and carried the trauma of her whole community. As the community elders, children and women die, she could witness

the rudeness of white doctors who prefer to walk away from the indigenous people rather than treating them. It made them probe into the settler world and forced them to steal the needed medical emergency kit to protect their own community. This frozen situation made her question the colonial system and encouraged her to bring about some change and revolution among their own people. This transformation from passiveness to activeness follows Fanon's insight into how the victim becomes the resistor under colonial rule.

“Half of Stacey's life was spent across the river in the warm sanctuary of white town's evenly-heated institutions with their high ceilings, the other half was spent looking at the bedraggled single old hall that squatted stubbornly in the centre of her village” (Maracle, *Ravensong* 39)

It is obvious from the text *Ravensong* that it is not the colonisers or the experts who protect the Salish people, but rather mothers, grandmothers and neighbours who cared for the diseased, and buried the dead. Through communal living and interlinking with ecology they could hold life together. Maracle proves through her writings that the real change has to come from the indigenous identity, which helps them to reconnect to culture and their land. She also confirms that the indigenous people are finally aware of the fact that only the Salish way of organising things healed them not the colonial power that already failed them.

“There was a sense of urgency in the room. A couple of women from the village helped her mom tend to Ella while the other nursed the babies. Ella couldn't hold water down, and she was incontinent. Drip the water into her mouth a drop at a time, Stacey. Ella resisted the care and attention. She grabbed Stacy's hand. Stacey leaned forward to hear her whisper” (Maracle, *Ravensong* 39)

The colonization brought diseases that exploited the Indigenous community and their ability to withstand colonial invasion. These kinds of strange diseases spread rapidly and caused the death of elders, children and large sections of the population. This community loss also meant the destruction of cultural knowledge. Since elders are the carriers of memory, traditional values and communal wisdom. By resisting this, they could recover their values and practices.

“Maybe the epidemics destroyed their ability to maintain the levels of effort it took to survive in the way they always had. One less person meant that much less effort could be spent tending tress who gave up sweetener only with great effort. There were no longer enough villagers who could spare the time to tend sickening trees.” (Maracle, *Ravensong* 12)

The colonisers' cruelty peaked when they were not even ready to bother the diseased Indigenous people, and they watched them die. It also mirrors the inhumanity in them. This novel clearly showcases the deep division created by colonialism among people. The colonial system has created nothing but the separation between the worlds, and the indigenous people were treated as less valuable. This is what Fanon is totally against and stresses the indigenous spirit

which survives through cooperation, healing traditions and collective responsibility.

“They had watched the villagers die. One day they would all pay for watching people die. Stacey knew it unforgivable. She saw the fire in her mind, remembering that even the old snake had rolled out of his hut to organize their resistance to it. They aren’t human, she told Stacey a while back” (Maracle, *Ravensong* 176)

In *Ravensong*, women’s strength is projected through emotional strength, protection and survival against colonial trauma. Lee Maracle presents these women not as passive victim and but as active survivors and resisters. They always stood on the frontline to safeguard their community and ecosystem. The abuse inflicted upon women and the environment is portrayed more evidently in the novel. Despite this oppression, the Indigenous people possess the strength and spirit to decolonise the entire colonial system.

“Kate looked in the direction of the woman with the gun. Now with her mouth broken, her jaw out of place, and her chin looking deranged, it was hard to tell her national origins at all. Her face had had a beautiful chiseled look before the snake had rearranged it. Now with her nose broken, her jaw out of place and her chin looking deranged, it was hard to tell her national origins at all” (Maracle, *Ravensong* 143)

At the end, Stacey’s path is shaped through communal teachings, storytelling traditions, her sister Celia’s gifted visionary insight and Raven’s guidance. She is further encouraged by her sense of belonging to the land and the community’s collective memories. Her perseverance helped fight back the judgments of the settlers. Both their literary production substantiates that living through their own way, remembering their rituals and stories, all belong to the process of decolonisation. This represents the same notion that Fanon claims that the real empowerment demands both the outer colonial resistance and inner healing of the oppressed self.

In conclusion, this research paper reveals that decolonisation is not just a single reforming historical event. It is an ongoing process of colonisation and resistance. This also emphasises how colonial power structure influences land, culture and identity in the postcolonial contexts. Indigenous and Native Literature always aims for meaningful decolonisation, which reinforces the cultural and impactful reformation. In *Solar Storms*, the colonial violence is depicted through the unbreakable relationship between land and identity and how it is disturbed by their rule. The exploitation of the land, rivers and territories is not just ecological harm, but a cultural and spiritual damage. Then, the same concepts were discussed by so many native American and Canadian writers. Leslie Marmon Silko is one of the most prominent writers who also explores the idea of decolonisation through reviving. Even in her novel *Ceremony*, she follows the life of Tayo, a mixed-race man traumatised because of colonial exploitation.

The Indigenous writers in general depict the colonial force and how it deeply wounded the culture valuing people. Though colonialism tries to disturb the indigenous people and force them to assimilate into the Western way of life, they stood against the settlers through decolonising their ideas. The sense of isolation is neglected by the power of communal living and standing together through resistance and resilience. This shows that decolonization mainly focuses on the rejection of colonial systems and values by embracing the native ways of living with nature and land. The title “Beyond Losing Land” becomes prominent because the destruction caused by colonialism reaches deeply into every aspect of Indigenous existence.

Land is one of the important aspects for both Indigenous and native people, which is deeply connected to ancestral heritage, traditions, language, and survival. “Between us there had once been a bond, something like an ancient pact land had made with water, or the agreement humans once made with animals. But like those other bonds, this bond too, lay broken” (Hogan, *Solar Storms* 22). The process of Colonialism attempted to exploit and manipulate this sacred relationship by violating natural resources and imposing their own laws, norms and power on them. However, Indigenous communities continue to resist these forces through just God things. Their struggle goes beyond saving territory; it is also a fight to revive dignity, ecological balance, and Indigenous ways of knowing. Thus, ‘Beyond Losing Land’ ultimately reveals that decolonisation is not only about recovering stolen spaces but also about reclaiming identity, history, and the sacred bond between humans and nature.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/59**THE UNADDRESSED BODY: KAFALA, ADDRESS, AND
REMEMBERED HOME IN BENYAMIN'S GOAT DAYS****Vinay Kumar**Research Scholar, Department of English
University of Delhi, India**Abstract**

Benyamin's *Goat Days* (Malayalam: *Aadujeevitham*, 2008; English trans. Joseph Koyippally, 2012) is among the few works of South Asian fiction to engage directly with working-class Keralite labour migration to the Gulf. The kafala system binds workers to a single sponsor, forecloses legal recourse and civic recognition, and severs them from the social life of address. Existing scholarship has focused on the novel's testimonial mode; its formal strategies of resistance have received far less attention. The central question here is how Benyamin mobilises second-person address as a formal insistence on Najeeb's subjecthood against the kafala's erasure. The concept developed to answer it is the *unaddressed body*: a structural condition of enforced addresslessness in which the labourer is denied standing as a subject to whom speech, recognition, or mourning may be directed. The concept draws on Judith Butler's theorisation of precarity, Bakhtin's concept of addressivity, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's account of subaltern inaudibility, though these frameworks pull in different directions: Butler and Bakhtin together explain what has been foreclosed, while Spivak sets the limits on what speaking can restore. Three formal sites carry this argument: Najeeb's sustained address to the implied Keralite reader; his calls to Hakeem through the padlocked gate; and his naming of the goats after figures from his Keralite past. All three acts are oriented toward a remembered Kerala, constituting what Avtar Brah calls homing desire as the spatial logic of address itself.

Keywords: Goat Days, kafala, precarity, addressivity, South Asian diaspora, unaddressed body, narrative address

Benyamin's *Goat Days* (*Aadujeevitham*, 2008; English trans. Joseph Koyippally, Penguin 2012) sits apart from most South Asian migration fiction. Where the dominant strand of diasporic writing has been preoccupied with cosmopolitan movement or the second-generation negotiation of hyphenated identity, *Goat Days* narrates the working conditions of a Keralite labourer confined to a desert goat farm under Saudi Arabia's kafala system: a sponsorship arrangement that binds workers to a single employer, forecloses legal exit, and removes the labourer from virtually all forms of civic and social recognition. Najeeb, the novel's narrator and protagonist, is not a diasporic subject navigating between cultures.

He is a man whose standing as a person capable of receiving speech, recognition, and address has been systematically removed.

The bulk of scholarship on the novel has centred on its testimonial mode and the politics of the Gulf lure in Keralite social imagination (Vinai and Prasuna 121), while Karinkurayil's work on Gulf-Kerala literary publics has mapped the broader conditions of representation under which such narratives circulate (17). These readings illuminate what the novel says about Gulf migration; what they leave open is how the novel says it, and what formal resources it brings to the political conditions it narrates. The focus here falls on Benyamin's use of second-person address as a formal insistence on Najeeb's subjecthood against the kafala's erasure, including what such an insistence can and cannot claim. The argument proceeds through close reading of narrative address, drawing on postcolonial and political theory to establish the stakes of those formal choices. Koyippally's English translation is the working text throughout. Address registers in Malayalam are more socially differentiated than in English, and the translation may flatten certain deictic markers of social proximity specific to the source text; where this bears on the argument, the essay notes it.

The concept of the *unaddressed body* was developed to describe a structural position in which the labourer is denied the status of a subject to whom one can speak, recognize, or mourn. Butler's analysis of precarity in *Frames of War* provides the political diagnosis: certain lives lack the normative frames that would make them recognisable. Bakhtin's concept of addressivity, as elaborated in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, identifies the formal mechanism: since utterance is constitutively oriented toward an addressee, to be denied that orientation is to lose the conditions through which speech can constitute a recognisable subject at all. A necessary restraint on both comes from Spivak's argument in "Can the Subaltern Speak?": audibility requires institutional structures, and speaking does not by itself restore what their absence has removed. The *unaddressed body* is the position where these three pressures converge.

In "Of Systemic Violence, Addressivity, and 'the Oil Encounter,'" Delphine Munos uses Bakhtin's notion of addressivity to trace the shifting referentiality of the second person in *Goat Days*, from the arbab to the goats to Allah (188–89). Her reading does not, however, ask why address itself becomes a site of contest: not simply that Najeeb speaks to multiple interlocutors but that kafala has produced a condition wherein any act of address by the labouring body is performed against a system dedicated to denying his standing as someone capable of being addressed in the first place. That question is where this essay begins.

The Kafala's Erasure of Address

The kafala system as it applies to low-wage migrant labour across the Gulf Cooperation Council states is often described as a sponsorship arrangement linking the worker's legal residency to a single employer. The description understates what the system produces. Researchers who specialise in Gulf labour

migration have shown how the kafala ties the legal status and mobility of each worker to a single citizen or corporate sponsor, so that the worker cannot change jobs or leave without the sponsor's consent, cannot access labour courts without the sponsor's cooperation, and can be deported at the sponsor's discretion (Gardner 30; Karinkurayil 19). The system gives the worker no civic existence apart from the arbab's gaze. It isolates and detaches the worker from social and legal structures that ordinarily recognise personhood.

Butler's *Frames of War* is where the theoretical picture starts to take shape. Certain populations, Butler argues, are constituted as ungrievable: their lives do not register within the normative frames that confer recognisability, and their deaths consequently do not count as losses (24–25). Precarity here is not economic vulnerability alone but a political condition in which the conditions of recognition are systematically withheld. The kafala migrant labourer fits this description. The system binds him to a sponsor while severing him from everything else through which social standing ordinarily works: civic institutions, legal recourse, and the communal life of compatriots. In Najeeb's case, he is severed even from Hakeem, the one person who shared his journey.

From the first pages, *Goat Days* places the reader within this condition. Najeeb and Hameed stay near a police station so a guard might notice them. Najeeb observes, "it was as if we were invisible to them" (Benyamin 3). The invisibility here carries no metaphorical excess. The two officers have no institutional incentive to take note of these men; they have no papers, no status in law, and make no claim on anyone's attention by their presence. The kafala produces the conditions upon which the novel begins.

When Najeeb arrives at the masara, the isolation becomes structural rather than circumstantial. The arbab issues commands that Najeeb cannot understand, and resorts to physical violence when Najeeb disobeys. Words produce nothing: "Although I knew that the arbab didn't understand a thing, I felt that it was my duty to say what I had to say" (Benyamin 66). He does not speak because he expects to be understood. He speaks because if he stops, he becomes a person whose words have no destination, and he must insist on creating a destination even knowing there is none. The masara truck drivers refuse to acknowledge him. The arbab who finally stops for Najeeb in the desert does so without a word. The novel is built around a narrator who keeps speaking into conditions that have been arranged to ensure that speaking changes nothing.

The Unaddressed Body: A Theoretical Account

The *unaddressed body* does not derive from any single one of these frameworks; it requires all three, and they pull against each other in productive ways. Butler's political analysis establishes that some lives are formed outside the frameworks of recognition, and the kafala is a system designed to engineer that condition on a mass scale. Bakhtin supplies the formal corollary: an utterance exists only in its orientation to an addressee, so removing that orientation does more than leave one

unheard; it removes the conditions through which speech constitutes a subject at all. Spivak qualifies both: speaking does not restore political standing if no structures of audibility are in place. Without her, the Bakhtin insight risks becoming a more optimistic argument than the novel warrants.

Bakhtin's framework is most directly applicable here. In *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, he writes that "addressivity, the quality of turning to someone is a constitutive feature of the utterance; without it the utterance does not and cannot exist" (99). The claim concerns grammar rather than sociology: it does not question whether speech reaches its destination but what an utterance is in the first place. Utterances are always directed towards someone. It does not matter whether the address is actual, implied, or imaginary. In Bakhtin's account, utterances are directed toward two kinds of addressees: the immediate addressed, and the "superaddressee," something like a higher or idealised addressee (126). What the kafala forecloses is not Najeeb's capacity to issue utterances but the infrastructure of addressees that would give those utterances a destination. Address is not optional. A person from whom addressees have been removed does not cease to speak; they find or construct them.

Bodies That Matter presents the political underside of this grammatical claim. Butler writes, "I can only say 'I' to the extent that I have first been addressed, and that address has mobilized my place in speech; paradoxically, the discursive condition of social recognition precedes and conditions the formation of the subject" (226). The subject, or 'I,' always exists through an anterior address. To be deprived of addressees is to be deprived of the social ground of subjectivity itself. Najeeb's sustained speech is thus an act of insistence rather than communication in any ordinary sense, because on Butler's account he is performing the preconditions for the "I" rather than taking them for granted.

Spivak's argument in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" adds a limitation that the Bakhtin-Butler combination cannot supply alone. Together Butler and Bakhtin account for what has been politically foreclosed and what formal mechanism is at stake. What they do not account for is the institutional dimension: the representational structures through which words must pass before they can count as words that matter. The subaltern's failure is not that she cannot speak, but that she cannot be heard. The institutional structures available are incapable of registering what she says (Spivak 64). In the absence of his sponsor's cooperation, Najeeb has no standing before any labour court, and his words carry no force before any administrative or civic body. The kafala ensures that his words reach no institutional ear. This is inaudibility created by legal architecture, not incidental isolation. Najeeb is not the gendered colonial subaltern Spivak theorised, and the fit is partial. But the structural mechanism she identifies, the gap between speaking and being heard, describes the legal design of the kafala with sufficient accuracy to carry weight in this analysis.

The Fence and the Voice: Address at the Limits of Infrastructure

Goat Days is directed, throughout, to a second-person “you” who is presumed to be Keralite: to share Najeeb’s language, recognise the cultural geography of his home region, and understand without explanation what going to the Gulf, and not returning, means for a family in Kerala. This presumption of a shared world is not incidental; it is the grammatical condition that makes utterance possible. Najeeb narrates because there is a “you” capable of receiving his account, and in narrating, he reinstates himself as the kind of subject whose words have somewhere to go. Against a system that removes the labourer from every structure through which his speech could count, addressing the implied Keralite reader is, from the novel’s first sentence, an insistence on standing.

The sharpest moment of this comes when Najeeb reflects directly on the act of telling: “I was apprehensive about sharing this with you. Then I decided I must, merely to explain how apparently trifling issues agitate and distress us. If such private dilemmas are not laid out in the open what is the use of telling a story?” (Benyamin 76–77). The final question is not rhetorical. It presupposes a social function of narrative, that stories have a use, and therefore presupposes a community for whom such stories can be useful. This is, in miniature, a claim about Najeeb’s own standing: he addresses a “you” whose recognition makes the telling meaningful. The kafala has removed that standing, and the act of narration persists in reasserting it.

Chapter twenty provides the most concentrated instance. Najeeb takes advantage of two days of rain, which has driven his *arbab* away, and walks in the dark towards the neighbouring *masara* where Hakeem has been kept since the night of their arrival. The kafala’s spatial logic materialises in a striking arrangement: two men who travelled together, who speak the same tongue and come from the same home region, have been placed on adjacent properties, both equipped with iron gates padlocked from outside. For months, Najeeb has only seen Hakeem from a distance. His *arbab* has forbidden contact, claiming risk of disease passing between the *masaras*. The system’s power to isolate operates as architecture: real gates with real padlocks.

Against this architecture, Najeeb speaks. “Hakeem, Hakeem, can you hear me? This is me, Najeeb ... the Najeeb who had come to the Gulf with you ... Are you there?” (Benyamin 136).

Though Najeeb calls Hakeem by name, he names himself as well. The move from “Hakeem, Hakeem” to “This is me, Najeeb” is an act of double address, where calling the other into the position of listener requires calling oneself into the position of speaker. In a setting where neither man has a name, legal persona, or place in relation to the social world that surrounds them, “this is me, Najeeb” is a claim to existence, not to place.

The phrase “the Najeeb who came to the Gulf with you” does not serve as a clarification; it attempts to invoke shared history as the ground of address. By

repeating a relational past, the two men are constituted as each other's addressees. The kafala has tried, via months of spatial separation, to erase that relation. The grammar of address refuses erasure, demanding acknowledgment of the relational context. The suggestion is that Najeeb cannot be addressed as Najeeb at all without it. "Are you there?" has a level-headed meaning and a philosophical one at the same time. In a system that has made these two bodies invisible, the question "are you there?" refers to status and not to position alone.

When Hakeem comes into view, what Najeeb observes complicates the address further. The person approaching him is "dark, skinny, dishevelled, ugly. Another scary figure. This was not my Hakeem. He did not look like Hakeem" (Benyamin 136). The possessive carries weight. "My Hakeem" is a social claim: Najeeb is insisting on a Hakeem who is relationally recognisable, who belongs to a shared world. The kafala has done more than separate them physically; it has broken apart the recognisable person who could have received Najeeb's address. What the system has accomplished is written on the body standing in front of him.

Najeeb has to reconstitute Hakeem as an addressee against the physical evidence that the system has worked: "Hakeem, is that you? Come closer, it is me, Najeeb." The second naming of himself is significant: the first naming did not accomplish the mutual recognition it sought. Najeeb re-identifies himself. The repetition is not failure but insistence; two names pronounced in the dark, across an iron gate, is the whole social world that is left to either man.

The Goats and the Naming: A Second Formal Site

Calling out to Hakeem and naming the goats are formally different operations. The first is direct address: it solicits recognition from an absent but human other. Naming works differently. Names are not speech acts in the same sense; they are semiotic acts that install an organising principle over a field of objects. When Najeeb names a goat Aravu Ravuthar, he does not address the goat as Aravu Ravuthar; he constitutes the goat as belonging to the social world that name indexes. The effect is spatial rather than communicative: naming populates the masara with Kerala.

The scope of this becomes clear in chapter twenty-five, where Najeeb catalogues the named goats: "People from my locality like Aravu Ravuthar, Marymaimuna, Indipokkar, Njandu Raghavan, Parippu Vijayan, Chakki, Ammini, Kausu, Raufat, Pinki, Ammu, Razia and Thahira, and public figures like Jagathy, Mohanlal and even EMS himself were a part of my masara" (Benyamin 161). EMS is the abbreviation for E. M. S. Namboodiripad, Kerala's first Chief Minister and its most iconic Communist figure. That EMS has been given to a goat on a Saudi farm has something of dark comedy about it, but the naming is not satirical. Satire requires distance; what Najeeb performs here is identification. He is not diminishing EMS by placing him in the masara. He is incorporating into the masara the political world EMS represents, the full frame of reference his name carries: a committed Communist tradition, an emancipatory public imaginary, the

collective memory of a state built partly on redistributive land reform. Naming EMS is not a private act of memory; it is an inscription of Kerala's collective political life into a space designed to contain only the body of the labourer and his labour. The masara becomes, through naming, a compressed version of a world the kafala was supposed to have erased. Brah's concept of homing desire gives this orientation its proper name: the remembered world supplies the names because the present one has nothing to offer (16).

By mid-novel, naming has established the conditions for address. Najeeb speaks to the named goats "as if I were talking to dear ones when I walked them, milked them, filled their containers and gave them fodder" (Benyamin 167–68). The phrase "as if" is worth pausing over. It is not a language of illusion but of conscious performance. A confused Najeeb would talk to the goats without registering any gap between them and human beings. The Najeeb who says "as if" knows what the gap is, yet speaks across it anyway, keeping alive the formal machinery of address when the kafala has taken away everything else it might run on.

Bakhtin's account of the superaddressee clarifies the formal logic at work here. If utterance requires an addressee, does naming a goat constitute address in any meaningful sense? Bakhtin argues that beyond the immediate listener, every utterance presupposes "a higher superaddressee (third), whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed, either in some metaphysical distance or in distant historical time"; this idealised third party can assume the form of "the people, the court of history" (126). When Najeeb names a goat EMS Namboodiripad, he is not addressing the goat as EMS; he is installing, in the only available form, the collective whose recognition would confirm his words. Bakhtin himself contrasts this structure against what its absence would mean: Thomas Mann's understanding of the torture chamber as "absolute lack of being heard, as the absolute absence of a third party" (126). The kafala masara is this kind of space: a space designed to eliminate every third party through whose recognition a speaking subject might be confirmed. Naming is Najeeb's way of constituting that third party within it.

Nowhere is this more personal than in the naming of a newborn goat Nabeel, after the son Najeeb has not yet seen. "At that instant, my mind shook free of all its shackles ... My Sainu is pregnant ... In that belief, I named that newborn goat Nabeel. The name I had thought of for my son" (Benyamin 107). The act entails a transfer. Najeeb transfers the social bond he cannot build with his unborn, unreachable child onto what is available. Butler argues in *Bodies That Matter* that the "I" is formed through prior address; Najeeb cannot fully form the paternal "I," cannot say "I am a father," because the child is not present to call him into that relationship. By naming the goat Nabeel and referring to it as "my son," he performs the relational precondition for a paternal identity that the kafala's separation has otherwise made impossible.

When the arbab takes Nabeel to castrate him, Najeeb addresses the goat directly: “My Nabeel? You, who I hoped would grow up in joy! My son?” (Benyamin 114). Addressing the goat as “my son” follows from the naming; Nabeel has been made legible within the social bond that fatherhood requires, and so can be addressed within it. The grammar of address remains open at the point where its referents have been taken away.

The farewell to the named goats at the moment of escape makes this tangible. Najeeb says goodbye to each by name, addresses them as brothers, and says: “I don’t have any human being to say goodbye to. All I have is you” (Benyamin 187). The named goats are not human, but they are, at this moment, the only community the relational structure of naming has managed to constitute. They can receive a farewell because they have been installed within the social world of Kerala names; that installation is what makes them addressable. Homing desire is what made the installation possible. The community Najeeb bids goodbye to is one he constructed himself, by name, because nothing else remained. That is as sharp a reckoning as the novel offers of what the kafala took from him.

Homing Desire and the Orientation of Address

Every addressee Najeeb manages to constitute is oriented toward Kerala. The implied reader is Keralite; Hakeem is a Keralite companion; the goats bear the names of Najeeb’s neighbours and Kerala’s public figures. Each is oriented toward the world from which the kafala has severed him, rather than the one he currently inhabits. This is structural, not incidental: Najeeb’s utterances have addressees because Kerala supplies them. The masara offers nothing of the kind.

This orientation precedes any individual utterance. Najeeb does not choose Kerala as his reference point from among alternatives; the kafala’s isolation has removed every other social world from which his address could draw its assumptions. Bakhtin observes that utterances are always shaped by the speaker’s sense of the addressee’s apperceptive background, the extent of their shared knowledge, shared situation, shared history (99). Najeeb’s narration presupposes, on every page, a reader who understands the cost of going to the Gulf without returning, the social meaning of the names he invokes, and the world from which the kafala has severed him. The homing is not thematic but grammatical: it is already inscribed in who Najeeb assumes is listening, before any explicit invocation of Kerala appears.

Avtar Brah’s concept of homing desire gives this structure a name. Brah distinguishes homing desire from a desire for homeland, arguing that diaspora “offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins while taking account of a homing desire, as distinct from a desire for a ‘homeland’” (16). In Brah’s account, homing desire is not the longing to return; it is an affective orientation, a structuring of the self toward a remembered world that does not require the possibility of return or the survival of the home imagined. For Najeeb, the Kerala his address and naming reconstruct in the masara is not a geography he expects to recover; it is the

relational world his utterances require in order to function as utterances at all. Addressivity and the orientation toward home turn out, on Brah's account, to be a single grammatical movement.

The fence scene makes this visible in a different register. When Najeeb calls to Hakeem across the padlocked gate, his identifying phrase ("the Najeeb who had come to the Gulf with you") reaches backward, toward Kerala, toward the shared history that constitutes both men as each other's addressees. The masara does not contain the relational world he invokes; it must be brought in through the act of address. Najeeb must summon the world from which both men come in order to restore conditions for mutual recognition. Homing desire functions here not as emotion alone but as a structural requirement of address itself: the only relational world available to Najeeb and Hakeem is the one they share in memory.

Conclusion

The framework of the *unaddressed body* brings into focus a claim that *Goat Days* makes beyond the specific conditions of the kafala and the experience of one Keralite labourer. The novel's formal resources, taken together (the address to the implied reader, the calls to Hakeem across the padlocked fence, the naming of the masara's inhabitants after figures from the world the kafala has severed Najeeb from), constitute an argument about what narrative can do at the limits of political recognition: that literary form can register the labouring body's standing as a subject of address at the point where legal standing has been foreclosed.

The grammar of address is the formal condition of political analysis, not its supplement. What the kafala administered at the level of legal status, *Goat Days* contests at the level of utterance. The novel does not reverse what the system accomplished; it demonstrates that the labouring body's claim on speech survived the system. Mohamed Shafeeq Karinkurayil's work on Gulf-Kerala literary publics has mapped the complex conditions under which Keralite Gulf migration has been represented, shaped by the tension between the need to document precarious experience and the social economies governing what can be publicly said about Gulf labour (Karinkurayil 17). *Goat Days* contributes to this archive not as documentary testimony but as formal demonstration. What close reading of narrative address shows, which social documentation of Gulf migration cannot show on its own, is that the grammar of the self's existence was never simply absent from these conditions. Across fences, through the dark, by name, speech continued to reach for its addressees.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/60**EMOTIONAL DIASPORA AND GENDERED DISPLACEMENT IN
GENTLY FALLS THE BAKULA****JESSIE DEVA PRIYA**

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Abstract

This paper examines the notions of emotional diaspora and gendered displacement in *Gently Falls the Bakula* by Sudha Murty. Moving beyond the conventional understanding of diaspora as geographical migration, the study focuses on the internal experiences of dislocation that occur within familiar social and domestic spaces. The character of Shrimati embodies a form of psychological estrangement, where the loss of identity unfolds gradually despite the absence of physical movement. The study adopts a feminist perspective to argue that such displacement is not incidental but shaped by gendered expectations that privilege male achievement while marginalizing female identity. In this context, the idea of “home” is redefined as a site of silent alienation. The paper concludes that the novel extends the scope of diaspora studies by presenting displacement as an internal and gendered experience rooted in everyday social structures.

Keywords: Emotional Diaspora, Gendered Displacement, Identity Loss, Patriarchy, Domestic Alienation, Sudha Murty

Introduction

Diaspora has traditionally been associated with migration, exile, displacement, and the emotional consequences of separation from one’s homeland. Classical diaspora studies primarily focused on communities that experienced geographical movement due to war, colonization, economic necessity, or political instability. However, modern literary criticism has expanded the meaning of diaspora beyond physical migration to include emotional, psychological, and cultural forms of displacement. Contemporary feminist writers particularly explore how women experience alienation not necessarily through travel across borders but within the familiar spaces of home, marriage, and family. Emotional estrangement, identity loss, and psychological isolation have therefore become significant themes in modern Indian English literature.

Sudha Murty occupies an important place in contemporary Indian writing for her realistic portrayal of middle-class life, women's struggles, and social expectations. Her novels are deeply rooted in Indian culture and focus on ordinary individuals negotiating emotional and social challenges. Unlike writers who rely on dramatic conflicts, Sudha Murty often portrays silent suffering and subtle emotional transformations. Her works examine how social structures shape personal relationships and individual identity. Through simple narration and emotionally powerful characterization, she presents the inner worlds of women whose sacrifices frequently go unnoticed within patriarchal society.

Among her novels, *Gently Falls the Bakula* stands out as a significant exploration of emotional isolation and gendered inequality within marriage. The novel narrates the life of Shrimati, an intelligent and academically brilliant woman who sacrifices her personal aspirations for the professional success of her husband, Shrikanth. Initially united by love and companionship, their marriage gradually transforms into a relationship marked by emotional distance and neglect. As Shrikanth becomes increasingly consumed by ambition and corporate success, Shrimati's individuality slowly disappears. Though she remains physically present within the domestic space, emotionally she becomes alienated and disconnected. This paper examines the notions of emotional diaspora and gendered displacement in *Gently Falls the Bakula*. It explores how Shrimati's identity gradually erodes under patriarchal expectations and how emotional neglect creates a condition of internal displacement. Using feminist literary criticism and diaspora theory, the study argues that Sudha Murty expands the concept of diaspora by presenting emotional alienation as an equally significant form of displacement. The paper further investigates themes such as silence, sacrifice, identity suppression, emotional loneliness, and marital imbalance to demonstrate how the novel critiques gender inequality within domestic relationships.

Traditionally, diaspora refers to the scattering of people away from their homeland, leading to experiences of nostalgia, alienation, and cultural dislocation. Scholars of diaspora literature often focus on migration narratives in which characters struggle to adapt to new geographical and cultural environments. However, recent literary studies have broadened this understanding by emphasizing emotional and psychological displacement. Diaspora is no longer confined to physical movement; it can also describe an inner condition of estrangement and emotional exile.

In feminist literary discourse, emotional diaspora refers to the experience of feeling disconnected from oneself, one's desires, or one's social environment despite physical stability. Women in patriarchal societies frequently experience such emotional displacement because their identities are shaped and controlled by social expectations. Marriage, family responsibilities, and gender roles often force women to abandon personal ambitions, resulting in psychological alienation. Emotional diaspora therefore becomes an invisible but powerful form of suffering.

In *Gently Falls the Bakula*, Shrimati's life perfectly illustrates this idea. She does not migrate to another country or physically separate from her culture. Yet, she gradually becomes emotionally displaced within her marriage and domestic life. Her emotional needs, intellectual aspirations, and personal identity are continuously ignored as her husband's professional success becomes the central focus of their relationship. Although she shares the same physical space with Shrikanth, emotionally she inhabits a world of loneliness and silence.

Shrimati's emotional displacement begins subtly after marriage. Initially, she believes that love and companionship will continue despite changing responsibilities. However, as Shrikanth becomes increasingly ambitious and career-oriented, their emotional bond weakens. His corporate lifestyle consumes his attention, leaving little room for emotional intimacy. Shrimati slowly realizes that her individuality is no longer valued. Her role becomes limited to supporting her husband's success rather than pursuing her own dreams.

The novel thus transforms the domestic space into a metaphorical site of exile. Shrimati experiences isolation not because she lacks material comfort but because she lacks emotional recognition and intellectual fulfillment. This emotional loneliness creates a condition similar to diaspora, where the individual feels detached from belonging and identity. Sudha Murty effectively demonstrates that emotional displacement can occur even within familiar environments and socially accepted relationships.

The concept of emotional diaspora in the novel also reflects the condition of many women in patriarchal societies. Their sacrifices are normalized, their silence is expected, and their emotional suffering often remains invisible. By portraying Shrimati's inner loneliness, Sudha Murty critiques a social system that prioritizes male ambition while marginalizing female individuality.

Patriarchy plays a central role in shaping the emotional displacement experienced by women in literature and society. Patriarchal culture traditionally defines women through domestic responsibilities and emotional sacrifice. Women are expected to prioritize marriage, family, and the success of male members over personal ambition. Such expectations create gendered displacement, where women gradually lose connection with their identity and aspirations.

In *Gently Falls the Bakula*, Shrimati represents the educated Indian woman whose intellectual potential is overshadowed by patriarchal marital expectations. Before marriage, she is academically talented, emotionally confident, and deeply interested in history and culture. She possesses intellectual curiosity and dreams of higher academic achievement. However, after marrying Shrikanth, her ambitions slowly disappear beneath the demands of domestic life and emotional support.

Shrikanth's character reflects the patriarchal mindset that unconsciously assumes female sacrifice as natural. Although he loves Shrimati, he gradually begins to see her primarily as a supportive wife rather than an independent individual. His

corporate success becomes the central objective of their married life, while Shrimati's dreams receive little attention. This imbalance illustrates how patriarchy often functions subtly through emotional neglect rather than direct oppression.

The displacement experienced by Shrimati is gendered because it arises specifically from socially constructed expectations of womanhood. She is expected to adjust, compromise, and remain emotionally available regardless of her own needs. Her silence is interpreted as maturity and devotion, while Shrikanth's ambition is celebrated as success. The unequal distribution of emotional labor within the marriage reveals the deeply gendered nature of domestic relationships.

The novel also critiques the cultural belief that material comfort guarantees happiness. Shrikanth assumes that providing financial security fulfills his marital responsibilities. However, Shrimati's emotional and intellectual needs remain unaddressed. Her displacement therefore emerges not from poverty or abuse but from emotional invisibility. The absence of emotional companionship transforms marriage into a site of isolation rather than belonging.

At the beginning of the novel, Shrimati is portrayed as an intelligent and passionate young woman. Her love for history, culture, and learning reveals her strong intellectual personality. She possesses independent thoughts and emotional sensitivity. Her marriage to Shrikanth initially appears to offer companionship and mutual respect. However, as Shrikanth becomes increasingly focused on his career, Shrimati's identity slowly begins to dissolve.

One of the most significant aspects of Shrimati's identity loss is the abandonment of her academic ambitions. She once dreamed of pursuing higher studies and intellectual exploration, but marriage redirects her life entirely toward supporting Shrikanth's professional journey. Her aspirations are not openly forbidden; rather, they are quietly neglected until they disappear. This subtle suppression reflects the emotional realities of many women whose dreams are sacrificed without explicit coercion.

The symbolism of the bakula flower in the novel further emphasizes Shrimati's condition. The bakula flower represents tenderness, emotional depth, and silent beauty. Like the flower that falls gently and unnoticed, Shrimati's identity fades quietly within marriage. Her suffering remains invisible because it lacks dramatic expression. Sudha Murty uses this symbolism to highlight the silent erasure of women's individuality in patriarchal domestic structures.

Shrimati's eventual realization of her emotional emptiness marks an important turning point in the novel. She recognizes that she has spent years living according to someone else's ambitions while neglecting her own existence. This realization reflects a psychological awakening in which she begins to understand the extent of her displacement. Her decision to reclaim independence represents resistance against emotional invisibility and patriarchal expectations.

Silence plays a crucial role in shaping women's experiences within patriarchal societies. Women are often culturally conditioned to tolerate emotional dissatisfaction quietly in the name of adjustment, sacrifice, and family harmony. In literature, silence frequently becomes a symbol of suppressed identity and emotional suffering. In *Gently Falls the Bakula*, silence functions as both a survival mechanism and a sign of emotional alienation.

Shrimati rarely expresses anger or openly confronts Shrikanth regarding her loneliness. Instead, she internalizes disappointment and continues performing her duties as a wife. Her silence reflects the expectations imposed on women to remain patient, understanding, and emotionally supportive regardless of personal suffering. Society often interprets female silence as virtue, but Sudha Murty reveals its psychological consequences.

Through themes of silence and sacrifice, the novel critiques gender roles that demand emotional labor exclusively from women. Sudha Murty suggests that relationships cannot survive solely through duty and adjustment. Emotional recognition, companionship, and mutual respect are essential for preserving individual identity and emotional well-being.

Shrimati's life reflects the condition of many educated women whose aspirations are overshadowed by domestic responsibilities. Although she possesses intelligence and intellectual ambition, her identity gradually becomes confined within the role of a supportive wife. This transformation reflects patriarchal structures that prioritize male achievement while expecting women to provide emotional and domestic stability.

Unlike traditional feminist narratives that emphasize direct rebellion, *Gently Falls the Bakula* portrays resistance through self-realization and emotional awakening. Shrimati eventually recognizes that her identity cannot survive through endless sacrifice and silence. Her decision to reclaim independence reflects feminist assertion of individuality and self-worth.

The novel also critiques the romantic idealization of marriage. Love alone cannot sustain relationships when emotional understanding and equality are absent. Through Shrimati's experiences, Sudha Murty demonstrates that women require intellectual fulfilment and emotional recognition alongside domestic stability. Marriage should therefore function as a partnership rather than a hierarchy based on gender roles.

Thus, the feminist perspective in *Gently Falls the Bakula* lies not only in exposing gender inequality but also in redefining women's emotional and intellectual needs as legitimate and important. Sudha Murty presents emotional companionship, identity preservation, and mutual respect as essential components of meaningful relationships.

Gently Falls the Bakula presents a profound exploration of emotional diaspora and gendered displacement within the context of marriage and domestic life. Through the character of Shrimati, Sudha Murty expands the traditional understanding of

diaspora beyond geographical migration and portrays emotional alienation as a deeply significant form of displacement. Shrimati's experiences reveal how women can become psychologically estranged within familiar spaces when their individuality, emotional needs, and ambitions are continuously ignored.

The study also highlights how silence functions as a mechanism of oppression within patriarchal relationships. Shrimati's inability to express dissatisfaction openly reflects the social conditioning imposed upon women to prioritize harmony over self-expression. Her emotional suffering remains invisible because it occurs within socially accepted structures of marriage and domesticity. Through this portrayal, the novel critiques the normalization of female sacrifice and emotional suppression.

Ultimately, *Gently Falls the Bakula* remains an important contribution to contemporary Indian English literature because it redefines diaspora as an emotional and psychological condition. The novel demonstrates that displacement can occur even without physical migration when individuals lose connection with identity, fulfilment, and emotional belonging. Through sensitive narration and realistic characterization, Sudha Murty exposes the silent emotional struggles of women and calls for a more compassionate and equal understanding of marriage, identity, and companionship.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/61**REMEMBERING LOSS: MOURNING, TRAUMA AND DIASPORIC GRIEF****JUEL RAJAN**Research Scholar, Department of English
Pachaiyappa's College**Abstract**

The study is a profound literary meditation on remembering loss, mourning, trauma, and the often-overlooked dimension of diasporic grief. The novel achieves through its unconventional narrator, Sreelakshmi, a woman who survives her own death only as a forgotten finger bone salvaged from her funeral pyre, which passes from hand to hand, awakening buried memories in each woman who touches it. The titular metaphor of eating a wasp, whose bitter aftertaste lingers long after the initial sting and contaminates even the sweetest honey, captures how mourning operates not as a linear progression toward closure but as a permanent, haunting presence that colours all subsequent experience. Trauma is rendered in unflinching through interwoven narratives of female suffering, including child sexual abuse, acid attacks, stalking, and the slow poison of societal shaming. The novel is set primarily within India, it engages deeply with diasporic grief understood as the anguish of displacement, exile, and loss of belonging. The women in these stories experience multiple forms of banishment, from her families, and her own communities, their own bodies, and the selves they might have become. The internal displacement mirrors the emotional landscape of diaspora, where home is simultaneously remembered and irretrievable. The novel argues that healing is not the erasure of pain but the courage to carry memory forward, to bear witness to what cannot be undone, and to live with the bitterness without demanding sweetness as compensation. Remembering loss becomes an act of witness that binds women across time and suffering, creating a collective archive of pain carried silently.

Keywords: Trauma, Mourning, Grief, Bitterness, Witness**Introduction**

Anita Nair's *Eating Wasps* (2018), the reader encounters a narrative that is at once hauntingly fragmented and fiercely coherent, a work that returns the acclaimed author of *Ladies Coupe* to the charged terrain of female desire and its consequences, yet does so with a darker, more experimental edge. The novel opens with a startling declaration: "On the day I killed myself, it was clear and bright, by Sreelakshmi, a thirty-five-year-old Sahitya Academy award-winning writer who has ended her own life in a small town by the river Nila in Kerala. The novel portrays why a woman of such literary fame and apparent independence would

choose death, and it is this very mystery that propels the novel's unique structure. It is not a direct investigation but a ghostly, meandering exploration of the world that still punishes the open expression of longing, a world where, as the title's metaphor suggests, a woman must decide whether to swallow, spit out, or fight back when a wasp (representing an insurmountable challenge or a bitter truth) flies into her mouth.

The novel's outline is as unconventional as its premise, weaving together a tapestry of ten women's lives through the eerie device of a single, persistent fragment, Sreelakshmi's index finger bone. After her cremation, her secret lover Markose retrieves this bone in the cremation ground and hides it within the false back of an antique cupboard. Fifty-two years later, that same cupboard finds its way to a private resort by the river Nila, where a frightened young girl named Megha, hiding inside, dislodges the bone, setting in motion a chain of encounters. The bone passes from hand to hand, mistaken for a piece of plastic or a curious talisman, it becomes a silent witness and a narrative conduit, unlocking the stories of each woman who touches it. We meet Urvashi, trapped in a loveless marriage and harassed by a lover who has turned into a cyber-stalker, Megha herself, a child grappling with the trauma of sexual abuse by an authority figure, Najma, an acid-attack survivor whose disfigurement becomes a perverse source of unwanted notoriety, Maya, an older woman caring for her adult autistic son while mourning a dead husband, and Liliana, the wife of a diplomat navigating the shallow cruelties of expatriate life and online exposure. These stories, spanning caste, class, and religion, are interwoven with glimpses of Sreelakshmi's own past, her all-consuming affair with a married man, her bold erotic fiction for a local magazine, and the slow, inexorable shunning by a society that celebrated her talent but condemned her unapologetic appetites. Nair crafts a novel that is both a sharp social critique of contemporary India, with Tinder, Instagram, and the threat of online shaming, and a timeless elegy for the women who eat the wasps, instead of honey.

Haunted Topographies

The narrative has haunted topography, which means that the physical landscape of Kerala is not merely a setting but a sentient vessel that absorbs and reflects human trauma. In the novel topography functions as an "affective sensory envelope", where the lush environment of coconut palms and paddy fields acts as an active participant in the characters' emotional architecture (Nair 5). Drawing from a complex framework of geography, psychoanalysis, and Gothic criticism, the environment does not just surround the characters, it acts upon them, serving as a witness that manifests through decay, atmosphere, and the repetition of tragic cycles.

Her spirit is embodied by the finger bone of Sreelakshmi, the protagonist of the novel who confides, died by suicide, which remains hidden in a cupboard at a resort near the River Nila. This object anchors her restless spirit to a specific room,

transforming it into a “heterotopia”, with normal social rules where the past and present collide and the dead “wait for a door to be opened, a word to be whispered, [or] a memory to be stirred” (Nair 67).

According to the text *Is a River Alive?* by Robert Macfarlane, Macfarlane argues that a river is a storage device because the river flows through the land where these women live, die, and suffer as the water absorbs their history. When the text says it “reflects” their stories, it means that by looking at the river, the characters see their own lives in a wider context. The river carries the “intergenerational transmission of trauma” just as it carries silt and minerals. In the narrative, the River Nila, or the Bharathapuzha, flows through the story as a living repository of collective memory, contrasting its timeless “sleepless flutter of silver movement” against the fractured lives of the women who seek refuge on its banks (Macfarlane 2). In Nair’s hands, the river becomes a memory for the visitors in the resort, a confined space between the wild and the domesticated that refuses to let stories stay buried.

The monsoon rains cause the water levels to rise, the external flood threatens to merge with the characters inner weather, creating a language of grief and release (Nair 10). The characters like the acid attack survivor Najma or the traumatised child Megha, the topography offers both a hideout and a site of courageous reclamation. The haunting is through, Megha a small girl who plays in the resort, as she experiences series of jump scares as a “lingering atmospheric pressure”, suggesting that “every soul has a story that stays behind, long after the breath has left the body, etched into the walls that housed it” (Nair 69).

Topography, in this context, reaches back to an intellectual lineage that moves from ancient Greek place-description to the precise scientific disciplines of the nineteenth century, yet Nair restores its primal, geographical power. The “Near the Nila” resort is near a river, neutral, it is a space where the physical layout of the rooms mirrors the characters internal “wasps” the secrets and shames they carry. The greenery of the state arches over the narrative in shades of green that “contain and amplify internal states,” suggesting that the external world is a mirror for the internal psyche (Nair 5). When Urvashi, a political journalist, seeks concealment from a stalker, the verdant landscape provides more than just shade it offers a spatial extension of her need for invisibility. Similarly, for the dancer Liliana, the athlete Brinda, and the bitter Theresa, the resort serves as a stage where their individual traumas are projected onto the environment.

The finger bone itself serves as the ultimate topographical anchor and it is a piece of the physical body that the earth was supposed to reclaim but did not, and its presence ensures that the room remains a haunted space. Nair describes this haunting not as a supernatural intrusion but as a persistent weight, a “metallic tang of a fear that had long since lost its edge but never its weight” (Nair 21). This fear is inhaled like the air itself fawling on the skin with “spider legs” and darting like “black floaters in the periphery” of one’s vision (Nair 21). Even the basic elements

of survival are corrupted by this geography, as “the water I drank tasted of fear” (Nair 21).

This sensory overload illustrates how fear becomes all-consuming, moving from a thought to a physical sensation that cannot be escaped within the confines of the haunted space. The novel unravels the mystery of Sreelakshmi’s death fifty-two years later; the landscape remains the only constant witness. The river’s rising levels during the monsoon become a metaphor for the breaking point of human endurance, as the water threatens to enter the resort and wash away the boundaries between the soul and the body.

The presence of these diverse women, the novel demonstrates that the landscape does not simply contain the story, it speaks and amplifies the “intergenerational transmission of trauma” etched into the very soil of Kerala. The topography is a map of pain, a record of every unspoken word and repressed sigh that has finally taken shape within the fabric of the rooms and the flow of the river. Nair’s haunted Kerala, the past does not stay past it flows continually into the present, carried by the water and housed within the walls.

The Writer as a Ghostly Archive

The settings in the novel, *Eating Wasps* specifically, the River Nila, the antique cupboard, and Sreelakshmi’s finger bone, function as haunted topographies. The bone acts as a physical relic and a parapsychological conduit that travels through the resort, connecting disparate women. This is anchored as, “Ghosts and writers are more alike than you think. We can be what you want us to be. We can hear your thoughts even if you don’t tell us. We can read the silences and shape your stories as if they happened to us. And I was both; a ghost and a writer” (Nair 21). It is paired by the omniscience of a writer with the spectral nature of a ghost; the text illustrates how Sreelakshmi becomes a “living archive”. Her consciousness, anchored to her finger bone, reads the silences of other women, turning the physical resort into a space where patriarchal trauma is continuously witnessed and recorded.

In the novel, the story begins with the suicide of the protagonist, Sreelakshmi, an acclaimed writer and Zoology professor, in 1965. After her cremation, her married lover, Markose, visits the cremation ground at night and retrieves a bone from her remains, specifically, her index finger. He keeps this bone sealed in a box, compartment of his cupboard, meaning that even in death, a part of Sreelakshmi remains trapped in the mortal world.

Sreelakshmi’s ambition as a writer is a central part of her identity. In the Kerala of the 1950s and 60s, she was a woman who chose to be different, chasing her dreams and becoming a college topper, an academic, and an admired writer. Her character was reportedly inspired by the real-life Malayalam writer Rajelakshmy, who was the first woman to win the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award and who also died by suicide at 35. Her ambition, however, came at a cost, she was seen as a “spinster”

because, as the novel suggests, “which man is going to marry an educated woman with dreams, ambitions and opinions?”

Her life becomes a struggle against societal expectations, and it is a “cataclysmic love affair” that eventually wears her down, leading to her death. In her afterlife, as a ghost tied to her finger bone, she finds purpose by immersing herself in the stories of other women, becoming a “seeker of stories” who reflects that it is “easier to lose myself in other people’s stories than dwell on my own”.

The act of taking the finger bone is layered with meaning. While a ring finger is associated with love and marriage, the index finger is a symbol of leadership and agency, making it a fitting metaphor for Sreelakshmi, a woman defined by her ambition and drive. Furthermore, by preserving the bone, her ex-lover, Markose “inserts himself even into her death while simultaneously metaphorically cossetting her remains in the way women are often ‘protected’ by keeping them within the confines of the home”.

The finger bone also acts as the novel’s omniscient narrator, passed from one character to another over the years, it serves as a conduit through which Sreelakshmi, as a ghost, can access the deepest secrets and life stories of the women who unknowingly hold it. This unusual premise sets the stage for the rest of the novel, where Sreelakshmi’s lingering presence connects the stories of several women who are all, in their own ways, fighting for autonomy and dealing with the consequences of their desires.

The Female Body as a Gothic Landscape

The text then smoothly transitions into Gothic literary criticism to explain how these spaces are haunted. It uses the following quote:

“Gothic fiction with its castles and abbeys, persecuted heroines, ghosts and nightmares, projects a peculiarly fraught fantasy world of neurosis and morbidity, and if we take a close look at the kinds of feeling in which these novelists were especially interested, we begin to perceive how anti-Enlightenment anxieties were actually ‘felt on the pulses’ of a whole generation. (Heholt 5)”

It explains that Nair replaces the traditional “castles and abbeys” of Gothic fiction with the topography of the female body and mundane, everyday spaces. The “anti-Enlightenment anxieties” primal fears of violation and loss of autonomy are no longer hidden in distant ruins but manifest in modern, trusted spaces like a school bus for Megha or a dating app for Urvashi. The female body itself becomes the primary haunted topography where the traumatic consequences of navigating a patriarchal society are violently inscribed.

The sprawling, ruined estate for the biological and social reality of the female form, writers like Nair demonstrate that the “neurosis and morbidity” once reserved for ghosts now define the lived experience of women navigating modern society. When the traditional “castles and abbeys” are replaced by the topography of the female body, the body itself becomes the site of the uncanny, a place that

should be a sanctuary but is instead treated as a territory to be conquered or surveilled. This transition highlights that the “anti-Enlightenment anxieties” mentioned by Heholt, specifically the primal fears of violation and the systematic loss of autonomy, are no longer safely contained within the distant ruins of a fictionalised history. Instead, these anxieties manifest in the mundane, everyday spaces of the present, such as a school bus or a digital dating interface.

In this framework, the female body is the primary haunted topography it carries the “ghosts” of societal expectations and the “nightmares” of physical threat. The traumatic consequences of existing within a patriarchal framework are not merely psychological but are violently inscribed upon the flesh, transforming the woman’s physical presence into a map of survival and haunting. In the novel they treat the body as a Gothic landscape, the text argues that the domestic and the personal have become just as fraught with peril as any medieval dungeon, suggesting that for the modern woman, the haunting is never truly external but is an inseparable part of her social navigation.

Palimpsestic Streets: and the Inscription of Violence

In *Eating Wasps*, the “streets” are replaced by the riverine pathways and resort corridors that connect separate lives, serving as conduits for traumatic memory rather than sites of urban anonymity. The Nila River itself operates as the central arterial palimpsest its flowing waters carrying layered histories of ritual, domestic life, and gendered violence across generations. The urban streets with their visible historical markers, the river’s palimpsestic nature is fluid and cyclical, with each tide potentially revealing what has been submerged.

The novel’s most direct inscription of violence occurs through Megha’s ghost, whose spectral presence transforms the resort’s physical spaces into haunted topographies. Her consciousness preserved at the moment of suicide becomes the living archive that annotates the landscape. When she observes contemporary women navigating their traumas in the same physical spaces where she suffered, the geography becomes charged with cross-temporal resonance. The resort’s gardens, dining areas, and riverbanks are not merely settings but testimonial sites where different generations of female pain become visible to the spectral witness, creating a topography where violence is never fully past but exists as a permanent geological layer in the emotional landscape.

The Architecture of Memory: Private Interiors and Public Traumas

Nair meticulously constructs the resort’s architecture as a mnemonic device that blurs the boundary between private suffering and public witness. Guest rooms typically space of privacy and retreat become transparent chambers where intimate traumas are exposed to Megha’s ghostly gaze. This architectural permeability mirrors how female trauma in Indian society often transitions from private experience to public spectacle, particularly through the mechanisms of gossip, social judgment, and digital exposure represented in other storylines.

The most powerful architectural metaphor is Megha's preserved room the site of her suicide now maintained as part of the resort's heritage. This space functions as a trauma museum that literalizes the public curation of private female suffering. The urban monuments that commemorate public figures or historical events, this room monumentalizes intimate despair, turning a personal tragedy into a curated artifact. The room's preservation represents how society often archives female pain as cautionary tale rather than addressing its systemic causes. Meanwhile, other characters rooms where contemporary dramas of infidelity, professional anxiety, and personal crisis unfold become satellite archives in this network of female experience, each private interior containing echoes of the central trauma housed in Megha's room.

Memory and trauma of Sreelakshmi

The study begins with the historical evolution of trauma from a physical injury to a psychological wound, anchoring its analysis in the foundational work of psychologists who defined the mechanics of traumatic memory. William James introduced this to English-speaking audiences by noting that hysteria "starts always from a shock and constitutes a disease of the memory where unresolved experiences act as permanent psychic traumata thorns in the spirit" (James 19). This is reinforced by the postulation in *Studies on Hysteria* that "the memory of the trauma acts like a foreign body which continues to exert influence long after the original event" (Freud & Breuer 6).

Crucially, the study utilises Pierre Janet's theory of dissociation, framing traumatic memory as a "failure of narrative integration" (Janet 660), where experiences are split from ordinary consciousness. The study maintains continuity by applying Janet's theory directly to the architecture of Anita Nair's *Eating Wasps*. The novel's nonlinear structure serves as a formal representation of traumatic memory, moving erratically across decades to mirror the "fragmented, intrusive nature of traumatic recall" (Nair 112). This fragmented form reflects the suppressed realities of women under patriarchy, bridging the psychological to the supernatural by treating memory not as a linear repository but as a "spectral presence that haunts the present" (Nair 5). Sreelakshmi's preserved finger bone acts as the physical vehicle for this memory, while her childhood act of eating a wasp serves as the governing metaphor: "the initial sweetness of desire followed by the bitter, lingering sting" (Nair 2).

The study maps this onto the "intergenerational transmission of trauma", where patterns of suffering are unconsciously replicated across characters (Nair 154). Finally, the narrative shifts from victimhood to agency, positing that trauma operates as both wound and catalyst. This is exemplified by Najma, whose refusal to hide her acid-attack scars represents a conscious reclamation of memory, transforming visible markers of trauma from shame into profound statements of survival (Nair 210). The study concludes that while trauma is inextricably linked

to the female condition, a conscious reckoning allows the memory of trauma to become the foundation for authentic selfhood (Nair 268).

The narrative grounds its spatial and Gothic analysis in Cathy Caruth's trauma theory to explain the novel's fragmented structure:

The wound of the mind the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that...is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor...trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on. (Wang and Ni 2)

This quote perfectly synthesises the haunted topography argument because trauma is an "unassimilated" event that repeatedly returns to haunt, and the novel cannot be told in a linear fashion. Sreelakshmi's finger bone acts as the agent of this repetitive return. As different women encounter this physical piece of haunted topography, their own buried wounds are triggered, proving that the trauma of female oppression is not isolated in the past but is a persistent, haunting presence in the physical spaces they currently occupy.

Urban Chronotopes: The Collapse of Past and Present in City Space

The novel achieves its most sophisticated engagement with archival porosity through its manipulation of chronotopic experience, the fusion of temporal and spatial relationships. Through Megha's ghostly consciousness, which exists outside linear time, the resort becomes a temporal collage where 34 years collapse into the continuous present. This narrative strategy transforms physical space into what might be termed a "trauma chronotope", a location where time functions not progressively but recursively, with past events continuously erupting into and shaping present consciousness. This chronotopic collapse manifests through parallel narratives that echo across decades. Megha's abusive relationship with the writer Urvashi finds its counterpart in Sree's entanglement with a married man. The public shaming Megha experiences anticipates the digital shaming faced by young Najma. The resort space becomes a temporal echo chamber where patterns of female oppression repeat with minor variations across generations. Significantly, this chronotopic experience is not accessible to all characters, only to Megha as archival consciousness and, by extension, to the reader. This creates a differential temporality where the burden of holding traumatic history falls to the spectral female witness, while living characters remain trapped in their immediate temporal frames, unable to recognise the historical patterns playing out through their lives.

Conclusion

Eating Wasps stands as one of Anita Nair's most daring and structurally innovative works, a novel that refuses the comfort of linear redemption while insisting on the radical necessity of female testimony. Through the ghostly device of Sreelakshmi's finger bone, a fragment of a writer who chose death over silence, Nair binds together ten disparate women's lives, revealing that their private humiliations, hungers, and violences are not isolated tragedies but the collective, unspoken grammar of a patriarchal society that still punishes female desire. The novel's rigorous grammatical control and precise, almost classical prose style create a deliberate tension with its chaotic, wounding content: sentences are cleanly constructed, yet they describe the sting of shame, the slow suffocation of online harassment, the brutality of acid attacks, and the profound loneliness of a woman whose erotic imagination becomes her crime. Nair is a redefinition of survival, not as triumphant escape, but as the messy, ongoing act of deciding whether to swallow, spit out, or fight back when the wasp enters one's mouth. The women who touch that bone, from Urvashi to Najma to Megha, the story offers no simple catharsis; instead, it grants them the possibility of being heard, of seeing their pain mirrored in another's. Sreelakshmi, who could not survive, the novel becomes her posthumous testimony, a reminder that a woman's death by her own hand is rarely an act of weakness but often a final, desperate assertion of agency in a world that has stolen every other choice. *Eating Wasps* thus leaves the reader with an uncomfortable, essential truth: that the most dangerous hunger is not for food or even for love, but for the right to narrate one's own life without apology, and that the novel, in its fractured, polyphonic brilliance, is one of the few spaces where such a right can still be claimed.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/62**CHARTING CARTOGRAPHIES OF TRISHANKU MEMORIES IN
AKIL KUMARASAMY'S "THE OFFICE OF MISSING PERSONS"****ROSELIN JENIFER F. S.**Research Scholar, PG & Research Centre of English, Fatima College
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**Dr. S. J. KALA**Associate Professor, PG & Research Centre of English, Fatima College
Madurai Kamaraj University, Marurai, India**Abstract**

Migration has always been a constant and continued process that has laid the foundations for the evolutionary history of the human beings. Leafing through the annals of history, one finds chronicled the exodus of varied civilisations and their eventual progression. These relocations were accelerated through colonisation in the end of twentieth century. It is then that the people from South Asia migrated to parts of America and Europe as indentured labourers and refugees. Out of these migrant groups, the Tamil diaspora is considered to be one of the most contemporary and globally recognised community that has been positioned all over the world. The literature of the diasporans deals with the nuances of being trapped in two worlds – the physical space they inhabit and their phantasmal imaginations of their homelands. Akil Kumarasamy, a noted Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic writer is one of the prominent literary figures who articulates the narratives of the Tamil diaspora. Her works narrate the trauma of displacement, loss of identity and cultural hybridity. *Half Gods*, Kumarasamy's collection of short stories, revolves around the life of an immigrant family and one of the short stories from the collection, "The Office of Missing Persons" highlights the plights of the migrants as they explore both geographical and bureaucratic spaces of diaspora. This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach which combines literary analysis and critical examination to assess the hyphenated existence of the diasporic community. It examines "The Office of Missing Persons" scaffolded by the theoretical frameworks of Avtar Brah to interrogate the ways in which bureaucratic institutions act as agents of diasporic violence.

Keywords: Memory, Identity, Diasporic Spaces, Global Cultural Flows, Network Society

The chronicles of human history are etched with the footprints of early human beings who travelled through the lengths of the epochs, forming civilisations that withstood the tests of time. These migrations have played intrinsic role in the formation of communal identity that in turn resulted in the emergence of nation states and empires. Migration is a global phenomenon that has been witnessed all

through the world and has paved way for the spread of human beings across the planet. Every civilisation that exists today and their cultural exclusivity is the product of such relocations.

The rise of the spirit of nationalism and technological advancements in Europe that started from the late fifteenth century culminated with the advent of Imperialism and Colonialism that became one of the most preliminary accelerants of such migrations. The colonial exploitation of South Asian and South East Asian countries resulted in the dislocation of the destituted workers. People moved from their homelands to survive famines, draughts and the inflictions of the world wars. The migrant workers were employed in foreign countries as indentured labourers in salt mines, shipyards and plantations. The twentieth century encountered the dissolution of major colonial powers as a result of which their hold onto the economic policies of the colonised regions began to lose its dominance. In this period, major colonies like India, China, Africa and Australia gained their independence. The sudden fragmentation of colonial powers created economic chaos in the newly independent countries. The remnants of colonialism and the dawn of new republics forced a mass migration of indentured labourers.

Migration is classified into two types based on the willingness of the immigrants, namely voluntary migration and forced migration. Voluntary migration occurs when people move from their homeland to a foreign place in search of education, marriage and better living conditions. A significant number of graduates from India who move to the first world countries constitute voluntary emigrants. On the other hand, forced migration happens when people are compelled to leave their homelands on account of genocides, threats and political persecutions. The Sri Lankan Tamil community is one of the most hugely populated Diasporas across the world that has settled all through the world, as a result of the Sri Lankan Civil War.

The presence of a Dravidian community in a strongly Aryan Sri Lanka dates back to 500 BCE, with archaeological evidences like the discovery of the 'Balangoda Man'. K.M. De Silva in his book, *A History of Sri Lanka* posits that the indigenous Sri Lankans called the Vaddas were the descendants of the Balangoda man and had mixed ancestries of both Tamil and Sinhalese: "Sri Lanka has been from very early in its recorded history a multi-ethnic society in which a recognisable Dravidian component was present" (13). The pre-historic records highlight that both the ethnic races prevailed in harmony without much cultural tensions.

The Later Chola period that reached its peak during the 10th century CE caused major conquests and migrations into the island thereby significantly increasing the already prevalent Tamil influence. This created a prominent rift between the Tamil North and the Sinhalese South. This cultural chasm deepened even further during the British rule in which the Tamils were favoured over the Sinhalese majority. These factors led to the increased tensions between the two communities. Sri Lanka became an independent country in 1948 under the Sinhalese government.

The mutual misconceptions between the two culturally excluded communities resulted in the Sri Lankan civil wars.

The civil war started around 1983 and ended in 2009 with casualties ranging from 1-1.5 lakhs on both the sides. As an aftermath, the Sri Lankan government triumphed and snuffed out the Tamil militant organisations and the later phases of the civil war witnessed inhumane violences unleashed upon the civilians. Unable to withstand the degrading conditions, the Sri Lankan Tamils migrated to India, Canada and other countries:

Analysts suggest that nearly one fourth of the total Sri Lanka Tamil population lives in diaspora, including about 100,000 in the United Kingdom, 250,000 in Australia, and about 10,000 in the United States (Fair 139)

Eventually, the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora is one of the largest communities in the world with more than 1 million people spread throughout the world. The Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic writers continue the legacy of passing down the memory of their homeland through poignant literary texts.

Akil Kumarasamy is one of the most prominent and contemporary writers of the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora. Kumarasamy was born and brought up in New Jersey as a second-generation immigrant. Kumarasamy's parents were among the many who cleaved themselves from Sri Lanka and reshaped their livelihood in America. Though Kumarasamy never experienced the horrors of the civil war, her works reflect the emotional trauma experienced by second-generation immigrants. Her stories often centre around the phantasmic connections between the homeland and their new homes. Her collection of short stories *Half Gods* (2018) spans multiple generations of a Sri Lankan Tamil family.

Diaspora and transnationalism studies have focussed on the ways in which migration, transnationalism and ethnonationalism plays a significant role in the academic discourses. Existing literature has predominantly framed diasporic experiences through the lenses of displacement, identity negotiation and political mobilisation, whereas they often treat bureaucratic systems as static backdrops rather than active agents that exert and reproduce diasporic violence. This research attempts to foreground the ways in which bureaucratic spaces like state institutions, refugee camps and administrative institutions reinscribe the hierarchy of legitimacy by effectively producing differentiated experiences of belonging and precarity within the diasporic experiences.

This study employs a qualitative interpretive research design to examine the ways in which bureaucratic spaces functions as agents of diasporic violence. Library research methodology is applied in order to gain contextual knowledge through credible sources of information like journal articles, books, editorials, documentaries and interviews. The research is designed in such a way to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The first part of the paper provides an introduction to diaspora, its history and types followed by a

comprehensive review of literature. The review has analysed the prevailing issues and concerns in diasporic discourses, leading to the identification of research gap. The final section of the paper attempts to answer the research gap by analysing the ways in which diasporic spaces like bureaucracy plays a significant role in diasporic experience.

This research paper titled, "Charting Cartographies of Trishanku Memories in Akil Kumarasamy's 'The Office of Missing Persons'" thus attempts to critically analyse Akil Kumarasamy's short story, "The Office of Missing Persons" from the collection *Half Gods* in light of diasporic sensibilities. The research ventures to explore the representation of Tamil diasporic identity and the ways in which the themes of migration and fragmented identity reflect historical displacement and cultural continuity. The specific short story is selected as it explores novel venues of diasporic postcolonial studies and the ways in which educational and administrative institutions exert diasporic violence. This paper thus endeavours to explore the ways in which bureaucratic spaces act as sites of violence, control and identity formation.

Bureaucracy is defined as an administrative system that is operated by a hierarchical system of networks assigned to provide organisational stability. The word bureaucracy is derived from the French word *bureau* which means a desk or an office and the Greek word *kratia* which means to rule. The word bureaucracy is defined as the form of government that exerts its power through official procedures. Max Weber posits that bureaucracy is one of the most efficient forms of governance. Keith Tribe's translation of Weber's *Economy and Society* defines it as, "the ongoing dynamics of managing social orders, that all social action is oriented to social organisations that provide them with opportunities that shape the way individuals lead their lives". (69). A bureaucratic organisation functions on statistical data, demographic archives and documentations. Ian Hacking advocates that the, "Statistical data do have a certain superficial neutrality between ideologies" (184). Hacking's statement amplifies the significance of bureaucratic systems.

Weber's definition of bureaucracy also warns about the 'iron cage' metaphor, which stifles an individual within rigid and institutionalised hierarchies. He uses the term "*stahlhartes Gehäuse* which translates to 'shell as hard as steel', to denote the ways in which human beings are reduced into statistical data. J.A Mbembe observes the historical evolution of bureaucratic state systems in his work, "Necropolitics". He asserts that the state-sanctioned criminal violences that takes place during wars and civil unrest are the products of bureaucratic oppressions: "Having become mechanized, serialized execution was transformed into a purely technical, impersonal, silent, and rapid procedure" (18). The excessive dehumanisation of the bureaucratic systems not only allows violences but also acts as active agents of violence.

The short story, "The Office of Missing Persons" revolves around V.S. Jeganathan, a Tamil entomologist whose teen-age son Jeevan has gone missing during the final stages of the civil war. The story begins with Jeganathan sitting in his study desk and dissecting a monarch butterfly. Jeganathan leaves his hometown and travels to the capital which is predominantly Sinhalese:

Jeganathan began to speak Sinhala in a slow, precise manner as if he were walking on a tightrope, his son's life caught in the balance of enunciating a language he had not needed to speak for the past three years living up in the north (62)

He is welcomed with indifference in the police station as the police officer instantly recognises his ethnicity through his broken Sinhalese. Jeganathan feels the oppressing weight of social tensions that attempts to reach him through bureaucratic agencies.

The police officer's indignation as he files Jeevan's details makes it clear for Jeganathan that all this is a trap: "The officer asked for Jeganathan's son's name and he knew it was a trick. He needed his name to find him and then have reason not to find him" (62). As the officer files Jeevan's details, it becomes evident that he is reduced to a data and is not considered a human being. Jeganathan then starts his protest against the government and its systematic agents to find his son. His personal fight gradually unravels into a people's movement as his students start to join together for the cause of finding millions of Tamil civilians who have gone missing over the last few years. Jeganathan becomes a global sensation throughout the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora that is spread out globally. The short story details on the pre-migration trauma and the conditions that make migration inevitable.

Forced migrants carry the memory and trauma of their place of origin and the diasporic communities formed through such compulsions tend to endure an overpowering sense of identity and community. Itty Abraham in her book, *How India Became Territorial* gives a contextual definition of diaspora:

Diaspora is a state practice that separates the territorially bound nation from its overseas community. It produces "insiders without," namely, nationals who live beyond the state's territorial borders (16).

The Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic identity is kept thriving through cultural and identity preservation activities that attracts global visibility of their diasporic struggles.

Benedict Anderson coins the term 'Long Distance Nationalism' to describe a form of national identity where the diasporic people remain radically involved in the politics of their homelands. The troubles in their homelands often become the identity markers of the diasporic communities which pass on the legacy of their past: "The conflicts have become more and more ethnocentric and intranational, they generate massive displacements and create, the so-called, 'conflict generated diasporas' or 'political diasporas'" (Pande 2). These diasporic communities that

have relocated to far more peaceful environments strive to aid the people who are still struck in their war-torn homelands.

The concept of Long-Distance Nationalism is explicated in the short story as the diasporic community help those who are stuck in the island state. Jeganathan refused to move out from Sri Lanka as he was invested in researching the beetles and butterflies of the island country. After Jeevan's disappearance, the family becomes the face card for the diasporic communities.

Jeganathan no longer had his university job, and his wife claimed he had turned their family into first-class beggars. "We get our charity in the mail," she said as she ripped open internationally stamped envelopes from sympathetic members of the Tamil Diaspora. "I bought this fish because of a Mr. Soundarajan from Brooklyn (29)

Jeganathan loses his job as he protests against the government, yet his global recognition aids the family to get financial assistance from the diasporans living in other countries

The Sri Lankan Tamil diasporans engage with their identity in a complex, multilayered perspective shaped by history, politics and the socio-cultural aspects in adaptation to their host societies. Monika Hess alleges that, "the host country profoundly shapes the nature and practices of its transnational and diasporic politics" (421). Influenced by the diplomatic dogmas of their host countries, the diasporans move ahead from the ideas of separatism and ethnonationalism towards reconciliation, accountability and cultural rights: "Political formations and aspirations that were forged at home have been transported across space and time, and continue to be relevant in the diaspora" (Sriskandaraja 497). The definition of diaspora thus becomes dynamic and encompasses national, financial, ideological and networked fields.

The oppressions perpetrated by institutional bureaucracies is dealt in detail by the Ugandan-British Sociologist Avtar Brah. In her seminal work, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, Brah explores how bureaucracy functions as a site where power is exercised through everyday practices and institutionalised prejudices: "multi-axiality draws attention to how power is exercised across global institutions-such as the International monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation" (239). Multi-axiality is defined as the intersecting axes of economic political and the cultural facets of power. The struggles faced by the protestors in the short story mirrors Brah's ideas, where they are subjected to violence through inter and intra- subjective spaces. These powers are produced, reiterated and exercised in multiple sites.

Bureaucratic violences are often targeted on the refugees, war victims and the diasporans as they are found to be helpless victims in an institutional network. Giorgio Agamben in his work *Homo Sacer* opines that a state considers the minority population as a biopolitical subject that has to be managed and regulated. He offers that a bureaucratic state rejects an individual the dignity of a political

subject upon whom humanitarian and citizenship are tied to: “The refugee must be considered for what he is: nothing less than a limit concept that radically calls into question the fundamental categories of the nation-state” (78). Agamben's concept of *Homo Sacer* highlights that the refugees in conflicted areas are reduced to biological beings devoid of any political authority. This incrimination is evident in Jeganathan as his role in society is reduced through institutionalised injustice. As long as Jeganathan aligned with the socio-political ideologies of the nation state he was lauded with governmental ratifications and sanctions: “While officials hassled other Tamil intellectuals at the university, they did not bother with him, the professor whose blue-winged insect talisman granted him a level of immunity” (64). The moment Jeganathan questions the institutional framework, he is stripped off his social station and expelled as a mere biological existence. Jeganathan was socially acclaimed as he had brought the government international recognition and was ostracised the moment he began questioning it. Jeganathan was not affected by military or physical threats but he was sidelined by an engineered hierarchy. The sites in which organised prejudice takes place is termed as diasporic spaces. Brah's concept of diasporic space is reiterated by Heather Robinson in her work, *Language, Diaspora, Home*:

For people living in diasporic spaces, the metaphor of the border often functions as powerfully as the physical delineation of territory, although it requires paperwork and money to cross, rather than presenting physical restrictions on movement as hard borders might (127)

Brah's idea of diaspora transcends geographical borders and permeates through trivial and mundane activities that takes place within a bureaucratic system. The bureaucratic bigotry seems evident through Jeganathan's struggle for quest of his missing son: “Jeganathan had contacted the local police, lodged cases in the capital, but had heard nothing” (67). This incident highlights the ways in which organised systems of network prescribe the birth, death and existence of an individual.

Jeganathan's victimisation begins with a silenced, selective ostracization enabled through bureaucratic networks. The institutions of governance are able to label and identify human beings through archival documents instead of humanitarian intentions: “Forty-seven students and one insect ex-professor sitting cross-legged and calling for the return of the disappeared were terrorists in training according to the reports from the central government” (73). The protestors were given an identity of terrorists based on the reports collected by biased bureaucrats. The grieving activists form a political momentum by gathering together and voicing out for the disappeared civilians. Jeganathan's quest to find his son and thousands of other disappeared Tamils leads to an international agitation for the cause of Sri Lankan Tamils. The Sri Lankan government forms an inclusive ministry called the Office of Missing Persons to identify and bring back the missing civilians.

It becomes evident that the complaints are received with indignation by the government officials: “Jeganathan reported his son’s disappearance to the Office of Missing Persons and watched as the information was lost in dark stacks cowering in the corner of the room. He left feeling as if his son had further disappeared” (75). Bureaucracy is often spun around the red-tape hypothesis in which excessive and complex regulations make the process slow and complicated. Hundreds of complaints received are stalled stacked and lodged into the corners of the departmental ministry with zero to minimum action taken to resolve the crisis. Bureaucratic organisations thus become voluntary or involuntary perpetrators of diasporic violence.

After the establishment of The Office of Missing Persons, the department is overwhelmed with complaints about the missing persons in each family. The missing persons are reduced to statistics and are categorised on the basis of the magnitude of the disappearance. The office collected the complaints received and stocked them into the archives without attempting to resolved the crisis. The missing persons were made to disappear once again among countless fires of statistical information: “While the Office of Missing Persons stayed unabashedly quiet, people grew louder, banging on the door, throwing their voices like rocks” (75). The office played a major role not just in perpetrating the violence but most importantly on attempting to obliterate the memory of the loved ones: “But a few weeks later, as the missing accumulated, people suddenly began to forget details of their loved ones” (75). The office incites communal tension by sharing the details of the victims.

The office thus plays a dual role of active perpetrators of the violence and a passive observer of the consequences: “An artist whose father and four siblings had disappeared believed the structure functioned as a burial chamber, a place to inter memories and forget” (75). The complications of bureaucratic procedures instigate a sense of exhaustion that enable the victims to undergo a period of momentary extermination of the memories of their loved ones: “A group trying to unforget, burned down the Office of Missing Persons. Ash thickened the air and in a matter of a few hours, their memories felt safe, contained within them” (75). The people view the office to be a burial chamber and they attempt to incinerate the building in order to resurrect their loved ones who are buried within the stacks of files.

The bureaucratic autonomy exerts its influence over international networks. Diasporans face the extremities of such systems as they are forced to exist in a legal limbo state suspended between two or more identities. Brah considers the geopolitical transactions in her work, *Decolonial Imaginings* and observes that the interactions between multiple identities is a result of a compromised intersectional prejudice: “The political climate created by the noxious discourse and policy of ‘hostile environment’ deeply impacted the lives of a variety of people including migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and diasporic groups” (5). The diaspora is

considered a statistical minority that is conveniently excluded as in the legal humanitarian rights. Rigid and prejudiced bureaucratic systems create hostile environments that tend to referee the migrants and the refugees through institutionalised oppressions.

The significance of bureaucratic interventions in perpetrating discrimination to the diasporans is dealt in detail in this paper. This research paper thus validates its hypotheses and ascertains that the diasporic spaces act as active agents of indignation, indifference and oppression. The concept of diasporic spaces might open up further research into the fields of Subaltern studies, Border studies and Postcolonial studies.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/63**NOSTALGIA, MEMORY, AND GENDERED TRAUMA: IDENTITY
FORMATION IN *THE HILLS OF ANGHERI*****SUMITHRA. S**

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Abstract

The Hills of Angheri (2005) by Indian English writer and surgeon Kavery Nambisan offers an intense examination of themes such as nostalgia, memory, gendered trauma, and the construction of identity within the socio-cultural landscape of rural India. The novel follows the journey of Nalli (Nalinakshi), a distinctive young woman from a rural village, whose aspiration is to become a doctor and provide care for the residents of her hometown, Angheri. After completing her studies, she moves to England for higher education, where she experiences feeling of alienation and nostalgia. The emotional experience is influenced by memory, as her medical journey serves as a bridge between the past and the present. Through this, the author explores the association between individual and collective memory, shaped by loss, displacement, and lived experience. It brings out the condition of women, portraying both hidden and evident forms of oppression rooted in familial and social structures. Identity formation is shaped through her constant negotiation between remembered and suppressed experiences. When she relocates from the protected environment of her childhood into the harsh realities of medical training and practice, she deliberately processes painful memories. Thus, the work offers a nuanced psychological and feminist reading of identity, emphasizing resilience and transformation through deeply rooted gendered experiences.

Keywords: Nostalgia, Memory, Emotional Wounds, Gendered Suffering, Trauma.

Indian society is highly tolerant of social inequalities, struggles, and identity crises. Women writers occupy a prominent place in the journey of Indian English Literature. Among them, the novels of women writers provide a panorama of perspectives, innovation, and creativity. Early women's writings include Rajlakshmi Debi's *The Hindu Wife* or *The Enchanted Fruit* (1876) and Toru Dutt a poet and translator wrote an unfinished novel titled, *Bianca* or *The Young Spanish Maiden* (1878). These writings focus on the psychological and moral growth of the prominent characters in the story, feminism, and cultural echoes of Indian women. Later, the next generation of women writers portrayed female characters as a merger of tradition and modernity. Among contemporary Indian

women writers, Kavery Nambisan is a distinctive writer from Karnataka's Coorg district. She is well-known for her ability to combine medical realism with creative writing. Nambisan explains that she left her full-time career as a surgeon and chose to run a clinic in a small town near her home while also treating patients privately. She values this arrangement for its simplicity and the sense of independence and flexibility it provides (Nambisan). She is a surgeon by profession and has a passion for writing novels. Nambisan, who believes that life feeds literature, says in an interview to New Asian Writing, "All my novels are a combination of experiences, memory and observation" (Nambisan). She has portrayed the suffering of the poor, subjugated women, and the practical difficulties of rural people in her novels. Her writings are strongly influenced by her childhood memories and are largely inspired by her father and the stories told by her grandmother. She began her writing career with children's magazines and has attained an honourable place in the world of Indian English fiction through her seven novels. Her first novel, *The Truth (Almost) About Bharat* (1991), is a coming-of-age novel about an insurgent student, Bharat, who runs away from college in search of life's meaning. Her next novel, *The Scent of Pepper* (1996), portrays the beauty, culture, and traditional values of her birthplace, Kodagu, while exploring four generations of confident, self-reliant, radiant, empowered, and resourceful women. Continuing her exploration of women's inner conflicts and social expectations, her next novel, *Mango-Colored Fish* (1998), portrays the life of a young woman, Shari, who plans to marry Gautam but becomes trapped between family expectations and personal freedom. Her fourth novel, *On Wings of Butterflies: A Novel* (2002), deals with a group of women entering politics and is inspired by women such as Milar, Pushpaben, Tara, and Heera, who raise their voices against the tyrannies of men. Extending her concern for women's struggles and social service, *The Hills of Angheri* (2005), a semi-autobiographical novel, depicts the life of a young girl who becomes a doctor and desires to serve rural villages. Likewise, her next novel, *The Story That Must Not Be Told* (2010), was selected as a finalist for the Man Asian Literary Prize in 2008, focuses on the plight and pain of marginalized slum dwellers, exposing the hidden truths of urban poverty and questioning the silence of the privileged class. *A Town Like Ours* (2014) is her seventh novel. The novel is set in a town called Pingakshipura and revolves around a retired social worker, Rajakumari. It deals with serious social issues such as discrimination, communal tension, and illnesses experienced by villagers.

This paper focuses on *The Hills of Angheri* (2011), a novel partly based on Kavery Nambisan's ambitions and experiences in rural healthcare in India. The novel portrays the life of a young girl, Nalli, from the traditional rural village of Angheri. She dreams of becoming a doctor and setting up a hospital in her village with the support of her childhood companions. Although all her family members oppose her decision, she joins the MBBS program in Madras and later completes her Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons (FRCS) in London. After returning

to Angheri with the desire to serve the people, she becomes frustrated by her shattered dreams and joins the Keshavanji Ashram Hospital. Following her father's death, she takes responsibility for caring for her mother and later moves to Madras to work in a private hospital, where she finds no real sense of contentment. Finally, Nalli decides to dedicate her life to serving the rural poor using her knowledge and experience without expecting support from her family, friends, or villagers. In *Writing with the Scalpel*, Kavary Nambisan explains that her interactions with patients facing financial hardships have given her valuable insights into their lives. Serving not only as a doctor but also as a confidante and guide has profoundly shaped her personality and, consequently, influenced her literary works (Nambisan)bu

Nostalgia and the Search for Belonging

Nostalgia is an emotional yearning for the past or a longing connected to pleasant childhood memories, loved ones, familiar places, or experiences that no longer exist in the present. L.M Montgomery a Canadian author in her novel *The Story Girl* states, "Nothing is ever really lost to us as long as we remember it. Nostalgia preserves the essence of people, places, and experiences, keeping them alive in the heart and mind" (Montgomery). In *The Hills of Angheri*, nostalgia is a powerful emotional tool expressed through Nalli's life. The novel presents nostalgia as a continuous return to one's roots and a search for emotional connection. The centre of Nalli's emotional world is the village of Angheri. It represents her happy childhood, familial affection, and joyful memories. After completing her higher education, she joined the MBBS program in Madras. Although she made new friends, met new people, and experienced a new environment, her mind continued to long for the hills, the people, the natural surroundings, and the rhythm of rural life. After completing eight months of her studies, Nalli returned to her hometown and returned to college with thoughts of Jai constantly on her mind. She wrote letters to him expressing her feelings, but his replies were formal and serious, and he never mentioned her emotions. After reading his letters, she remembers the time they spent together playing with spinning tops, and the spinning top becomes a symbol of the affection, memories, and emotional connection she received from Jai. Nalli utters:

It was the first real gift she got from him for some wickedness, 'Here, take this,' he would pulling it out from his pocket. Always a bribe. Only the bugri had been spontaneous. Jai taught her to spin the bugri and then lift it, still spinning on her palm. She carried it everywhere, gripping it, feeling the grooves and the sharpness of the nail on her palm, the cord wound around her wrist and fingers. (114)

In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym describes nostalgia as a deep desire to return to a home that no longer exists or may have existed only in imagination. After completing her internship, Nalli had self-doubt about continuing her studies as a surgeon; therefore, she wrote a letter to Jai asking for

his opinion. In his reply, Jai encouraged her to try, rather than doubt herself. He motivated her by referring to the yellow flowers that usually bloomed after the first rain on the bushes beside the stream. Nalli wishes to pluck the flowers herself, just as Jai did. He plucked the flowers without falling into the water, while Nalli struggled to do the same. Nalli remembers:

The yellow flowers by the stream for which she had nearly broken her nose. They came always after the first rain, bursting and exploding from the low green bushes that hugged the narrow strip of land that banked the stream. Those brightly screaming yellow flowers which she wanted, like Jai, to lean forward and pluck while standing on the opposite side of the stream near the rocks where the flow was but a few feet wide. Jai could do this without getting a drop of water on himself. He stood with his feet wide apart and leaned forward like a gently falling vertical rod. His body was angled and came so near the water that it seemed certain he would fall. The bed of pebbles gleamed dangerously in the shallow, sun-drenched stream. Jai leaned until his face was inches away from the water and, reaching out with one hand, plucked a whole bunch. (Nambisan 177).

After completing her MBBS in Madras, Nalli moved to England to continue her studies as a medical professional. After completing her exams, she was posted in Liverpool, where she met Stan, an ambulance driver who became a good companion and treated her with respect. While spending a weekend in Cheshire, she suddenly began to think about her home in Angheri. She remembers the faces of her grandparents, Aji and Jai, with tenderness and emotional attachment. Nalli looked at photographs sent from home, which filled her with nostalgia and longing for her family and homeland. The author shows Nalli emotion as follows:

In the photograph the family sent me, they looked so complete that I felt disappointed. Sujju beautiful, with a strand of hair that had slipped out of place; Ajja morose as always in photos; Appa stern; Amma composed; Budhi smiling; And Vishnu. The real change occurred in Vishnu. Each time I looked at the photo, my eyes were pulled towards him. Memories of long ago pinched and nibbled at my brain. (Nambisan 255).

Similar to Nalli in *The Hills of Angheri* by kavary Nambisan, Ashima in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* is a distinctive female character who experiences nostalgia and emotional longing while living in a different country. In *The Namesake*, Ashima, Ashoke's wife, leaves India after marriage and moves to America with her husband. She experiences deep homesickness because she is separated from her parents, relatives, and her familiar Indian life.

Whenever she experiences loneliness in her adopted country, she turns to the letters written by her parents. Reading these letters evokes memories of her homeland and family, allowing her to relive their love, care, and concern. The letters serve as an emotional bridge to her past, providing comfort and a sense of belonging despite the geographical distance from home.

Thus, Nalli and Ashima are connected through nostalgia, memories, and emotional survival. Nalli searches for her identity through professional independence and personal growth, whereas Ashima preserves her identity through family values, cultural traditions, and emotional attachment to her homeland.

Women, Education, and Patriarchal Resistance

In “A Writer Is Not a Professor”, an interview with Nobel Prize-winning novelist Doris Lessing, French literary critic Jean-Maurice de Montremy reflects on the condition of women in patriarchal societies and emphasizes the importance of freedom in shaping female identity. She states:

Where a free woman has no place to make a choice of her own, out of this struggle to be free is born a new person who makes choices, take decisions and becomes aware herself as a person, regarding the complexities of the life of a free woman and the ironic nature of the freedom they enjoy (de Montremy 42).

The novel starts by depicting the marriage of Nalli’s elder sister when Nalli is merely twelve years old. As a young and observant girl, she watches the preparations for Sujju’s marriage and begins to understand the cultural discrimination that women face. Gappu Mavu, the younger wife of her grandfather Ajja, strongly insists on these traditional customs. Gappu Mavu states, “So it will be you in a few years” (Nambisan 7). Nalli refuses to marry and strongly expresses her desire to study medicine and become a doctor. However, Ajja opposes her ambition, saying, “If God had wanted you to be a doctor, you would have been a boy” (Nambisan 8). Even though Appa wants to support her studies, the family refuses to accept the idea, adhering to the traditional belief that women should focus on cooking and managing the home. Similar to Nalli in *The Hills of Angheri*, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1998), authored by Shashi Deshpande presents Sarita (Saru), a young heroine who aspires to become a doctor to gain independence and self-respect. Her mother constantly favors her younger brother and treats Sarita with anger and neglect due to patriarchal attitudes toward men. Sarita realizes that only education can help her overcome these restrictions and fulfil her ambition, but her mother does not value her educational aspirations and remarks, “But she’s a girl... And don’t forget, medicine or no Medicine, doctor or no doctor, you still have to get her married, spend money on her wedding. Can you do both?” (Deshpande 144). Both protagonists face emotional struggles and seek empowerment through education, professional identities, and personal courage. Similarly, Appa encourages Nalli by teaching her about the courage of Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, and other great leaders. In contrast to Ajja’s conventional mindset, he supports progressive educational ideals, whereas Ajja is shocked to learn that girls and boys are educated alike. “He was shocked when he heard the girls were taught the same subject as boys” (Nambisan 16). He believes that girls should get married after completing their schooling, so he tries to divert Nalli’s mind from

becoming a doctor. He is more concerned with teaching her domestic work and cooking than with her education. Kavery Nambisan shows,

Ajja tried to divert Nalli's mind from the crazy idea of studying to be a doctor. He taught her to milk cows without hurting them, to tend sick calves, cut sugar cane and husk paddy. All of it she learnt, but when he tried to show her how to cook, she was not interested. She was too fond of food to have the patience to prepare it (Nambisan 16).

When Budhi, Nalli's cousin, falls ill with jaundice, his condition worsens within a few days as the yellowness deepens. This marks a turning point in Nalli's life, strengthening her desire to become a doctor. After they take him to the village Vaidyar, he is given kashayam (made of herbal extract) and gradually begins to recover. This incident makes Nalli firmly declare her ambition to become a doctor. Vaidyar states,

The Vaidyar treated Budhi with a kashayam which he made himself. Two weeks later, Budhi was up and about, eating normal food. 'He will be strong enough to go to school next week, the Vaidyar said. He was in the porch with Appa and Ajja. Amma served coffee. Our village needs doctors who fears the skill of others? Appa looked steadily at Nalli. His eyes were thinking (25).

After receiving inspiration from Jai, Appa's friend, and Ajji, a doctor in Mysore, Nalli begins to dream of joining a medical college. When Jai discusses Nalli's goal, he argues that education for women is merely decorative and not truly useful. He believes that eventually she will become just another man's wife, and therefore there is no real purpose in her becoming a doctor. She utters,

I want to be a doctor,' she said. I heard. 'They're all against it.' I know. He looked down at his feet, which were wet from washing. 'I can't see why you want to. All for a degree that'll be an ornament around your neck. Nalli wondered if he was joking. 'When you come back here and start your hospital, I'll help, she said. 'What a crazy idea. You'll soon be someone's wife (23).

This reflects the traditional patriarchal mindset in which women are often denied the privilege of being treated as independent individuals deserving of dignity and respect. Instead, they are seen as part of a man and his family, and after marriage, they are expected to move from the care of their parents to that of their husbands. The role of women in traditional Indian society is reflected in the Manusmriti, an ancient Hindu legal text attributed to Manu. The text argues that women should remain under the protection and authority of male family members throughout their lives—under their fathers in childhood, their husbands after marriage, and their sons during widowhood. It further suggests that women should not exercise independence or make decisions on their own. Nalli's dream of becoming a doctor is shattered when Appa receives a marriage proposal from a family in Shimoga. He explains that if Nalli becomes a doctor, it will be difficult to find a suitable

husband for her. He believes that after marriage, she can choose to become a lecturer by studying Kannada literature, as this is considered a safer and more acceptable option for women. Appa adds:

A good offer like this one could not be ignored. And, if she were to become a doctor, how would they find her a husband? Shimoga was a big town. She could go to college, do Kannada literature. She was good in Kannada, she had won a prize. She could be a lecturer, even a professor (Nambisan 31).

Eventually, the marriage proposal suddenly fails, and this disappointment indirectly opens the path toward Nalli's aspiration to become a doctor. Appa travels to Madras to collect a medical application form and enrolls in a medical program there. After enrolling in a medical course in Madras, Nalli faces many difficulties adapting to city life. She finds it hard to adjust to the metropolitan lifestyle and feels that she is unsuited to the urban environment. She even experienced ragging on campus, which made her think of discontinuing her studies. Despite these struggles, she remains determined and gradually focuses on achieving her goals despite these struggles. Her identity as a village girl troubles her as she faces gender restrictions at home and humiliation in college because of her rural background. The author shows,

There came a time when everything about herself felt wrong to Nalli. Her hair was too flat on her head, her cheeks were shiny, her voice too loud and her clothes dreadful. A few girls in college dressed like her, in half-saris, and they were happy being themselves. But Nalli was unhappy, she wanted to be a city girl. Something had to be done about her clothes. Ajja had said she should wear only half-saris but Amma reasoned that it was all right to wear skirts if they reached below the knee. (69)

Nalli's desire to change her appearance and become a "city girl" reflects Simone de Beauvoir a French philosopher and political activist in her treatise *The Second Sex* (1949) view that women are socially conditioned to shape their identity according to external expectations rather than personal choice. While pursuing her medical course, Nalli faces further emotional turmoil when her cousin Vishnu comes to visit her. His presence fills her with fear and discomfort, instead of respecting her personal space and feelings, he tries to control her body and emotions through his unwanted touch and suggestive behaviour. The authors says:

He chose a seat hidden from view by a pillar. 'City life suits you,' he said, flicking her earring with his fingers. If only the colour of her cheeks did not give her away, everything about Vishnu filled her with dread. His furtive fingers stroked her shoulder and slid beneath her arm (Nambisan 65).

This action shows how women are often treated as objects rather than as individuals with dignity and choice. The incident highlights the patriarchal attitude in which men feel entitled to exercise power over women, reinforcing gender inequality and the lack of safety women experience even in educated spaces. Stephanie Hodgson-Wright a Feminist Scholar and Literary Critic in her easy

“Feminism and Post feminism “appear in the collection of *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Post feminism* (1998) edited by Sarah Gamble reflects on the reins of patriarchy as “Patriarchy is a system of social relations in which men hold dominant power and women’s interests are placed below those of men. This dominance is expressed through gender-based divisions of labor, reproductive responsibilities, and socially constructed ideals of femininity. Such power structures are sustained by the meanings society attaches to biological differences between men and women”. (Hodgson-Wright 3)

Although Nalli completes her semester examinations and waits for her results, unlike men such as Jai and Vishnu, who are free to make decisions about their future careers, she continues to face gender-based trauma and restrictions, especially through Jai. He says, “Jai had said that being a doctor was not for girls and she had walked away angry “(Nambisan 121). Despite facing many hardships, Nalli successfully completes her medical course in Madras, India. Even after earning her degree, she encounters gender-based restrictions from her father when she expresses her future plans. While she wishes to continue her studies as a surgeon in London, her aspirations are questioned and limited by the patriarchal expectations. Appa declares,

Appa tried to dissuade her. ‘I’ve never heard of a woman surgeon,’ he said. “Surgeons have to operate all day and even at night. A surgeon should be strong. When Nalli persisted, he did something despicable. He met the Sardar and requested him to discourage her. The Sardar told her with very little delicacy that she was not suited for surgery. Doing minor cases and leaving behind complications for the seniors to manage was all very well, but being a surgeon meant doing everything on her own. It demanded a certain manliness, an aggressive faith in oneself. Anatomy or pathology might suit her better, with fixed hours, holidays and no calls. (176)

Eventually, she persuades her father and travels to London to complete her Royal College fellowship in Medicine. Finally, she achieves her goal through hard work and determination. After reaching this great height in her career, she plans to return to Angheri and serve her people. In *Images of Woman in the Indo-Anglian Novel* (1979), literary critic Meena Shirwadkar observes that:

As women received education, they began to feel an increasing urge to voice their feelings. The awareness of individuality, the sense of compatibility with their traditionbound environment and resistance to patriarchal moral values and behaviour problems at home and at place of work or in society-all come up in a welter of projection (Shirwadkar 201).

The work *The Hills of Angheri* authored by Kavary Nambisan tells the story of a young girl who feels it difficult to establish her identity in a patriarchal society, influenced by memory, nostalgia and emotional trauma. The novel also reveals the way memories of home and childhood continue to influence personal identity in the context of displacement and alienation. The novel’s combine of feminist

concerns and psychological depth portrays identity formation as a constant cycle of repression, healing, and self-realization.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/64**TIDALECTICS OF THE VOID: POST-TRUTH AND OCEANIC
ROUTES IN MADELEINE WATTS'S THE INLAND SEA****KAVEYA. R**

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Abstract

This article examines Madeleine Watts's debut novel, *The Inland Sea*, which sits at a crucial intersection between post-truth epistemology and the Blue Humanities, two frameworks rarely discussed together. This article suggests that Watts uses a tidalectic method, inspired by Édouard Glissant and Kamau Brathwaite, to critique Australia's complex relationship with water, memory, and truth, especially under the post-truth condition where ecological experiences often fail to lead to political action, and hydrological stories are either suppressed or turned into commodities. In response to this divide, the novel's repeated engagement with maritime memory offers a way to repair what has been actively ignored. By examining three aspects, the emergency dispatch narrative, its geological imagery, and its strategic use of the sea snake figure from Iris Murdoch, the article shows that the inland sea is not just absent but haunting. It acts as a Cretaceous memory, a deep-time water archive, and the settler state continually denies sustaining its exploitative relationship with the land. *The Inland Sea* shows that restoring oceanic memories is a crucial initial step in revealing the truth about the approaching sea, a future characterised by rising waters, ecological crises, and the resurfacing of suppressed hydrological histories.

Keywords: post-truth, Blue Humanities, tidalectics, maritime memory, settler colonialism, climate fiction, oceanic routes

Introduction

In the contemporary moment, characterised by a 'post-truth' epistemology in which emotional conviction often overrides factual evidence and ecological warnings stagnate into political inertia, the connection between narrative, memory, and physical reality faces an extraordinary crisis. The disjunction is most apparent in settler-colonial Australia, where water histories are frequently obscured or otherwise reconfigured into marketable spectacles, and where experiences of drought, flooding and rising sea levels do not translate into meaningful change. Madeleine Watts's first novel, *The Inland Sea* (2021), considers the intersection of post-truth discourse and the Blue Humanities, two fields rarely brought together. The article argues that, in the dialectical tradition of Édouard Glissant and Kamau Brathwaite, Watts interrogates Australia's troubled relationship with water, memory and truth, especially in a post-truth age

when ecological realities rarely prompt political action and hydrologic stories are censored or commodified.

The Inland Sea, as a recursive oscillation between absence and presence, between forgetting and return, is to see how the novel reappropriates the inland sea not as a geographical void or existential metaphor, but as a lively and deep-time archive. Specifically, the Cretaceous inland sea that once covered central Australia functions as a submerged epistemological reservoir: a pre-human water memory that the settler state intentionally suppresses to maintain its exploitative relationship with land. In light of the post-truth gap between experience and action, the novel's recurring focus on maritime memory provides a means to address and repair what has been actively ignored.

This article analyses three interconnected narrative strategies: the emergency dispatch narrative, which breaks causality and reflects the post-truth environment where urgent signals do not lead to collective action; the novel's use of geological imagery of aquifers, drying rivers, and buried seabeds, which depict a form of "slow violence" that resists traditional representation; and Watts's strategic reimagining of the sea snake figure from Iris Murdoch, serving as a chthonic messenger of oceanic memory that challenges terrestrial certainties. Collectively, these elements create a tidalectic revival of suppressed hydrological histories. By reviving oceanic memory, the novel argues, this process is not nostalgic but preparatory: it is the crucial first step in expressing the truth of the approaching sea, a future marked by rising waters, ecological catastrophe, and the resurfacing of collective amnesia. In this sense, *The Inland Sea* reinterprets the inland sea not as a metaphor or void but as a tidal force that calls for new forms of testimony, justice, and awareness.

THE RHYTHM OF FALSE WITNESS: POST-TRUTH AND THE TIDALECTIC ALTERNATIVE

The post-truth condition, as theorists have well documented, extends beyond politics and into epistemological and emotional domains. Lauren Berlant's notion of cruel optimism demonstrates how attachment to familiar fantasies, such as the hope for ecological stability, prevents structural change, even as evidence mounts of the collapse of the environment. In Australia this is a persistent denial: drought is an urgent crisis but once the rains come it is quickly forgotten; floods are often framed as acts of resilience rather than signals of systemic vulnerability. Watts's novel does justice to this fact.

In *The Inland Sea*, the central character is an emergency dispatch operator in Sydney, taking calls from people in crisis, whether from accidents, overdoses, domestic violence, or from the repeated bushfires and heatwaves and her character is a prime example of one of the fundamental paradoxes of life in a post-truth world: she receives emergency broadcasts of catastrophe but cannot act on them except to pass them on, because of the procedures she must follow. Calls are recorded, classified, and assigned, but they do not lead to any real change. As

Berlant states, “A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project” (Berlant 1). The protagonist’s desire to help and the fantasy that her work has meaning ultimately become the barrier to seeing the system’s structural futility. This shift can be disorienting:

A shift of eight hours involved being dropped into emergencies and pulled out, hearing only pieces of whatever the story was, up to fifty times an hour. We asked the questions we were meant to ask, we did it quickly, we stuck to the script... We were not meant to hear the problem. We were not meant to hear the woman howl for the baby turning blue in her arms. But the woman howling couldn’t know that I was not the person she was meant to tell. She didn’t know that I couldn’t help her (Watts 24).

This illustrates the post-truth condition at work: experience without narrative, testimony without witnesses, urgency without results.

The emergency dispatch story reflects the wider ecological crisis. Sydney, the main character, faces an unprecedented drought, but life goes on as if nothing is wrong. Water restrictions are followed and then disregarded; reservoirs shrink even as swimming pools stay full; media coverage swings between concern and forgetfulness.

The calls went on like that, until late afternoon. At a quarter to five a red siren above the windows that overlooked the park began to blare. It means there’s high traffic, Pat explained, with all her curls and her teeth. A car crash, a breakdown, asphyxia, a wrong number, a misdial, a car crash and then screaming (Watts 23). The equivalence drawn here, crash, misdial, screaming, reveals how emergency protocols reduce catastrophe to interchangeable data points. This is not due to ignorance but rather to wilful distention: a hallmark of the post-truth condition, where information is accessible yet fails to become knowledge, and where knowledge fails to lead to action.

The tidalectic method, as developed by Kamau Brathwaite, offers an alternative to the linear, progressive temporality that underpins both colonial historiography and post-truth futility. Brathwaite describes tidalectics as a recursive movement:

Tidalectics engage what Brathwaite calls an ‘alter/native’ historiography to linear models of colonial progress. This ‘tidal dialectic’ resists the synthesizing telos of Hegel’s dialectic by drawing from a cyclical model, invoking the continual movement and rhythm of the ocean. Tidalectics also foregrounds alter/native epistemologies to western colonialism and its linear and materialist biases (Nwadike 59).

In this refusal of Hegelian synthesis and the myth of infinite progress, tidalectics avoids both the colonial erasure of indigenous temporality and postmodern free fall into meaninglessness, and provides a grounded, rhythmic mode of narrating

history that rises and falls without arriving at a final, totalizing end. As Astwood notes,

Tidalectics represents an imperfectly cyclical model of progression tied to the particular situation of diasporic communities both separated and united by water, in which the physicality of real-world tidal vectors plays an equally important role as their metaphoric signification (Astwood 12).

Watts's novel operationalises this tidalectic logic: the emergency calls recur without resolution; the drought deepens and then, impossibly, persists; the memory of the inland sea returns not as linear history but as recurrent haunting. The novel does not offer catharsis or resolution, because the post-truth condition, read tidalectically, is not a problem to be solved but a rhythm to be inhabited and transformed.

WHEN THE GROUND YIELDS: GEOLOGY AS TIDALECTICS FORCE

If the emergency dispatch narrative reflects the post-truth condition in the moment, as a failure of attention now, the novel's geological imagery works across time, invoking deep-time water archives that challenge settler notions of time. The 'inland sea' of the title refers to the Eromanga Sea, a vast Cretaceous body of water that once covered much of central Australia, leaving fossilised marine life in what is now an arid desert. This geological memory is not merely background but an active presence: the protagonist repeatedly encounters ammonites, belemnites, and other marine fossils in the dry interior, remnants of a sea that has not so much disappeared as been buried. Watts writes:

From the edge of the ocean, it was easy see how seductive the west must have looked for those nineteenth-century men trapped at the edge of all this vastness, believing in the water that was Out There. Back then, the British had believed an inland sea lay at the heart of Australia. They had stood right where I was standing on the edge of the continent and noted that some of the rivers didn't terminate down there in the churning ocean below the cliffs. Some rivers flowed west. Turned their backs on the Pacific and slouched suggestively inland. (Watts 51)

This passage performs a dialectical reversal: the sea is not absent but subterranean, not past but dormant. The settler state, invested in the fiction of terra nullius and its hydrological corollary, the empty, manageable continent, must actively deny this aqueous archive. To acknowledge the inland sea is to recognise that the land was never dry, never empty, never fully colonisable. It is to recognise that water precedes and exceeds the settler hydro commons of dams, pipes, and legal entitlements. The concept of slow violence, developed by Rob Nixon, is particularly illuminating here. Nixon writes:

The oxymoronic notion of slow violence poses a number of challenges: scientific, legal, political, and representational. In the long arc between the emergence of slow violence and its delayed effects, both the causes

and the memory of catastrophe readily fade from view as the casualties incurred typically pass untallied and unremembered. (Nixon)

Slow violence describes environmental disasters that unfold gradually over long periods, such as drought, desertification, toxic buildup, and species extinction, and that challenge traditional storytelling methods, which tend to focus on spectacular, immediate events. Watts's use of geological imagery addresses this challenge by changing the scale of representation. The ongoing drought in the novel's present exemplifies slow violence: it has no single cause, a clear end, a specific perpetrator, or a witness. However, by comparing this drought with the Cretaceous Sea, Watts shows that slow violence is not a storytelling failure, but a problem with the usual temporal frameworks used in narratives. The inland sea requires a deep understanding of deep time: it prompts the reader to consider two-time scales simultaneously, the urgent, fearful timing of an emergency call and the geological timescale of marine fossils within desert rocks.

This double consciousness is tidalectic. The sea manifests not as a one-time event but as a recurring force: seen in fossilised shells uncovered by roadworks, in the mysterious humidity of a dry heatwave, and in the ground literally yielding beneath settler infrastructure.

There were signs set up every few metres along the path, warning of unstable ground. The edges of the cemetery were crumbling. It sat upon a dyke filled with building waste, between two walls of rock. Below, the base of the cliff was being inundated with waves. It didn't drain properly. The land was breaking up piece by piece. In fifty years', time, once erosion and the rising waters had taken their toll, the cliffs would no longer exist. And who knew what would become of the bodies? (Watts 50)

The novel indicates that the inland sea is not just a metaphor for psychological emptiness, as a careless reading might suggest, but a real, physical, deep-time archive beneath the settler landscape that demands acknowledgement. The deteriorating cemetery, constructed on landfill between rock walls, eroded by waves, and suffering from poor drainage, symbolises the fate of all settler claims to permanence. The victims of slow violence, such as erosion, flooding, and the unburied dead, remain untallied and unremembered in settler colonial memory, yet the novel's geological imagery insists on bearing witness to them. To read tidalectically is to learn to perceive this ongoing pressure.

THE SEA SNAKE AS OPAQUE OBJECT: REANIMATING MURDOCH THROUGH GLISSANTIAN RELATION

The third narrative strategy Watts deploys is the most unexpected: a strategic reanimation of the sea snake figure from Iris Murdoch's philosophy. Murdoch, in *The Sovereignty of Good*, uses the image of an attentive sea snake to illustrate the ethical demand to attend to reality beyond the sovereign self. For Murdoch, the sea snake is a figure of radical alterity: it cannot be assimilated to human

purposes, does not signify metaphorically, and resists the projective tendencies of the ego. To attend to the sea snake, to really see it, is to practice a form of love that Murdoch calls the difficult task of justice. As Murdoch writes, “Art pierces the veil and gives sense to the notion of a reality which lies beyond appearance; it exhibits virtue in its true guise in the context of death and chance” (Murdoch 86). Watts’s novel invokes this figure explicitly but also transforms it. The protagonist encounters a sea snake, or something like it, in a moment of crisis in the Australian desert, hundreds of kilometres from any ocean. The creature is out of place, anachronistic, impossible. Yet the novel has already prepared us for such an apparition:

The word describes a belief in the meaning of patterns, and encourages the human mind to read significance in, say, couches that have been pushed across front doors, in sea snakes in the water, in the progression of an algal bloom, in rivers flowing west, in the distant shape on the desert horizon that might be a swan (Watts 54).

This is not a hallucination but a tidalectic return. The sea snake is a messenger from the repressed inland sea, a chthonic emissary that refuses the land/sea binary upon which settler epistemology depends. Its movement collapses the distinction between terrestrial and aqueous, revealing that the category of “land” is itself a colonial imposition on a more fluid reality.

Watts’s sea snake differs from Murdoch’s in crucial ways, however. Where Murdoch’s sea snake is a static object of contemplation—a challenge to the perceiving subject, Watts’s sea snake is a dynamic agent of return. It does not wait to be seen; it appears unbidden, and its appearance forces a reckoning with what has been denied. The protagonist’s response is not Murdochian attention but tidalectic testimony: she cannot see it, cannot be changed by it. The sea snake functions as what Glissant calls an ‘opaque’ object, one that resists transparency and assimilation, demanding instead a poetics of relation that honours its irreducible difference. As Glissant writes,

Agree not merely to the right to difference but, carrying this further, agree also to the right to opacity that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity. Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components (Glissant 190).

Crucially, the sea snake is also a figure of the coming sea. In a novel structured by drought, the appearance of a marine creature in the desert foreshadows rising waters. The Cretaceous Sea, the deep-time archive, is not only a memory but a future: climate models predict that rising seas will inundate coastal Australia, and that extreme weather events will intensify. The sea snake thus operates on three temporal registers simultaneously: it recalls the prehistoric inland sea, it haunts the drought-stricken present, and it foretells the drowning to come. This is

tidalectics as prophecy: not linear prediction but recursive return, a wave that has already begun to break.

PIERCING THE VEIL: TIDALECTIC ATTENTION AND THE JUSTICE OF TESTIMONY IN *THE INLAND SEA*

The three narrative strategies examined, emergency dispatch, geological imagery, and the sea snake figure, converge on a single ethical proposition: that reviving oceanic memories is an essential first step towards expressing the truth about the coming sea. This proposition is not abstract but practical. The novel's protagonist does not achieve political agency or environmental salvation. She remains trapped in the post-truth condition, answering calls that do not add up, watching drought deepen, haunted by a sea that should not be there. Yet she testifies. The novel itself is that testimony: an act of attention that refuses the post-truth injunction to look away.

In this context, testimony is not equivalent to action. Watts is too clear-eyed to suggest that telling a story will save the planet or topple settler-colonial structures. But testimony is a precondition for action. The post-truth condition operates precisely by severing experience from testimony, testimony from memory, and memory from justice. The emergency dispatch operator hears disaster but cannot narrate it meaningfully; the drought is experienced but not remembered; the inland sea is present but not acknowledged. By restoring these connections, by giving the emergency calls a narrative form, by connecting the drought to deep-time water archives, and by allowing the sea snake to speak, *The Inland Sea* performs the work of repair at the level of form.

This repair is tidalectic. It does not develop dialectically toward synthesis and resolution but recurses, wave after wave, toward a deeper ability to perceive returns. The novel's structure embodies this: it loops, circles back, repeats images and phrases, and avoids linear progression. The protagonist does not learn and grow in the traditional novelistic sense. Instead, she learns to attend to calls, fossils, and the sea snake. This attention, as Murdoch understood, is the core of justice. For Murdoch, justice is "the attempt to pierce the veil of selfish consciousness and join the world as it truly is" (Murdoch 91). Watts expands this idea: in a post-truth era and amidst slow ecological collapse, honest perception of reality demands tidalectic attention to what has been actively ignored. The inland sea is genuinely the case. The approaching sea is genuinely the case. Recognising them is the beginning of justice.

Conclusion

The Inland Sea, from this analysis, is not simply about climate despair or ecological hope, but a much stranger, more essential phenomenon: a tidalectic experiment in witnessing under conditions that hinder the act of witnessing. Madeleine Watts has created a novel that rejects both the allure of spectacular catastrophe and the numbness caused by information overload, instead advocating for a recursive, patient, and deeply material attentiveness to what has been actively

forgotten. The inland sea in the title is not a metaphor for psychological emptiness; despite mistaken interpretations, it is a Cretaceous water archive, a submerged epistemology and a geological critique of the settler state's myth of a dry, empty, and controllable continent. To read this novel tidalectically is to recognise this pressure: fossils surfacing in desert cuttings, humidity clinging to heatwaves, and the ground crumbling beneath infrastructure built on landfill and denial.

The three narrative strategies discussed in this article work together to create the tidalectic effect. The emergency dispatch narrative breaks causality and highlights the post-truth condition as a failure of attention, where urgent signals are received, categorised, and stored without becoming transformative knowledge. The protagonist, an operator trained to hear but not listen, who follows scripts that prevent her from responding to human cries on the line, serves as a figure of the ecological citizen in late capitalism: overwhelmed by data, constrained by procedure, and complicit through proximity. However, the novel extends beyond this. Its geological imagery broadens the temporal perspective from the immediacy of the emergency call to deep time. The drought deepening throughout the story is not a one-time event but a recurring pattern, understandable only when compared with the memory of the Cretaceous Sea. This juxtaposition of different time scales, the frantic second-by-second dispatch work and the millions of years of marine sedimentation creates a double consciousness characteristic of tidalectic perception. The reader learns to hold two seemingly conflicting truths at once: that the land is dry yet once submerged, that the sea is absent yet returning, and that the present emergency is part of a much longer rhythmic wave.

The sea snake figure, inspired by Iris Murdoch and radically reimagined, forms the third and most surprising component of this tidalectic system. While Murdoch depicted the sea snake as an object of reflective thought, challenging the ego's tendency to project, Watts brings it back as an agent of return. The snake is there, suddenly, incongruously, sinuous in among the dry grass as if it were water. It is not there to be simply observed but to demand attention. As Glissant would describe, it functions as an opaque object, resisting categorisation and calling for a poetics of relation. Its presence in the desert is not a hallucination but a prophecy: it evokes the ancient inland sea, it endures in the arid landscape, and it warns of a submersion to come. Through this triple temporality, the sea snake emerges as the most potent symbol of tidalectics, a recursive wave that has already begun breaking and will continue to do so, regardless of human awareness or indifference.

These three strategies are unified by a single ethical claim: that restoring oceanic memory is essential for any meaningful response to the rising sea. This claim is intentionally modest. The novel does not suggest that testimony will save the world, that storytelling can dismantle settler-colonial systems, or that attention alone is political action. Watts, aware of the post-truth environment she depicts, refrains from offering such assurances. At the end the protagonist remains trapped,

still taking inconsequential calls, watching droughts get worse, haunted by a sea that should not be. There is no salvation, no agency, no clarity for her. Yet, she bears witness. The novel itself is that witness, an act of attention that rejects the post-truth demand to look away. Although testimony may be imperfect, it is necessary for action. The post-truth era disconnects experience from testimony, testimony from memory, and memory from justice. The emergency worker hears disaster but cannot narrate it; the drought is felt but not remembered; the inland sea exists but is unacknowledged. By reestablishing these connections by giving voice to emergency calls, connecting drought to ancient water archives, and letting the sea snake speak, the novel works to repair these disruptions through its form. This repair is tidalectic, not dialectical. It does not aim for synthesis, resolution, or higher unity. Instead, it moves in a recursive, wave-like manner, increasing the capacity to recognise what returns. The novel's structure embodies this rejection of linear progression through loops, repetitions, and circling back to images and phrases. The protagonist does not grow in the traditional novelistic sense; she learns to attend. She learns to hear calls differently, see fossils, and acknowledge the sea snake. As Murdoch suggested, this attention is the core of justice. To pierce the veil of selfishness, to connect with the world as it truly is, and to perceive what has been actively ignored are not dramatic victories but ongoing, challenging, often failing efforts. In a post-truth era, amid slow ecological collapse, such efforts are both exceedingly difficult and critically necessary.

The implications of this interpretation extend beyond Watts's novel into the larger conversation between the Blue Humanities and post-truth epistemology. These frameworks operate in barriers. Blue Humanities are concerned with maritime memory, oceanic pathways and water-based archives; post-truth theory deals with political knowledge, media environments and the demise of factual consensus. *The Inland Sea* shows that integrating these discussions is essential. The post-truth era is not just a facts crisis but also a focus crisis, shaped by a tendency to overlook what is difficult, slow, or overwhelming. The ocean's deep temporal scales, its resistance to land-based categories, and its unpredictable returns offer vital tools for redirecting attention. To read tidalectically is to recognise what the post-truth condition urges us to ignore: the fossil in the roadcut, the humidity in a heatwave, the sea snake in dry grass. These are not just metaphors; they are real and reemerging.

The inland sea, Watts insists, is really the case. The coming sea is really the case. To see them is to begin to be just. This is not a conclusion in the sense of an ending, a final synthesis, a settled position. Tidalectics has no conclusions, only returns. The wave breaks, withdraws, and breaks again. The novel loops back to its beginning. The reader closes the book and, if the reading has done its work, finds herself attending differently to the world outside: to the weather, to the news, to the ground beneath her feet. The inland sea is still there, buried but not gone. The sea snake is still moving through grass that was once water. The calls are still

coming in, urgent and unanswerable. To attend to them is not to solve anything. It is to refuse the post-truth injunction to look away. And that refusal, however small, however inadequate, is where any possible justice begins.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/65**FEELING UNHOMELY: CULTURAL HYBRIDITY AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL DISPLACEMENT IN *EXIT WEST*****K. M. MADHUMATHI SRI**

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Abstract

This paper scrutinizes the feeling of ‘unhomeliness’ in *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid with the help of the concepts like cultural hybridity and the ‘unhomely’ theorized by Homi K. Bhabha. The prevailing criticisms on the novel often highlights on aspects like migration, borders and globalization. Comparatively, little focus has been given to the psychological dimensions of displacement. This research paper observes how migration in the novel *Exit West* is not merely a geographical movement but an emotional condition that is profoundly internal which disturbs the sense of belonging. By analysing the central characters Nadia and Saeed, this study observes how migration as an experience develop a constant feeling of unhomeliness where well known places become unfamiliar and identity is unstable. According to Bhabha’s conceptualization, the unhomely occurs when there is a collapse of boundaries between home and the world. Drawing upon this notion, the current paper explores how liminal spaces are inhabited by the characters that are neither completely rooted nor fully alien. The emotional consequences of displacement are reflected through the evolving relationship of the characters, that further shows how intimacy itself is unsettled because of migration. This study contributes to the prevailing criticisms by focusing on the psychological and affective dimensions of diaspora. In doing so, the focus is shifted from external movement to internal experience. This study, ultimately, argues that *Exit West* redefines the idea of home as a fluid and contested space, shaped by processes of cultural negotiation and identity transformation.

Keywords: Unhomeliness, Cultural Hybridity, Diaspora, Identity formation, Liminality, Belonging.

Introduction

The contemporary global landscape, marked by accelerated migration and cultural interpenetration has foregrounded questions of identity and psychological rootedness in unprecedented ways. Literary narratives that engage with these dynamics often move beyond material displacement to explore the affective and psychological dimensions of migration. Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West* (2017) is one

such text that reimagines migration through a speculative yet deeply human lens, tracing the journey of its protagonists, Nadia and Saeed, as they traverse borders via magical doors. While the novel has been widely read as a commentary on the refugee crisis and globalization, it also offers a nuanced exploration of the internal states of migrants, particularly the sense of “unhomeliness” that emerges from cultural hybridity and fractured belonging. This paper seeks to examine how *Exit West* represents psychological displacement through the lens of Homi Bhabha’s theory of cultural hybridity, with particular emphasis on the concept of the “unhomely.”

Homi Bhabha’s postcolonial framework, especially as articulated in *The Location of Culture* (1994), provides a critical vocabulary for understanding the ambivalent and often disorienting experiences of individuals situated between cultures. Central to Bhabha’s thought is the notion of hybridity, which challenges the fixity of cultural identities by foregrounding the “third space” as a site of negotiation and transformation. Within this space, identities are neither entirely rooted in the past nor fully assimilated into the present, but are instead continually reconstituted through interaction and difference. The “unhomely,” a related concept, describes the unsettling condition in which the boundaries between home and the world become blurred, rendering the familiar strange and the self-fragmented. In the context of migration narratives, this concept is particularly useful for analyzing how individuals experience not only physical displacement but also a profound sense of psychological estrangement.

Exit West lends itself productively to such a reading, as its characters inhabit multiple cultural spaces without ever fully belonging to any of them. The magical doors in the novel function as both literal and metaphorical devices, collapsing geographical distances while intensifying emotional and psychological dislocation. Nadia and Saeed’s movement from an unnamed war-torn city to various global locations such as Mykonos, London, and Marin does not result in a stable sense of home but rather amplifies their internal fragmentation. Their relationship, too, becomes a site of hybridity, reflecting divergent responses to displacement and evolving cultural affiliations. Through these narrative strategies, Hamid foregrounds the complexity of migrant subjectivity, resisting reductive portrayals of refugees as either victims or assimilated subjects.

Existing scholarship on *Exit West* has predominantly focused on themes such as globalization, border politics, and the ethics of hospitality. Critics have examined the novel’s use of magical realism to critique the arbitrariness of national boundaries and to humanize the refugee experience. Others have explored its engagement with temporality, technology, and the reconfiguration of space in a globalized world. While these studies offer valuable insights into the socio-political dimensions of the text, there remains a relative paucity of sustained analysis on the psychological implications of cultural hybridity as experienced by the characters. In particular, the affective condition of “unhomeliness” has not

been sufficiently foregrounded as a central analytical category in readings of the novel.

Moreover, while Bhabha's theory has been widely applied in postcolonial literary studies, its specific applicability to *Exit West* in terms of psychological displacement and intimate relational dynamics has not been exhaustively explored. Much of the existing criticism tends to invoke hybridity in a generalized manner, without delving into its nuanced manifestations in the characters' inner lives. This gap is significant, as it overlooks the ways in which hybridity operates not only at the level of cultural identity but also within the psyche, shaping emotions, relationships, and perceptions of selfhood. By focusing on the "unhomely" as a lived, affective experience, this paper aims to bridge this gap and offer a more comprehensive understanding of the novel's engagement with displacement.

This study, therefore, positions itself at the intersection of postcolonial theory and psychological analysis, arguing that *Exit West* articulates a form of displacement that is as much internal as it is external. Through a close reading of the text, the paper will demonstrate how Nadia and Saeed embody different responses to hybridity, and how their evolving identities reflect the tensions inherent in inhabiting the "third space." It will also examine how the narrative structure and stylistic choices of the novel contribute to the representation of unhomeliness, emphasizing moments of detachment, and reconfiguration of belonging.

In doing so, the paper contributes to ongoing discussions in postcolonial and migration studies by foregrounding the psychological dimensions of hybridity, an area that has often been underexplored. It also extends Bhabha's theoretical framework by applying it to a contemporary text that engages with current global realities, thereby demonstrating its continued relevance and adaptability. By centering the concept of the unhomely, the study seeks to illuminate the subtle and often overlooked ways in which displacement is experienced and narrated.

The following section reviews existing literature on *Exit West*, cultural hybridity, and postcolonial approaches to migration narratives, in order to situate the present study within the broader scholarly discourse and further delineate its contribution.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Critical scholarship on *Exit West* has expanded significantly since the novel's publication in 2017, largely because the text appeared during a period marked by intense global discussion on refugees, borders, migration, and nationalism. Many scholars approach the novel as a literary response to the contemporary refugee crisis and examine how Mohsin Hamid humanizes displaced individuals by focusing on ordinary emotional experiences rather than political rhetoric alone. The novel's magical doors, which instantly transport migrants across countries, have received particular scholarly attention because they radically transform the conventional structure of migration narratives. Instead of describing dangerous journeys in detail, Hamid shifts attention toward the psychological and emotional

consequences of displacement. This narrative strategy has made the novel especially relevant within postcolonial and migration studies.

A major area of existing scholarship focuses on globalization and border politics in the novel. Critics frequently argue that the magical doors symbolize the collapse of geographical and political barriers in an increasingly interconnected world. Through these doors, Hamid challenges rigid ideas of nationality and belonging. Wenhui Huang and Meng Chen observe that the doors in *Exit West* function as “symbolic thresholds” into spaces of cultural negotiation and identity transformation (“Traversing the Interstices”). Their argument is important because it identifies migration in the novel as more than physical movement. The migrants crossing through the doors enter unfamiliar emotional and cultural environments where identity becomes unstable and continuously negotiated.

Several scholars also interpret the novel through the framework of cosmopolitanism and transnationalism. These readings emphasize how migration creates multicultural spaces where individuals from different linguistic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds coexist. The sections set in Mykonos, London, and Marin especially receive attention because they depict societies transformed by large-scale migration. Critics argue that Hamid portrays identity as increasingly fluid within these globalized environments. Traditional distinctions such as native and foreigner, insider and outsider, begin collapsing within the novel’s migrant communities. In this sense, *Exit West* reflects broader contemporary anxieties regarding nationalism, mobility, and global interconnectedness.

Another important body of criticism examines Hamid’s use of magical realism. Scholars argue that the magical doors allow Hamid to universalize migration and remove sensationalized focus from physical suffering alone. Instead of emphasizing dangerous sea crossings or violent borders in detail, the novel foregrounds emotional disorientation and cultural instability. Critics therefore interpret magical realism in *Exit West* not merely as fantasy but as a technique that exposes the surreal nature of contemporary migration itself. The sudden movement across borders reflects the unpredictability and fragmentation experienced by migrants in the modern world.

Questions of identity and belonging also occupy a central place in existing scholarship. Nadia and Saeed are frequently analyzed as contrasting responses to displacement and cultural negotiation. Nadia is often interpreted as a character more willing to embrace change, hybridity, and reinvention, while Saeed is associated with nostalgia, religion, and emotional attachment to tradition. Scholars frequently use these contrasting responses to examine how migration reshapes identity unevenly. However, many studies tend to discuss these transformations primarily in sociological or cultural terms without fully exploring their emotional and psychological consequences.

This limitation becomes significant when considering the emotional structure of the novel. Although critics acknowledge hybridity and identity transformation,

comparatively fewer studies focus deeply on psychological displacement and emotional fragmentation. Much of the scholarship prioritizes refugee politics, globalization, or multicultural coexistence, while the emotional instability experienced by Nadia and Saeed receives less sustained analysis. The gradual breakdown of intimacy and emotional continuity often remains secondary within critical discussions of the text. This gap is important because Hamid repeatedly portrays migration as an internal emotional condition as much as a geographical experience.

The theoretical framework of Homi K. Bhabha provides an especially productive lens for addressing these concerns. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha challenges fixed and essentialist understandings of identity by arguing that culture is always shaped through interaction, negotiation, and ambivalence. According to Bhabha, “all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity” (38). Hybridity therefore refers to the emergence of identities that develop through contact between cultures rather than through isolated cultural purity. This concept becomes central to *Exit West*, where migration repeatedly destabilizes fixed notions of nationality, religion, home, and belonging.

Bhabha’s theory of hybridity is particularly valuable because it avoids simplistic celebrations of multicultural harmony. For Bhabha, hybridity is not a peaceful blending of cultures but a deeply ambivalent condition shaped by instability and negotiation. Hybrid identities exist within tension because individuals living between cultures often experience uncertainty and fragmentation. Yasmin Gunaratnam explains that hybridity involves “in/stabilities” that complicate identity and belonging (“Rethinking Hybridity”). This theoretical perspective is especially relevant to *Exit West*, where Nadia and Saeed continuously negotiate changing cultural environments while struggling emotionally with displacement and alienation.

Closely connected to hybridity is Bhabha’s concept of the “third space.” Bhabha argues that identity emerges within an interstitial cultural space where meanings are negotiated and transformed. The third space destabilizes rigid binaries such as East and West, self and other, native and foreigner. It creates possibilities for new forms of identity beyond traditional categories. In *Exit West*, migrant spaces such as Mykonos, London, and Marin function as third spaces because they force individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds into shared environments shaped by instability and adaptation.

However, the third space in the novel is not represented as entirely liberating. Hamid repeatedly emphasizes emotional loneliness, uncertainty, and fragmentation within these hybrid spaces. The migrants coexist physically but continue struggling psychologically with memory, nostalgia, and unstable belonging. This emotional dimension becomes especially significant when examined through Bhabha’s concept of the “unhomely.” Bhabha explains that the unhomely condition occurs when “the borders between home and world become

confused” (*The Location of Culture* 13). The unhomely does not simply refer to homelessness in a literal sense. Instead, it describes a psychological state in which individuals feel emotionally displaced even within spaces that should provide comfort and familiarity. Political violence, migration, and cultural instability disrupt emotional continuity and create feelings of estrangement.

This concept becomes central to understanding Nadia and Saeed’s experiences in *Exit West*. Even before migration physically begins, violence transforms their homeland into an emotionally unstable space. Familiar streets and domestic routines gradually become associated with fear and uncertainty. After migration, this emotional instability intensifies further. Neither the homeland nor the host countries provide complete belonging. Nadia and Saeed therefore occupy an ongoing condition of emotional in-betweenness.

Banu Akçeşme argues that Bhabha’s concept of unhomeliness helps explain how displacement shapes “identity and belonging, emotional and mental reactions and attitudes” (“Exploring Unhomely Lives”). This insight is particularly important because it shifts attention toward the psychological dimensions of migration rather than treating displacement purely as a political issue. In *Exit West*, emotional fragmentation shapes the characters’ relationships, memories, and selfhood as deeply as physical relocation.

The present study therefore employs Bhabha’s concepts of hybridity, the third space, and the unhomely to analyze migration as a psychological condition within *Exit West*. Unlike earlier scholarship that focuses primarily on globalization or refugee politics, this paper foregrounds emotional instability and fragmented belonging. Through close analysis of key scenes involving Nadia and Saeed, the study demonstrates how Hamid portrays migration as an ongoing process of emotional negotiation in which identity remains unstable, and continuously transformed.

Cultural Hybridity and Fragmented Belonging

Before migration physically begins in *Exit West*, Mohsin Hamid already introduces a society shaped by cultural uncertainty and emotional instability. The unnamed city in the novel exists within a modern global world influenced simultaneously by local traditions, technological modernity, religious expectations, and political violence. Hamid deliberately avoids naming the city because the experiences represented in the novel are not confined to one nation alone. The city becomes symbolic of several contemporary societies experiencing instability and fragmentation. This universality strengthens the novel’s postcolonial relevance because displacement is represented as a shared global reality rather than an isolated regional crisis. Through this setting, Hamid establishes that cultural identity in the contemporary world is already unstable even before migration occurs.

Nadia’s characterization strongly reflects this instability. From the beginning, she resists traditional social expectations imposed upon women while continuing to

inhabit a society shaped by conservative values. Hamid's description of her black robe becomes particularly important because it immediately complicates cultural assumptions. Nadia wears the robe not out of religious devotion but because it allows her social freedom and protection from harassment. Hamid writes that she wore it "so men would not bother her so much" (16). This simple statement reveals how identity in the novel functions performatively rather than essentially. Nadia's external appearance does not accurately represent her inner beliefs or desires. Her identity already exists within a hybrid space where outward cultural markers and personal individuality intersect uneasily.

Hamid further develops this hybridity through Nadia's living arrangements. She lives alone despite social disapproval, smokes marijuana, and resists conventional expectations surrounding gender and marriage. Yet she does not completely reject the cultural environment around her. Instead, she selectively negotiates within it. This negotiation reflects Bhabha's theory that identity is not formed through complete acceptance or rejection of culture but through continuous interaction with competing social forces. Nadia therefore becomes a powerful example of hybrid identity because she cannot be reduced either to tradition or rebellion alone. Saeed's characterization initially appears more stable and culturally rooted. He values prayer, family relationships, and emotional continuity. His connection with his parents especially reveals his attachment to familiarity and domestic security. Hamid portrays Saeed's family life warmly during the earlier sections of the novel. The conversations, shared meals, and routines within the apartment create an atmosphere of emotional intimacy and stability. However, this apparent stability gradually collapses as violence spreads across the city. The transformation of Saeed's emotional world becomes one of the clearest examples of psychological displacement in the novel.

At the beginning of *Exit West*, Nadia and Saeed appear rooted within familiar cultural structures. Yet Hamid subtly establishes instability even before migration begins. Nadia wears a black robe, but Hamid immediately complicates its meaning by explaining that she wore it "so men would not bother her so much" (Hamid 16). This moment reveals that identity in the novel is already hybrid and performative. Nadia outwardly appears conservative, yet internally she rejects rigid social expectations. Hamid therefore challenges simplistic assumptions about religion, gender, and cultural authenticity.

Saeed, by contrast, remains emotionally connected to tradition and family life. He values prayer, domestic routines, and emotional continuity. Yet even Saeed cannot preserve stable identity once political violence transforms the city. Hamid describes how fear gradually becomes part of ordinary life. Familiar streets become militarized, and public spaces turn threatening. Home itself begins to feel unstable. This transformation is significant because it suggests that psychological displacement begins before physical migration occurs.

One important scene occurs after Saeed's mother is killed by a stray bullet. Hamid narrates the moment with painful simplicity: "Saeed's mother was killed" (94). The emotional force of the scene lies in its abruptness. Violence destroys ordinary life without warning. After this moment, Saeed's relationship with home changes permanently. The city no longer represents comfort or continuity. Instead, it becomes associated with grief and instability.

Migration through the magical doors intensifies this fragmentation. When Nadia and Saeed arrive in Mykonos, they enter a space populated by migrants from multiple countries and cultures. National identity begins losing clarity because everyone shares the condition of displacement. Hamid writes that "we are all migrants through time" (209). This statement expands migration beyond geography and presents it as a universal human condition shaped by change and impermanence.

Mykonos functions as what Bhabha calls the third space. It is neither home nor destination but a temporary zone where identities are renegotiated. Nadia adapts more quickly to this environment. She interacts with strangers openly and becomes curious about unfamiliar social worlds. Yet Hamid avoids presenting her adaptability as complete liberation. Nadia remains emotionally isolated despite outward confidence. Her identity becomes increasingly fluid, but this fluidity also creates loneliness.

Saeed responds differently. He clings to memory, prayer, and familiarity in order to preserve emotional continuity. In London, he becomes drawn toward migrants "who prayed as he prayed" (Hamid 121). These moments reveal his desire to reconstruct emotional stability within unfamiliar environments. Yet the very need for such reconstruction demonstrates the depth of his displacement.

Hamid therefore portrays hybridity as emotionally difficult rather than celebratory alone. Huang and Chen argue that hybridity in the novel is "fraught with alienation and pain" ("Traversing the Interstices"). This observation becomes visible through Nadia and Saeed's growing emotional distance from one another. Migration changes not only their surroundings but also their inner emotional worlds.

Psychological Displacement and the Unhomely

Hamid's portrayal of displacement becomes especially powerful because he focuses on ordinary emotional experiences rather than dramatic political speeches. The novel repeatedly shows how fear enters everyday life slowly and changes the psychological meaning of familiar spaces. Streets, markets, houses, and workplaces gradually become associated with danger and uncertainty. This emotional transformation reflects Bhabha's idea of the unhomely condition, where the distinction between private safety and public instability begins collapsing. In *Exit West*, home itself slowly becomes emotionally unfamiliar.

The atmosphere of fear surrounding Nadia and Saeed's city intensifies gradually throughout the narrative. Hamid describes curfews, military checkpoints, explosions, and disappearances in a restrained narrative voice that makes the

violence feel disturbingly ordinary. The characters continue working, eating, talking, and attempting to sustain relationships even while society disintegrates around them. This emotional normality amid violence makes the displacement more psychologically realistic. The novel suggests that migration rarely begins with a single dramatic moment. Instead, it emerges through the gradual erosion of emotional security.

One particularly important scene occurs when Nadia and Saeed witness public executions and increasing military control within the city. Hamid describes how the city becomes divided into territories controlled by different armed groups. Familiar movement becomes impossible. Fear begins shaping ordinary routines and emotional behavior. The characters no longer experience home as stable or predictable. This transition is central to understanding unhomeliness because the homeland itself becomes psychologically alien before migration physically occurs.

Saeed's emotional attachment to family intensifies this psychological crisis. After his mother's death, grief becomes inseparable from his understanding of home. The apartment once associated with comfort and continuity gradually transforms into a painful reminder of loss. Hamid's restrained narration makes this grief especially effective because the emotional devastation is communicated through ordinary details rather than excessive sentimentality. Saeed continues praying, caring for his father, and attempting normal conversation, yet emotional fragmentation increasingly shapes his behavior.

Nadia experiences psychological displacement differently. While Saeed becomes more attached to memory and continuity, Nadia focuses on survival and adaptation. Yet her outward strength often conceals emotional isolation. Hamid repeatedly portrays her moments of silence, distance, and introspection. Even before migration, she lacks complete emotional belonging within her society. Migration therefore does not suddenly create alienation for Nadia. Instead, it intensifies feelings of detachment that already existed beneath the surface.

The magical doors themselves also symbolize psychological rupture. Unlike conventional migration narratives that describe dangerous journeys across borders, Hamid presents migration as sudden and emotionally disorienting. The doors collapse geographical distance instantly. This narrative strategy forces attention away from physical travel and toward emotional consequences. Nadia and Saeed enter unfamiliar environments without gradual preparation or emotional transition. Their displacement therefore feels abrupt, fragmented, and psychologically overwhelming.

When the couple arrives in Mykonos, Hamid emphasizes confusion, exhaustion, and emotional uncertainty rather than relief. The refugee camp lacks permanence and emotional intimacy. Thousands of displaced individuals occupy the same space, yet genuine connection remains limited. The migrants coexist physically while carrying separate memories, languages, and emotional histories. This

emotional fragmentation reflects the instability of the third space described by Bhabha. Individuals inhabit transitional environments where old identities weaken while new identities remain uncertain.

Hamid's description of waiting becomes especially important in these scenes. Migrants wait for food, information, transportation, and legal decisions. More importantly, they wait emotionally for a sense of stability that never fully arrives. This endless waiting creates psychological suspension. The migrants are separated from the past but not securely connected to the future. The refugee camp therefore becomes not only a political space but also a psychological representation of incomplete belonging.

Nadia and Saeed's emotional relationship gradually weakens within this unstable environment. Earlier, they depended upon each other as emotional protection against social collapse. However, migration slowly changes their desires, fears, and emotional priorities. Hamid portrays this transformation realistically through small moments rather than dramatic confrontations. The couple speaks less intimately, experiences silence differently, and gradually develops separate emotional worlds. Their relationship illustrates how displacement reshapes identity internally over time.

The London sections of the novel further develops this emotional fragmentation. London appears multicultural and globally connected, yet migrants continue experiencing instability and hostility. Hamid describes protests, anti-migrant sentiment, and social tension throughout the city. Nadia and Saeed occupy abandoned houses alongside migrants from different nations, languages, and religions. These communal living arrangements reflect the possibility of new hybrid communities emerging through displacement. At the same time, however, these spaces remain temporary and politically uncertain.

Saeed's increasing attachment to religious gatherings reveals his emotional struggle to preserve continuity. He seeks people "who prayed as he prayed" (121) because familiar rituals offer temporary psychological comfort. Prayer functions not simply as religious practice but as emotional reconstruction. Saeed attempts to maintain connection with an earlier version of himself that migration has destabilized. Yet his nostalgia also reveals the impossibility of fully recovering the past.

Nadia responds differently to London's hybrid environment. She becomes increasingly open to unfamiliar friendships and social possibilities. Her emotional world expands beyond earlier cultural expectations, particularly through her interactions with women around her. However, Hamid avoids presenting this adaptation as complete freedom. Nadia's growing independence is accompanied by emotional loneliness and uncertainty. She gains new forms of selfhood while simultaneously losing emotional continuity with her past.

The scenes in Marin deepen this exploration of unhomeliness and identity transformation. Marin appears calmer and more stable than the earlier migrant

environments, yet emotional displacement continues shaping both characters. Nadia becomes closer to the female cook and begins imagining alternative forms of intimacy and belonging. Her attraction toward the cook symbolizes her movement toward emotional reinvention beyond earlier cultural boundaries. Yet Hamid carefully avoids simplistic celebration. Nadia's transformation remains emotionally complicated because it distances her from earlier relationships and identities.

Saeed, meanwhile, grows increasingly attached to people who remind him of his homeland and cultural memory. His emotional world becomes shaped by nostalgia and longing for continuity. These differing responses eventually make emotional intimacy between Nadia and Saeed impossible to sustain. Importantly, the novel does not portray their separation as failure. Instead, Hamid presents it as part of the natural emotional transformation produced by migration and time.

The final reunion between Nadia and Saeed years later becomes one of the most emotionally significant scenes in the novel. They meet peacefully and remember each other with affection, yet they no longer belong together romantically. Hamid refuses melodramatic reconciliation. Instead, he emphasizes emotional maturity and acceptance. Migration has changed them irreversibly. Their earlier identities cannot be recovered because displacement continuously reshaped their emotional lives.

This ending powerfully reinforces Bhabha's concept of the unhomely. Nadia and Saeed survive migration and adapt to new environments, yet belonging remains unstable and incomplete. Home no longer exists as a fixed emotional reality. Instead, identity becomes fluid and continuously negotiated across memory, movement, and cultural interaction. Hamid therefore presents displacement not as temporary interruption but as an enduring emotional condition within the contemporary global world.

The emotional core of *Exit West* lies in its portrayal of unhomeliness. Bhabha explains that the unhomely condition emerges when private and public spaces collapse into one another, creating emotional estrangement (*The Location of Culture* 13). In Hamid's novel, Nadia and Saeed repeatedly experience this condition as migration destabilizes their sense of home, memory, and intimacy. Importantly, unhomeliness begins before migration itself. Political violence invades domestic life and transforms familiar spaces into sources of fear. Saeed's family apartment, once associated with safety, becomes emotionally fragile after his mother's death. Nadia's independent lifestyle also becomes increasingly threatened by social instability. Home no longer functions as emotional refuge. Instead, it becomes uncertain and temporary.

The refugee camp in Mykonos intensifies this emotional instability. Although thousands of migrants live together, emotional isolation dominates the atmosphere. The camp lacks permanence and intimacy. People coexist physically while remaining psychologically disconnected. Hamid repeatedly emphasizes

waiting, uncertainty, and suspension. The migrants exist between past and future without stable belonging in either direction.

One particularly revealing moment occurs when Nadia and Saeed begin realizing that migration has changed their relationship itself. Earlier, intimacy functioned as emotional shelter against violence. Hamid writes that they had become “each other’s shelter” (79). Yet displacement gradually weakens this emotional connection. Their responses to migration become increasingly incompatible. Saeed turns toward nostalgia and religious continuity, while Nadia moves toward adaptation and reinvention.

This emotional divergence becomes clearer in London. Saeed finds comfort among migrants who share his cultural background, while Nadia grows increasingly distant from traditional structures. Their separation is not dramatic or hostile. Instead, it develops gradually through silence, emotional distance, and changing desires. Hamid portrays displacement realistically by showing how migration slowly transforms emotional identity.

Nadia’s eventual relationship with the female cook in Marin symbolizes this transformation. She begins imagining forms of intimacy and belonging beyond earlier expectations. Yet Hamid does not portray this change as simple liberation. Nadia gains independence, but she also loses emotional continuity with her past. Her new identity remains shaped by instability and transition.

Secondary criticism supports this interpretation of psychological displacement. Akçeşme argues that Bhabha’s concept of the unhomely reveals how displacement reshapes “identity and belonging, emotional and mental reactions and attitudes” (“Exploring Unhomely Lives”). Similarly, Gunaratnam notes that hybridity produces instability rather than harmony (“Rethinking Hybridity”). These theoretical insights help explain why the migrants in *Exit West* continue experiencing alienation despite adaptation.

Another important aspect of unhomeliness in the novel is memory. Nadia and Saeed gradually lose emotional connection with earlier versions of themselves. Memories become fragmented and unreliable. Home survives only through recollection, yet recollection itself changes over time. This instability intensifies their emotional displacement because the past can no longer provide secure belonging.

The final reunion between Nadia and Saeed reflects this emotional complexity. Years later, they meet peacefully and remember one another with affection, but they no longer belong together romantically. Hamid avoids sentimental reconciliation. Instead, he emphasizes emotional transformation. Migration has reshaped them permanently. Their relationship mattered deeply, yet displacement changed the people they once were.

Through these experiences, *Exit West* demonstrates that migration is fundamentally psychological as well as geographical. Hamid portrays displacement as an emotional condition marked by instability, loneliness,

memory, and incomplete belonging. Using Bhabha's concept of the unhomely, the novel reveals how individuals living between cultures experience persistent emotional negotiation.

Conclusion

Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* presents migration as a deeply emotional and psychological experience rather than merely a political or geographical phenomenon. Through Nadia and Saeed's journeys across multiple cultural spaces, the novel explores how displacement reshapes identity, intimacy, memory, and belonging. Using Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and the unhomely, this paper has argued that migration in the novel produces emotional fragmentation and unstable selfhood.

The analysis demonstrates that hybridity in *Exit West* is profoundly ambivalent. Nadia and Saeed encounter new possibilities of identity and experience through migration, yet they also experience loneliness, alienation, and emotional instability. Hamid therefore refuses simplistic celebrations of globalization or multiculturalism. Instead, he foregrounds the emotional difficulty of living between cultures.

The magical doors symbolize this unstable condition. They remove the physical difficulty of migration but intensify emotional displacement by forcing characters abruptly into unfamiliar environments. The migrants enter spaces resembling Bhabha's third space, where identity must be constantly renegotiated. Neither the homeland nor the host nations provide complete emotional belonging.

The study also demonstrates that unhomeliness remains central to the novel's emotional structure. Political violence destabilizes home even before migration occurs, while displacement further fragments memory and intimacy. Nadia and Saeed respond differently to this instability. Saeed seeks continuity through religion and nostalgia, while Nadia moves toward reinvention and adaptation. Their emotional separation reflects the uneven effects of migration on identity.

Ultimately, *Exit West* portrays migration as an ongoing emotional condition rather than a completed transition. Hamid presents identity as fluid, unstable, and continuously shaped by movement and cultural negotiation. By foregrounding psychological displacement, the novel expands contemporary migration discourse beyond politics and borders to reveal the intimate emotional realities of living between worlds.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/66**ARI GAUTIER'S *THE THINNAI* - A STUDY OF DIASPORIC
SUBJECTIVITIES AND RACIAL HIERARCHIES****A. MANJU REKHA**Research Scholar, SRM Institute of Science and Technology
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School of Humanities, Pondicherry University, Pondicherry, India**Abstract**

This paper offers a sustained literary analysis of Ari Gautier's novel *The Thinnai* (Le thinnai, 2018; English translation by Blake Smith, 2021) through the thematic lens of race, ethnicity, and minority experience in diaspora. Set in the working-class fishing district of Kurusukuppam in the former French colonial enclave of Pondicherry, the novel assembles a cast of characters who embody the contradictions of postcolonial identity: Creoles marginalised by their mixed-race heritage, Dalit converts who have renounced caste in exchange for French citizenship, colonial war veterans who served for France and returned to poverty, and a wandering old Frenchman whose family history connects Pondicherry to the Atlantic world of enslaved Tamil labour. Through close reading of these characters — particularly Gilbert Thaata, Lourdes the Creole servant, and the unnamed child narrator — and drawing on the postcolonial theories of Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Édouard Glissant, and Avtar Brah, this paper argues that 'the thinnai' itself functions as both a spatial and ethical figure for a radical politics of minority hospitality. Gautier's novel does not merely represent minority suffering; it insists that the spaces of the marginalised are the richest and most culturally complex spaces in the postcolonial world, and that the story of Pondicherry tells its story through them.

Keywords: Diaspora, postcolonial identity, creole, marginalised experience, identity conflicts.

Introduction

There is a sentence at the beginning of Ari Gautier's novel *The Thinnai* that stops the reader cold — not because of any stylistic flourish, but because of its startling social precision: the community of Kurusukuppam, the narrator tells us, is "a bewildering mix of Creoles, colonial war veterans, proud communists, and French citizens who have never left India's shores" (Gautier 1). In seven words — "French

citizens who have never left India's shores" — Gautier compresses three centuries of colonial history, an entire paradox of belonging, and a uniquely Pondicherrian form of minority identity that has no equivalent anywhere else in the world.

This paper takes that sentence as its point of departure. The Thinnai is, on one level, a warm and violent novel about a neighbourhood and its eccentrics, a story told through the eyes of a Tamil boy growing up on his family's thinnai — the raised stone platform at the entrance of traditional South Indian homes, a space of rest, hospitality, and storytelling open to all who pass. But beneath its carnivalesque surface, the novel is a work of profound political seriousness, one that maps the intersections of race, caste, colonial history, language, and diasporic experience in one of the most overlooked corners of world literature: the Franco-Tamil community of Pondicherry.

Gautier himself is a product of this community. Born in Madagascar to a Tamil father and a Malagasy mother, raised in Pondicherry, educated in French, and now living in Oslo, he is a writer of multiple Diasporas. As a self-described first French marginalised novelist, he has built his literary project around the recovery of a community — the Bas-Créoles, the Dalit converts, the imprisoned labourers, the colonial soldiers — that postcolonial Indian literature has largely ignored and that French literature has never acknowledged (Osman, "The literary gifts"). The Thinnai is the central achievement of this project.

French Pondicherry and Its Forgotten Communities:

To understand what is at stake in *The Thinnai*, one must first understand the singular historical reality that produced both the novel and its author. Pondicherry — today constitutionally known as Puducherry — was the capital of French India for nearly three centuries, from 1674 until the transfer of sovereignty to the Republic of India in 1954. Unlike British India, the French territorial administration in Pondicherry operated under a distinctly different legal philosophy: French republicanism, with its rhetoric of universal citizenship, produced a set of provisions by which Pondicherrian residents could claim full French citizenship if they renounced their personal Hindu or Muslim law — a provision codified in the *Loi Regnault* of 1881 (Namakkal 38–42).

The social consequences of this legislation were profound and paradoxical. A small but significant community of Pondicherrian Tamils became legally French — legally European, culturally Tamil, racially Brown — a category of personhood that the administrative categories of both India and France struggled to accommodate. These were people who spoke French at home and Tamil in the street, who celebrated Bastille Day with genuine enthusiasm while eating idlis and fish curry, who named their children after French Revolutionary heroes and Tamil deities simultaneously. Among them, a further social distinction emerged: the Bas-Créoles or Low Creoles — people of mixed Tamil, French, Portuguese, and sometimes African descent who occupied the lowest rung of this already-

marginalised community, dismissed by upper-caste Tamils and ignored by white French alike (Kabir 204–05).

Alongside and beneath this Creole community lived the Dalit communities of Pondicherry, for whom French colonialism offered an unusual and double-edged opportunity. The renunciation of personal law required for French citizenship also effectively meant the renunciation of caste — for caste operated through Hindu personal law. Many Dalit Pondicherrians converted to Catholicism and claimed French citizenship not out of attachment to France but as a calculated act of escape from the caste system. The untouchable thus became the Frenchman, trading one form of marginalisation for another but at least acquiring legal personhood in the process. This is the community that Gautier, himself a pariah Catholic of Dalit origin, has set out to retrieve from historical silence ("Sunday Book Pick").

The Novel in Context: A Literature without a Tradition:

When Gautier sat down to write *The Thinnai*, he confronted a striking absence: there was virtually no literary tradition of Franco-Tamil writing. The French writers who had written about Pondicherry had invariably focussed on the colonial administration and the white residents. The Tamil writers who had addressed the city had written in Tamil. The Franco-Tamil community, the Bas-Créoles, the Dalit converts, the colonial soldiers — none of them had a literature. Gautier set out to write one ("Paper Frenchmen").

The Thinnai was originally published in French as *Le thinnai* in 2018 and translated into English by the historian Blake Smith in 2021. Its publication marked a significant moment in world literature: the first French-language novel to centre the working-class, multiracial, caste-marked communities of Pondicherry's Black Town. The novel was shortlisted for the Prix du Printemps du Livre du Forum de Saint Louis and has since been translated into Norwegian, with a Tamil translation forthcoming. Its reception has been notable for the range of readerships it has found: Tamil readers recognising their city, French readers discovering a history they did not know, and global readers of postcolonial literature finding in Kurusukuppam a neighbourhood that crystallises questions of race, belonging, and minority experience that are urgently relevant everywhere ("Rollicking Saga").

Theoretical Framework:

Homi Bhabha: The Third Space and Hybridity:

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "Third Space of enunciation" is the theoretical framework most immediately applicable to the world of *The Thinnai*. For Bhabha, cultural identity in the postcolonial context is never simply a matter of belonging to one culture or another; it is always produced in an ambivalent, in-between space where the meanings of race, nationality, and culture are contested, negotiated, and transformed. This Third Space is the site where colonial mimicry, hybridity, and the subversive potential of the colonised subject become visible (Bhabha 36–39).

The thinnai, the afore mentioned raised platform, in Gautier's novel is the concrete representation of Bhabha's Third Space. It is neither street nor home — a threshold space that belongs to both and neither. Culturally, it is the space where the French and Tamil, the Creole and the Dalit, the colonial past and the postcolonial present encounter one another without any single identity claiming priority. The characters who gather on the thinnai are themselves Third Space subjects: Gilbert Thaata, a white Frenchman who is poorer than his Tamil hosts; Lourdes, a Creole servant who is legally French but socially excluded; the narrator's family, Tamil-Catholic-French citizens who have never left India. None of them fits neatly into any available category, and it is precisely this unfitting that Gautier presents as the authentic condition of Pondicherrian life (Bhabha 120–21).

Stuart Hall: Identity as Production:

Stuart Hall's influential distinction between two models of cultural identity can also be applied effectively in reading the novel. The first model treats cultural identity as a fixed essence — something pre-given, shared, and stable, which cultural production merely expresses. The second model, which Hall advocates, treats identity as a process of becoming — always unstable, always produced through representation and narrative rather than simply expressed by them. For Hall, diasporic identities in particular are defined not by origins but by the continuous, open-ended process of positioning and repositioning in relation to culture, history, and power (Hall 222–24).

The characters of *The Thinnai* exist within precisely this second model of identity. They are not what they are by nature or origin; they are what they have been made by three centuries of colonial encounter, caste struggle, religious conversion, linguistic mixing, and transoceanic movement. The novel's narrative structure — the child narrator recalling the stories told by Gilbert Thaata, who is himself recalling a family history that stretches across continents and centuries — formally enacts Hall's model of identity as a process of narrative production. Identity in the novel is not something you have; it is something you tell, and retell, on the thinnai, for as long as someone is willing to listen (Hall 235–37).

Édouard Glissant: Creolisation and the Poetics of Relation:

Édouard Glissant's theory of creolisation offers the most textured framework for the social world of Kurusukuppam. For Glissant, creolisation is not the blending of cultures into a homogeneous mixture but a process of mutual transformation — unpredictable, open-ended, producing something genuinely new — that occurs when cultures in contact maintain their difference even as they change one another. His concept of the Relation — an ethics and aesthetics of encounter based on the recognition of irreducible difference — provides an alternative to both colonial assimilation and ethnic nationalism as models for cultural diversity (Glissant 11–22).

Scholar Ananya Jahanara Kabir, in her landmark essay "Creole Indias, Creolizing Pondicherry" (2022), has applied Glissant's framework directly to *The Thinnai*,

arguing that the novel presents Pondicherry as a contact zone for cultural materials arriving through two overlapping circularities: the transoceanic — connecting Pondicherry to the Caribbean, the Mascarene islands, and the wider French empire — and the coastal — connecting it to other coastal enclaves up and down the Indian peninsula. The thinnai, in Kabir's reading, functions as the architectural expression of what she calls "the archipelago of fragments": a spatial and narrative structure that holds together diverse cultural inheritances without dissolving their differences (Kabir 205–08).

Avtar Brah: Diaspora Space and the Politics of Home:

Avtar Brah's concept of "diaspora space" provides the final theoretical resource for this analysis. Brah distinguishes between diaspora — the experience of displacement and the longing for an originary home — and diaspora space, which she defines as the intersectional space where the experiences of those who migrate and those who stay converge. Her concept of "homing desire" — the longing for home as a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination — is particularly relevant to a novel in which all the characters are, in different ways, negotiating their relationship to a home that is simultaneously present and lost (Brah 192–208).

Brah's framework is essential for understanding the novel's treatment of the "French citizens who have never left India's shores" (Gautier 1). These characters experience a form of diaspora-in-place: they are legally attached to a nation they have never inhabited, culturally formed by a colonial encounter they did not choose, and geographically rooted in a city that has been, since 1954, formally transferred to another nation-state. Their homing desire is directed not toward France but toward a Pondicherry that existed before decolonisation — a Pondicherry that is, in the novel's present tense, already disappearing under the pressures of modernisation, tourism, and the removal of Creole culture (Brah 200–03).

Analysis: The Theme through the Characters:

The Thinnai as a Character: Radical Hospitality and Minority Space:

Before examining the human characters of the novel, it is necessary to understand that the thinnai itself as a literary and political figure. In Tamil architectural tradition, the thinnai is a raised stone or brick platform built at the entrance of a home, where neighbours can sit and converse, tired travellers can rest overnight, and the household's social life extends into the semi-public world of the street. It is, in the most precise architectural sense, a threshold: neither fully inside nor fully outside, neither entirely private nor entirely public, governed by a principle of hospitality rather than ownership (Sadanand 193–94).

In the novel, the thinnai is the space where all of Gautier's thematic concerns converge. It is the space where Gilbert Thaata arrives and settles, Lourdes, the cook, retires after the house-hold cooking job is done, where the child narrator listens and is formed. The thinnai belongs to the narrator's working-class Tamil-

French family — not to the Ville Blanche of French colonial administration, not to the upper-caste temples of Tamil Brahminism, but to the margins of both. And it is from this marginal position that the thinnai's radical hospitality operates: it receives everyone without requiring anyone to abandon who they are ("Breaks New Ground").

One of the novel's most politically pointed observations is that it is the thinnai of the poor — the Dalit, the Creole, the fishing community — that practises genuine hospitality, while the institutions of colonial power have always required assimilation as the price of admission. The French Republic offered citizenship to Pondicherrian Tamils on the condition that they renounce their personal law. The Hindu caste system offers social membership on the condition that one be born into the right lineage. The thinnai requires nothing. It asks only that you sit, eat, and tell your story. This is why Gautier chooses it as both his title and his central metaphor: in a world structured by the conditional and hierarchical distribution of belonging, the thinnai embodies an unconditional welcome ("Writing Pondicherry").

Gilbert Thaata: Whiteness in Poverty and the Exposed Myth of Race:

Gilbert Thaata is the novel's most enigmatic and thematically loaded character. He arrives at the thinnai on Bastille Day — a date that is itself a compressed symbol of Pondicherry's Franco-Tamil identity — as a white-skinned, blue-eyed, impoverished vagabond in search of whisky, food, and an audience. He is described as "a White man as poor as a church mouse and an unapologetic do-nothing" ("Sunday Book Pick"), a Frenchman at the very bottom of the social hierarchy, living on the charity of Tamil hosts whose colonial submission he quietly exploits.

What makes Gilbert Thaata as revelatory as a character is the way his presence exposes the absurdity of colonial racial hierarchy. The residents of Kurusukuppam receive him with disproportionate respect precisely because of his white skin and his "real" Parisian French, unmarked by Tamil intonation. The narrator's family feeds him, gives him whisky, and listens to his stories, treating him with a respect they would never show a Tamil beggar of equivalent poverty. This is internalised colonial hierarchy — the psychic afterlife of three centuries of French rule. As one critic notes sharply, the contrast with Lourdes is telling: the family forbids Lourdes from speaking her Creole French for fear of it corrupting their own, but they share their whisky and French food with Gilbert Thaata simply because he is white and speaks "real" French ("The Thinnai – Ari Gautier").

And yet Gautier does not render this dynamic as simple victimhood. Gilbert Thaata is aware of his privilege and consciously exploits it. He is, in his way, a survivor: a man who has learned how to convert his racial whiteness into meals and shelter and an audience. His stories — the long, spellbinding tale of the Stone of Sita, the mysterious diamond that has cursed his family across generations and across oceans — are the mechanism by which he earns his keep. He trades colonial

mythology for hospitality, and the transaction is not without irony: the great colonial narrative is being repurposed as a party trick by a broken-down old man on a Tamil verandah (Gautier, "Writing Pondicherry").

Gilbert Thaata's life story also characterises the novel's transoceanic ambitions. His family's history connects Pondicherry to the French Antilles, where thousands of Pondicherrian Tamils were transported as enslaved labourers after the abolition of slavery in 1848. The Stone of Sita, as it travels from Golconda to France to the Caribbean to Pondicherry, traces exactly the routes of colonial labour migration that mainstream histories have suppressed. Gilbert Thaata is not merely a colourful character; he is a walking archive of the diasporic connections that Pondicherry has been trained to forget (Kabir 210–14).

The character also illuminates a crucial paradox of racial hierarchy in colonial space. When whiteness and wealth are separated — when the white man is poorer than his brown hosts — the conceived lines of racial and financial superiority become blurred. Gautier does not make this point didactically; he brings it out through the simple observation of social behaviour, and through Lourdes's contemptuous clarity about what Gilbert Thaata actually is ("Rollicking Saga").

Lourdes: The Creole Servant and the Double Marginalisation of Language:

If Gilbert Thaata embodies the paradox of racial privilege without economic power, Lourdes — the Creole housemaid of the narrator's family — embodies the opposite: economic labour without social recognition, cultural richness without cultural legitimacy. Lourdes is a member of the Bas-Créole community — Pondicherry's mixed-race population of Tamil, French, Portuguese, and sometimes African descent — and she is "the only character in the novel presented as speaking Pondicherrian Creole, a language that has received almost no scholarly attention or literary documentation outside of Gautier's novel" (Kabir 210).

The family's treatment of Lourdes's language is one of the novel's most quietly devastating social observations. She is forbidden from speaking Creole in the household, evidently for fear that her "corrupted French" will corrupt the family's own French — a linguistic anxiety that is also a racial and class anxiety. The implicit logic is that Lourdes's language is contaminated by her mixed-race heritage and her lower-class status, and that exposure to it might compromise the family's own hard-won claim to linguistic respectability. This is a community that has itself been marginalised by the French colonial system, yet within its own domestic space it reproduces the same logic of linguistic hierarchy against a woman who is even more marginalised than they are ("The Thinnai – Ari Gautier").

And yet Lourdes is the most practically intelligent character in the novel. Where the men of Kurusukuppam are seduced by Gilbert Thaata's stories and his whiteness, Lourdes sees him clearly for what he is: a useless freeloader exploiting the family's misplaced colonial honour. Her reproach — asking her master not to

treat Gilbert Thaata like "the king of Vattalagundu" ("The Thinnai – Ari Gautier") — is both funny and politically sharp, a moment in which the servant's social clarity cuts through the master's colonially conditioned reverence. Lourdes is not fooled by race; she judges people by what they do.

Lourdes's ancestral connection to Tranquebar — the Danish colonial enclave on the Tamil coast — further extends the novel's transoceanic reach. Through her family descent, the novel acknowledges that the colonial history of India's coast is not exclusively French or British but a layered record of multiple European presences: Portuguese, Danish, Dutch, French, British. Lourdes's Creole body is literally the product of these multiple colonial encounters, a living archive of the racial and cultural mixing that official histories prefer to ignore (Kabir 211).

The fact that Lourdes is a woman adds another dimension to her marginalisation. In a community already defined by its minority status, she is marginalised within the minority — subordinated by gender as well as by race and class. She cooks, she serves, she resists with her wit, and she is silenced in her language. Gautier does not sentimentalise her situation, but he gives her some of the sharpest lines in the novel, ensuring that the reader registers her intelligence even as the narrative documents her oppression.

The Child Narrator: Inheriting Multiplicity:

The unnamed child narrator of *The Thinnai* is the novel's most delicate and complex figure. He is the lens through which the reader sees everything — the thinnai, the neighbourhood, Gilbert Thaata, Lourdes, the community's eccentrics and dreamers — and he is also the figure through whom the novel explores the experience of growing up as a minority child in a world of overlapping and contradictory identities.

The narrator is Tamil, Catholic, legally French, poor, and deeply curious. His formation is not an education in any single cultural tradition but a creolised education in multiplicity: he learns Tamil from his family, French from school and from Gilbert Thaata, Creole indirectly from Lourdes, and the language of colonial history from the gap between what the books say and what he observes around him (Gautier, "I Can't Write").

The narrator's famous comparison of Kurusukuppam to the Gaulish village of Asterix is one of the novel's most affectionate and politically knowing moments. The Gaulish village in René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo's comic series is the last holdout of a community surrounded by Roman — read: colonial — power, maintaining its culture, its peculiarity, and its stubborn independence in the face of overwhelming force. The comparison is funny, but it is also accurate: Kurusukuppam is a community that has persisted through three centuries of French rule, postcolonial absorption into India, and the deletion of the thinnai culture by modernisation, maintaining its peculiar, mixed, impossible identity simply by continuing to live it ("Rollicking Saga").

The child narrator's perspective allows Gautier to explore what it means to inherit a diasporic identity without fully understanding it. The narrator does not, as a child, know the full history of French colonialism in India, the bonded labour trade, or the racial hierarchies that structure his community's regards for Gilbert Thaata. He experiences these things as atmosphere, as feeling, as the texture of daily life — which is exactly how most minority children experience the systems that shape their world. It is only as the adult narrator, looking back, that he can begin to name and analyse what he lived through as a child. This temporal structure — memory working backward across time to produce understanding — is itself a figure for the diasporic condition: the effort to make sense of an identity formed before one had the conceptual tools to understand it (Gilroy 15–19).

The Community of Kurusukuppam: A Taxonomy of Minority Experience:

Beyond the three central characters, the community of Kurusukuppam constitutes a taxonomy of minority experiences — a systematic exploration of the different ways in which people can be marginalised by the intersection of race, caste, class, and colonial history.

The colonial war veterans are among the most intense figures in this taxonomy. These are Tamil men who served in the French armed forces — fighting France's wars in Indochina, in Africa, in Europe — and who returned to Pondicherry after service to find themselves still poor, still living in the Black Town, their military service impelling no real social progress. They had offered their bodies to the French nation and received in return a pension insufficient for dignity and a citizenship that could not protect them from racism. Their pride is real but painful: the pride of men who have been used and discarded by the institution to which they gave their loyalty (Namakkal 120–25).

The Periyarist characters — those influenced by the Tamil rationalist and anti-caste reformer E. V. Ramasamy Periyar — introduce a further dimension to the novel's exploration of minority identity. Characters in the novel invoke Periyar's name while simultaneously displaying the caste biases that Periyar spent his life combating — a contradiction that Gautier observes with both sympathy and irony. The lapsed Periyarist Paulin "dreams of a casteless society, but his biases show through in subtle and not so subtle ways" ("The Thinnai – Ari Gautier"). This is not hypocrisy so much as the difficulty of unlearning structures of hierarchy that have been internalised over generations.

The arrival of the Auroville hippies in the novel's later sections introduces yet another dimension of racial and cultural complexity. When a new wave of white Westerners arrives in Pondicherry in the 1960s — bearded, unkempt, seeking spiritual enlightenment — the community of Kurusukuppam reacts with uncertainty and mild disgust. These are not the European colonisers they are accustomed to, the saheb-types with their uniforms and their authority; these are Europeans who have come to India seeking something the community is not sure it wants to sell. The irony is double: a community shaped by French colonialism

now finds itself the object of a new form of Western appropriation, this time spiritual rather than political (Gautier 142–48).

Across all these figures, the novel maintains a consistent and humane attention to the way in which poverty functions as the common denominator of minority experience. Whatever differences of race, language, caste, or colonial status divide the residents of Kurusukuppam, they are united by their economic instability — the direct product of colonial arrangements that extracted wealth from the colony while leaving its working-class communities in permanent insufficiency.

Language as the Site of Racial Struggle:

One of the novel's most formally innovative and politically charged aspects is its handling of language. The original French text is interspersed with Tamil, Creole, and other languages — a multilingual practice that Gautier has described as a deliberate refusal of what he calls "linguistic colonisation": the practice of subordinating minority languages to the dominant one through footnotes, glossaries, and explanatory parentheses. In the English translation by Blake Smith, this multilingualism is maintained: Tamil words appear without always being translated, Creole phrases surface and recede, and the reader is sometimes asked to sit with incomprehension ("Paper Frenchmen").

This linguistic practice is directly connected to the novel's thematic concerns. Language in the world of Kurusukuppam is not a neutral medium of communication but a marker of race, class, and colonial status. French, spoken "properly," confers respectability; Tamil, spoken at home, signals ethnic belonging; Creole, spoken by Lourdes, signals racial mixture and social exclusion. The family's prohibition on Lourdes speaking Creole is not merely a domestic preference but a micropolitics of racial hierarchy, an attempt to maintain linguistic distance from a form of speech that has been stigmatised as "corrupted." By including Creole in his text — and by giving Lourdes some of the sharpest and most memorable lines in the novel — Gautier performs a literary act of restitution, restoring linguistic dignity to a language and a community that has been denied it (Kabir 210–12).

Conclusion

Ari Gautier's *The Thinnai* is many things at once: a carnivalesque novel of neighbourhood life, a historical saga spanning centuries and oceans, a meditation on memory and storytelling, and a deeply serious work of postcolonial politics. What holds all these dimensions together is the figure of the thinnai itself — the threshold space that refuses to belong exclusively to any one culture, class, or racial group and that insists on the value of the marginalised, the mixed, and the forgotten.

The novel's treatment of race, ethnicity, and minority experience is characterised throughout by a refusal of simplification. Its minorities are not victims in any straightforward sense; they are agents of their own survival, possessed of humour, desire, political conviction, and cultural richness. Gilbert Thaata exploits his racial

privilege even as he is distressed by the collapse of the colonial system that discussed it. Lourdes resists linguistic silencing with humour and practical intelligence. The child narrator inherits a world of overlapping identities and makes something human and spacious out of it. The Periyarists dream of equality while practising hierarchy. This complexity is not a failure of political clarity but its fullest expression: Gautier knows that the structures of race and caste produce not types but people, and people are always more interesting than the categories that confine them (Bhabha 36).

What the thinnai offers, as a literary figure, is a model for a different way of thinking about minority space. In the standard cultural geography of postcolonial India, the Black Town is defined by what it lacks — wealth, modernity, institutional power, cultural prestige. Gautier inverts this geography. Kurusukuppam is not a space of lack but a space of abundance: abundance of story, of character, of cultural memory, of multilingual richness, of the kind of human solidarity that only emerges when people have nothing but one another. The thinnai is not a lesser space than the Ville Blanche; it is a richer one, precisely because it is open to everyone (Glissant 18–20).

This inversion is Gautier's most radical political claim, and it is made through form as well as content. A novel set entirely in a working-class fishing district, written in French with Tamil and Creole intermixed, narrated by an unnamed child who notices everything — such a novel is itself a form of thinnai, a threshold space that receives all comers and asks them to sit and listen. Reading *The Thinnai*, one is placed in the position of the listener, receiving Gilbert Thaata's stories, watching Lourdes cook and parry, and slowly coming to understand that the history being told on this modest verandah belongs to the world, not merely to one forgotten corner of former French India.

In a global literary landscape that still struggles to hear the voices of the truly marginalised — the Dalit, the Creole, the colonised who were French but not French, Indian but not Indian — *The Thinnai* is a necessary and genuinely moving book. It does not ask for pity. It asks for something harder: attention, presence, and the willingness to sit on the threshold and listen to what only the marginalised have always known.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/67**FROM FIRE TO EXILE: DRAUPADI'S DIASPORIC JOURNEY IN *THE PALACE OF ILLUSIONS* BY CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI: A FEMINIST RECLAIMING OF MYTH, MEMORY, AND POLITICAL RETURN****POOVARASI. D.**Research Scholar, Department of English, Auxilium College
Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India**DR. KALAISELVI R. H.**Assistant Professor, Department of English, Auxilium College
Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India**Abstract**

The voice of Draupadi in *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is site of displacement, memory and resistance and thus a feminist-diasporic retelling of the Mahabharata. This article views Draupadi as an affective and symbolic figure of diaspora whose existence is characterized by emotional displacement, gendered marginalization and a quest of belonging that is never to be realized. The paper builds upon the ideas of Avtar Brah of diaspora space and homing desire, by arguing that the movement of Draupadi, between her origins as fire-born and her exile into the forest, was a process of identity bargaining with the shifting status quos of patriarchal modes of power and cultural norms. The study, through close examination of her birth, marriage and exile, shows how Divakaruni uses myth to create a feminist memory and political displacement discourse in which acts of remembering are resistance to the erasure of narratives. The article also discusses how the voice of Draupadi defies the prevailing epic traditions by the reconstructions of identity based on storytelling and self-articulation. Here, it is the home that is redefined not as the exact geographical position but as the narrative space that is dynamic and defined by memory, agency, and resistance. Placing the story of Draupadi as an exemplar of diasporic subjectivity, the article explains the process of belonging as reclaimed through reinterpretation, narrative authority, and feminist consciousness as providing a critical framework in the analysis of the intersection of gender, myth, and diaspora.

Keywords: Diaspora Space, Homing Desire, Feminist Mythography, Emotional Displacement, Cultural Memory

Introduction

"It was only my brother he meant to raise up to show to his people. Only my brother that he wanted. Dhari wouldn't let go of me, however, nor I of him. We clung together so stubbornly that my father was forced to pick us both up

together” (Divakaruni 6). By saying these, the story of Draupadi starts not as a tale of belonging but as a tale of displacement, of being forced into the world. Since the very beginning of her appearance, she is defined by a feeling of secondary existence- an accidental appearance in a building in favor of another. In *The Palace of Illusions*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni rearranges these mythic origins into the story of diasporic displacement as the life of Draupadi is a ceaseless negotiation of inclusion and exclusion, visibility and marginalization. Her identity is never completely established in the spaces in which she lives, but rather is determined by the contradictions of acceptance and alienation. This paper contends that the path of Draupadi, fire to exile, can be interpreted as a diasporic experience not in the geographical sense, but in the affective and symbolic aspects. She lives in the areas that do not turn into a true home, be it Panchal, Indraprastha, or forest, and her identity is constantly mediated by the system of patriarchal power and the cultural norm. She has a state of emotional displacement as belonging is never unconditional and postponed and the self is not constructed by stability but by negotiation. This paper views the experience of Draupadi through the framework of diaspora space and homing desire, as written by Avtar Brah, as an act of emotional exile and feminist reclaiming. The concept of the Diaspora space suggested by Brah allows reading the world of Draupadi as a place where power, memory, identity collide to create a subject that is both central and peripheral. In the same way, the idea of homing desire enables us to interpret the desire of Draupadi not as the desire to go back to a specific homeland but as a desire to find some recognition, agency, and selfhood in the changing environments. Moreover, this paper locates the story of Draupadi as an important place of opposition. In her own telling of the epic story, she is no longer merely an object of the epic narrative rather, she is the speaking subject of the epic narrative, thus undermining the patriarchal systems which once suppressed her. Her narration is a kind of political revenge, which is not bringing her back to the physical house but helping her to repossess the power of memory and identity. From this perspective, Draupadi is a contemporary diasporic feminist, and her lifelong discovery of belonging is one of ongoing reinterpretation, resistance, and self-articulation.

Theoretical Framework

Avtar Brah (1996) redefines diaspora out of the context of physical migration by providing the concept of a diaspora space as a place in which identities are constructed at the crossroads of history, power and memory. Here, belonging is not fixed but is a constant negotiation process in many sites and at different times. The key concept in her theory is the homing desire, which does not mean the homeland is literally going back home, but a desire to a place of emotional and cultural belonging, which will never be taken up. The framework is especially applicable to the story of Draupadi. She leaves no national boundaries, but her existence is characterized by emotional uprootedness, because she never belongs

in any place she lives. Her identity is not complete, but it is created by her various roles as daughter, wife, queen, and exile, and her subjectivity is constantly redefined by the process of memory and narration. According to the prism of Brah, the story of Draupadi can also be interpreted in the context of a diasporic state; ie., the absence of a fixed location makes her both an object of vulnerability and agency. She longs not for either of these physical geographies (Panchal or Indraprastha) but for a geography which acknowledges and constructs her identity in her own terms.

Literature Review

Academic interest in *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has increasingly developed out of generic diasporic concerning accounts to fine-tuned feminist and identity-based readings of the character of Draupadi. One of the previous diasporic readings of the novel is by Ravichandran and Lakshmi (2017), who discuss the way in which the experiences of Draupadi can be read through the lens of displacement, fragmentation, and negotiation of the culture of identity. Their analysis shows the importance of diaspora studies in analyzing the text, but the analysis is rather descriptive and does not delve into a particular theoretical system. Sharma (2023) further elaborates on the same point by finding the aspects of diasporic in the characterization of Draupadi, especially her alienation and emotional detachment. Although this work is not deaf to the fact of diasporic sensibilities, it addresses the concept of diaspora in a loose and general sense, not placing it in a systematic theoretical framework. Maheswary (2024) changes the perspective to a psychological and feminist reading and looks at Draupadi as a multifaceted and strong character who is influenced by emotional problems and a conflict between the inner worlds. This paper focuses on her narrator voice and agency, and makes her a contemporary retelling of a myth. But, the diasporic aspects of her identity are only touched upon implicitly. Even more recent work, by Keerthika and Sudha (2025) in *Myth, Memory, and Migration: Tracing the Dual Diasporic Identity of Draupadi in The Palace of Illusions*, provides the notion of a double diaspora in order to understand the multiple displacements that Draupadi undergoes. Their discussion anticipates the overlaps of myth, memory, and migration, implying that the identity of Draupadi is constructed in a variety of ways-psychological, cultural, and symbolic. Although this method largely progresses towards diasporic readings of the text, it mainly takes into consideration the dual displacement and fails to theorize the spatial and relational processes of belonging in full. Though the works of all lead to the understanding that *The Palace of Illusions* is an influential feminist retelling with diasporic implications, there still exists a gap in the implementation of a full-fledged diaspora theory which relates displacement to identity formation, power relations, and narrative agency. In this respect, the notions of diaspora space and homing desire developed by Avtar Brah can offer a more specific and theoretically-grounded paradigm. The focus that Brah makes on the intersections between

power, memory and belonging helps to better comprehend the state of Draupadi as an individual conditioned under the conditions of constant negotiation in unstable conditions. This article attempts to fill this gap by placing the story of Draupadi in the context of the theoretical framework of Brah, and thus to extend the current feminist and diasporic understandings into the area of diasporic subjectivity. By doing so, it redefines the journey of Draupadi as an act of affective diaspora and emphasizes memory and narration as feminist acts of resistance and political reversion.

Research Gap

Most of the existing literature on *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has concentrated on the feminist re-telling of the Mahabharata, although there are some works on the theme of displacement and identity. Nevertheless, such analyses tend to use a generalized approach to diaspora without addressing a systematic theoretical approach. Even recent publications, including Keerthika and Sudha (2025), that propose the concept of the so-called double diaspora, are still largely descriptive and fail to delve into the dynamics of space and relationship to belonging in an in-depth manner. This leaves a severe gap in bridging diaspora and identity formation, power structures, and narrative agency. This paper fills this gap by using the ideas of Avtar Brah on the subject of diaspora space and homing desire to make a more theoretically-founded and more nuanced interpretation of the Draupadi as a diasporic subject.

Research Methodology

The approach taken in this study is qualitative and interpretative founded on close reading of a text *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. The major episodes like the birth of Draupadi, her marriage, and exile are discussed in order to track down the themes of displacement, identity negotiation and resistance. The theoretical framework by Avtar Brah, especially the theoretical ideas of diaspora space and homing desire serve as a guideline to analysis and to explain the experience of Draupadi that were not confined to the actual physical migration. Through the combination of literary analysis and the diaspora theory, the paper examines the role of memory and narration as a form of feminist resistance and political return.

Myth, Memory and the Feminist Politics of Rewriting

The novel by Divakaruni turns out to be a feminist version of the Mahabharata focusing on the consciousness of Draupadi. As opposed to the classic forms in which she emerges as a symbolic or episodic character, in *The Palace of Illusions* the character has turned into the first-person narrator of her own life, retelling the epic in her own words. This movement also anticipates the use of memory as both political and feminist protests. Retelling history becomes a way to regain control of agency, expose omissions, and transform established mythic authority. Through this re-telling Draupadi transforms into the subject of a patriarchal narrative rather than the object of it, disrupting the patriarchal reasoning of the epic with its

selective recollection, stress and re-definition. Within the work itself, individual memories are not simply passive recollections they are also ways of reinterpreting those memories. Recalling the defining moments of her life, such as her birth in fire, her polyandrous marriage, her disgrace in the dice -hall, and her years-long exile in the forest, Draupadi does not reiterate the epic but criticizes its silences and hierarchies, which are patriarchal. Pre-empting her suffering, longing, rage, ethical thoughts, she constructs a counter-memory that challenges the prevailing heroic and dharma-driven discourses. This counter-memory does not just establish her subjectivity as a woman, but as a teller, who re-engineers time, blame, consequence as she sees it, in her own ethical and emotional priorities. This procedure is also in line with wider tendencies in the diasporic writing wherein memory is an important tool used in identity reconstruction when belonging has ceased to exist. In the case of diasporic subjects, the homeland can be re-enchanted, fragmented or even unattainable, and hence memory takes on a performative or even creative power it is used to bind together dispersed histories, conflicting lineages, and interlacing cultures. The voice of Draupadi is also such that myth is turned into a feminist resistance point, in which the storytelling process itself becomes a political reclamation, not a nostalgic one. Her telling of the story back to the past is not a restoration but a re-writing, the creation of a symbolic space where the suffering and speech of women is not an incidental part of the epic but its meaning. By doing so, her mythic memory turns into some sort of feminist re-worlding wherein the process of remembering is inextricably linked to the process of reclaiming home.

From Fire to Exile: A Diasporic Feminist Arc

The pattern of origin to exile which traces the trajectory of Draupadi in *The Palace of illusions* can be understood as a diasporic feminist pattern she won't even feel at home anywhere, but precisely this incapacity to belong completely to herself allows her to evolve the resisting, self-telling subjectivity. Draupadi's identity has been constructed through the boundaries of power, memory, and myth at various locations including her birth scene in Panchal, at Indraprastha's shaky palace, and during her exile in the forests. In this fashion (and not through the traditional heroic-oriented narrative), Divakaruni critiques the epic form as not only an order, but as a diasporic movement that is characterized by marginalization, resistance, and the narrative return. The story of Draupadi therefore serves as an exemplar of how displacement and marginalisation can turn out to be the same factors that give rise to the feminist voice. Instead of obliterating her, the unsteadiness of her roles, daughter without her filial security, wife without her own body, queen without her own political throne, drives Draupadi to the heightened self-consciousness and narrative control. By narrating her own story, she denies herself a symbolic role in the male-dominated narrative of the epic she rewrites the order of events, prefigures suffering, and redefines dharma in a manner that would reflect her own moral and emotional interests. By doing so, her diasporic-feminist arc does not

provide a nostalgic reversion to a whole homeland but creates a shifting space of memory and narration where speaking back itself is a home and a politics.

Born into Fire and Exiled: The Politics of Origin

The fact that Draupadi was born out of fire signifies that she is essentially different among the other characters in the epic. She does not come into being in a normal family set up but rather comes out of a ritual fire, built as much by the divine will as by blood. This source represents both the power of an empire and its estrangement from its territory in that this creature lives only to complete the objectives of an empire but never exists within and/or is a full participant of either the family of the empire or the family(s) of the empire. Her inferior status is made clear by how her father favors her brother: "It was only my brother he meant to raise up... Only my brother that he wanted. Dhari wouldn't let go of me, however, nor I of him. We clung together so stubbornly that my father was forced to pick us both up together." (Divakaruni, 2008, p. 6) This scene sums up the rationality of the diaspora space, in which the implication of inclusion is conditional, and the identity is constructed through exclusion. Draupadi exists within the room she invades, but it is not her main object or passion it is incidental, an overabundance, a superfluous commodity that can only be dealt with and not glorified. Her origin therefore becomes a metaphor of partial belonging as she is inside the family, and structurally on the margins. This is a prelude in feminist terms of her life-long attempt to be acknowledged not as a useful woman (daughter, wife, queen) but as a subject with inherent value and narrative agency.

The Palace as an Unsteady Home

Indraprastha seems at first, to provide Draupadi with a seat of power and centrality: she is queen, the wife of five powerful brothers, the center of a new kingdom being constructed. However, this superficial calm is soon torn apart, and the palace turns out to be a shaky dwelling place, a place where her identity is always bargained in a patriarchal prison. Her five marriages, both told with mythic seriousness, have the effect of dis-uniting her identity, of making her a collective, relational being, as opposed to being a complete subject. She becomes a subject of talk, a commodity to be traded, and an entity to be defined by the relationship she has with other people, and the inner sense of self is not given so much been in a room. Her forced exposure during the dice-game crystallises the limits of belonging under patriarchy: "I no longer resisted the floor. I let my body sink into it." (Divakaruni, p. 110). This is not a mere surrender but emotional exhaustion the weariness after the recurring efforts to be perceived, listened to, and defended in a system, which ends up not valuing her agency. The palace, instead of being a safe house, turns into a diaspora space, a place of intersection of power, memory, and gender roles to keep Draupadi half-in and half-out. Not only is her role as queen and as wife not one where she has control over her own body or narrative, it is also one where she experiences increased surveillance and symbolic violence. The palace, in this manner, reveals how even privileged spaces may become the

location of diasporic estrangement of women whose bodies and voices become communal property and no longer their own.

Exile and Political Return

Exile in the forest marks a turning point in Draupadi's journey. Out of the strict hierarchies and dramatics of the palace, she finds a realm that is both severe and free severe in the sense of deprived of material possessions and socially unrecognized, but free in the sense that she no longer is always acting out her roles to a courtly audience. During this period, she starts to develop a self who is no longer solely defined by her relational identities, daughter, wife, co-wife or queen. This change is a displacement of emotions with a shift to self-reflexivity, as she goes back to the past to grieve but re-evaluate, re-read and re-arrange its meaning. This exile can be interpreted as a journey to inner belonging instead of a literal journey back to Panchal or Indraprastha by the homing desire concept developed by Avtar Brah. Homing desire does not presuppose a determinate, recuperable homeland but is an affective disposition towards a place of recognition and consistency which is unrelentingly, at least, partial, deferral. To Draupadi, that is not a city or kingdom but a narrative self which she constructs with the help of her voice. She is not only narrating experiences from her life such as, birth, marriage, humiliated and living in exile, but as she narrates those experiences, she creates the experience of going back to herself. To speak from a political voice that has been reclaimed and in the process of becoming vocal again is an act of resistance against the annihilation of women often found in epic speech. Exile emerges as a condition that enables women to reclaim their past newly as feminist with a voice of their own. This dimension of political-return of exile enables Draupadi to rewrite the silence of the epic with feminist criticism as well, making her marginalisation her epistemological privilege. Applying a new perspective on her marriage, her humiliation, and decisions made by the brothers is made possible by the fact that she is no longer a part of the performative politics of the palace, and she can look at them critically as she has never had such an opportunity before. In her narration, she does not just tell what occurred but questions why it was conceptualised as dharma, honour or fate, revealing how the codes of patriarchy naturalise the suffering of women. In this respect, her forest-exile is not merely a bodily exile in the kingdom; it is a narrative arrival of the moment when Draupadi insists on her right to re-write her mythic past, that is, transforming the displacement space into a place of feminist re-worlding and discursive sovereignty.

Feminist Replacement of Home and Identity

Draupadi's journey ultimately re-defines the concept of home. Home is a narrative construct created by memory, articulation, and feminist re-writing rather than a predetermined geographical or social location, like Panchal, Indraprastha or a forest as a simple haven of refuge. Draupadi creates a first-person story where she recalls her repressed experiences, rearranges the chains of blame and guilt, and

reveals the silences that perpetuate patriarchal power. This way, she makes displacement an agency, making the same state of exile a source of critical self-knowledge. Her narrative also speaks back to patriarchal readings of the Mahabharata that tend to either make her a source of discord or a passive object of desire to men. Foregrounding her anger, desire, ambivalence and moral reasoning, she forms a voice that not only claims her suffering, but also her ethical and narrative autonomy. In this, Draupadi is a diasporic feminist subject whose identity is not shaped by adhering to a location but through the constant process of self-defining. Her account turns into a symbolic home to readers subjected to the conditions of fragmentation, marginality and emotional displacement - to provide an example of how memory and narration can serve as a place of feminist resistance and political reclamation and not as a simple reproduction of accepted myth. It is also this re-definition of home as a narrative and affective project that leaves a space where readers (especially women and diasporic subjects) can claim the story of Draupadi as theirs. By rewriting the epic as a marginal, Draupadi does not just recover her own subjective history; she provides a repertoire of resistive subjectivity to be performed by others as well as adapted and re-told in their contexts. By doing so, her text is a feminist-diasporic collective archive in which myth is not a fixed, authoritative tradition but an open, living structure that can be re-written by those who are not at the centre of it. Home, then, ceases to be a point of departure to be nostalgically reclaimed, but a horizon of continued feminist re-narration, in which the process of remembering, re-thinking and re-telling becomes the practice of belonging.

Discussion

The quest that Draupadi goes through in *The Palace of Illusions* is an on-going negotiation of identity in what Avtar Brah calls diaspora space where belonging is constructed through power, memory and gender. Her birth as a fire-born creature, her existence in Indraprastha and in exile show that she lives in spaces that are never quite made into a home, and the exile does not have the physical movement of migration, but the affective one. The fractured identity as daughter, wife, queen, and exile shows the role of patriarchal structures in locating and marginalizing her, giving her roles without granting agency in a more radical way via the idea of the homing desire. Through the telling of her own narrative, Draupadi turns memory into resistance, and makes a claim of narrative authority in a culture that attempts to silence her. The novel thereby transforms the definition of diaspora to gendered and symbolic state, where identity is in a state of constant negotiation, resistance, and reinterpretation.

Conclusion

In "*The Palace of Illusions*," the author reinterprets Draupadi as a woman living in diaspora who has experienced displacement, memory and resistance. This paper discusses how Draupadi's journey through the fire and her exile represents a lifelong struggle with personal identity in the context of an unstable patriarchal

structure, based on Avtar Brah's theoretical framework. Her experience upsets the traditional conception of diaspora by pre-empting an emotional and symbolic exile instead of physical migration. Restructuring the concept of home as a narrative and affective location, the novel makes memory and narration a key factor in identity formation. This narration by Draupadi is a kind of political payback and she is able to recover her agency and reject erasure in the epic tradition. The paper finally makes Draupadi a diasporic feminist figure whose experience provides a critical reference point to interplay between gender, myth, and diaspora. Thus, it points out the way in which reinterpretation and self-articulation represent effective forms of resistance in the situation of displacement.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/68**QALANDARI MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT: BU ALI SHAH
QALANDAR AND THE MAKING OF A SUFI CENTRE AT PANIPAT
(13TH–14TH CENTURY)****PRINCE**Research Scholar, Department of History
University of Delhi, India**Abstract**

The movement of Sufi orders across Central and South Asia during the medieval period fundamentally shaped the religious and cultural landscape of the subcontinent, yet remains peripheral to mainstream diaspora scholarship. This article focuses on the Qalandari order, tracing the migration of Shaykh Fakharuddin Iraqi from Iraq to Panipat around 600 Hijri (c. 1203 CE) and the life and legacy of his son, Bu Ali Shah Qalandar (1209–1324), born in Panipat and the central figure in the city's transformation into a major Sufi centre in Haryana. Bu Ali Shah's biography is entangled in genuine historical uncertainty: sources dispute his birthplace, Panipat or Ganja in present-day Azerbaijan, his spiritual lineage, and the location of his burial, with both Panipat and Karnal staking claims to his final resting place. Rather than resolving these disputes, this article reads them as constitutive of diasporic identity. Drawing on Persian tazkiras, the "*Sharaf al-Manaqib*," Nizami's "*Encyclopaedia Iranica*" entry, Rizvi's "*History of Sufism in India*," and the contemporary scholarship of Shahida (2025), it argues that the Panipat settlement was a two-generational diasporic project whose cultural achievement, a shared Hindu-Muslim devotional space still active today, was built on the accumulated labour of migration, negotiation, and remembering. The article engages throughout with Avtar Brah and Stuart Hall to bring this regional case into broader conversations about South Asian migration, remembered homes, and medieval cultural synthesis.

Keywords: Sufism, Qalandaris, Migration, Cultural synthesis, Panipat, Settlement

Routes, Roots, and the Question of the Sufi Migrant

There is a peculiar tension in the way we talk about Sufi saints in South Asia. The dominant narrative tends toward rootedness: the saint arrives, settles, and becomes so identified with a place that the place is almost defined by him. Ajmer belongs to Moinuddin Chishti; Pakpattan to Farid al-Din Ganj-i-Shakar; Panipat, as this article argues, to Bu Ali Shah Qalandar. But this emphasis on arrival and rooting risks obscuring the prior movement, the routes through which these figures, or their families, actually travelled, and the ways in which that movement shaped both the migrant household and the landscape it entered. Avtar Brah has argued

that diaspora always implies a journey that is simultaneously material and imaginative, and that home in diasporic experience is irreducibly double: it names both the place left behind and the place eventually made (16). To read the Bu Ali Shah tradition through this lens is to notice things the hagiographic literature tends to smooth over.

The concept of routes, roots, and remembered homes; is a productive provocation for medieval South Asian history because it asks us to treat movement not as the precondition of settlement but as something that continues to matter after the migrant has stopped moving. Stuart Hall's distinction between "routes," the material paths through which cultural identity is carried and transformed, and "roots," the originary attachments that diasporic subjects mythologise, is useful here ("Cultural Identity" 235). The Sufi case is a particularly interesting instance of this tension: the Sufi tradition contains both a theology of rootlessness, the wandering dervish, indifferent to place, and a powerful practice of root-making through the khanqah and dargah. What makes the Bu Ali Shah case especially interesting is that migration and settlement fall across two generations: the father makes the route, the son inherits the roots. The diasporic project is a family project.

Bu Ali Shah Qalandar has received remarkably little sustained scholarly treatment outside of devotional Urdu and Hindi literature and a small body of regional historical studies. The most authoritative scholarly notice remains Khaliq Ahmad Nizami's entry "Abū 'Alī Qalandar" in the *Encycloaedia Iranica*, which provides the most concise summary of what can be established about his life against the considerable noise of hagiographic accretion (Nizami, "Abū" 258). More recently, Shahida's study of the dargah as a site of emotional wellbeing for infertile women has drawn renewed scholarly attention to the living culture of the Bu Ali Shah shrine, even as it notes the persistent uncertainty surrounding his biographical details (Shahida 4–5). This article attempts a different kind of examination, not of the shrine's contemporary function but of the diasporic process through which it came to exist.

The Qalandari Order and the Migrant Sufi in the Sultanate Period

The Qalandaris occupied a distinctly awkward position in the social world of medieval Islamic mysticism. Where the Chishtis and Suhrawardis had developed settled institutional cultures, networks of khanqahs, chains of discipleship, relationships with political patrons; the Qalandaris were defined largely by their rejection of exactly these things. Ahmet Karamustafa, whose study of antinomian dervish groups remains the most thorough treatment of this tradition, describes the Qalandaris as part of a broader current of "God's unruly friends": figures who cultivated deliberate transgression of social norms as a spiritual method, shaving heads and beards, discarding respectable clothing, and embracing the wandering life as both a literal practice and a theological statement (Karamustafa 17–21). The origins of this tradition are traced by most scholars to the twelfth-century figure

of Jamal al-Din Sawa of Saveh, whose disciples spread a distinctive antinomian Sufism across Iran and Central Asia before it reached the subcontinent.

What makes the Qalandari case particularly relevant to diaspora studies is its ambivalent relationship to settlement. If, as James Clifford has argued, diaspora consciousness involves a sustained tension between “dwelling and travelling,” then the Qalandaris embody that tension in unusually acute form: their theology valorised movement, yet their historical trajectory in South Asia was one of gradual institutionalisation (“Diasporas” 302). Rizvi documents how the Qalandariyya-Chistiyya tradition navigated this tension by combining antinomian Qalandari style with the more settled institutional culture of the Chishti order, a hybrid formation well suited to the conditions of the early Delhi Sultanate (Rizvi 1: 261–65). Bu Ali Shah’s own lineage reflects this hybridity: the sources suggest he was a disciple of either Shah Khizr Rumi or Saiyad Najmu’d-Din; both figures associated with the Qalandariyya-Chistiyya line (Shahida 4; Rizvi 1: 261).

The migration routes along which scholars and Sufi teachers reached northern India in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries ran primarily through Multan, a city that functioned as the great gateway of Central Asian Sufi culture into the subcontinent (Nizami, *Life and Times* 12). Multan in this period was dominated by the Suhrawardi order under Baha al-Din Zakariyya, and the relationship between the Suhrawardis and wandering Qalandars who passed through the city was, to put it diplomatically, not always warm. Nevertheless, Multan was a crucial node in the network of Sufi migration: a place where routes converged, where travellers rested and exchanged cultural knowledge, and where the intellectual traditions of Central Asian and West Asian Sufism were translated into forms that could travel further east. From Multan, migrating Sufis and scholars moved through Lahore and Sirhind toward the Gangetic plain.

It is along this corridor that Shaykh Fakharuddin Iraqi, Bu Ali Shah’s father, made his way to Panipat, arriving around 600 Hijri (c. 1203 CE). Multiple sources confirm that his father came from Iraq and settled down in Panipat in this period, making him the primary migrant in the family’s diasporic story (Shahida 4–5; Chishti). The most detailed account of Fakharuddin’s route is preserved in the *Sharaf al-Manaqib* of Hamiduddin Arif of Panipat, a text regarded as particularly reliable because its author descended from Bu Ali Shah’s own family. According to this source, Fakharuddin’s journey passed through Multan, where he encountered the Suhrawardi network, and then through Hamdan in western Iran, where he married Bibi Hafiza Jamal, daughter of Maulana Neymatullah Hamdani. He returned to Panipat with his wife, and it was there that Bu Ali Shah was born in 605–606 Hijri (1209 CE), during the reign of Qutb al-Din Aibak (Shahida 4; Chishti).

Bu Ali Shah Qalandar was therefore not himself a migrant in the conventional sense: he was a second-generation settler, a man born into an already-diasporic household in a city that was his father’s adopted home before it was his own. This

distinction matters for the diaspora analysis this article is attempting. Brah's concept of the "homing desire," the imaginative and practical work through which diaspora subjects make home in new places, applies most directly to Fakharuddin (Brah 16, 180). But the second generation inherits both the achieved home and the memory of its making, and it is this double inheritance that shapes Bu Ali Shah's life and legacy. The father's routes became the son's roots; and what the son built on those roots was one of the most enduring Sufi centres in northern India.

Reading Bu Ali Shah's Biography: Disputed Facts and Their Significance

The historical record of Bu Ali Shah's life is characterised less by what it establishes than by what it disputes, and any intellectually honest treatment of his biography must begin by acknowledging the uncertainty that pervades it. Three specific disputes deserve sustained attention: the question of his birthplace, the question of his spiritual lineage, and the question of his burial site. Far from being embarrassing lacunae in the record, these disputes are themselves historically significant: they reflect the contested nature of diasporic identity and the multiple communities that have claimed Bu Ali Shah as their own.

The birthplace dispute is perhaps the most fundamental. The dominant tradition, supported by the *Sharaf al-Manaqib* and asserted consistently by the dargah community, is that Bu Ali Shah was born in Panipat in 1209 CE. This is also the position taken by Nizami in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* entry, which remains the most authoritative scholarly source on his life (Nizami, "Abū" 258). However, there is a competing tradition. As Shahida observes, drawing on Safvi's careful documentation of the dargah, "an epitaph on his tomb in Persian gives his birthplace as Ganja in present-day Azerbaijan" (Shahida 4; Safvi). Some scholars have suggested that this "Ganja" refers not to Azerbaijan but to a neighbourhood once known as Ganjah near Lahore, which would keep his birth in the subcontinent while gesturing toward his family's West Asian origins (Shahida 4). The Karnal and Panipat communities both claimed to host his burial site when Bu Ali passed away in 1324 in a small village in Karnal, creating uncertainty about his final resting place that persists to the present day (Shahida 5; Naqvi).

The principal textual sources for Bu Ali Shah's biography are the Persian tazkiras: the *Siyar al-Awliya* of Mir Khwurd (c. 1350 CE) and the *Akhbar al-Akhyar* of Abd al-Haqq Muhaddith Dehlawi (c. 1590 CE). Both are hagiographic rather than biographical in any modern sense, and genre conventions shape what they record as much as historical reality does. What they agree on is: Bu Ali Shah's full name was Sharfuddin Bu Ali Shah Qalandar; he was born in 1209 CE and died in 1324 CE, giving him a hagiographically conventional lifespan of 115 years; and he was a figure of formidable learning who taught near the Quwwat al-Islam Mosque by the Qutb Minar in Delhi for some twenty years before turning fully to the Sufi path (Shahida 4–5; Chishti).

The dispute about spiritual affiliation is equally instructive. The Qalandariyya-Chistiyya tradition suggests Bu Ali Shah was a disciple of either Shah Khizr Rumi

or Saiyad Najmu'd-Din (Rizvi 1: 261; Shahida 4), while other accounts connect him to the Chishti milieu of Delhi through Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki's circle. A third tradition emphasises his Owaysi affiliation, spiritual transmission bypassing living masters entirely, and holds that Bu Ali Shah received his title from Hazrat Ali while meditating in the waters of Karnal (Chishti; Naqvi). These competing attributions are not simply historiographical confusion. They reflect the way Bu Ali Shah's settlement drew on multiple streams of Sufi culture that his father's migration had brought into contact, and the way subsequent generations claimed him for their own lineages.

What the tazkiras are notably silent about are the interior dynamics of the family's diasporic experience: the texture of Fakharuddin's settlement, the cultural adjustments the household made, the ways growing up in an already-diasporic family shaped Bu Ali Shah's spiritual formation. Brah's concept of the "homing desire," the imaginative work of making home in a new place, is precisely what the tazkira genre suppresses (Brah 16). The sources present Bu Ali Shah as always already belonging to Panipat, and in one literal sense they are right: he was born there. But the family's roots were no more than a generation deep, and the Persian language of his verses, his family's Iraqi genealogy, and the institutional forms his *khanqah* adopted all testify to the prior journey his hagiographers preferred to leave in shadow.

The *Khanqah* as a Diasporic Institution: Settlement, Hospitality, and Sacred Space

The *khanqah* that Bu Ali Shah eventually established at Panipat was the primary institutional form through which his family's diasporic settlement was given durable public shape. Combining the functions of a spiritual residence, a hospice for the poor and travelling, a gathering place for *sama*, and a centre of Islamic learning, the *khanqah* extended its social reach well beyond the circle of formally initiated disciples, drawing in the destitute, the curious, the ritually marginal, and the spiritually seeking from across the urban community.

For the purposes of diaspora analysis, the *khanqah* matters above all as a spatial practice: a way of claiming and marking space in a new environment. Richard Eaton has argued that the Sufi's physical presence in a landscape transformed both the landscape and the communities it served, creating new centres of cultural gravity that attracted flows of people, goods, and devotional forms ("Sufi Folk Literature" 119–21). Bu Ali Shah's *khanqah* created precisely this kind of gravity in Panipat's social geography, its pull felt across religious and caste communities alike.

The hospitality of the *khanqah*; the langar, or communal kitchen, that fed the poor and the travelling, was the mechanism through which this attraction was exercised. The sources are consistent in emphasising that Bu Ali Shah's *khanqah* was open to all comers regardless of community or caste, and the contemporary evidence of the dargah's function bears this out: Shahida's study records that "a large

congregation gathers every Thursday” at the dargah, with “attendees engaging in ritualistic acts of devotion” including *langer* and the annual *Urs*, and that the tomb is visited by people “transcending religious, cultural, and national boundaries” (Shahida 5–6). The persistence of this inclusive hospitality across seven centuries is itself testimony to how deeply the founding diasporic ethos of the *khanqah* was inscribed in its institutional culture.

What the *khanqah*’s hospitality created, in Brah’s terms, was a kind of “diasporic space”, not a space defined by ethnic or religious homogeneity, but one in which “multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed” (Brah 208). The people who came brought different languages, different ritual practices, different social locations; the *khanqah* provided a framework within which these differences could be temporarily suspended, made to matter less than the shared devotional purpose that brought people together. What was specific to Panipat was the particular configuration of that mixing, shaped by the family’s Iraqi and West Asian origins, by Bu Ali Shah’s scholarly formation in Delhi, and by the specific social landscape of early Sultanate Haryana.

The spatial development of the Panipat complex reflects the increasing integration of the Sufi settlement into the life of the city. The current dargah, comprising the tomb of Bu Ali Shah, a mosque, and a vast open courtyard, was constructed by Mahabat Khan, a general in the service of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir (Shahida 3–4). This Mughal patronage is itself significant: it represents the assimilation of a diasporic Sufi settlement into the empire’s official commemorative culture, testimony to the cultural capital that generations of devotion had accumulated around Bu Ali Shah’s name.

Cultural Synthesis and the Remembered Home: Poetry, Devotion, and Shared Sacred Space

The most durable legacy of the Bu Ali Shah settlement at Panipat is not institutional but cultural: the development of a devotional tradition that draws on both Islamic and Hindu devotional resources, and that continues to animate the dargah in the present day. This tradition relates to the concept of remembered homes because it represents the cultural form through which diasporic memory is carried and transformed across generations. The poems attributed to Bu Ali Shah, and the *qawwali* and *kafi* traditions that developed around them, are not simply records of what was; they are active vehicles through which the community’s understanding of its origins and identity is continually renegotiated.

The Persian verses attributed to Bu Ali Shah are characterised by a striking plainness of diction, speaking directly of love, longing, and the dissolution of the self in the divine rather than deploying the elaborate rhetorical ornament of court poetry. This directness made them accessible across linguistic communities. Aditya Behl has argued that the accessibility of Sufi verse was a deliberate strategy of cultural outreach: the poem that could be sung and understood by a non-literate audience was a form of mission as well as a form of art (23–27). The *sama*

tradition of Bu Ali Shah's *khanqah* was working in this way from early in its history, and Charan et al. note that *qawwali* and *Sufiana kalam* remain central means through which devotees at Sufi shrines establish connection with the divine across linguistic and cultural lines (1074–76).

The absorption of Haryanvi elements into the *khanqah*'s devotional culture worked primarily through oral transmission, leaving traces in the later *kafis*, *qawwalis*, and *dohas* composed in Bu Ali Shah's honour, where Persian and Hindavi elements are woven together in ways that suggest a long history of cultural mixing. Simon Digby observed that the Sufi *khanqah* was one of the few institutional spaces in which the Persian-speaking Muslim elite and the vernacular-speaking Hindu majority were brought into sustained contact ("Sufi Shaikh" 66), and Eaton has argued that Sufi folk literature served as the primary vehicle through which Islamic devotional culture was translated into locally comprehensible forms across the subcontinent ("Sufi Folk Literature" 121–24). The Bu Ali Shah tradition is a particularly clear instance of both processes working together.

One specific dimension of this synthesis deserves attention: the relationship between the *khanqah* and the *Nath* yoga tradition widely practised in the region. The sources record encounters between Bu Ali Shah and *Nath* yogis following the conventional hagiographic pattern of the contest between Muslim saint and Hindu holy man. These accounts are not straightforward historical reportage, but they testify to a genuine engagement between the *khanqah* and the local religious landscape. Eaton has argued that this kind of engagement, the Sufi's ability to address local religious vocabularies without being absorbed by them, was precisely the source of the Sufi's cultural authority in South Asia ("Sufi Folk Literature" 123).

The development of the annual *Urs* as a major pilgrimage event is the clearest evidence of the shared sacred culture the settlement produced. The *Urs* draws together visitors from Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian communities who share the same devotional space and address the same figure as intercessor (Shahida 5–6). As Shahida's contemporary study demonstrates, the *dargah* functions not only as ritual space but as a site of social support and catharsis that cuts across religious lines: the Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh women in her study all find in the *dargah* a common emotional language of hope and community, even as they bring different religious frameworks to that shared space (Shahida 10–11).

Hall's account of diasporic cultural identity as produced "not outside but through representation" is useful here ("Cultural Identity" 222). The Bu Ali Shah tradition does not simply reflect a pre-existing Hindu-Muslim synthesis; it actively produces that synthesis through the ongoing practice of devotion, through the performance of his verses, through the telling and retelling of his life story—including, as we have seen, the competing stories about where he was born and where he is buried. The disputed facts of his biography are not problems to be

solved but resources for a tradition that has always been built on the negotiation of multiple claims and the accommodation of multiple communities.

It is important to be honest about the asymmetries that shaped this synthesis. The dargah at Panipat was, and remains, institutionally a Muslim space: its custodians are drawn from families claiming descent from Bu Ali Shah's disciples; its formal religious observances follow Islamic practice; its architecture speaks a Persian and Mughal aesthetic vocabulary. The Hindu, Sikh, and Christian devotees who participate in the *Urs* do so as guests, welcome and indeed necessary guests, since their participation validates the universalism the tradition claims, but guests nonetheless. The cultural synthesis was real, but it was not a synthesis of equals.

Conclusion: Diaspora, Disputed Biography, and the Medieval *Longue Durée*

Bu Ali Shah Qalandar was born in Panipat in 1209 CE, the son of an Iraqi scholar who had arrived roughly a decade earlier via Multan and Hamdan. This is the most probable account, supported by the *Sharaf al-Manaqib* and corroborated by the secondary literature (Shahida 4–5; Nizami, “Abū” 258). But the biographical record remains genuinely uncertain: an epitaph on the tomb itself suggests a birthplace of Ganja, gesturing toward an origin in the Iranian or Caucasian world that the Indian hagiographic tradition prefers to minimise (Safvi; Shahida 4). When Bu Ali Shah died in 1324 in a small village near Karnal, the uncertainty continued: both Karnal and Panipat claimed his body, with Panipat eventually prevailing (Shahida 5; Naqvi).

What does this contribute to the broader conversation about South Asian migration and diaspora? Several things emerge, though they should be advanced cautiously and not with more confidence than the evidence permits.

First, it suggests that the study of pre-modern South Asian migration needs to attend to the generational dimension of diasporic settlement. Bu Ali Shah's story is not a story of a migrant making a home but of a migrant's son inheriting a partially made home and completing it. The *khanqah*, the devotional culture, and the cultural synthesis were all built on a foundation his father had laid. It is the second generation, not the first, that typically transforms a settlement into a centre, and the Bu Ali Shah case is an unusually clear illustration of this dynamic.

Second, the disputed facts of Bu Ali Shah's biography are evidence of the contested nature of diasporic identity rather than mere historiographical inconveniences. Hall's insight that diasporic cultural identities are produced through representation rather than simply expressed by it (“Cultural Identity” 222) is borne out here: the saint who was born in Panipat (or Ganja), buried in Panipat (or Karnal), and trained in the Chishti (or Owaysi, or Qalandari) path is not a stable historical figure but an ongoing cultural construction, claimed and reclaimed by successive communities across seven centuries.

Third, the Panipat case complicates any straightforward narrative of either Hindu-Muslim harmony or Hindu-Muslim conflict in medieval South Asia. What the Bu Ali Shah settlement produced was neither a fusion that dissolved difference nor a

coexistence that maintained rigid separation, but something more unstable and more interesting: a shared sacred space in which difference was negotiated rather than resolved, boundaries made porous at certain points while remaining firm at others. Shahida's contemporary study shows this negotiated porosity is not a relic of a more tolerant medieval past but a living reality, with women from Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh communities still finding in the dargah a common emotional language of hope and community (Shahida 7–11). The diasporic settlement that Fakharuddin began and Bu Ali Shah completed is still being inhabited, still being made.

The dargah of Bu Ali Shah Qalandar stands in Panipat today, rebuilt across seven centuries but still marking the place where a migrant sufi's family put down roots in the soil of Haryana. The epitaph still gestures toward a distant origin the Indian tradition prefers to forget. The burial dispute with Karnal remains unresolved. And pilgrims still come; Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians, to seek the blessings of a saint whose biography resists the clean boundaries of origin, lineage, and belonging. That resistance is not a failure of historical memory but its most honest achievement. Routes become roots, but they do not disappear entirely; and the remembered home is always, in some measure, a home that was built somewhere else.

Notes

The *Sharaf al-Manaqib* of Hamiduddin Arif of Panipat is the most detailed local source on Bu Ali Shah's family history, and it is regarded as especially reliable because the author was a descendant of Bu Ali Shah's family. The account of Fakharuddin's route through Multan and Hamdan is preserved in this text. The dating of Fakharuddin's arrival at "600 Hijri", corresponding to approximately 1203 CE, is consistent across the secondary sources that cite this tradition (Shahida 4; Chishti).

The Ganja birthplace inscription is discussed by Safvi in her documented visit to the dargah in 2016 and is noted with appropriate caution by Shahida, who observes that "locals and dargah attendants assert in interviews that Bu Ali was indeed born in India" (Shahida 4). Nizami's *Encyclopaedia Iranica* entry does not resolve the question definitively but treats Panipat as the primary location of his life and significance (Nizami, "Abū" 258). The burial dispute between Karnal and Panipat is documented by Naqvi, and Shahida notes that Bu Ali "was residing in a small village in Karnal" when he died (Shahida 5).

The relationship between Bu Ali Shah and the Chishti silsila is a genuinely complicated question. Rizvi discusses the Qalandariyya-Chistiyya tradition and its spread in India in the first volume of his history (261–65), and notes that the boundaries between Sufi orders were considerably more permeable in the thirteenth century than later institutional histories tend to suggest. The Owaysi tradition, spiritual transmission without a living master, represents a third option

that several sources invoke for Bu Ali Shah (Chishti; Naqvi), and it is not necessarily incompatible with the other attributions.

Shahida's contemporary fieldwork at the dargah, conducted in 2023, provides valuable evidence of the continuity of the khanqah's original ethos of inclusive hospitality. Her interviews with the *Gadde Nashin Fakir* (shrine attendant) and with regular devotees confirm that the dargah draws visitors from across religious and national communities, and that the rituals performed there; the offering of paan, the placing of locks in the jaali, participation in langer, are available to all who come (Shahida 5–6). This contemporary evidence cannot, of course, be projected directly onto the medieval *khanqah*, but it does suggest the remarkable durability of institutional patterns that were laid down in Bu Ali Shah's own time.

Shahida's study is significant not only for its contemporary evidence but for its methodological commitment to documenting the dargah's function across religious communities. Her five participants include Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh women, and her analysis shows how the dargah accommodates different religious frameworks, *wasifa* for Muslim participants, and the shared ritual of the jaali lock for all, while maintaining a common emotional space of hope and catharsis (Shahida 7–11). This is precisely the kind of negotiated porosity that this article has been arguing was established in the medieval period.

The point about diasporic identity as cultural construction rather than natural expression draws on Hall's foundational argument in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," where he distinguishes between two ways of thinking about cultural identity: as a fixed essence derived from shared history, and as a "production" that is "never complete, always in process" (222). The Bu Ali Shah tradition exemplifies the second model: it is a tradition that has never stopped producing itself, through disputed biographies, contested burial sites, competing silsila attributions, and the ongoing negotiation of who belongs at the dargah and on what terms.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/69**DIGITAL ROUTES AND VIRTUAL HOMELANDS: REIMAGINING
MEMORY, IDENTITY, AND BELONGING IN SOUTH ASIAN
DIASPORA****RAJKAMAL PATEL**Research Scholar, Department of Political Science
Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya, Bilaspur, Chhattishgarh, India**Abstract**

Diaspora studies has historically privileged geographical displacement and territorial loss as the primary frameworks for understanding diasporic experience, foregrounding migration, nostalgia, and state-mediated cultural nationalism. Such approaches remain anchored in spatial paradigms that treat digital mediation as supplementary rather than constitutive of transnational life. In an era of intensified digital connectivity and networked communication, however, the conditions under which diasporic identities are produced and sustained have undergone a significant transformation. Digital routes and virtual spaces increasingly emerge as central to the negotiation of memory, identity, and belonging, enabling the continuous rearticulation of “home” beyond the limits of physical territory and fixed spatial imaginaries. Within South Asian diasporic contexts, digital platforms function as dynamic sites of world-making where virtual homelands, affective publics, and mediated memory practices intersect to shape contemporary forms of transnational belonging. Online environments including social media networks, diaspora-specific forums, and virtual archives operate as contested arenas in which collective memory is produced, kinship networks are sustained, and alternative narratives of belonging and return are articulated beyond state-centric frameworks. These digitally mediated practices complicate conventional homeland–host land binaries by generating fluid, hybrid, and affective forms of identification that resist linear narratives of loss, displacement, and return. Situating digital diaspora within postcolonial and digital culture scholarship foregrounds the epistemic and political significance of virtual spaces as constitutive dimensions of diasporic formation, highlighting their role in enabling dispersed communities to author and negotiate their own narratives of identity, memory, and belonging in an increasingly networked world.

Keywords: Digital Routes; Virtual Homelands; South Asian Diaspora; Transnational Identity; Collective Memory

1. Introduction

Within South Asian migration and diaspora studies, scholarly inquiry has long privileged geographical displacement, territorial rupture, and physical distance as the primary coordinates through which diasporic experience is understood (Safran

83). Classical and transnational approaches alike have often framed diaspora through movement across borders, the persistence of homeland attachment, and the negotiation of belonging between homeland and hostland. While these frameworks have generated important insights, they remain substantially anchored in spatial-territorial assumptions that inadequately account for the transformation of diasporic life under conditions of digital mediation (Brah 181).

The expansion of networked communication, platform infrastructures, and algorithmically organized digital environments has altered the conditions under which identity, memory, and belonging are produced and sustained (Castells 407). Digital platforms no longer function merely as tools for maintaining pre-existing transnational ties; they increasingly operate as social and cultural spaces in which diasporic subjectivities are formed, contested, and rearticulated (Castells 407). This shift is particularly significant in relation to South Asian Diasporas, where histories of colonial mobility, Partition, labor migration, and postcolonial transnationalism intersect with contemporary digital practices in complex ways (Mallapragada 62).

Despite growing scholarship on digital diaspora, a significant conceptual gap persists. Much of the literature treats digital media instrumentally—as facilitating communication, preserving cultural ties, or extending offline community—rather than as constitutive of diasporic formation itself (Brinkerhoff 31). Such approaches risk underestimating how digital environments reshape the meaning of “home,” transform the performance of hybrid identities, and generate new architectures of mediated memory (Bhabha 56). Recognizing digital mediation as constitutive rather than supplementary requires a rethinking of diaspora beyond inherited territorial paradigms.

This article advances that intervention through the conceptual lenses of digital routes and virtual homelands. Digital routes are understood not simply as channels of communication, but as networked pathways through which diasporic relations, affective ties, and cultural meanings circulate and acquire social form. Virtual homelands, similarly, refer not to symbolic simulations of a lost territorial origin, but to digitally mediated spaces in which belonging is continuously produced, negotiated, and reimagined. Taken together, these concepts offer a framework for understanding how online environments function as primary sites of diasporic world-making (Papacharissi 14).

Focusing on South Asian diasporic contexts, the discussion examines how digital mediation reconfigures three interrelated dimensions of diasporic life: the conceptual unmooring of home from fixed territory, the negotiation of hybrid and relational identities in platformed environments, and the production of collective memory through digital archives, networked publics, and participatory media practices. It argues that these processes complicate conventional homeland–hostland binaries and foreground more fluid, affective, and digitally constituted forms of transnational belonging (Hall 225).

This article contributes to contemporary diaspora studies in two ways. First, it extends existing scholarship by repositioning digital mediation from the margins to the conceptual center of diasporic analysis. Second, it brings diaspora studies into closer conversation with postcolonial theory, digital culture scholarship, and media studies in order to develop a more adequate framework for understanding transnational identity in networked conditions.

The discussion proceeds in four parts. The next section revisits the evolution of diaspora theory from classical territorial models to digital paradigms, identifying the theoretical gap that necessitates a reconceptualization of diaspora. The third section develops the framework of digital routes and virtual homelands through the interrelated dynamics of home, identity, and mediated memory. The fourth section grounds this framework through illustrative cases drawn from digital cultural practices, political mobilization, and virtual sacred spaces in South Asian diasporic contexts. The final section discusses the broader implications of this framework for rethinking diaspora in an increasingly networked world.

2. Rethinking Diaspora: From Territorial to Digital

The conceptual vocabulary of diaspora has evolved through distinct but overlapping theoretical phases, each shaped by changing historical conditions and shifting understandings of mobility, belonging, and transnational connection. Classical diaspora theory, particularly associated with foundational formulations by William Safran and Robin Cohen, defined diaspora through dispersal, collective memory, homeland orientation, and the aspiration—real or symbolic—of return (Safran; Cohen). Within this framework, belonging remained closely tied to territory, and diasporic consciousness was largely interpreted through rupture, loss, and geographic separation.

While foundational, this classical model proved increasingly inadequate for explaining the complexity of postcolonial and late twentieth-century migrations. Critics such as Avtar Brah complicated these assumptions by emphasizing diaspora as a relational field structured through multiple histories of power, identity, and location rather than a singular attachment to origin (Brah 181). Similarly, transnationalism shifted attention from exile-centered models toward ongoing cross-border social, economic, and cultural processes, foregrounding mobility, networked ties, and multi-sited forms of belonging (Appadurai 178). Yet even as transnational approaches destabilized rigid homeland-hostland binaries, they largely remained organized around territorial assumptions in which physical borders, migration routes, and embodied mobility retained analytical primacy.

The rise of digital media introduced a further shift that existing models only partially captured. Early scholarship on digital diaspora documented how migrants used online forums, websites, and communication technologies to sustain social ties, exchange information, and maintain symbolic connections to homeland (Brinkerhoff; Everett). However, much of this work treated digital infrastructures instrumentally—as channels facilitating pre-existing transnational relations—

rather than as environments actively shaping the production of diasporic subjectivity. This instrumental framing underestimated the extent to which platforms, algorithms, and networked publics alter not merely the mediation of diaspora, but its constitutive conditions.

Recent scholarship has moved toward a more substantive recognition of digital mediation as socially generative. Research on digital culture, platform society, and mediated publics suggests that online environments are not neutral containers for social interaction but structured spaces that shape identity formation, memory practices, visibility, and affective relations (Castells 408). For diaspora studies, this shift carries major theoretical implications. It suggests that belonging can no longer be conceptualized solely through territorial attachment or cross-border movement, but must also be understood through digitally mediated forms of presence, circulation, and relationality.

This shift is especially significant in South Asian contexts, where colonial histories, Partition, labor migration, and postcolonial mobility have produced layered and heterogeneous diasporic formations. Digital mediation does not simply extend these histories into online space; it reconfigures how they are remembered, contested, and inhabited. Virtual archives reconstruct Partition memory, social media platforms produce new forms of cultural affiliation, and networked communication sustains affective publics that operate across, and sometimes beyond, the territorial logic of nation-states (Mallapragada; Georgiou). The central theoretical gap, therefore, lies not in the absence of digital diaspora scholarship, but in the continued subordination of digital mediation within broader diaspora theory. Existing models often incorporate the digital without reconceptualizing diaspora itself. Addressing this gap requires moving beyond viewing the digital as supplementary infrastructure and toward understanding it as constitutive of contemporary diasporic formation. It is this shift—from territorial to digital paradigms—that grounds the framework of digital routes and virtual homelands developed in the following section.

3. Digital Routes and Virtual Homelands

The central theoretical intervention of this article lies in treating digital mediation not as a secondary layer imposed upon diasporic life, but as a constitutive environment through which belonging, identity, and memory are continuously produced. If earlier frameworks positioned diaspora in relation to movement between territorial locations, digital routes foreground the significance of networked circulation, platformed interaction, and mediated presence as central to contemporary diasporic formation. Within South Asian contexts in particular, where histories of migration, colonial rupture, and postcolonial mobility already complicate singular notions of origin and return, digital environments intensify and transform the processes through which diaspora is lived and imagined.

3.1 Rethinking Home and the Architecture of Virtual Homelands

One of the most significant consequences of digital mediation is the conceptual unmooring of “home” from fixed territory. In classical diaspora thought, homeland functioned as a geographic origin—whether materially accessible or symbolically idealized—around which collective memory and diasporic longing were organized (Safran; Cohen). Yet contemporary digital practices increasingly suggest that home is not merely remembered in relation to territory but actively produced through mediated interaction. The concept of virtual homelands captures this shift by recognizing digitally constituted spaces as sites where belonging is continuously assembled rather than passively inherited (Mallapragada).

Virtual homelands emerge through the interplay of platform infrastructures, digital objects, and affective participation (Mallapragada 62). Social media networks, diaspora forums, online archives, streaming platforms, and digitally mediated religious spaces allow dispersed communities to sustain social ties while also producing new symbolic geographies of identification. In such spaces, belonging does not depend exclusively on physical return or territorial proximity; it is articulated through shared narratives, recurring digital practices, and the circulation of cultural signs. This includes forms of what may be understood as everyday digital homelanding: the curation of memory through archived photographs, the circulation of language and cultural idioms through short-form media, participation in transnational ritual practices through livestreamed worship, and the reproduction of collective identity through everyday digital interaction.

This shift also transforms the temporal structure of diasporic belonging. Rather than orienting identity solely through nostalgia for a lost past or anticipation of return, virtual homelands enable more dynamic and recursive relations to time. Past, present, and imagined futures intersect through digital memory practices, algorithmic recirculation, and participatory media cultures. In this sense, digital routes do not simply preserve homeland attachment; they reshape the very conditions through which homeland is imagined, inhabited, and made socially meaningful.

3.2 Identity, Hybridity, and the Digital Third Space

Digital mediation also reshapes the negotiation of diasporic identity. Foundational work in postcolonial theory has long emphasized identity as relational, unstable, and continually formed through processes of representation rather than fixed essence (Hall 225). For diasporic subjects, identity has historically involved navigating multiple cultural locations, often through forms of hybridity that unsettle binary distinctions between origin and settlement. Digital environments intensify these dynamics by providing expanded spaces for self-representation, experimentation, and transnational relationality.

In this respect, digital platforms may be understood as extending, and in some respects operationalizing, Homi Bhabha’s notion of the Third Space (Bhabha 37),

where identity is negotiated through difference and translation. Online environments create conditions in which cultural meanings are negotiated through remix, translation, mimicry, and performative self-fashioning. Identity is articulated not as the preservation of authentic cultural essence but through ongoing processes of mediated becoming. This is evident in the ways diasporic subjects use digital platforms to perform layered forms of belonging through language, visual culture, political expression, and everyday interaction.

Such practices reveal that digital identity formation is shaped not only by user agency but also by platform affordances. Algorithms structure visibility; interfaces shape participation; metrics of engagement influence what circulates and what gains social legitimacy. As a result, identity in digital diaspora cannot be understood solely as expressive performance. It is co-produced through interactions between users, platforms, and networked publics. This is where the concept of affective publics becomes particularly significant, as digitally mediated communities are often sustained not only through shared identities but through shared emotional intensities, solidarities, and forms of mediated responsiveness (Papacharissi 22).

These dynamics are especially significant in South Asian digital contexts, where questions of caste, religion, language, gender, and region intersect with diasporic subjectivity in highly complex ways. Digital spaces may enable solidarities across such differences, but they may also reproduce hierarchy, exclusion, and contestation. The significance of the digital Third Space, therefore, lies not in romanticizing online hybridity but in recognizing digital environments as structured yet open arenas in which identity is negotiated through both possibility and power.

3.3 Mediated Memory and Digital Archives

Perhaps the most profound transformation enabled by digital routes concerns the production and circulation of memory. Collective memory has always been central to diasporic formation, linking dispersed populations through shared histories, inherited trauma, and symbolic attachments to origin. Yet digital mediation alters not simply how memory is preserved, but how it is constituted. As José van Dijck argues, memory and media are mutually shaping processes rather than separate domains (van Dijck 9), highlighting the co-constitution of technology and remembrance. This insight is especially significant for understanding digital diaspora.

Digital archives, participatory memory projects, social media commemorations, and community-based repositories have become crucial sites for producing what may be called mediated memory. These practices do not merely document pre-existing histories; they actively reconstruct them. This is particularly evident in South Asian contexts shaped by the afterlives of Partition, colonial displacement, and migratory fragmentation. Projects such as digital oral history archives and community-driven repositories make possible the circulation of voices and

experiences often marginalized within official state historiographies. In doing so, they transform memory from a largely inherited structure into a participatory and networked process.

Digital mediation also reshapes the intergenerational transmission of memory. Through digitized photographs, oral histories, video testimony, and platformed storytelling, younger generations may encounter traumatic or formative histories not through direct experience but through mediated forms of relational inheritance. This resonates with broader discussions of postmemory, while also extending them into the digital realm through the specific affordances of searchable archives, algorithmic recirculation, and networked accessibility.

Importantly, digital memory is not neutral. Platforms structure remembrance through visibility regimes, curation logics, and commercial architectures. What is remembered, amplified, or rendered discoverable is often shaped by algorithmic and institutional power. This complicates celebratory narratives of digital democratization. Yet even within such constraints, digital archives and mediated memory practices create significant possibilities for historical reclamation, alternative narration, and diasporic continuity.

Taken together, virtual homelands, digital hybridity, and mediated memory should not be understood as separate domains but as interrelated dimensions of digitally constituted diasporic formation. The digital reshapes where home is imagined, how identity is negotiated, and how memory is produced. It is through this convergence that digital routes emerge not as metaphor alone, but as a substantive framework for rethinking contemporary diaspora. These conceptual transformations become more clearly visible when examined through the everyday digital practices of diasporic communities, where abstract processes of identity, memory, and belonging take concrete social form.

4. Digital Diaspora in Practice: Illustrative Cases

The theoretical framework developed thus far gains analytical force when examined through concrete digital practices. If digital routes and virtual homelands describe the conceptual conditions of contemporary diasporic formation, their significance is most clearly demonstrated through the everyday ways South Asian diasporic communities use digital infrastructures to reproduce culture, sustain transnational networks, and reshape religious and political belonging. The cases that follow are not intended as exhaustive empirical representation, but as illustrative sites through which broader theoretical dynamics become visible.

4.1 Digital Cultural Reproduction and Networked Belonging

One of the most visible manifestations of digital diaspora can be found in practices of cultural reproduction across social media platforms, especially in spaces shaped by visibility, circulation, and user-generated participation. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have become important sites through which

diasporic subjects reproduce, reinterpret, and transmit cultural practices beyond the limits of family, locality, or formal community institutions.

Digital food cultures provide a particularly significant example (Mallapragada 62). Culinary blogs, Instagram archives, recipe channels, and food-centered social media communities do more than preserve culinary tradition; they transform food into a mediated archive of memory, identity, and regional belonging. Recipes, vernacular food practices, and everyday acts of cooking become embedded within broader digital narratives of heritage, migration, and self-representation. In this sense, food operates not only as cultural symbol but as a medium through which diasporic belonging is narrated and socially reproduced (Mallapragada).

Similar dynamics emerge through digital heritage initiatives and visual storytelling practices. Community-led projects centered on family photographs, personal archives, and social media storytelling produce alternative repositories of diasporic memory that often challenge official historical narratives. Digital heritage practices such as South Asian community archives or social media-based historical storytelling demonstrate how cultural memory can be sustained through participatory digital infrastructures rather than solely through institutional or state-sanctioned forms of preservation.

These practices also reveal how digital cultural reproduction is not reducible to preservation alone. It frequently involves reinterpretation, aesthetic experimentation, and hybrid cultural production. Cultural identity in digital diaspora often emerges through remix rather than replication. This is visible in diasporic fashion cultures, multilingual digital expression, meme cultures, and transnational media circulation, where inherited cultural forms are selectively reworked in relation to contemporary contexts. Digital routes thus facilitate not only the continuity of culture but its ongoing transformation.

4.2 Connective Action, Political Mobilization, and Digital Contestation

Beyond the domain of cultural reproduction, digital routes also facilitate forms of political articulation and transnational mobilization that extend diasporic engagement into explicitly contested public spheres. Digital routes are equally significant as infrastructures of political communication and transnational mobilization. For diasporic communities historically positioned across multiple political contexts, social media platforms have expanded possibilities for participation in homeland politics, solidarity activism, and transnational public engagement. Platforms such as Twitter/X, WhatsApp, and increasingly decentralized networked spaces have enabled forms of what may be understood as connective action, where mobilization occurs through flexible digital networks rather than centralized organizational structures (Castells 408).

Recent South Asian political contexts illustrate this dynamic. Diasporic engagement surrounding protests, democratic crises, and contentious political events has frequently unfolded through digital platforms that allow rapid circulation of information, coordinated advocacy, and transnational amplification

of local struggles. Hashtag activism, digital witness practices, and networked solidarity campaigns demonstrate how digital routes can enable diasporic actors to participate in political life beyond the constraints of territorial distance.

Yet these same infrastructures also reveal the contested and uneven nature of digital diaspora. Platforms that enable mobilization also reproduce polarization, surveillance, and forms of digital repression (Papacharissi 22). Algorithmically intensified echo chambers, disinformation campaigns, coordinated harassment, and state-linked narrative interventions complicate celebratory understandings of digital political participation. Diasporic digital publics may function as spaces of resistance, but they are equally shaped by conflict, asymmetrical power, and platform governance (Papacharissi; Castells).

This tension is analytically significant. It underscores that digital routes should not be understood as inherently emancipatory spaces, but as politically contested environments in which possibilities for democratic participation coexist with forms of control, fragmentation, and ideological struggle. Recognizing this ambivalence is essential to avoiding overly idealized conceptions of digital diaspora.

4.3 Virtual Sacred Spaces and Digitally Mediated Religious Life

In addition to cultural and political domains, digital mediation also reshapes religious life, reconfiguring how diasporic communities experience spirituality, ritual, and collective belonging. A further illustration of digital mediation as constitutive of diasporic formation can be seen in the reconfiguration of religious practice. Religious institutions and practices have long played central roles in sustaining diasporic community, cultural continuity, and forms of collective belonging. Digital mediation has transformed these functions by extending religious life into virtual environments.

Livestreamed rituals, digital darśan, online congregational practices, religious discussion forums, and platform-mediated devotional communities now form part of everyday religious life for many diasporic communities (Georgiou). These practices are not simply technological substitutes for physically co-present worship; they often generate distinctive forms of participation, intimacy, and transnational religious connectivity. Through digital mediation, sacred practice becomes networked, portable, and temporally flexible, allowing dispersed communities to participate in ritual and communal life across geographic distance. This is particularly significant in diasporic contexts where religious belonging intersects with migration, minority identity, and cultural continuity. Virtual sacred spaces often function simultaneously as spiritual sites, community infrastructures, and cultural anchors. They sustain not only religious practice but broader forms of diasporic sociality, intergenerational transmission, and identity formation.

Seen together, these illustrative cases demonstrate that digital routes operate across multiple domains of diasporic life. They shape cultural reproduction, political mobilization, and religious practice not as isolated phenomena but as

interconnected dimensions of digitally constituted belonging. These practices provide concrete grounding for the broader claim that digital mediation is not supplementary to diaspora but integral to how contemporary diasporic worlds are organized, inhabited, and contested.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The preceding discussion has argued for a reconceptualization of diaspora that moves beyond inherited territorial paradigms and takes digital mediation seriously as constitutive of contemporary transnational life. This shift carries broader implications for diaspora studies as a field. If belonging, identity, and collective memory are increasingly produced through platformed interaction, networked circulation, and digitally mediated publics, then frameworks that continue to privilege geography as the primary organizing logic of diaspora risk obscuring fundamental transformations in how diasporic formations now operate.

One major implication of this intervention concerns the concept of home itself. Rather than treating home exclusively as a territorial origin, symbolic destination, or site of return, the framework of virtual homelands suggests that home may also be understood as a mediated and continuously produced social relation. This does not displace the material significance of territory, borders, or nation-states, nor does it deny the continuing force of migration regimes, racialized exclusion, or geopolitical inequality. Rather, it suggests that these realities are increasingly lived, negotiated, and contested through digital environments that reshape the conditions of diasporic belonging.

A second implication concerns the conceptual relationship between diaspora and identity. The analysis developed here suggests that identity in contemporary diaspora cannot be adequately understood through inherited models of cultural preservation or even through earlier formulations of hybridity alone. Digital mediation introduces new questions concerning platform power, algorithmic visibility, mediated affect, and the co-production of subjectivity through socio-technical systems. Bringing these dynamics into diaspora theory expands the field's analytical reach and opens more sustained dialogue with media studies, digital sociology, and platform studies.

A third implication concerns memory. The analysis of mediated memory and digital archives suggests that memory in diaspora is increasingly participatory, networked, and shaped through digital infrastructures. This has consequences not only for how histories of displacement are remembered, but for how historical authority, archival legitimacy, and intergenerational transmission are understood. In this sense, digital routes alter not only where diaspora is enacted, but how diasporic continuity itself is sustained.

Taken together, these implications support a broader theoretical claim: digital mediation should be understood not as an external variable added to existing theories of diaspora, but as a constitutive condition requiring those theories to be rethought. This article has advanced that claim through the framework of digital

routes and virtual homelands, showing how digitally mediated environments shape cultural reproduction, political contestation, religious life, and affective belonging across South Asian diasporic contexts.

At the same time, this framework also points toward areas requiring further inquiry. The digital is neither socially neutral nor universally accessible. Questions of platform governance, digital inequality, surveillance, data extraction, and algorithmic power complicate any straightforward account of digital belonging. Future research may therefore extend this framework by examining how caste, class, gender, language, and unequal access to digital infrastructures shape differentiated experiences within digital diaspora.

In conclusion, contemporary diaspora can no longer be understood solely through the cartographies of displacement, migration routes, and territorial attachment that shaped earlier paradigms. While these histories remain indispensable, they are no longer sufficient. Digital routes and virtual homelands foreground the extent to which diasporic worlds are increasingly organized through mediated interaction, networked memory, and digitally constituted forms of presence. Recognizing this shift does not replace territorial understandings of diaspora; it transforms them. It allows diaspora to be understood more adequately as a formation produced not only across borders and histories of movement, but also across platforms, data flows, and mediated publics in an increasingly networked world.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/70**OUTSIDERS WITHIN: POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITY, CULTURAL
MEMORY, AND THE DKHAR SUBJECTIVITY IN ANJUM HASAN'S
*LUNATIC IN MY HEAD*****RUMANA PARVIN**Research Scholar, Department of Humanities & Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Engineering Science and Technology, Shibpur, India**DR. AVERI MUKHOPADHYAY**Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities & Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Engineering Science and Technology, Shibpur, India**Abstract**

The tribals, particularly the Khasi community living in Meghalaya, commonly use the term “Dkhars” to refer to the non-tribal people in that particular region. Being the minority, Dkhars remain excluded from the dominant culture and narratives of belonging, even if they grew up in this urban milieu. To foreground the complexities of identity, where belonging is neither fully denied nor securely attained, Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of “Third Space” focuses on the urban space as a site of hybrid belonging. In this context, Edward Said’s notion of the “Othering” becomes crucial to understand how the Dkhar identities are marked as marginalized within the local socio-cultural landscape. Set against the backdrop of the small-town of Shillong, Meghalaya, Anjum Hasan’s *Lunatic in My Head* (2007) exhibits the characters of Firdaus Ansari, Aman Moondy, and Sophie Das, three protagonists born and raised there, and yet consistently got denied from the cultural legitimacy and symbolic participation in its remembered past. The study incorporates Jan Assmann’s framework of cultural memory to argue that the characters’ sense of displacement is deeply embedded in the socially transmitted memory and shaped by colonial histories of the past and postcolonial continuities in the present. By examining *Lunatic in My Head* (2007) as a critical lens for exploring cultural memory and postcolonial identity politics, the paper reveals how collective remembrance acts simultaneously as a mechanism of inclusion and a tool of exclusion and how memory, transmitted through language, culture, and spatial politics, functions as a gatekeeping force by relegating certain communities to the margins.

Keywords: Dkhar, Khasi Community, Memory, Space, Postcolonial Identity**Introduction**

Located in the northeastern state of Meghalaya, the Khasi community use the term “Dkhars” for the “migrants from the plains, who were given shelter and later adopted the Khasi culture” (Kharmawphlang, 39). The category of the Dkhars is deeply political, and they are marked as culturally and socially distinct within a

region defined by its own indigenous identity. Dustin Lalkuhlpuia (2026) claims that though the northeastern region has a rich cultural tradition, this place is marked by insurgency and it brings attention to urgent issues such as complex identity formations, process of othering, and marginalization. Unlike the conventional binaries of colonizer and colonized, the Dkhars occupy a complex position. They are simultaneously privileged and marginalised, visible yet estranged, included as well as excluded from the dominant cultural narratives of that region. They inhabit a layered space of belonging that forms a contradictory nature of identity in the postcolonial context. The postcolonial identity has always been a complex phenomenon to understand as the transition from colonialism is shaped by transmission of memory, culture, and the complex power dynamics of a particular area.

Contemporary literary discourse traces the intricate identities in societies shaped by colonial histories and contemporary Indian fiction has emerged to a great extent to interrogate the layered identities shaped by social positioning and colonial hierarchies. Set against the backdrop of the ethnically stratified small-town, Shillong, Anjum Hasan's *Lunatic in My Head* (2007) raises the question of identity not as a fixed category, but as a continuously negotiated state where cultural differences complicate everyday experiences of belonging. The figure of the Dkhars, the non-indigenous outsiders, become central to understand how postcolonial subjectivity is constructed and contested. Through the lives of Firdaus Ansari, Aman Moondy, and Sophie Das, the novel foregrounds the ambivalent condition of the characters who inhabit a space without fully belonging to it. In this context, Dipanjoy Mukherjee writes:

"As postcolonial authors continue to challenge and redefine identity through storytelling, their works remain central to understanding the ongoing processes of cultural decolonization and human resilience" (140).

The study of postcolonial literature sheds light on how the individuals and societies negotiate the lasting impacts of colonization, and the narratives serve as a vital space for resistance in a globalized world (Mukherjee). To explore the contradictory nature of identity, a nuanced theoretical framework is developed through Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "Third Space" that challenges the idea of stable cultural identities by proposing a space of enunciation. This space becomes particularly significant as it produces and reproduces meaning and identity through negotiation and hybridity. Hasan's novel contextualizes this framework through its portrayal of the urban environment as a hybrid belonging. Shillong, in this context, functions as a "Third Space" or hybrid atmosphere, where the Dkhar or non-tribal subjectivities are constantly shaped and reshaped through interactions with dominant cultural practices. At the same time, identity can be understood as an ongoing process, rather than a fixed entity. It is constantly evolved and shaped by the system of representation (Hall). Within this Third Space of a complex cultural space, Sophie's acute awareness of her linguistic and

cultural difference, Aman's introspective disengagement, and Firdaus' attempt to assert autonomy are infected by underlying structures of power dynamics.

The novel also invites a reading of the Dkhar characters through Edward Said's concept of "othering" within a localized cultural context, marked by difference in language, appearance, and social practice. It operates through subtle gestures and everyday interactions to move beyond spatial and cultural frameworks to consider the role of memory in shaping identity. Jan Assmann's (2011) exploration of cultural memory provides a crucial lens to encompass the shared narratives, symbols, practices through which communities construct and transmit a sense of "self" over time. In *Lunatic in My Head* (2007), cultural memory operates both at the level of dominant indigenous community and within the Dkhar population. The urban space, in this sense, becomes a repository of memories, where the layers of experiences intersect to produce complex configuration of identity. As Muthaiah quotes, "postcolonial literature, particularly in the Indian context, is fundamentally concerned with the concept of identity" (Muthaiah, 1), the different dynamics of the characters reveal how postcolonial identity is constituted through the interplay of multiple forces; i.e, cultural, linguistic, historical.

Rather than focusing on the grand historical narratives of conflict and resistance, this paper situates Hasan's novel as a depiction of the everyday experiences and contradictory belonging of the indigenous and non-tribals through the quiet, often imperceptible ways in which power is inscribed in daily interactions. The seemingly mundane moments create complexities of identity and the emphasis on the quotidian aligns with broader shift in postcolonial studies to examine the micro-politics of a small-town. Moving beyond the binary opposition of the colonizer and colonized, this paper foregrounds the nuances of lived experience through the perspectives of Sophie, Aman and Firdaus, by bringing together the theoretical insights of Bhabha, Said, and Assmann. The study not only reflects the complexities of a specific socio-cultural context but also speaks to broader questions about what it means to inhabit a world where identities are constantly in dilemma and delusion.

Negotiating Belonging: Reading the Dkhar Subjectivity:

Shillong has been established as the administrative headquarters of the undivided Assam under British colonial rule in 1874. It marked the beginning of significant transformations in the lives of indigenous communities, particularly in the fields of religion, marital practices, and education (Roy). This significant demographic and cultural shift intensified a sense of vulnerability among the indigenous population. Being culturally distinct and smaller in number, these tribals increasingly perceived themselves as marginalized from the mainstream Indian population. Consequently, this heightened tension contributed to a resistance among their own community to accept the presence of non-tribals in the Northeastern region. Inside the socio-cultural fabric of the Khasi community, the Dkhars are called as "foreigners, often used derogatorily" (Das, 160). The question of

belonging and identity in postcolonial context has long been understood as a site of tension, negotiation, and transformation. Adharshila Chatterjee mentions that, “our negotiation with the concept of ‘home’ in the postcolony must be premised upon the broader scope and contexts of specific geopolitical and socioeconomic impetuses” (Chatterjee, 122). This disruptive idea of home or belonging emerges from familial and institutional processes that internalize racialized differences and shape performative identities.

To exist as “the Other” within spaces shaped by colonial histories is to carry and transmit intergenerational silences and traumas (Chatterjee). In this context, the Dkhars, living in the Northeastern region of Shillong, become the outsiders to the Khasi community. In Anjum Hasan’s *Lunatic in My Head* (2007), Firdaus, a Bihari by origin yet raised in Shillong; Sophie, born of an intercultural Bengali-northerner parentage; and Aman, who grows up locally yet remains uncertain of his belonging, embody varied configuration of Dkhar identity. The instability of their experiences unfolds within a culturally layered environment that both includes and excludes them. Ahmed and Biswas (2020) point out that the very title of the novel exerts the psychological unrest and disillusionment of its characters. They experience deep emotional strain arising from alienation and separation from dominant narratives as they lack cultural rootedness and marked as “outsiders”. Their condition becomes emblematic of a deeper existential struggle as “in a post-colonial situation, lunaticism is more mental and not external. It can never be shown, but felt. It is also co-related with identity which is questioned. Hence, the characters have gone lunatic in their desperate quest for identity, in their search for roots” (Ahmed and Biswas, 15).

In the opening of the novel, Firdaus “looked at people, however, and people looked at her” (Hasan, 3), suggesting her awareness of behaviour, appearance, and linguistic difference. The situation reveals how she navigates this space through observation and social distinctions. To examine the Dkhar subjectivity, Bhabha’s concepts of the “Third Space” and “hybridity”, prominently articulated in *The Location of Culture* (1994), refer to the in-between cultural space where interactions produce mixed identities. This hybrid belonging challenges the notion of identity as a fundamental condition of postcolonial existence. He argues that philosophy has conceived identity as a process of self-recognition through reflection; whereas, anthropology has located it within the “Nature / Culture” (Bhabha, 46). Positioned as a Dkhar within a predominantly Khasi atmosphere, eight-year-old Sophie Das’s life, particularly within the institutional space of school, becomes a microcosm of hybridity. Anjum (2007) exclaims, “Sophie was odd because she was a Das, yet could only speak a few sentences of Bengali” (Hasan, 23). Her struggles with language, her awareness of familial difference collectively underscore the impossibility of a unified self in the small-town of Shillong.

Postcolonial texts reframe the struggle as an ongoing interrogation of representation itself through a continuous confrontation with difference. The visible and invisible lines of demarcation is grounded in the everyday experiences of observation, interpretation, and negotiation. Within the Indian context, Ranjan Ghosh's (2016) emphasis on culture and tradition on thought beyond the boundaries extends Bhabha's framework of Third Space. In the second chapter of *Thinking Literature across Continents* (2016), J.H. Miller observes that neither he nor Ghosh claims to represent a unified cultural voice; instead, both speak from a specific, situated positions within highly diverse traditions. Ghosh states, "a critical comparative negotiation between the self and the other, the native and the foreign, the insider and the outsider, is what forms culture" (Ghosh and Miller, 214). This acknowledgement of internal heterogeneity reveals how different cultural positionings produce unexpected points of convergence to reproduce meaning through interaction rather than isolation.

Though Sophie and Firdaus' location within a hybrid space reveals two distinct and intersecting modes of negotiation, and they do not necessarily translate into ease or belonging. Rather, the non-tribal identity often intensifies their sense of isolation. On the other hand, Aman Moondy, another Dkhar character, emerges as an introspective figure. Caught between aspiration and discontent within his surroundings, Aman's internal dilemma pushes him to leave this small-town in near future. The novel vividly captures Aman's confrontation with "the language of the bullies, a dkhar – an outsider" (Hasan, 36). While Bhabha emphasizes for hybrid identities, it does not dismantle existing hierarchies. Critics such as Ania Loomba (2005) have pointed out, "Bhabha generalises and universalises the colonial encounter. Thus, ironically, the split, ambivalent, hybrid colonial subject projected in his work is in fact curiously universal and homogeneous" (Loomba, 149-150). Loomba gives a reference of Ella Shohat, who argues to distinguish between the forms of hybridity, such as coerced assimilation, internalized self-denial, political and social condition, and forms of creative transformation. (Loomba). These varied forms of hybridity are reflected through the differing experiences of three characters, where assimilation, mimicry, and internal conflict shape their everyday negotiation of identity.

Sophie, Aman, and Firdaus illustrate the multiple trajectories of lived experiences. Sophie, being the youngest one, represents the psychological burden of in-betweenness, Aman embodies its quite escape through his engagement with Pink Floyd, and Firdaus maturely deals with her adaptation in an academic environment. Their condition resonates with Sara Ahmed's notion of the "transnational movement of peoples on the formation of identity without assuming an ontology of the stranger" (Ahmed, 79). Ahmed extends the idea of home that confines strangeness to consider how experiences of unfamiliarity and otherness exist within this very space. Within the familiar space of home, one feels connected with family, neighbour, or friend. But still, it confines strangeness to

what lies outside. Instead, it is important to consider how experiences of unfamiliarity and otherness may already exist within the very environment one calls home, and in that way, culture and identity is negotiated over time. Gillian Bottomley's evaluation of culture as the lived practices is significant to understand in this very context. He states, "People leave one set of social and historical circumstances and move, or are moved, to another. By this very movement, migration challenges the idea of a distinct way of life" (Bottomley, 3). The subculture that is formed through migration and distinct experiences, offers a nuanced portrayal of how ways of life are transformed in layers of expressions. The differing experiences of the protagonists is also shaped by gender roles, and it reveals how the postcolonial subjectivity is mediated through the intersectional structures of power. Sophie and Firdaus' responses towards restrictive social expectations significantly and simultaneously diverge and converge at some points. This similarity and deviation reflect what Stuart Hall describes as identity being a "production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall, 222). Firdaus, being the young female professor, demonstrates a greater capacity for negotiation, by channelling her energies into intellectual engagement through research and teaching. The child, Sophie, by contrast, confines herself, both socially and emotionally, and dissolves herself in reading novels for developing a coping mechanism and creating an imaginative refuge from the outside world. For both of them, the production of identity, that is incomplete and in process, is converged as they adopt similar ways of coping, yet demonstrating it differently. Aman's experience introduces a different dimension, where masculinity intersects with cultural marginality to create a form of disengagement. His immersion in music serves as both an escape and an alternative mode of self-expression. While Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) *Third Space* suggests the possibility of hybrid identity formation, these coping strategies reveal the affective dimensions of inhabiting such a space. Ania Loomba (2005) argues that postcolonial identities are shaped within enduring structures of inequality, and these characters intellectual labour underscores the need for alternative spaces of meaning-making. Through Firdaus' voice to her lover, Hasan writes, "You, your homeland, your tribe, your love for your mother, your schemes, your beliefs – I share nothing of this... There are no people I call my people" (Hasan, 167).

Othering and Cultural Memory: Constructing the Outsiders Within:

The Dkhar subjectivity of three prominent characters in Anjum Hasan's *Lunatic in My Head* (2007) can be further illuminated through the intersecting frameworks of othering and cultural memory. The historical structure of belonging plays a crucial role to shape the negotiated identities in the present and postcolonial context. Edward Said's formulation of "othering" in the book *Orientalism* (1978) offers this shifting focus on the difference that is produced and remembered. Said emphasises his ideology in the Western epistemological structure, that centres on

how Europe constructs the “Orient” as its cultural opposite. In the non-Western context, Hasan’s construction of the Dkhar characters reflects a localized form of this same mechanism. The Khasi community has their own historical and cultural past. The internal “Other” is produced when people from the plains migrated there, and started adopting the Khasi culture in ways that echo the structural dynamics identified by Said. In the introduction of the book, Said writes, “for the readers in the so-called Third World, this study purposes itself as a step towards an understanding not so much of Western politics” (Said, 25). It signals Said’s own intention to make his framework useful for readers in postcolonial context to understand how power dynamics and hierarchy function in broader social environment beyond the colonizer-colonized binary.

In Hasan’s narrative, the Dkhar subjectivity as the “outsiders within” signifies the similar structure of exclusion, alienation, and the formation of “self” operate beyond the East-West dichotomy. Little Sophie’s experience in a social gathering reveals a deep form of detachment from her surroundings. Her partial familiarity with the Khasi language amplifies her sense of exclusion. “She knew the meaning of certain words, and could sometimes make sense of what was being said from the tone in which it was spoken” (Hasan, 97). But the incomplete access to language places her in an in-between position. This “Othered” zone is neither fully included nor entirely excluded from the Khasi culture. Sophie’s intensified experience is what Said embodies as the production of “Other” through everyday practices that mark difference. The discomfort of belonging emerges from a particular culture and language aligns with Sara Ahmed’s (2000) argument that the moment of dissatisfaction and disorientation is constituted for a stranger within a familiar space. Ahmed states, “the figure of the stranger is far from simply being strange; it is a figure that is painfully familiar in that very strange(r)ness” (Ahmed, 21). Sophie’s encounter to a Khasi get-together party exemplifies how lived experiences produce a constant sense of unbelonging even within the ordinary social interactions.

The predominant role of cultural memory in shaping the collective perceptions and difference of belonging is necessary to consider to fully understand the experiences of the Dkhar characters in the novel. Jan Assmann articulates, “The contents of this memory, the ways in which they are organized, and the length of time they last are for the most part not a matter of internal storage or control but of the external conditions imposed by society and cultural contexts” (Assmann, 5).

The Dkhar identity as foreigners is historically rooted and culturally distinct from the dominant cultural memory of the Khasi narrative. Aman Moondy’s reflection in Hasan’s narrative, that the “Dkhars were afraid of tribals, tribals were afraid of dkhars” (Hasan, 72), captures the mutual detachment and fear from social relations. The internal cultural memory is embedded in the “Shillong-flavoured timelessness” (Hasan, 72), where collective experiences are sustained through

shared narratives and social practices. Aman's personal aspiration to leave the town is a response to a cultural environment where memory reproduces boundaries and reinforces otherness in the region's collective history.

The historical transformation of Shillong, particularly under colonial rule, which introduced new administrative and social hierarchies, plays a crucial role in shaping these cultural memories. Partition, urbanization and increased mobility led to the rise of migrant communities of diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, and this region has transformed into a multicultural space. However, the growing assertion of indigenous identity through "sons of soil" politics fostered the othering of non-tribal settlers (Basaiaimoit and Mangang). In Hasan's (2007) novel, "Firdaus lived with her grandfather, a man of eighty-one who had spent most of his life in a village in Bihar till circumstances forced him to move here" (55-56), and Firdaus's sense of an absence of homeland is what Assmann defines as an exclusion from shared identity, and at the same time, she constantly tries to fit in and reshape her identity within the microcosmic environment of academia in this macrocosmic small-town. Firdaus' sense of alienation comes from the internalized social structures as scholars such as Partha Chatterjee (1993) have argued that colonial modernity reshaped indigenous identities by imposing new categories of cultural distinctions. He states:

"Once colonialism as an economic and political formation is shown to have been produced by an indigenous history of capitalist development, everything that followed from colonial rule becomes, by the ineluctable logic of historical theory, an integral part of that same indigenous history" (Chatterjee, 31).

The construction of identity politics through the intersectional configuration of "othering" through cultural memory is constructed over time and history. The Dkhars, repeatedly designated as outsiders, reinforces this framework that normalizes exclusion. Firdaus' attitude towards the local boys and "their loping stride, their silent, moody mystique" (118) captures her complex perspective of men around her. She is marked by both fascination and distance, and immediately substantiates this perception by recognizing that "it was Shillong that gave these men their glamour" (118). Aligning with Benedict Anderson's (2006) concept of the nation as an "imagined political community" (6), where shared narratives create a sense of belonging among members while simultaneously excluding others, Firdaus simultaneously accepts her deep sorrow and attachment towards her belonging. Despite real inequalities and exploitation, the nation is perceived as a profound sense of shared solidarity. This feeling of collective belonging makes a nation imagined (Anderson). In the novel, the Khasi community's sense of identity is sustained through such narratives. Firdaus' recognition of Shillong's role in shaping the identities of its own people intensifies her alienation. She finds herself unable to share in this culturally produced "mystique".

The different experiences of the characters demonstrate that cultural memory is not monolithic, but contested and unevenly experienced. Assman (2011) examines

how communities represent their identities collectively in ethnic terms, rather than individually. She analyses the role of cultural memory in shaping these shared self-images. While the dominant memory of the community positions Dkhars as outsiders, the characters themselves inhabit a more ambiguous space. For them, belonging is both desired and denied. This tension reflects what Ashis Nandy (1983) describes as the “intimate enemy”, where colonial and postcolonial identities are intertwined in complex and contradictory ways. The title of Nandy’s book refers to the internalization of colonial values, resulting the self-alienation experienced by the colonized. This “enemy” does not just refer to the external oppressor. Rather, it becomes a part of oneself that has started to value the colonizer’s worldview. The results lead to a loss of authentic selfhood and formulate a hybrid self. In *The Location of Culture* (1994) Bhabha states, “It is not that the voice of authority is at a loss for words. It is, rather, that the colonial discourse has reached that point when, faced with the hybridity of its objects, the presence of power is revealed as something other than what its rules of recognition assert” (112). Beyond the colonizer-colonized binary, this framework reveals that the hybrid identities of the characters in *Lunatic in My Head* do not fit in the fixed categories of belonging; rather, the cultural memory of that particular region, continues to reinforce the boundaries by gathering lived experiences of difference and shaping collective perceptions of belonging and exclusion at the same time.

Conclusion

The postcolonial identity is a nuanced and layered exploration of fragmented selfhood. It becomes a site of tension, negotiation, and acceptance of cultural memory in a particular region. Through the experiences of Sophie, Firdaus, and Aman – three Dkhar characters from the novel, the study foregrounds how subjectivity is shaped not only within the fluid dynamics of identity formation, but also through the persistent structures of othering through collective and distinct experiences. While the “Third Space” enables the possibility of character reconfiguration, the lived experiences reveal the prevailing socio-cultural hierarchies in the society. The concept of “othering” demonstrates how the Dkhars continuously positioned as outsiders within local milieu, and simultaneously, the framework of cultural memory allows to understand that these distinctions of insider-outsider binary are historically sedimented and collectively sustained. The cultural memory of Shillong reinforces lived experiences of difference, and normalizes the boundary of the Khasi community and the Dkhars, even as these boundaries are challenged by hybrid subjectivities. The comparative trajectories of three prominent characters reveal that postcolonial identity is not a uniform experience; instead, it is mediated through gender, class, aspiration, and individual values. Their varied responses underscore the ways in which individuals inhabit and response to conditions of marginality. From this perspective, Anjum Hasan’s *Lunatic in My Head* (2007) resists reductive understanding of belonging and reframes identity as an ongoing process by the interplay of power, memory, and

everyday experience. It contributes to the postcolonial discourse by illuminating the complexities of living as the “outsiders within” in contemporary cultural contexts.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/71**ENVIRONMENTALISM OF THE POOR AND POSTCOLONIAL
SOLASTALGIA IN *THE HUNGRY TIDE*****RUBINA**

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Abstract

The Hungry Tide (2004) by Amitav Ghosh is set in the Sundarbans, an ecological hotspot in the Indian state of West Bengal. In this novel, Ghosh engages with complex themes of human–nature symbiosis, the catastrophic impact of the climate crisis, and competing approaches within the discourse of ecological conservatism. The narrative foregrounds the marginalized communities of the Sundarbans, situating the human–animal–nature relationship within a history shaped by violent pasts, most notably the Morichjhapi massacre, as well as recurring natural disasters such as floods and cyclones, and pervasive experiences of loss, both individual and communal. In *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh argues that contemporary fiction is increasingly accommodating the inanimate, the material, and the “unpresentable” to expand the scope of cultural epistemology. Simultaneously, it has begun to confront environmental devastation and its uneven consequences for marginalized populations. In *The Hungry Tide*, the geographical and socio-cultural formation of the Sundarbans embodies an ongoing, lived engagement with the climate crisis, not as an imagined future apocalypse, but as an immediate and persistent reality. The paper analyses the novel’s textual rhythm of ebb and flow, which mirrors the tidal ecology of the region, formally enacting patterns of displacement and loss shaped by the overwhelming force of nature, through the literary practice of “worldbuilding”. The paper postulates a postcolonial articulation of the “environmentalism of the poor” emerging through the character of Kanai, a translator, whose perspective complicates and at times contests the conservationist logic represented by Piya, a marine biologist. The tension that foregrounds the ethical dilemma of environmental protection enacted at the potential cost of indigenous and local populations in the delta. The paper aims to explore *The Hungry Tide*’s rendering of the environmental loss alongside human grief, while raising critical questions of trauma, mourning, and solastalgia.

Keywords: Sundarbans, Climate Crisis, Environmentalism, Postcolonial ecocriticism, solastalgia, Human–nature symbiosis.

Environmentalism of the Poor and Postcolonial Solastalgia in *The Hungry Tide*

The Hungry Tide, published in 2004, by Amitav Ghosh, is set in the Sundarbans, an ecological hotspot in West Bengal, India. In this novel, Ghosh engages with complex themes of human–nature symbiosis, the catastrophic impact of the

climate crisis, the indigenous and extrahuman adaptation to the unique geophysicality of the delta, and competing approaches within the discourse of ecological conservatism. All characters of the novel, including the main characters, are not only in the Sunderbans, where it not only functions as a metaphorical statement, but the Sunderbans itself is a character central to the 'worldbuilding' of this narrative. Each character, setting, event, and totem embodies the currents of ecoconsciousness in the novel. The choice of the Sunderbans as the setting is a temporal and spatial decision to ameliorate the ecological semiotics and consciousness required of climate fiction. Ghosh has asserted the need for such a strategy in his other works as well. The Sunderbans does not exist in space so much as in time. The novel has two sections: the ebb and the flow, to mirror the logos of the place. Emerging and erasing itself twice daily with the tidal rhythms of the Bay of Bengal, the delta resists the stability of cartographic imagination and unsettles conventional notions of territory, dwelling, and belonging. Land here is neither permanent nor sovereign; islands appear, fragment, dissolve, and reconstitute themselves within an amphibious ecology where human habitation remains perpetually contingent upon water, sediment, weather, and the unpredictable agencies of the nonhuman world. In this sense, the Sunderbans is not merely a landscape but a lifelace: a lived ecological formation in which memory, labour, ritual, mobility, mourning, and survival are materially embedded within the shifting environment itself.

In his seminal essay, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, Amitav Ghosh writes, "Nowhere is the awareness of nonhuman agency more evident than in traditions of narrative. (86)" Extending these claims, Ghosh further illustrates the capacity of the 'climate fiction' and its ability to represent something unnameable, which he calls the "uncanny" - a word borrowed from Sigmund Freud and Martin Heidegger (40). With regards to climate change, "uncanny" is often used by Timothy Morton to describe his own theorisation of the "hyperobject" - temporally and spatially vast, incomprehensible, and uncertain experiences of nonhuman ontologies (Morton 1). Ghosh and Morton both recognise the literature's growing fascination with the "uncanny" and the "hyperobjects"; in the era where the illusion of human exceptionalism fades away, and humans are made to realise the "presence and proximity of non-human interlocutors" (Great Derangement 40). In *The Hungry Tide*, the 'uncanny' events, storms, cyclones, and floods are not mere representational "filler", but they are the affective tool for the history of these "hyperobjects" like the Sunderban delta, mangrove forest, Malta River, Bengal Tigers, and Irrawaddy dolphins and many extrahuman entities of the landscape that constitutes the environment of the novel beyond an aesthetic description. Ghosh uses the social relationships of humans to demonstrate the agency of a slowly disappearing ecological landscape, operating as a performative and political means with which to address current environmental concerns while resisting the language of catastrophism.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh conceptualises the Sundarbans through an archipelagic spatiality that exceeds fixed geographical boundaries and nationalist mappings. The region emerges instead as a fluid network of relations structured by tides, crossings, dispersals, and precarious forms of coexistence between humans, animals, rivers, forests, and storms. Such archipelagic instability produces not only ecological vulnerability but also a distinctly postcolonial form of solastalgia: a condition in which the experience of home persists alongside its continuous ecological erosion. However, Ghosh attempts to subvert the definition of solastalgia. Unlike conventional articulations of displacement predicated upon exile or migration, solastalgia in the Sundarbans emerges from remaining in place while the place itself undergoes irreversible transformation. Such a definition fails to subsume the environmental distress caused by a forced detachment and displacement from the home to conserve it while it still exists. Home becomes temporally unstable, sedimented with the memories of floods, cyclones, political violence, displacement, and environmental loss. In the novel, the Sundarbans is a fluctuating archipelagic “lifepace” where ecological memory, ritual, storytelling, and subaltern modes of inhabitation articulate an “environmentalism of the poor” that contests elite conservationist epistemologies while registering slow violence and postcolonial solastalgia. Storytelling, ritual practices, oral histories, and local ecological knowledge function not merely as cultural residues but as modes of ecological historiography through which marginalized communities negotiate the slow violence of environmental devastation and state abandonment/violence. Through these submerged histories and precarious life-worlds, *The Hungry Tide* articulates what may be understood as an “environmentalism of the poor,” foregrounding forms of ecological consciousness that emerge not from abstract conservationist discourse but from intimate, lived entanglements with vulnerability, loss, and survival within a rapidly transforming deltaic world. Each character embodies a different kind of environmental or ecological consciousness. Ghosh uses the positionality and identity of each character to demonstrate a perspective on climate discourse from different sensibilities. Most notably, the ideals that critique the neoliberal globalisation and the homogeneous idea of conservation through the ecological humility of a humanist like Nirmal. Martinez-Alier coined the term ‘environmentalism of the poor’ in 2002 to define the disparities of the Global North and the Global South, which on a localised level extends to question the real cost of conservation ecologies and discourses. Martinez-Alier asks the question: Who bears the cost of conservation? The indigenous, the land-dependent, and the poorest are always the first to be impacted by climate policies. Rob Nixon, in his seminal work, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, asserts the vital role of writer-activists in making these elusive disasters perceptible through imaginative storytelling and creative testimony. By humanising delayed destruction, these authors provide a voice for communities facing displacement without moving, where the land beneath them

is rendered uninhabitable. Nirmal humanises the settler inhabitants of the Morichjhāpi Island. He advocates for ethical reevaluation for the long-term, outsourced casualties of state and imperial power. Humanisation requires the stories to be told; Nirmal realises this a little too late. However, the storytelling, local myths of bon bibi and Dokhnni Rai, and totem not only represent a deeply ethical and conscious relationship of humans and the Other but also hint at a solution that is rooted in indigeneity and alternate epistemologies.

Ghosh weaves the narrative around four main characters: Kanai, the Bengali polyglot businessman based in Delhi, who runs a translation and interpretation agency, and is on a short visit to Lusibari Island in the Sunderbans to meet his aunt, Nilima. Piyali Roy, a marine biologist (cetologist) researching marine mammals like dolphins, was born to Indian Bengali parents who immigrated to the United States for better opportunities. Piya has come to the Sunderbans to study and observe the population of the Irrawaddy dolphins (*orcaella brevirostris*), after an epiphany where she eventually forms a hypothesis about them.

Fokir, an indigenous fisherman from the delta who knows not only the geography and topography of the rivers but also of various creatures that inhabit these places, their behaviour, and their patterns of movement and most importantly, the songs, folktales, and stories of the land. And, Nirmal, Kanai's uncle who has left him the journal containing the accounts of events of his last days before his death. Nirmal's presence in the story is through his powerful voice from the journal/khatobook entries. In these entries, Nirmal engages with the complexities of a place like the Sunderbans, the vulnerabilities of its inhabitants, and many forms of violence ranging from imperial extraction to state violence on refugees that relies on the conservationist logic but results in furthering the ecocidal violence. Nirmal's engagement with history takes into account the ecological historiography of the place; all his references to the past involve the natural phenomenon of storms. Fokir and Nirmal are representative of material struggles for survival rather than aesthetic appreciation, and challenge the conventional "post-materialist" view that environmentalism is a luxury affordable only to the wealthy. As explained in the essay, *Varieties of Environmentalism*;

Two features distinguish these environmental movements from their Western counterparts. First, for the sections of society most critically affected by environmental degradation - poor and landless peasants, women, and tribals - it is a question of sheer survival, not enhancing the quality of life. Second, and as a consequence, the environmental solutions they articulate strongly involve questions of equity as well as economic and political redistribution. (Guha & Martinez-Alier 101)

Rooted in the Global South, this movement focuses on livelihood and social justice. It highlights the struggle of "ecosystem people" (those who depend on local resources) against "resource omnivores" (wealthy consumers, state power, and industries that plunder distant resources for economic growth, greed, and/or

development). Guha and Martinez-Alier propose a "new synthesis" they call Social Ecology, based on the values of diversity, sustainability, and equity. They highlight three "forgotten" intellectuals as guides for this movement: Mahatma Gandhi (for his anti-industrial, village-centred ethics), Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen (for grounding economics in thermodynamics), and Lewis Mumford (for his ecological approach to urban and regional planning) (ibid 201).

The Hungry Tide constructs the Sundarbans as a fluctuating archipelagic "lifeplace" where ecological memory, ritual, storytelling, and subaltern modes of inhabitation acknowledge the relationship with nature and the divine. Ghosh asserts that indigenous people in 'lifeplaces' like the Sunderbans have always been aware of other beings, including the bioregion. He writes, "In the Sunderbanas, for example, the people who live in and around the mangrove forest have never doubted that tigers and many other animals possess intelligence and agency" (*Great Derangement* 85). In *The Hungry Tide*, the ritual of worshipping Bon Bibi by going to Garjontola Island is followed intergenerationally. First, by Kusum's father, who believed that Bon Bibi's messengers saved him from the tiger, the embodiment of demon Dokhnni Roi. He believed that dreamed a vision of Bon Bibi who assured him, "Don't be afraid; believe in me. This place you've come to, I value it as my own; if you're good at heart, here you'll never be alone" (234). As an ancestral ritual, Kusum and Fokir practised the same every year and prayed for protection in front of Bon Bibi. Later, Ghosh narrates how such rituals and intergenerational storytelling sustain the indigenous ecological knowledge. Piyali Roy is puzzled by Fokir's ecological knowledge and dolphin behaviour. When asked about this, Fokir replies;

I had heard about Garjontola from my mother. She would sing to me and tell me tales about this island. This was a place, my mother said, where no one who was good at heart would ever have cause for fear. (...) As for the big shush, the dolphins who live in these waters, I knew about them too, even before I came here. These animals were also in my mother's stories: they were Bon Bibi's messengers, she used to say, and they brought her news of the rivers and khals. They came here during the bhata, my mother said, so they could tell Bon Bibi about everything they had seen. During the jowar they scattered to the ends of the forest and became Bon Bibi's eyes and ears. This secret her own father had told her, and he had told her also that if you could learn to follow the shush, then you would always be able to find fish. (Ghosh 307)

Subaltern ecological knowledge in the novel survives through collective and embodied forms such as myth, ritual, oral storytelling, and multispecies communication. Grounded in tidal rhythms, bird movement, crowding of islands, soundscapes, collective warning systems, oral circulation, the swamspeak of the Sunderbans is dispersed, collective, non-centralised ecological communication emerging from human, animal, tidal, and material interactions. The ecological

semiotics of the symbiotic relationship between human and more-than-human (both biological and nonbiological entities because sentience in lifespaces is sustained through totem, storytelling, and myth making. Language and rationality are the two most debated and justified markers of subjectivity, offered in Western metaphysics to establish anthropocentric hegemony over the Other. The agentive elements upheld by the indigenous population for survival, substance, subversion of ecocidal suffering are inherently depicted without language - the dolphins, tiger as the embodied presence of Dokhnni Rai, Bob Bibi as the protector, Shah Jungli as the powerful natural presence that creates order, are beyond the sphere of logocentricism. Even the indigenous himself, Fokir, used the ecological semiotics - knowing the ebb and flow of the river, his knowledge of the topography of the island and the river, his observation of shashuk (dolphins) behaviour is conveyed without any words during his time with Piyali Roi on the river. This more-than-human or extrahuman communication indicates not only the futility of logocentricism but also centralises the difference (of language) as the mode of symbiosis proposed by the deep ecology thinkers.

The amphibious geography and the instability of the land are mirrored by the spatial back and forth through the format of the narrative. Ghosh moves his narrative of Piyali and Fokir from the river to that of Kanai and Nilima on the land. Similarly, the narrative moves from the past via remembrance and recollection of colonial history, personal history, collective memory, and the history of the landscape, its storms, and its violence to the present and unstable, in flux, ever-changing future.

The omnipresent narrator reminisces about the visibly impacted state of the wetland archipelago and its islands, noting the changes and impact of human activity in the area over the decades. Upon his arrival in Canning, Nilima asks Kanai;

‘Why did you insist on coming through Canning? It would have been so much easier if you had come through Basonti. No one comes this way nowadays.’

‘Really? Why not?’

‘Because of the river,’ she said. ‘It’s changed.’

‘How?’

She glanced up at him. ‘Wait. You’ll see soon enough.’ (Ghosh 23)

Nilima’s statement expresses the ambiguity of the delta region where the low and high tide changes and reshape the surroundings almost every day. But the change to the Matla River is implied to be permanent. Kanai compares the condition of the river with his teenage memories of the place;

He remembered the Matla as a vast waterway, one of the most formidable rivers he had seen. But it was low tide now and the river in the distance was no wider than a narrow ditch, flowing along the centre of a kilometer-wide bed. (Ghosh 24)

Later, Nilima explains the reason as she notices men and women dragging themselves through the mud, which she is incapable of doing anymore. Her ageing body mirrors the depleted condition of the river itself. She explains, “(...) there isn’t as much water in the river nowadays and at low tide it gets very shallow” (25). Despite Ghosh engaging with the ideas of eco-nostalgia and eco-grief, the limitations of the definition of solastalgia are subtly put into question by Kusum’s struggle in Morichjhāpi.

There are memories of the tide country that evoke human suffering, whether it be the death of Kusum’s father by a tiger, the gendered exploitation of her mother, or the relentless storms flooding and killing people. Even then, the nostalgia - the longing for a place to call home, experienced by Kusum and the refugee settlers in Morichjhāpi Island in their time of exile, is akin to environmental distress. For such distress was so deeply rooted in their identity, enmeshed with the ecology and sense of place. The precarity that forces people to be away from their ecological home generates “eco-nostalgia” - an emotion of melancholy marked by a desire to return home. Kusum felt such desires while living in Dhanbad, as she expressed to Nirmal;

We dreamed of storm-tossed islands, straining at their anchors, and of the rivers that bound them in golden fetters. We thought of high tide, and the mohonas mounting, of islands submerged, like underwater clouds. (Ghosh 164)

Similar to the refugees who lived on the Sunderbans across the border before the partition, the displacement and dispossession followed them, yet “they too had longed to watch the tide rise to full flood” (165). The state-sponsored violence against refugees demonstrates how ecological rhetoric can become complicit in social domination, echoing what social ecology identifies as the inseparability of ecological and political violence. Ghosh subverts the definition of solastalgia by reversing the human-lifeplace relationship. In the novel, the humans are slowly withering and are disposed of by others to conserve the land, while the land remains.

Piya’s marine biology facts illuminate the shared ecological heritage and identity. As she mentions that “(...) the first known specimen of *Orcaella brevirostris* was found there [Calcutta], that strange cousin of majestic killer whales of Puget Sound” (95). In contrast, Piya’s initial detachment from the land and its people makes her objectively reminisce about the lost wetlands that stretched till Calcutta, the declining number of Irrawaddy dolphins, and the growing settlements in the ecologically sensitive area of the Sunderbans. Her own painful childhood memories invoke distance from her mother’s language, her parents, and their/her own identity. Ironically, the violence of displacement and dispossession is opted for rather than forced, and the desire to return to a home where a sense of belonging is narrated towards the end.

The Hungry Tide can be interpreted as a novel that advocates for the concept of conservation in the Sundarbans landscape that is neither purely scientific explorations nor experiences with legends, myths and history, thereby expressing human interaction with the non-human realm alone, but rather an integration of the two approaches. Piya and Fokir both represent these two seemingly oppositional approaches, respectively. The local fisherman is able to trace the dolphin's location and behaviour without any GPS or equipment Fokir's knowledge is from his lived experiences, while Piya has her scientific knowledge, she is quick to notice the patterns of loss;

These waters had once contained large numbers of dolphins ... several 19th-century zoologists had testified to it ... Piya had been hoping the trip would yield a few encounters with knowledgeable boat people, but such opportunities had been scarce. (Ghosh 45)

While on her expedition to study the dolphins, Piya engages with Kanai in several conversations that verbalise her knowledge of the changes in the habitat of the nonhuman beings and the number of these beings.

'It's known for sure that these waters once held large populations of marine mammals.'

'What's happened to them then?'

'There seems to have been some sort of drastic change in the habitat,' said Piya. 'Some kind of dramatic deterioration.' 'Really?' said Kanai. 'That was what my uncle felt too.' 'He was right,' said Piya grimly. 'When marine mammals begin to disappear from an established habitat, it means something's gone very, very wrong.' (Ghosh 266)

While Piya's concerns remain centred around the marine mammals, Nirmal worries about the people of the islands. His concerns and grief for changing homes of the human is a solastalgic longing to prevent the river from rising and to ultimately stop the violence. Thus, Piya's concern for dolphins and the concerns by Nirmal with his worries for the future in his writings invoke a similar feeling of loss.

I am afraid because I know that after the storm passes, the events that have preceded its coming will be forgotten. No one knows better than I how skillful the tide country is in silting over its past. There is nothing I can do to stop what lies ahead. But I was once a writer; perhaps I can make sure at least that what happened here leaves some trace, some hold upon the memory of the world. (Ghosh 69)

However, Nirmal's concerns are situated in his class consciousness, centring the marginalised impacted by the vastness and all-powerful nature and the unsympathetic structures of the state. In Nirmal's letter, the social ecology and the Eco-Marxist concerns are more prominent, for his concern is even ecological, taking into account the impact of the poorest and the most downtrodden refugees

who have decided to inhabit one of the islands of the tide country, the Morichjhāpi Island, as he writes in one of his letter entries;

These islands had seen so much suffering, so much hardship and poverty, so many catastrophes, so many failed dreams, that perhaps humankind would not be ill served by their loss. Then I thought of Morichjhāpi: what I saw as a vale of tears was for others truly more precious than gold. (Ghosh 216)

He acknowledges the entanglement, the value of ‘home’ for the people of the tide country with the islands and the river, that anywhere else would feel like exile. Nirmal’s growing recognition of the tide country does not merely signal ecological awareness but reflects a social ecological understanding in which environmental precarity is inseparable from historical violence, dispossession, and social hierarchy.

On the other hand, Kanai - a modern, ambitious man, sees and acknowledges the ecological and social change in the Lusibari without the conservationist or the Marxist ideals. He admires the aspirations and accepts the changes as a turn of the time, most evidently through his own projection via the character of Moyna, Fokir’s wife, an aspiring nurse at the Trust’s hospital. He notes;

It was astonishing to think of how much had changed in the tide country since his last visit, not just in material matters but in people’s hopes and desires. Nothing was better proof of this than the very existence of this hospital and the opportunities it provided and the aspirations it nurtured. (Ghosh 134)

Furthermore, the reminiscences, frustrations and romanticism of the landscapes, nonhuman beings, marginalised humans, and the natural phenomenon figure in the discussions of the past. Ghosh represents the Sundarbans not as a stable geographical space but as an unstable archipelagic “lifeplace” produced through tidal rhythms, storytelling, ritual, memory, and ecological precarity. Through this unstable ecology, *The Hungry Tide* develops a postcolonial form of “environmentalism of the poor” that foregrounds the lived experiences of vulnerable communities against abstract conservationist discourse, while simultaneously registering slow violence and solastalgic trauma.

The symbiotic relationship, however anthropocentric by the standards of Western ecological movements, held by the indigenous population fears and reveres the ‘spirit’ of the Other. In *The Hungry Tide*, the fear of tigers (considered demons) and the reverence for the forest create an imaginary line between the areas to be used by the local population—protected by Bon Bibi—and the areas to be avoided, inhabited by the tiger demon. As Horen Naskhor puts it, despite Nirmal’s obvious scepticism of his beliefs: “(...) It’s the fear that protects you, Saar; it’s what keeps you alive. Without it the danger doubles” (244). Nirmal is amazed to realise this reverence for such a divide - an imaginary line, one that generates both awe and fear. As he notes;

(...) Bon Bibi had drawn to divide the tide country. In other words, we had crossed the border that separates the realm of humans from the domain of Dokkhin Rai and his demons. I realized with a sense of shock that this chimerical line was, to her and to Horen, as real as a barbed-wire fence might be to me. (Ghosh 223–24)

A social ecologist, or a representative of social ecology in the novel, Nirmal Bose—though initially viewing the jungle as merely an empty wilderness—is finally disillusioned into accepting the accelerated pace unique to the tide country and the mangroves. Nirmal accounts for history through storms and their casualties, unlike the personal and ecological tragedies of villagers such as Kusum, Fokir, or Moyna. He reads his relationship with the tide country in the form of collective memory; the storm of 1694, the great storms of 1737, 1885, 1897 and so on (224–25). For Nirmal, the lifespace of the Sunderbans itself becomes an archive of human history, shaped by violence of all kinds - colonial, state, ecological and social. His letters record lifespace as an archive of geological disruptions in the lives of the poorest.

Both perspectives are proponents of the environmentalism of the poor; firstly, for Nirmal, the colonial history - Daniel Hamilton in Lusibari, his resistance to governments' attack on refugees, advocates for the acknowledgement of indigenous entanglement with the land—resonating with Nixon and Guha's ideas of environmentalism. Secondly, the symbiotic relationship of Kusum and many other refugees, who, despite the ecological brutality, do not feel at home anywhere else other than the tide country. As Nirmal wonders, "where else could you belong, except in the place you refuse to leave" (254). Similarly, Kusum questions the environmentalism that often puts humans under scrutiny and *others* them to save the environment. The police's announcement before the commencement of the violence, during the forced starvation of the Marichjhapi islanders;

This island has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for its animals, it is a part of a reserve forest, it belongs to a project to save tigers, which is paid for by people from all around the world. (Ghosh 261).

Kusum, in despair, wonders who these people might be who have more empathy for the animals but not for the humans. She exclaims, "No one could think this a crime unless they have forgotten that this is how humans have always lived — by fishing, by clearing land and by planting the soil" (262). The forced displacement and dispossession are so deeply tied to her identity and sense of place in these words that a definition of solastalgia that solely relies upon ecological degradation and not the human cost of it could be interpreted as post-human.

Kanai Dutt and Piyali Roy are on the expedition, taken through the journey from the embankment and lived experience to realise the entanglement with a lifespace. Piyali, after her encounter with a dolphin, crocodiles in the middle of the river, and after narrowly escaping a tiger attack, comes to appreciate the ecological knowledge of the indigenous people, like Fokir. She soon realises the complexity

of this relationship. The symbiosis with the forest proves neither simple nor utopian.

After witnessing the murder of a tiger by the villagers, Piya feels anger and frustration. Soon, Kanai explains the growing population in this precarious situation, the historical conservation movement, and the number of people killed each year. He mentions how the push for conservation has led to mass killings of islanders by the tigers, which go unreported. He points at the complicity of conservationists who disregard the poor, including Piya herself: "Because it was people like you, [...] who made a push to protect the wildlife here, without regard for the human costs" (301). Kanai also acknowledges his own complicity, along with the entire class of privileged individuals who will follow the Western ideals and hide the pain of the marginalised. To Piya's concerns, he replies, "It's not you who's paying the price in lost lives" (301). Piya comes to accept the vulnerabilities specific to the wetland by the end, calling it "her home with a sense of belonging." However, for such an embodied ecological sensibility to develop, Fokir had to sacrifice his life in the storm to protect her.

On the other hand, Kanai's pragmatic understanding and experience of the world and his anthropocentric worldview are challenged by what he experiences. His experience, rooted in an urban lifestyle, initially distances him from the ecological realities of the tide country. Finally, after being warned by Fokir again and again, Kanai's sublime encounter with the tiger takes away his exceptionalism, when he finally feels, "it was as if his mind, in its panic, had emptied itself of language" (329). The deconstruction of the logocentrism of human exceptionalism is constant in the novel, but Kanai's encounter with the tiger has a presence of agency entirely in the tiger's grasp -the one without logos.

This spiritual experience with the uncanny encourages Kanai to accept an ecological humility that humans are not the sole proprietors of nature. His gift to Piya, *The Story of Dukhey's Redemption*, highlights this participation in the indigenous mode of "environmentalism of the poor," including storytelling and passing on totems. The gift, in turn, helps Piya humanise the local and harmonise the complexities of such ecological symbiosis.

Thus, it can be argued that Ghosh invokes the lifeplace of Sundarban and the beings inhabiting it through all forms of epistemology and agency. The mutual recognition of human and non-human matter calls for a symbiotic relationship. Such a relationship requires an ecological humility rooted in lived and embodied experience, while also recognising the scarcities and vulnerabilities of the precarious population residing there. Thus, *The Hungry Tide* articulates an environmentalism of the poor in which ecological precarity, indigenous epistemology, and embodied coexistence reveal the inseparability of social and environmental domination.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/72**MOTIVES AND MISSIONS OF MAOISTS: A POLITICAL READING
OF ARUNDHATI ROY'S "WALKING WITH THE COMRADES"****V. R. RAJA PRAVINA**Research Scholar, Sri Meenakshi Govt. Arts College for Women
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**DR. D. M. AMALA**Head and Associate Professor, Sri Meenakshi Govt. Arts College for Women
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**Abstract**

Arundhati Roy is the most popular postcolonial writer. She is well known for her debut novel, *The God of Small Things*. This marvelous novel has won the Booker Prize in the year 1997. She is also famous for her non-fictional writings, which focus on human and environmental welfare. Roy, the political activist travelled into the forests of Central India in 2010. There she stayed several weeks with the Maoists. During her stay, she explored their identity, motives and missions. She wanted to record her experience in a form of book. So, she published the book "Walking with the Comrades" in 2011. The 'Comrades' in the title refers to the Maoists. The genuine intention of the writer is to make people aware of the suffering endured by the tribes (Adivasis) and Maoists. As a human rights activist, she is serving as voice for the muted people. This research paper's objective is to explore both real identity and projected or framed identity of Maoists.

Keywords: Tribes, Maoists, comrades, identity, motives and missions

Arundhati Roy is a radical postcolonial Indian writer and activist. She came into limelight with her first novel *The God of Small Things*, for which she received Booker Prize in 1997. After twenty years in 2017, she published her second impactful novel titled, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. In between her service the nation is immense. She educated people through her non-fictional writings. She is known for her bold criticisms and questions against the government. For instance, on Feb 23 2019, she delivered a speech on 'Corporate and Saffron Fascism' in a meeting organised by Makkal Adhikaram at Trichi. In which she criticized the ruling party for increasing the taxes and petrol rate. Invariably all her non-fictional writings and speeches are revolutionary. These writings serve as the voice for the silenced people, who have become the victims of the capitalist society. Through these essays it is evident that, she is majorly concerned about the environmental and human welfare. So, she fights against dam projects, mining projects and high taxes to protect environment and common people. Some of her famous non-fictional writings are "Walking with the Comrades", "Democracy: Who's She When She's at Home?", "Listening to Grasshoppers", "How Deep

Shall we Dig?”, “Azadi” and “Breaking the News”. The aim of this paper is to explore and find the missions and motives of Maoists in Arundhati Roy’s “Walking with the Comrades”. “Walking with the Comrades” is one of the essays in the book, *Broken Republic* (2013).

In this globalised era, people have already become the active members of the capitalised society. The capitalists (means of production) are finding new ways to induce common people’s greed. Consequently, common people imbibe the greed and consciously or unconsciously become a part of this capitalised society. Apart from these two groups, there is a group which left unnoticed in India. They don’t understand or don’t know ‘greed’. They are the people of tribal community. When the common people become the major contributors of the capitalist society, these tribes (Adivasis) remained unaffected by the greed. In this essay she quotes the line spoken by the Superintendent of Police, who says that, “tribes don’t understand greed” (Roy 34). They live an alienated life, which is far from the capitalist society. The government, corporate companies and media know that, it is impossible to make these tribes a part of the main stream. Their non- cooperation led to the silent civil war in some forests in India. Since, these tribes had no other choice or hope, they started to fight against the government to help themselves. These fighters or rebels are known as the Maoists.

In 1950, Indian Parliament adopted the Indian Constitution. Roy considers that day as a tragic day in the lives of the tribal people of India. The government twisted the entire tribal community as trespassers and acted to disgorge them out of their own homelands. In addition to this, the government criminalized their way of life. It took violent measures to displace a large population of Adivasis, just to implement hundreds of dam projects, mining projects and irrigation projects. In the guise of development projects, the tribes are thrown out of their own lands. It is projected as if the tribes are taken to the mainstream and the perks of modernism have been given to them, but actually the government seized their traditional rights. The people of mainstream are too busy to notice and to voice against the injustice happening for these tribes. Roy strongly mentions that this displacement of tribal people will affect each and every citizen of this country.

In this essay Roy records the history of resistance by the tribes for centuries. They fought against the British, landlords or zamindars, money lenders and now they are fighting against the government. Hundreds of MoUs have been signed by the governments of Jharkhand Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Orissa with many corporate companies. The corporate projects are signed for iron factories, steel factories, power plants, aluminum factories, big dams and coal mines. All the projects were worth billion rupees. These governments were busy in making money, so the voices of the tribes remained subdued for years. To make the situation worse, the government acted violently to displace the tribes. Consequently, some of the tribes decided to answer the government with their

weapons. So, the war in the central India was between the Maoists and Government of India.

The Maoists belong to the Communist Party of India. Their aim is to rebel against the government through people's power. For which, they started war against the Indian government in a non-violent manner. They were the devoted followers of the Chinese political leader, Mao Zedong. According to Zedong, power flows from the barrel of the gun. They don't believe in elections and they achieve their goals by using weapons. The origin of this Maoists group can be traced back to the Naxalite peasant revolt of 1967. So, the Maoist struggle is an outcome of the 1967 uprising.

The Hindu evangelicals started schools, hospitals and ashrams in the remote villages to spread Hinduism. The tribes were forced to join the Hindu fold. They first converted the big landlords and the village chiefs. Here, Roy mentioned the conversion of Massa karma, the founder of the Salwa Judum. He changed his name as 'Mahendra Karma' and conferred the 'twice-born' (Dwij) status. Following this many people's names were also changed. Their original tribal names were changed into Hindu names in their Voter identity cards. This mission is a part of Hindutva drive. The tribal people, who refused to join the Hindu fold were labeled as untouchables (Katwas). These Katwas later emerged as Maoists. According to Roy, the real motive of these Maoists is to help the tribal community and to protect nature. Their genuine objective is very clear in one of the banners in the forests. In which they have written that "Stop India from becoming the grazing ground of imperialism." (Roy 31) Besides, they have undertaken a lot of missions to protect environment and the tribal people.

The People's War Group (PWG) is a party that belongs to the Communist Party of India. The PWG was legally announced as an independent party in April 1980. Following that in 1981, the Maoists comrades of PWG, began to organize tribal people to voice against the injustices. They started to demand a rise in the price of tendu leaves. The government paid three paise for a bundle. Eventually, the walkout was a great success and the worth was increased to six paise a bundle. Following this with the help of PWG, people started a strike to increase the price of bamboo. The tribals were paid ten paise for a bundle, which has twenty culms of bamboo. The end result of this long agitation was, the government tripled the price to thirty paise for a bundle. These two successful strikes developed belief in the hearts of the tribals towards the PWG party. The tribes started to approach the party for further help. The greatest threat and perennial problem faced by these tribes was the ill-treatment done by the Forest Department. The forest officials prevented the people doing their mundane work. It includes ploughing fields, cattle grazing, gathering firewood and fruit. In other words, the government officials stopped or prevented these people from living. The tribal people were not ready to give up their identity and basic rights over their homelands. They have

decided not to immigrate to the cities. Consequently, the people were beaten, arrested, humiliated and the crops were destroyed.

The party decided to help the tribal people in this issue and it was further encouraged by the active participation of the people. So, the party supported the people to cultivate in their lands. The party reallocated 300,000 acres of forest to those tribes between 1980 and 2000. The freedom they got was really a real freedom, which is greater than Indian Independence.

The Maoists' party started growing more powerful with people's support. Sometimes they used weapons to attack the government officials in order to save themselves but the government and media started to frame their identity cruelly. In this essay Roy records such framed stories. For example, in 2007 Gai Yojana scheme was announced by the government. In the election campaigns, they promised to give cows for adivasis. As per the scheme, each and every Adivasi will receive a cow from the government. Later, the TV channels and newspapers reported that the Maoists have attacked and killed the cows given to them. They also gave a reason that, these people are anti-Hindu and anti-BJP. This news shocked them, because they didn't receive any cow from the government. So, they issued a statement "We did not kill cows with hammers" (Roy 70).

Even though the Maoists have a genuine intention to protect the natural resources and Adivasis, the government and media portrayed them as cruel savages. Besides, the government also started the Operation Green Hunt to drive the Maoists and people out of their own homelands. The government trained hundreds and thousands of policemen in Counter-Terrorism and Jungle Warfare College located in Kanker. The motive of this warfare training center is to fight the guerrilla like a guerrilla. From this training school, eight hundred policemen graduated every six weeks. The places where the Maoists live were labelled as Maoist- infested areas. The word 'infested' disturbs Roy. 'Pakistan' is the name used by the police to signify area controlled by the Maoists.

In "Walking with the Comrades", Roy's concern for the tribal people and the natural resources is evident. As a human rights activist, she vehemently attacks the ways in which the government officials abuse Adivasis. She explores the background reason for the conflict, purpose of Maoists party and Adivasis' identity. This research paper explored the identity, missions and the motives of Maoists.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/73**TALES OF HAUNTED LEGACIES: GREED, GHOSTLY MEMORY,
AND THE UNHOMELY IN *TUMBBAD*****SONA JOHN**Research scholar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
National Institute of Technology, Goa, India**Abstract**

The following paper explores the Bollywood film *Tumbbad* (2018) in relation with Jacques Derrida's concept of hauntology, detailed in his work *Specters of Marx*. The paper argues that the film operates as a postcolonial critique of inherited greed while simultaneously embracing a decolonial approach through its reliance on myth, cyclicity, and spectral temporality. *Tumbbad* evokes colonial and pre-capitalist greed as a spectral force, one that transcends time, haunting generations as an inherited curse- turning "home" into the site of decay, memory, and dread. Against the backdrop of colonial India, the film reconfigures its ancestral mansion not as a stable site of belonging, but an unhomely space where buried histories and unresolved violences return persistently. Drawing on Derrida's concept of hauntology, the paper reads Hastar not only as a mythological figure but also as a spectral representation of unquenchable desire generated through overlapping regimes of both feudal and colonial extraction. The narrative's cyclical temporality displaces linear histories of progress, privileging repetition, return and entrapment. In doing so, *Tumbbad* redefines postcolonial space as a haunted archive where greed, colonial residue, and fantasy intermingle, yielding a spectral inheritance that turns home into a haunted space. The film depicts a state of existential immobility as subjects remain attached to bequeathed, cursed inheritances. Ultimately, the paper argues that *Tumbbad* reimagines history as migrating across generations to haunt bodies and spaces alike, making "home" a site of spectral unease.

Keywords: Hauntology; Postcolonial Gothic; Spectral Inheritance; Spectral Return; Unhomely Space

Introduction

The Gothic has long served as a literary and cinematic mode through which societies confront their buried anxieties, unresolved histories, and forbidden desires. Emerging initially within eighteenth-century European literature, the Gothic tradition transformed spaces such as castles, ruins, crypts, and ancestral homes into symbolic landscapes haunted by the return of suppressed pasts. Over time, the Gothic evolved beyond its Eurocentric origins and became a flexible critical mode capable of articulating the traumatic afterlives of colonialism, violence, and historical rupture within postcolonial societies. In postcolonial

contexts, the Gothic no longer merely stages supernatural terror; rather, it becomes a language through which nations and communities negotiate spectral inheritances left behind by colonial domination, feudal exploitation, and capitalist greed. The ghosts that haunt postcolonial narratives are therefore not simply apparitions of the dead, but manifestations of histories that refuse erasure. They return repeatedly, unsettling linear narratives of modernity and progress.

Within Indian cinema, the Gothic has increasingly emerged as a productive framework for exploring historical anxieties, caste hierarchies, inherited violence, and fractured identities. Films rooted in horror and folklore frequently reveal how the past continues to intrude upon the present through haunted spaces, cursed lineages, and recurring cycles of desire and destruction. Among such films, *Tumbbad* occupies a singular position. Directed by Rahi Anil Barve, the film transcends the conventions of mainstream horror by weaving together mythology, colonial history, greed, and spectral memory into a deeply unsettling cinematic experience. Set against the backdrop of colonial India, the narrative follows Vinayak Rao's obsessive pursuit of hidden treasure guarded by Hastar, a cursed deity abandoned by the goddess of prosperity. Through its rain-soaked landscapes, decaying mansion, and cyclical narrative structure, the film constructs an atmosphere where history itself appears haunted.

Unlike conventional horror narratives that seek resolution through the defeat of evil, *Tumbbad* refuses closure. The curse of greed persists across generations, suggesting that historical violence and acquisitive desire cannot be neatly contained or exorcised. The ancestral mansion in *Tumbbad* functions not merely as a physical structure but as a haunted archive of memory, secrecy, and decay. The home, traditionally imagined as a site of security and belonging, becomes profoundly unstable and uncanny. This transformation resonates strongly with postcolonial articulations of the "unhomely," a concept elaborated by Homi K. Bhabha to describe the collapse of boundaries between home and world, private and political, familiar and strange. In *Tumbbad*, the domestic sphere is invaded by spectral forces generated through inherited greed and historical violence.

The film's engagement with haunting can be productively understood through Jacques Derrida's concept of hauntology, articulated in *Specters of Marx*. Derrida challenges traditional notions of linear temporality by arguing that the present is always inhabited by spectres of the past and anticipations of the future. Haunting, in this sense, signifies the persistence of unresolved histories that continue to shape contemporary existence. The spectre disrupts the stability of time and identity, neither fully present nor entirely absent. Hauntology thus foregrounds the idea that what has supposedly disappeared continues to linger, returning insistently through traces, memories, and absences. This theoretical framework becomes particularly significant in postcolonial contexts where colonial histories continue to haunt nations long after formal independence.

In *Tumbbad*, haunting operates not only through supernatural imagery but also through structures of inheritance. The treasure guarded by Hastar symbolizes an insatiable desire transmitted across generations, transforming greed into a spectral legacy. Vinayak's obsessive pursuit of wealth mirrors broader histories of colonial and feudal extraction, where accumulation depends upon exploitation, violence, and endless consumption. The colonial backdrop of the film is crucial in this regard. The narrative unfolds during British rule, a period marked by economic extraction and systemic impoverishment. Yet the film does not present colonialism as an isolated historical event; rather, it depicts greed itself as a transhistorical force that survives through changing political structures. The spectre of accumulation migrates across generations, inhabiting bodies, spaces, and desires. In this sense, Hastar emerges not merely as a mythological creature but as the embodiment of an inherited and endlessly reproducing hunger.

The film's narrative structure further reinforces this hauntological logic. Rather than progressing linearly toward redemption or liberation, the story unfolds through repetition, recurrence, and cyclical return. The same acts of greed repeat across generations, suggesting an inability to escape inherited patterns of violence and desire. Instead of presenting history as a forward-moving trajectory, *Tumbbad* imagines it as an inescapable loop where the past continually resurfaces within the present. This cyclical temporality aligns with Derrida's notion that the spectre disrupts chronological order, making the boundaries between past, present, and future indistinct. At the same time, *Tumbbad* can also be read through a decolonial lens because of its reliance on indigenous mythology, oral storytelling traditions, and non-Western understandings of time and cosmology. While the Gothic genre historically emerged from Europe, the film indigenizes Gothic aesthetics through local folklore, ritualistic imagery, and mythic structures deeply rooted in Indian cultural memory. Hastar's legend does not function simply as a borrowed horror trope but as part of a distinctly regional cosmology where divine wrath, greed, and curse coexist within cyclical understandings of existence. The film thereby resists Western epistemological frameworks that privilege rationality and linear temporality. Instead, it embraces ambiguity, myth, and spectrality as legitimate modes of understanding reality. Such a decolonial approach destabilizes colonial binaries between reason and superstition, modernity and myth, civilized and primitive.

Furthermore, the film's visual language intensifies its Gothic atmosphere through persistent images of decay, darkness, and entrapment. The incessant rain that engulfs *Tumbbad* creates a world suspended between life and death, while the underground chamber housing Hastar resembles a womb-like crypt where desire endlessly reproduces itself. These spaces are not passive settings but active participants in the narrative's haunting. The architecture of the mansion, with its collapsing walls and hidden secrets, becomes a material embodiment of spectral history itself. The landscape remembers what human beings attempt to suppress.

This paper therefore argues that *Tumbbad* functions as a postcolonial Gothic text that reimagines colonial and feudal greed as a haunting force transmitted across generations. Drawing upon Derrida's hauntology, the study examines how the film constructs spectral inheritance, cyclical temporality, and unhomely space to critique inherited structures of exploitation and desire. By situating haunting at the intersection of mythology, colonial history, and capitalist accumulation, the paper demonstrates how *Tumbbad* transforms horror into a meditation on unresolved historical violence. Ultimately, the film reveals that history does not disappear with time; it survives as a spectre, returning repeatedly to haunt spaces, bodies, and memories.

Theoretical Framework

Derrida's *Specters of Marx* offers a profoundly productive framework for reading *Tumbbad* as the film itself unfolds through haunting, spectral temporality, cursed inheritance, greed, repetition, and the collapse of clear boundaries between life and death, wealth and decay, past and future. Rather than approaching the film merely as folk horror or mythological allegory, Derrida's theory of spectrality allows *Tumbbad* to be understood as a meditation on the persistence of unresolved histories and the violent afterlife of desire. Derrida's central argument in the opening chapter of *Specters of Marx* is that the spectre destabilizes the metaphysical distinction between presence and absence. A ghost is neither fully alive nor fully dead; it exceeds binary structures that attempt to separate reality from illusion, being from non-being, or past from present. Spectrality therefore disrupts linear temporality. The spectre is always "to come" (Derrida 2) and return. Derrida argues that justice begins not in order or harmony, but in disjointure, in what he calls the *Un-Fuge* or "out of joint" (Derrida 20) condition of existence. *Tumbbad* depicts a world governed by greed, transaction, inheritance, and accumulation, where all relationships become economic. The treasure of Hastar appears to promise mastery and possession, yet every attempt to own wealth produces decay, violence, and spiritual corruption. The gold cannot stabilize social order because it is itself spectral. Derrida insists that any attempt to totalize or contain alterity within systems of exchange inevitably produces violence. The spectral nature of wealth becomes one of the most crucial Derridean insights for analysing the film. Derrida, drawing from Marx and Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*, describes money as ghostly, fetishist, and disincarnated. Capital possesses a strange spectral life: it is immaterial yet overwhelmingly powerful, abstract yet materially destructive. Wealth erases difference and transforms all values into exchange-value. In *Tumbbad*, gold functions exactly in this manner. The coins extracted from Hastar are never neutral objects of value; they embody a cursed economy in which desire endlessly reproduces itself. Gold becomes a spectral force that possesses the subject rather than an object possessed by him. Derrida's formulation of money as both fetish and ghost illuminate how the film portrays capitalism not merely as economic practice but as haunting.

Another important Derridean concept relevant to *Tumbbad* is inheritance. Derrida argues that inheritance is never stable transmission but a haunted responsibility toward unresolved pasts. One never inherits a unified legacy; inheritance is fractured, contradictory, and spectral. The heir must negotiate competing voices and unfinished demands. In *Tumbbad*, inheritance appears both materially and symbolically. Vinayak inherits greed from the feudal order represented by the crumbling mansion and the myth of hidden treasure. Yet he also passes this curse onto his son. The film thereby stages inheritance as contamination rather than continuity. The father does not simply transmit wealth; he transmits haunting. Derrida emphasizes that the spectre always returns through repetition across generations, and these intergenerational haunting structures the emotional and narrative core of the film. In *Tumbbad*, the incessant rain, the unfinished decay of the mansion, and the recurring descent into darkness create a world suspended in anticipation. The narrative moves forward, yet it remains trapped within repetition. The future never arrives as liberation; instead, it returns as haunting. This suspended temporality reflects Derrida's understanding of spectral time, where the present is never self-identical but always contaminated by traces of what has been and what is yet to come.

Finally, Derrida's concept of conjuration- the simultaneous invocation and exorcism of ghosts- offers a compelling lens through which to understand the film's ritualistic structure. The characters repeatedly attempt to control the supernatural through incantation, secrecy, and ritual exchange, yet these very acts intensify haunting. Derrida argues that exorcism paradoxically confirms the power of the ghost it seeks to eliminate. Likewise, every attempt in *Tumbbad* to suppress or manipulate Hastar only ensures the continuation of the curse. The film therefore dramatizes the impossibility of fully exorcising historical violence, greed, and desire. Through Derrida's spectral philosophy, *Tumbbad* emerges not simply as a horror film but as a meditation on capitalist desire, cursed inheritance, and the persistence of unresolved histories. The film reveals how the past survives within the present as haunting, how wealth operates through spectral abstraction, and how every attempt at mastery ultimately collapses before the irreducible return of the ghost.

Film Analysis

Tumbbad, directed by Rahi Anil Barve begins with Mahatma Gandhi's words on the screen: "The world has enough for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed"- clearly establishing and foreshadowing the intimidating presence of human greed in the film. The spectral universe of *Tumbbad* opens with a mythic narration about the Goddess of Prosperity and her firstborn child, Hastar, who attempts to possess all the gold and food of creation. This primal act of greed becomes the origin of the curse that haunts Tumbbad across generations. The deity- Hastar- that is being worshipped by the ancestors of the protagonist Vinayak Rao is himself a strong symbol of greed and its repercussions. The film

immediately establishes that the past is not dead but continues to contaminate the present through repetition, memory, and inheritance. Hastar's existence is erased from scriptures, yet his forgotten presence persists as haunting. Derrida's concept of spectrality becomes crucial here because the spectre is precisely that which is excluded from official history yet continues to return. Hastar survives in the gap between absence and presence, becoming a revenant whose curse dislocates linear temporality and turns *Tumbbad* into a space where the past endlessly erupts into the present.

The film's recurring rain and decaying landscapes further intensify this spectral atmosphere. Tumbbad (village in Western India) itself appears suspended outside historical time, trapped in a perpetual state of ruin and waiting. Derrida argues in *Specters of Marx* that time becomes "out of joint" when haunted by unresolved histories, and this disjointed temporality structures the narrative of the film. The incessant rain functions almost as materialized haunting, a visible manifestation of divine wrath and historical decay. The village cannot move toward futurity because it remains chained to a cursed inheritance. The film therefore transforms geography into spectral memory, where every structure, well, and corridor carries traces of an unfinished past. Derrida's hauntology illuminates how the film destabilizes chronological time and presents history as recursive rather than progressive.

Vinayak's childhood experiences in the mansion reveal how greed itself is inherited spectrally. His mother remains in the zamindar's house with the hope of acquiring hidden treasure, while the old great-grandmother exists in a horrifying state between life and death. The old woman embodies Derrida's notion of the ghost as neither fully alive nor dead. Her decaying body, rooted into the house itself through the tree growing out of her, visualizes spectral existence as a condition of unresolved attachment. Even when she warns against the treasure, her very existence testifies to the impossibility of escaping haunting. Vinayak's fascination with wealth begins here, not as individual desire alone but as inherited contamination. Derrida's theory of inheritance becomes significant because inheritance is never simply material transmission; it is the passing down of unresolved desires, violence, and curses that continue haunting future generations. The death of Sadashiv after merely speaking about the treasure demonstrates how spectral power operates through fear and prohibition. The curse is not merely supernatural but ideological, governing the consciousness of the characters. Derrida insists that haunting functions through what official discourse attempts to suppress or deny. In the film, the treasure remains simultaneously visible and forbidden, desired and feared. Vinayak's mother recognizes this danger when she calls him "just like his father," identifying greed as a hereditary force rather than a personal flaw. Her demand that he swear never to return to Tumbbad recalls Derrida's discussion of conjuration, where oaths and promises attempt to control the spectre but ultimately reaffirm its power. The very act of swearing against

Tumbbad ensures the continuation of haunting because prohibition intensifies desire.

When Vinayak returns to Tumbbad years later, the film explicitly stages the return of the repressed. His revisiting of the abandoned mansion resembles the return of a spectre to the site of unfinished history. The old woman warns him that “not everything you inherit should be claimed,” directly foregrounding Derrida’s argument that inheritance is fractured and ethically unstable. Yet Vinayak responds that greed is the only quality he possesses, revealing how spectral inheritance shapes subjectivity itself. His decision to burn the old woman in order to “free” her also evokes Derrida’s discussion of exorcism. Exorcism never fully destroys the ghost; instead, it paradoxically confirms the spectre’s continued presence. The burning of the old woman does not end the curse but merely transfers the burden of haunting onto Vinayak himself. Derrida’s hauntology thus exposes how attempts to master or eliminate the spectral only reproduce it in new forms.

The descent into Hastar’s womb-like well becomes one of the film’s most powerful visualizations of Derridean spectrality. The underground chamber exists outside ordinary reality, functioning as a liminal space between life and death, myth and materiality. Hastar himself is not merely a monster but a figure of insatiable capitalist desire. Derrida’s analysis of money as spectral and fetishist becomes particularly relevant here. The gold coins extracted from Hastar’s loincloth are not ordinary commodities; they are cursed objects produced through repetition, violence, and endless hunger. Wealth in the film possesses a ghostly agency that controls human life rather than serving it. Vinayak imagines himself mastering the treasure, yet the ritualistic repetition of entering the womb and stealing coins reveals his own enslavement to spectral capital. Derrida’s framework clarifies how the film critiques capitalist accumulation as a haunted economy built on insatiable desire.

The figure of Hastar also embodies Derrida’s concept of the uncanny coexistence of attraction and repulsion. Hastar yearns eternally for food yet despises it, creating a paradoxical structure of desire without fulfilment. This endless hunger mirrors capitalist consumption itself, where satisfaction is perpetually deferred. Derrida argues that spectrality destabilizes all fixed oppositions, and Hastar exists precisely within such instability. He is divine yet monstrous, victim yet predator, absent from scripture yet overwhelmingly present in the lives of the characters. His fragmented body reflects Derrida’s insistence that the spectre disrupts metaphysical unity and coherent identity. The horror of Hastar lies not simply in his appearance but in his refusal to fit into stable categories of meaning.

The relationship between Vinayak and his son in the final chapter reveals the intergenerational transmission of haunting. Although Vinayak initially considers his son weak and incapable, the child quickly internalizes the logic of greed, already calculating the future value of the gold coins. The son’s suggestion that

they steal Hastar's loincloth itself instead of individual coins demonstrates how spectral desire intensifies across generations. Vinayak attempts to control what he passes down, yet what he truly transmits is the curse of accumulation itself. The son inherits not simply wealth but a haunted mode of existence structured by endless desire. The climax of the film, where Vinayak sacrifices himself by becoming bait for Hastar, appears momentarily redemptive. However, the ending refuses complete closure. Although Hastar is seemingly destroyed, the son survives with the gold and exits the mansion carrying the burden of inherited greed. Derrida insists that the spectre can never be fully exorcised because haunting belongs to the structure of history itself. The film therefore denies the possibility of final liberation or moral resolution. Vinayak's death does not end the curse; it merely transforms its form and transfers it to the next generation. The spectral survives because desire survives.

Ultimately, *Tumbbad* can be read as a cinematic articulation of Derridean hauntology, where greed, history, and inheritance operate through spectral repetition. The film reveals how the past continually returns to destabilize the present, how wealth functions as ghostly abstraction, and how every attempt to master desire only deepens haunting. Through Derrida's framework, *Tumbbad* emerges not simply as folk horror but as a philosophical meditation on capitalism, cursed inheritance, and the impossibility of escaping the ghosts that history leaves behind.

Conclusion

Tumbbad stages the impossibility of fully burying the past. Through the lens of *Specters of Marx*, the film emerges not merely as a horror narrative about greed and cursed inheritance, but as a hauntological meditation on the spectral persistence of violence, desire, colonial modernity, and historical memory. Hastar functions not simply as a monstrous deity, but as a revenant- an unresolved trace that continually returns because the structures that produced him remain intact. The decaying mansion of Tumbbad, the endless rain, the buried womb-like chamber, and Vinayak's obsessive pursuit of gold together construct a world permanently "out of joint," where time refuses linear closure and where the past survives within the present as an active, contaminating force. The film thus dramatizes Derrida's claim that spectrality unsettles the distinction between absence and presence, life and death, reality and apparition. Greed itself becomes spectral: inherited, contagious, and endlessly reproducible across generations. *Tumbbad* does not offer redemption or closure; instead, it leaves viewers within the unsettling space of Derridean hauntology, where history remains unfinished, justice remains deferred, and the spectres of the past continue to demand recognition.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/74**THE VIOLENCE OF THE SILENCE: CONCEALED HISTORIES AND
IDENTITY FORMATION IN HELEN OYEYEMI'S *THE ICARUS GIRL*
AND *BOY, SNOW, BIRD*****P. SUMEDHA**

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Abstract

The present article focuses on the function of silence and secrecy as the narrative techniques in *The Icarus Girl* and *Boy, Snow, Bird* by Helen Oyeyemi. The writer uses silence as a major phenomenon to articulate the concepts of identity, intergenerational trauma, and emotional imbalances. The article further attempts to explore the concealed family histories and hidden truths employing trauma theory and psychoanalytical interpretations to justify the postcolonial themes. The unresolved pasts and the fractured framework of the families are inherited by the child protagonists in both the novels which will be explored and analysed. In *The Icarus Girl*, Jessamy's relationship with Tilly Tilly, a doppelgänger creates tension in the story manifesting topics of discussion like diaspora, hybridity, and dual personality. Similarly in *Boy, Snow, Bird* the issues of racial passing and secrecy in the details of lineage within the Whitman family are presented. The child figure becomes a pivotal point of discussion wherein the unspoken histories and hidden truths are revealed. Oyeyemi's adept use of fragmented narration, shifting narrative technique, reinterpretation of myth, and revision of fairy tale further highlights the thematic expressions of the plots of these two novels. Silence screams and secrecy schemes in the fiction of Oyeyemi, exposing the hauntings and horrors with which the characters live.

Keywords: Silence and Secrecy, Identity, Trauma, Postcolonial, Psychological Fragmentation

Helen Oyeyemi is a contemporary British-Nigerian writer whose fiction is celebrated for its inventive and innovative narrative structures, retellings of fairy tales, and search of identity, belonging, and the uncanny. Oyeyemi was born on December 10, 1984 in Ibadan, Nigeria and migrated to the United Kingdom at a very young age. These experiences get reflected in the form of thematic expressions like hybridity and diasporic consciousness in her fiction. Her journey of writing began early, completing her debut novel *The Icarus Girl* when she was still doing her A-Level at school. *The Icarus Girl* was published in 2005 and became an instant success. The novel captures the attention of its readers for its Gothic elements and portrayal of the elements of Yoruba mythology.

The subsequent works of Oyeyemi namely *The Opposite House*, *White is for Witching*, *Mr. Fox*, *Boy*, *Snow*, *Bird*, and *Gingerbread* exemplify her ardent interest in subverting the conventional narrative forms. Her writing is dominantly infused with non-linear storytelling, fragmented structures shifting perspectives and metafictional narratives. A prominent feature of her fiction is her art of combining of realism with the supernatural presenting a kaleidoscope of ghosts, doubles, and enchanted spaces. These metaphors serve to creating psychological and cultural tension.

Oyeyemi's literary world is heavily involved in the representation of folktales and fairy tales, which the author then modifies and reinterprets using feminist and postcolonial elements. To deal with the issues of race, gender, and identity, Oyeyemi frequently employs motifs like mirrors, doubles, and transformations. She establishes her characters in liminal spaces, dealing with varied cultural affiliations and indulging in the perennial conflict with the unstable self. The intense and extensive writings of Helen Oyeyemi which highlight the contrasting features of voice and silence, absence and presence, reality and imagination make her one of the prominent voices in the postcolonial genre with her effective and evocative narrative voice.

Silence is more than just the lack of words in *The Icarus Girl* and *Boy*, *Snow*, *Bird*; it is a potent narrative and psychological force. Racial concerns, hidden family histories, generational secrets, and emotional repression all have a significant impact on how identities are formed in the two novels. According to Oyeyemi, homes are places where children experience emotional instability and shattered identities as a result of the selective revelation, manipulation, or withholding of reality. Her characters inherit histories that are either partially or completely hidden, making it difficult for them to comprehend who they are.

Trauma theory is a useful tool for analysing the idea of silence as a psychological burden. Cathy Caruth contends that because trauma cannot be fully expressed or consciously processed, it reappears through fragmented memory and recurrence. The child characters in Oyeyemi's work become carriers of unresolved familial fears because trauma is inherited rather than personally experienced. Similarly, the fragile identities depicted in the novels are illuminated by psychoanalytic theories put forth by Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud. Freud's theory of the eerie is particularly pertinent in *The Icarus Girl*, where Jessamy's enigmatic doppelganger Tilly Tilly makes the familiar scary. In order to comprehend the shattered identities in *Boy*, *Snow*, *Bird*, Lacan's idea of the mirror stage—which postulates that identity arises through misrecognition—is equally important.

Through the theories of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha, the novels also be analysed under postcolonial interpretations. Oyeyemi's characters inhabit liminal identities that defy rigid cultural classification, as explained by Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the "third space." Spivak's concept of the subaltern highlights the ways in which dominant social structures repress some

voices, particularly those of women and racial minorities. The destructive effects of silence and concealment on people navigating race, gender, culture, and memory are revealed in Oyeyemi's novels through various academic frameworks. The protagonist of *The Icarus Girl* is eight-year-old Jessamy Harrison, who was born to an English father and a Nigerian mother. Jess lives in a transitional cultural area, which contributes to her psychological disintegration and emotional loneliness. She finds it difficult to relate to other kids and feels cut off in both Nigerian and British cultural contexts. Her loneliness is exacerbated by the quiet around her emotional state and cultural identity.

Jess is already struggling with anxiety and emotional instability at the beginning of the book. Despite being aware of her unusual behaviour, her parents are unable to understand or properly address her psychiatric problem. The description of Jess as different from everyone else" (Oyeyemi, *The Icarus Girl* 7) early in the novel highlights her social and personal estrangement. Her lack of communication with her parents, who are unable to completely comprehend the extent of her psychological pain, exacerbates her isolation. Jess feels more alone and emotionally distant as a result of their failure to connect honestly with her. Within the family, silence serves as a kind of repression, keeping emotional realities hidden beneath routine household exchanges.

The novel's eerie aspect is introduced by TillyTilly's presence. According to Freud, the uncanny is the terrifying reappearance of something repressed but previously familiar. This idea is embodied in TillyTilly, who is both familiar and exotic, a menace and a buddy. At first, Jess finds solace in TillyTilly's companionship since the latter seems to comprehend her loneliness and her suffering. At first, Jess's constant insistence that "TillyTilly was her best friend" (Oyeyemi, *The Icarus Girl* 218) seems harmless, but TillyTilly eventually turns evil and destructive, symbolising the darker aspects of Jess's broken psyche.

The novel's doubling pattern both exemplifies psychic fragmentation and parallels Freud's idea of the uncanny. Jess's broken sense of self is reflected in her incapacity to discern between reality and fantasy. TillyTilly can be seen as an expression of emotional trauma, cultural anxiety, and suppressed fears that Jess is unable to actively express. According to Freud, suppressed emotions frequently resurface in warped ways, and TillyTilly is just one example of this.

Instead of resolving Jess's identity dilemma, her trip to Nigeria makes it worse. Rather of finding a solid sense of herself, she grows more perplexed by cultural norms and family backgrounds. She learns about Yoruba spiritual traditions from her grandmother, especially the idea of the "abiku" kid, a spirit child connected to the instability of life and death. The supernatural and spiritual aspects strengthen Jess's transitional existence and complicate her psychological state.

Intergenerational trauma is seen in the quiet surrounding Jess's mental pain. Her parents continue to suppress her emotions by avoiding addressing the underlying reasons for her instability. According to Cathy Caruth, because trauma resists full

representation, it frequently shows itself indirectly. Therefore, rather than being expressed directly, Jess's trauma manifests as nightmares, hallucinations, and paranormal experiences.

Jess's shattered consciousness is reflected in the story's splintered structure. By purposefully blurring the lines between truth and fiction, Oyeyemi allows readers to feel Jess's emotional bewilderment and doubt. The story itself experiences psychological instability, illustrating how trauma affects perception.

Cultural hybridity is another important feature of the book. The in-between cultural zone that postcolonial subjects occupy is described by Homi K. Bhabha's idea of hybridity. Jess lives in what Bhabha refers to as the "third space," not entirely belonging to either Nigeria or Britain. Because cultural affiliation is still lacking, this liminal identity causes anxiety. The psychological effects of juggling several cultural affiliations are reflected in Jess's fractured identity.

Another factor contributing to Jess's estrangement is the silence concerning racial and cultural differences. Jess has a solid foundation for understanding herself because her parents don't often talk about the ramifications of her mixed-race status. As a result, her psychic disintegration becomes both cultural and personal. Jess's realisation of TillyTilly's damaging impact is one of the novel's most illuminating moments. Even so, she is unable to adequately describe her experiences to others. Her emotional reality can no longer be adequately expressed through language. As a result, silence manifests as both suppression and communication failure.

The novel's Gothic setting heightens its themes of psychiatric disorder and silence. The supernatural serves as a metaphor for unresolved pain and buried fears. Oyeyemi turns everyday home settings into eerie settings where suppressed anxieties suddenly come to the surface. *The Icarus Girl* uses these strategies to show silence as a damaging heritage that destabilises emotional reality and split's identity.

The sensation of psychological isolation and diasporic exile in *The Icarus Girl* is inextricably linked to silence. Jessamy's incapacity to comprehend the contradictory cultural realities around her leads to her fractured mind. She lives what Homi K. Bhabha refers to as a liminal or hybrid existence, where identity is continuously negotiated rather than firmly established, as a mixed-race child raised between Nigerian and British customs.

When Jess considers that "Wuraola sounded like another person, not her at all" (Oyeyemi, *The Icarus Girl*, 20) it is clear that she is uncomfortable with who she is. Her Nigerian name serves as a metaphor for an identity she is unable to completely embody, highlighting the distinction between one's inner self and one's public persona. This perplexity is exacerbated by the family's silence because cultural tensions are still mostly unspoken. Though she doesn't have the words to describe it, Jess can sense emotional uneasiness surrounding her. The uncanny presence of TillyTilly, who serves as Jess's doppelganger, is a progressive

manifestation of this emotional repression. Freud's concept of the uncanny, in which something familiar becomes terrible via repression and return, is reflected in TillyTilly's role. TillyTilly turns quiet into a menacing psychological force by embodying Jess's repressed fears, loneliness, and unresolved anxieties. Jess's mental instability is exacerbated by her frequent isolation from her peers, which causes her to withdraw more and more into imaginary and fear-driven inner worlds. By obfuscating the distinction between reality and delusion, Oyeyemi's use of fragmentary narration perpetuates this instability. The phrase "Everything was too quiet" (Oyeyemi *TIG* 8) perfectly captures the suffocating environment that surrounds Jess, when stillness is linked to psychic dread and emotional asphyxia rather than tranquillity.

Thus, the novel's supernatural elements serve as a metaphor for the concealed emotional violence brought about by repression, secrecy, and cultural displacement. Because family communication is still insufficient and incomplete, even Jess's parents are unable to understand the extent of her pain. As a result, trauma quietly permeates generations, moulding the young protagonist in ways that are still challenging to clearly describe. Oyeyemi illustrates that silence is never empty through Jess's broken identity; rather, it is packed with cultural worries, hereditary phobias, and emotional voids that plague each person's mind to this day.

Oyeyemi reimagines the "Snow White" fairy tale in *Boy, Snow, Bird* to explore issues of race, gender, beauty, and concealment. The protagonist of the book is Boy Novak, who marries Arturo Whitman and becomes Snow's stepmother after fleeing from an abusive father. But when Boy gives birth to Bird, whose darker complexion reveals the Whitman family's hidden African American ancestry, the story gets more complicated.

The main secret of the book is the Whitman family's history of racial passing. They rely on hiding and remaining silent in an effort to preserve their whiteness. Instead of being innate, race becomes something that is performed, exposing identity as erratic and socially manufactured.

In racist societies, silence serves as a survival strategy, as demonstrated by the politics of racial passing. In order to gain social acceptance and financial security, the Whitmans hide their Black heritage. However, generational identity confusion and emotional disintegration result from the suppression of racial history.

Snow is a symbol of idealised whiteness and femininity. At first, Boy describes Snow using fairy-tale imagery connected to innocence and purity because he believes she is nearly unbelievably lovely. However, because it relies on racial invisibility, its beauty is profoundly ideological. Snow's reputation as the "fairest" is a reflection of societal norms that elevate whiteness as the ideal of beauty.

These meticulously constructed illusions are upset by the birth of the bird. Her darker complexion reveals the Whitman family's hidden heritage and compels

them to face their suppressed past. The disclosure undermines gender norms, family systems, and racial identity.

Boy's choice to banish Snow is reminiscent of the exile motif found in fairy tales. She plays the part of the "wicked stepmother," but Oyeyemi makes this job more difficult by exposing the insecurities and societal pressures that underlie Boy's behaviour. The book reveals the patriarchal systems that influence female behaviour rather than portraying women through crude dichotomies of good and evil.

The novel's recurrent mirror imagery can be explained by Jacques Lacan's notion of the mirror stage. According to Lacan, a child creates an appearance of continuous selfhood despite internal fragmentation by associating with its reflection. Mirrors represent both self-recognition and misrecognition at the same time in *Boy, Snow, Bird*.

The novel's identity instability is encapsulated in the well-known statement, "Nobody ever warned me about mirrors." Uncomfortable facts about race, beauty, and selfhood are revealed by mirrors, which makes them hazardous. Characters are always negotiating how they see themselves and how others see them. Using Judith Butler's performativity theory, the book also explores gender performance. Butler contends that gender is frequently expressed through socially conditioned behaviours and expectations rather than being innate. Boys both conform to and defy conventional expectations of femininity. Bird symbolises the subversion of conventional beauty standards, while Snow signifies idealised femininity.

The novel's changing narrative points of view highlight how unstable truth is. Boy and Bird create several versions of events by narrating different parts of the story. The fractured identities created by repression and secrecy are reflected in the fractured narrative structure.

In the book, silence serves both beneficial and detrimental purposes. Families hide unpleasant facts in order to maintain social harmony, but these silences invariably have negative emotional effects. Bird inherits doubt, absence, and bewilderment as a result of significant family history details being left unsaid.

In order to comprehend how disadvantaged voices are muted throughout the book, Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?" becomes pertinent. Bird and other characters find it difficult to express realities that are suppressed by prevailing social narratives. The book shows how gender and racial hierarchies dictate which identities are revealed and which are kept secret.

The novel also heavily relies on fairy-tale revisionism. Oyeyemi rejects the conventional fairy tale resolution. There is neither a stable resolution nor a return to harmony. Rather, identity continues to be malleable, erratic, and constantly disputed.

Thus, the story depicts silence as a social framework that shapes identity and belonging rather than just as secret. The Whitman family's secret past serves as an

example of how racial and gender identities rely on selective visibility, exclusion, and suppression.

In *Boy, Snow, Bird*, silence serves as a tool for the meticulous construction and maintenance of racial identity, gender, and family history. The Whitman family's hidden African American heritage demonstrates how suppression and selective visibility shape identity. According to Oyeyemi, racial passing is a deeply psychological state that causes unease and alienation across generations rather than just being a social performance. Through the recurrent symbolism of mirrors, Boy's narration continuously reveals the instability of identity categories. Her statement that "Nobody ever warned me about mirrors" (Oyeyemi, *Boy, Snow, Bird* 3) highlights the perilous connection between truth and self-perception. Mirrors turn into places of revelation where meticulously constructed illusions start to crumble. The novel's identity emerges through simultaneous recognition and misrecognition, making Jacques Lacan's mirror stage theory especially pertinent.

While repressing the histories that jeopardise their identities, characters create cohesive versions of themselves. Snow's beauty is idealised because it complies with prevailing norms of femininity and whiteness. At first, Snow seems almost unreal to Boy, who remarks that "she was an extraordinary-looking kid." A swan lady from the Middle Ages, but with the pinkest lips and darkest hair—every colour at its most extreme (Oyeyemi, *BSB* 78). But the book progressively reveals this beauty's ideological underpinnings, showing how femininity is intricately linked to racial privilege and invisibility. Bird's darker complexion reveals the Whitman lineage's hidden truth, upsetting these meticulously maintained tales.

As a result, the family can no longer maintain their silence over race. Bird strives to comprehend her own place in the family system and bears the burden of this secret. She became aware that there were "bits of faces that weren't mine." There were fragments of Mom's, Dad's, Aunt Mia's, Grammy Olivia's, and other people's faces, some of which were as small as my index finger. (Oyeyemi, *BSB* 157) indicates identity's inherent instability and supports Judith Butler's claim that identity is socially constructed rather than innate. By rejecting oversimplified depictions of motherhood and femininity, Oyeyemi further muddies gender myths. The fairy-tale theme of exile is replicated by Boy's choice to send Snow away, but the book also criticises the patriarchal systems that give rise to such positions. As a result, silence influences the characters' perceptions of race, beauty, and belonging on a social and psychological level. Oyeyemi shows how hidden histories still haunt the present through fractured narration and fairy-tale revisionism, proving that identity is constantly malleable, contested, and susceptible to disruption.

The connection between gender and silence is highlighted in both books. The identities of female characters are shaped by cultural expectations, hidden histories, and emotional baggage. Because women are often expected to repress

emotional reality in order to maintain family security, silence becomes gendered. Jess's mother in *The Icarus Girl* finds it difficult to preserve emotional harmony within the family while mediating between Nigerian and British cultural frameworks. The strain women have to maintain unity in the face of personal conflict is reflected in her reticence about cultural problems.

Similar to this, female characters in *Boy, Snow, Bird* negotiate identities shaped by social performance, racial expectations, and beauty standards. Because of patriarchal systems, Boy, Snow, and Bird all suffer from emotional uprooting and marginalisation. Another helpful framework is provided by Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. According to Kristeva, the abject shatters border and undermines identity. Abjection is symbolised by Miranda's pica in *White is for Witching*, but comparable processes may be seen in *Boy, Snow, Bird* through body visibility and racial ambiguity. Bird's darker skin is devalued since it undermines the family's delusion of racial purity.

Oyeyemi's fiction frequently exhibits psychological disintegration. Silence hinders the creation of coherent identities, causing characters to experience fragmented selves, unstable memories, and emotional confusion. Because they inherit unresolved conflicts without knowing where they came from, children are particularly vulnerable. In both books, the young characters are in a state of transition between ignorance and knowledge. While Bird gradually unearths hidden histories that alter her perception of herself, Jess detects unexplainable hidden realities. Their stories show how kids absorb stillness and try to make sense of fractured realities.

These psychological conflicts are symbolised in Oyeyemi's novels by the supernatural and fairy tale themes. While mirrors and fairy-tale themes in *Boy, Snow, Bird* highlight the volatility of social identities, TillyTilly serves as the externalisation of Jess's fractured identity. Instead of being set or stable, gender in Oyeyemi's narrative continues to be fluid, malleable, and shifting. Her female characters defy easy classification and instead represent conflicting identities influenced by trauma, race, memory, and cultural expectations.

The novels' themes of disintegration and stillness are reflected in Oyeyemi's storytelling style. She regularly uses vague supernatural elements, shifting perspectives, nonlinear frameworks, and untrustworthy narration. Readers in *The Icarus Girl* mostly see things from Jess's point of view, which raises questions about the veracity of paranormal activity. The disjointed story reflects Jess's erratic awareness and emotional bewilderment.

The alternate narrators in *Boy, Snow, Bird* provide conflicting interpretations of reality. The fragmented form reflects the volatility of identity itself by preventing readers from accessing a single authoritative narrative.

Additionally, narrative omissions and gaps allow silence to operate structurally. By purposefully omitting specifics, Oyeyemi forces readers to piece together secret histories from disparate details. The characters' attempts to comprehend

incomplete familial narratives are mirrored in this strategy. Another factor contributing to fragmentation is the reworking of myths and fairy tales. Oyeeyemi appropriates well-known stories only to subvert their accepted interpretations. Fairy tales now reveal the instability that underlies social structures rather than offering moral clarity or resolve.

As a result, readers must actively engage with the novels. Meaning eventually emerges through interpretation, mirroring the characters' attempts to make sense of shattered identities and concealed truths. Silence and concealment are shown to be profoundly transformational forces that shape identity, memory, and psychological experience in Helen Oyeeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* and *Boy, Snow, Bird*. Through postcolonial interpretations, psychoanalysis, and trauma theory, the novels reveal how hidden histories plague people for generations. Jess's fractured identity in *The Icarus Girl* results from hereditary trauma, unsolved cultural tensions, and emotional repression. TillyTilly serves as these psychological cracks' eerie expression. Racial passing and family secrets in *Boy, Snow, and Bird* highlight the volatility of identity categories created by silence and exclusion. The novels' emotional and psychological aspects are enhanced by Oyeeyemi's use of fractured narration, supernatural themes, and fairy-tale revisionism. The reader's experience and the identities of the characters are shaped by silence, which also serves as a theme and narrative framework.

Helen Oyeeyemi depicts silence and concealment as damaging inherited factors that shape fractured identities in *The Icarus Girl* and *Boy, Snow, Bird*. Both books show how hidden pasts continue to plague people through trauma, hybridity, and psychological conflict, undermining selfhood, race, memory, and belonging throughout generations.

Finally, the novels imply that societies built on secrecy and repression cannot sustain identity. Oyeeyemi's literature exposes the emotional violence ingrained in ethnic, cultural, and familial histories through secret plots and silence screams. Her works demonstrate how the past never fully disappears through memory, trauma, and the unsettling persistence of the unsaid.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/75**MIGRATION, DISPLACEMENT, AND URBAN ALIENATION IN
CONTEMPORARY INDIAN PARALLEL CINEMA****SUFIYA ANSARI**Junior Research Fellow, Department of English
Faculty of Arts, Banaras Hindu University**Abstract**

Migration has emerged as a central thematic concern in contemporary Indian parallel cinema, reflecting the socio-economic transformations of a globalizing nation. Films such as *Peepli Live*, *Dhobi Ghat*, and *The Lunchbox* illustrate how filmmakers employ realistic aesthetics and understated narratives to depict the lived experiences of individuals negotiating displacement and mobility. While *Peepli Live* foregrounds the economic distress that compels rural populations toward migration, *Dhobi Ghat* captures the fragmented lives of migrants within an urban metropolis, and *The Lunchbox* reflects the emotional isolation that often accompanies life in rapidly expanding cities. Through these narratives, contemporary parallel cinema explores how migration disrupts identity, belonging, and social relations, placing individuals in precarious environments marked by alienation and exploitation. The portrayal of migration moves beyond policy-driven frameworks, instead emphasizing intimate human experiences shaped by structural inequalities of class, caste, and gender. These films resist romanticized notions of mobility, highlighting the psychological toll of migration, including loneliness, nostalgia, and the erosion of community ties. By situating personal struggles within broader political and economic contexts, they critique dominant development discourses and question the promises of modernity. Ultimately, migration in Indian parallel cinema becomes a critical lens through which the complexities of contemporary society are examined, offering a nuanced understanding of mobility, marginalization, and resilience.

Keywords: Rural-to-Urban Mobility; Class Inequality; Realism; Globalization; Social Marginality

Introduction

Migration has long been one of the defining experiences of modernity, shaping not only economic and demographic realities but also cultural identities, emotional landscapes, and everyday social relations. In the Indian context, migration occupies a particularly significant place due to the country's uneven developmental patterns, rapid urbanization, agrarian crises, and the socio-economic transformations accelerated by economic liberalization in the post-1991 era. Rural-to-urban migration, in particular, has become central to understanding contemporary India, as millions move from villages and small towns toward

metropolitan centers in search of livelihood, opportunity, and security. Yet migration is rarely a simple journey of upward mobility. It is often marked by precarity, displacement, fractured belonging, emotional isolation, and the reconfiguration of identity within unfamiliar socio-spatial environments. Migration, therefore, must be understood not merely as physical movement across space but as a deeply lived and affective condition that reshapes how individuals experience home, labor, memory, and social relations.

Traditional studies of migration have often approached the subject through economic and demographic frameworks, focusing on labor mobility, remittances, urbanization, and development indicators. Scholars such as Saskia Sassen argue that migration in the era of globalization is inseparable from transformations in labor markets, capital flows, and urban restructuring, where mobility is shaped less by individual choice than by global economic inequalities (Sassen 1988). Similarly, Jan Breman's work on informal labor in India demonstrates that migration is frequently a response to distress rather than aspiration, particularly among economically marginalized populations displaced by agrarian crisis and uneven industrial development (Breman 2013). Such scholarship has been crucial in understanding migration as a structural outcome of political economy, yet these approaches often privilege macro-level analysis over the intimate human experiences of displacement—loneliness, nostalgia, fractured community ties, emotional estrangement, and the psychological burden of mobility.

It is in this context that cultural and cinematic studies provide a crucial intervention. Cinema offers a mode of engaging migration not simply as a statistical or policy issue but as a lived social reality experienced through bodies, emotions, spaces, and everyday routines. As Hamid Naficy suggests in his work on cinema and displacement, film has a unique capacity to render mobility as both material and affective, capturing the psychic and spatial consequences of migration in ways that conventional sociological frameworks cannot fully articulate (Naficy 2001). The moving image becomes particularly significant because migration itself is a spatial experience—one involving transitions, borders, unfamiliar environments, interrupted rhythms, and shifting relationships between self and place.

Indian cinema has historically engaged with themes of migration, displacement, and mobility in multiple forms. Early popular cinema often depicted migration through melodramatic narratives of rural protagonists arriving in cities, where urban life functioned as a site of aspiration, corruption, or moral conflict. Films such as *Shree 420* (1955) or *Deewaar* (1975) encoded migration within broader narratives of nation-building, class struggle, and modernity. However, mainstream cinema frequently resolved displacement through melodramatic closure, often romanticizing urban success or reintegrating the migrant subject into familiar ideological frameworks. The city, though chaotic, remained a space of possibility and cinematic spectacle.

Parallel cinema and later independent filmmaking, by contrast, have approached migration through realism, fragmentation, and socio-political critique. Emerging as an alternative to commercial Hindi cinema, parallel cinema has historically foregrounded marginal subjects, everyday struggles, and structural inequalities. Scholars such as M. Madhava Prasad argue that Indian parallel cinema challenged dominant narrative forms by engaging more directly with the contradictions of modernity, class relations, and social realism, often resisting the ideological closure of mainstream cinema (Prasad 1998). Similarly, Ravi Vasudevan notes that alternative cinematic practices in India opened up spaces for representing urban transformation, marginal labor, and fractured modern subjectivities beyond the spectacle-driven frameworks of popular cinema (Vasudevan 2010).

Contemporary Indian parallel cinema inherits this realist impulse while responding to the specific conditions of neoliberal globalization, urban restructuring, and intensified internal migration in twenty-first-century India. Rather than treating migration as a heroic journey or developmental success story, these films foreground precarious labor, emotional alienation, fractured belonging, and the invisibility of migrant lives within rapidly transforming social landscapes. Rajinder Dudrah's work on Indian cinema and social change emphasizes that contemporary filmmakers increasingly turn toward intimate narratives and everyday realism to critique broader political and economic structures (Dudrah 2006). This shift is particularly visible in films that focus on urban loneliness, agrarian distress, and informal labor, where mobility becomes inseparable from vulnerability.

Migration in cinema must also be understood through the spatial turn in cultural theory. Henri Lefebvre's concept of the "production of space" is especially useful in this regard, as it demonstrates that spaces are not neutral containers but socially produced environments structured by power, inequality, labor, and ideology (Lefebvre 1991). Migrants do not merely move into spaces; they enter socio-spatial systems that regulate visibility, access, belonging, and exclusion. Similarly, Marc Augé's concept of "non-places" highlights how modern urban life generates anonymous spaces of transit—railway stations, offices, apartment complexes, roads—that intensify experiences of isolation and disconnection (Augé 1995). These frameworks are particularly relevant for cinematic analyses of migration, where cities, villages, domestic interiors, and transit spaces often function not just as backdrops but as active affective environments shaping character experience.

Arjun Appadurai's theorization of globalization further complicates migration by emphasizing that mobility is not solely physical but also imaginative and aspirational. In *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai argues that migration in the contemporary world is deeply connected to shifting imaginaries of aspiration, mediated by media, consumer culture, and global flows (Appadurai 1996). Yet such aspirations often collide with material inequalities, producing tensions

between imagined futures and lived realities. Contemporary Indian parallel cinema frequently captures this contradiction, showing characters who move toward urban spaces in search of possibility only to encounter precarity, alienation, or emotional estrangement.

Feminist migration studies have also expanded understanding of displacement by drawing attention to the gendered dimensions of mobility. Scholars such as Rachel Silvey argue that migration cannot be understood solely through labor and economics because women often experience movement through domestic relocation, emotional displacement, care work, and patriarchal constraints (Silvey 2006). Cinema similarly reveals that migration is not always represented through trains, roads, or labor contracts; it may also appear as psychological dislocation within domestic spaces, marriages, or urban routines. Such frameworks allow for a more nuanced reading of migration beyond conventional economic narratives. Within Indian film studies, scholars such as Lalitha Gopalan and Omar Ahmed have highlighted how contemporary Indian cinema increasingly employs minimalist realism, fragmented narrative structures, and affective atmospheres to represent marginalized experiences and everyday precarity. Rather than spectacularizing mobility, these films slow down narrative tempo and focus on ordinary routines, silences, intimate spaces, and interrupted aspirations. Such cinematic strategies are particularly important in migration narratives because they capture the experiential texture of displacement—waiting, loneliness, uncertainty, labor fatigue, and emotional disconnection.

This paper examines migration as a central thematic concern in contemporary Indian parallel cinema through close readings of *Peepli Live* (2010), *Dhobi Ghat* (2010), and *The Lunchbox* (2013). Although these films differ in tone, narrative structure, and socio-spatial setting, they collectively explore migration as a lived condition shaped by structural inequalities and affective disruption. *Peepli Live* foregrounds agrarian distress and rural dispossession, revealing migration as economic compulsion born from systemic neglect. *Dhobi Ghat* examines the fragmented lives of migrants within Mumbai, exposing urban precarity, informal labor, and unequal social visibility. *The Lunchbox*, in turn, shifts the discourse toward emotional migration, portraying loneliness and affective displacement within the rhythms of metropolitan life.

By analyzing these films, this paper argues that contemporary Indian parallel cinema resists romanticized narratives of mobility and instead presents migration as a complex negotiation with class inequality, urban alienation, emotional fragmentation, and social marginality. These films move beyond policy-driven understandings of migration to foreground intimate human experiences shaped by structural violence and precarious belonging. Migration in contemporary Indian parallel cinema thus emerges not simply as movement across geography but as a critical cinematic lens through which the contradictions of globalization, modernity, and everyday survival in contemporary India are rendered visible.

Migration as Economic Compulsion in *Peepli Live*

Anusha Rizvi's *Peepli Live* (2010) approaches migration not through the visual spectacle of movement itself but through the socio-economic conditions that make movement inevitable. The film is set in Peepli, a drought-stricken village where agrarian collapse has rendered rural life economically unsustainable. Rather than depicting migration as a journey toward opportunity, *Peepli Live* foregrounds the structural violence that pushes rural subjects toward displacement. Migration in the film remains largely implicit, yet it operates as a haunting presence throughout the narrative, emerging from debt, land loss, unemployment, and the erosion of agricultural livelihoods. In this sense, the film offers a critique of neoliberal development by showing how the rural crisis produces what Jan Breman calls "distress mobility"—movement compelled by economic desperation rather than aspiration (Breman 1996).

The opening sequence immediately establishes agrarian distress as the central condition of the narrative. Natha and his brother Budhia are shown approaching a local politician to seek help after their land is threatened with confiscation due to unpaid loans. This scene is significant not only for its narrative exposition but also for the way the *mise-en-scène* visualizes the collapse of rural agency. The bureaucratic office is cramped, cluttered, and indifferent, visually emphasizing the imbalance between powerless farmers and inaccessible institutional structures. The brothers' hesitant body language, torn clothing, and subdued speech contrast sharply with the politician's performative authority, establishing a rural world in which economic survival depends on navigating systems of neglect and spectacle rather than receiving genuine support. Migration here is not yet spoken of directly, but the conditions that historically push farmers toward urban labor migration—land insecurity, indebtedness, and agrarian decline—are clearly embedded within the narrative framework.

The film repeatedly states debt as a central mechanism of dispossession. Natha's family does not face hunger merely because of personal failure but because of a broader economic system in which agriculture has ceased to guarantee survival. In scenes showing the family's home, the sparse interiors, cracked walls, and minimal possessions visually communicate material scarcity. Rizvi's use of production design is significant here: the domestic space is not romanticized as a pastoral rural home but represented as a site of exhaustion and economic fragility. The absence of abundance in the frame—empty utensils, dry land, undernourished livestock—becomes a visual language of collapse. Through such images, the film constructs migration as an unspoken horizon: when agriculture fails, mobility becomes a compulsion rather than a choice.

Sound design plays a crucial role in reinforcing this atmosphere of rural precarity. Unlike mainstream Hindi cinema, which often relies on dramatic background scores to heighten emotion, *Peepli Live* employs environmental sounds—rustling dry fields, village chatter, radio broadcasts, animal noises, and bureaucratic

noise—to create a grounded sonic realism. The soundscape of rural life is neither idyllic nor silent; it is marked by monotony, repetition, and social tension. In scenes where Natha sits quietly while others discuss his fate, ambient sounds dominate over dialogue, emphasizing his powerlessness within systems that speak about him rather than with him. This understated sonic strategy aligns with the film's realist aesthetics, drawing attention to everyday rural life as structurally burdened rather than emotionally dramatized.

One of the film's most striking interventions lies in its use of satire to critique development discourse. The absurd suggestion that Natha should commit suicide so that his family can receive government compensation becomes the narrative catalyst, exposing a political economy in which death is more economically valuable than life. The scene is framed with comic understatement, yet its irony is devastating. Natha's silence and confusion in response to this suggestion contrast with Budhia's practical acceptance of the idea, revealing how normalized economic desperation has become. Migration in this context is linked to a larger critique of state policy: rural subjects are abandoned to such an extent that survival itself appears unsustainable. As scholars of agrarian distress in India have argued, migration frequently emerges as a response to precisely these forms of structural neglect, where agriculture no longer supports subsistence and rural populations are forced into precarious labor elsewhere (Breman 1996; Gupta 2012).

The arrival of media crews transforms the village into a spectacle, and here Rizvi uses visual contrast to critique how development discourse erases structural realities. Television reporters, satellite vans, microphones, and staged debates invade the dusty village landscape, creating a jarring collision between urban media modernity and rural deprivation. The camera often frames media personnel in exaggerated movement—rushing, shouting, competing for coverage—while villagers remain static or bewildered in the background. This contrast visually dramatizes the unequal politics of representation. Rural suffering becomes content, but the systemic causes of agrarian crisis remain unaddressed.

A particularly significant scene occurs when news anchors debate farmer suicides from studio spaces far removed from the village. The bright artificial lighting of television studios sharply contrasts with the muted, natural lighting of Peepli's rural environment. This visual dichotomy is not incidental. The hyper-lit studio represents spectacle, performance, and mediated discourse, while the earthy, sun-baked textures of the village signify lived material reality. Lighting here functions ideologically: urban media visibility does not illuminate truth but instead obscures structural violence through sensationalism. The rural crisis becomes a consumable spectacle rather than political urgency.

The use of irony is further reinforced through editing. Rapid cuts between news coverage, political reactions, and village life create a fragmented narrative rhythm that mirrors the absurdity of public discourse surrounding rural suffering. The comic tone does not diminish tragedy; instead, it intensifies critique by exposing

how bureaucratic and media systems trivialize structural distress. Natha's body becomes a symbolic site onto which political agendas, journalistic ambitions, and state narratives are projected, while his actual subjectivity remains marginalized. Migration here is rendered as part of this broader structural invisibility: rural lives matter only when they become spectacles of crisis.

The film's visual realism is especially effective in depicting agrarian collapse as a spatial condition. Wide shots of dry fields, dusty roads, barren landscapes, and sparse village infrastructure situate rural life within a geography of abandonment. Unlike commercial cinema's lush rural imagery, *Peepli Live* frames the village as depleted and precarious. The recurring use of earthy color palettes—faded browns, dusty yellows, muted greens—creates an atmosphere of exhaustion rather than pastoral nostalgia. These visual textures are central to the film's migration discourse because they show the village not as a stable site of belonging but as a space emptied of economic possibility.

The climax of the film deepens this critique by revealing migration as invisibilized labor rather than heroic mobility. After the media frenzy and political spectacle dissipate, Natha is presumed dead, but the final scenes reveal him alive in an urban construction site, working anonymously as a laborer. This moment is one of the film's most powerful commentaries on migration. The shift from rural village to urban labor space is abrupt and visually stark. Surrounded by concrete structures, machinery, and anonymous workers, Natha becomes indistinguishable within the informal labor economy.

This final image redefines migration not as liberation but as erasure. The man who was once the center of national media attention is now absorbed into the invisible machinery of urban development, laboring in silence. The irony is profound: the state and media spectacle surrounding his potential death has no interest in his continued life as a migrant worker. The urban construction site functions as a symbolic endpoint of agrarian dispossession, revealing how rural crisis feeds the labor demands of expanding urban economies.

Sound again becomes crucial in this concluding sequence. The noises of construction—hammering, machinery, industrial rhythm—replace the ambient sounds of village life. This sonic shift marks not progress but displacement. The intimate social soundscape of rural life gives way to mechanical anonymity, underscoring the emotional and existential rupture that migration entails.

Thus, *Peepli Live* constructs migration as economic compulsion born from agrarian collapse, debt, and systemic neglect. Through satire, realist aesthetics, rural mise-en-scène, ironic editing, and a contrastive use of sound and lighting, the film critiques celebratory narratives of development and exposes the structural violence underlying rural-to-urban mobility. Migration in *Peepli Live* is not framed as aspiration or empowerment but as “distress mobility”—a movement produced by economic breakdown and sustained by the invisibility of precarious

labor. In doing so, the film transforms migration into a critique of neoliberal India, where rural abandonment and urban expansion remain intimately connected.

Migration and Urban Fragmentation in Dhobi Ghat

Kiran Rao's *Dhobi Ghat* (2010) offers one of the most nuanced cinematic explorations of migration in contemporary Indian parallel cinema by shifting attention from the structural causes of displacement to the fragmented realities of life within the metropolis. Unlike *Peepli Live*, where migration is understood as an economic compulsion generated by agrarian collapse, *Dhobi Ghat* situates migration within Mumbai itself, examining how urban life reorganizes identity, labor, aspiration, and belonging. The film does not present migration through a singular narrative of arrival or settlement; rather, it portrays the city as a layered and unequal social space inhabited differently by individuals divided by class, profession, gender, and mobility. Through the intersecting lives of Munna, Yasmin, Arun, and Shai, *Dhobi Ghat* reveals that migration in the urban context is not simply a physical relocation but a continuous negotiation with anonymity, aspiration, emotional estrangement, and social fragmentation.

Mumbai in *Dhobi Ghat* is not represented as the glamorous, spectacular city familiar from mainstream Hindi cinema. Instead, Rao constructs it as a fractured metropolis composed of uneven rhythms, intersecting lives, and socially segregated spaces. The city is experienced through narrow lanes, crowded trains, terraces, laundries, apartments, water tanks, construction sites, and anonymous streets—spaces that are visually and socially disconnected even while geographically proximate. This fragmented representation resonates with Henri Lefebvre's notion of urban space as socially produced, structured by unequal access, class division, and everyday practices (Lefebvre 1991). Mumbai in the film does not function as a unified backdrop but as a living social organism that shapes and limits the experiences of those who inhabit it.

The opening sequences establish this fragmented urban geography through montage-like observational imagery: laundry flapping across Dhobi Ghat, trains cutting through neighborhoods, people moving through streets, domestic interiors, and fleeting glimpses of urban routines. Rather than orienting the viewer through conventional establishing shots, the film presents Mumbai as a collection of partial, disconnected fragments. The camera lingers on surfaces, textures, windows, staircases, rooftops, and urban movement, creating a visual sense of discontinuity that mirrors the migrant experience of inhabiting a city without fully belonging to it. The city is seen in pieces rather than as a coherent whole, emphasizing urban fragmentation as both aesthetic strategy and thematic concern. Munna emerges as the film's most explicit migrant subject, embodying the precarious realities of informal labor in the metropolis. A washerman from rural Uttar Pradesh who works at Dhobi Ghat while aspiring to become a film actor, Munna occupies multiple social positions at once: laborer, migrant, dreamer, service worker, and urban outsider. His migration narrative is not dramatized

through flashbacks or sentimental exposition; rather, it is embedded in his everyday routines and interactions with the city. Munna moves constantly through Mumbai—washing clothes, delivering garments, navigating trains, meeting clients, socializing with friends—yet this mobility does not translate into social stability or upward mobility. His movement through urban space is marked by labor, precarity, and invisibility.

One particularly revealing sequence shows Munna at work in the Dhobi Ghat, where rows of washermen rhythmically scrub clothes in open stone basins. The camera does not sensationalize the labor but observes it in long takes, emphasizing repetition, physicality, and collective anonymity. Water splashes, fabric strikes against stone, bodies bend in mechanical rhythm. The sound design here is crucial: the repetitive slapping of cloth, water movement, worker chatter, and ambient city noise create a sonic environment of labor that foregrounds physical effort without melodrama. Unlike commercial cinema's use of music to elevate labor into spectacle, *Dhobi Ghat* uses environmental sound to situate migrant work within the exhausting rhythms of everyday survival.

Munna's labor sustains the city's domestic and upper-class lives, yet he remains socially marginal within the very urban economy he helps maintain. This reflects Jan Breman's analysis of informal labor migration in India, where migrants often occupy unstable, low-paying service roles essential to urban functioning but excluded from formal recognition and security (Breman 1996). Munna's aspiration to become an actor further complicates his migration narrative. His dreams of cinematic mobility exist alongside his economic precarity, illustrating the tension between imagined possibility and structural limitation—a contradiction that Arjun Appadurai identifies as central to modern aspirational culture (Appadurai 1996).

Lighting and framing play an important role in constructing Munna's urban subjectivity. His scenes often unfold in natural or dim lighting, whether in crowded streets, cramped living quarters, or public transport, emphasizing realism and material immediacy. In contrast to the polished interiors associated with Arun's upper-middle-class existence, Munna's spaces are textured, crowded, and transitional. Close framing often places him within narrow corridors, packed trains, and constricted rooms, visually reinforcing the limited social mobility available to him despite his constant physical movement across the city.

If Munna represents labor migration, Yasmin's narrative expands the understanding of displacement by foregrounding emotional and domestic migration. Through her video diaries, Yasmin narrates her experience of moving to Mumbai after marriage, only to encounter loneliness, neglect, and eventual emotional collapse. Her migration is not driven by labor but by patriarchal domestic relocation, illustrating feminist migration scholars' argument that movement is often experienced differently by women, shaped by marriage,

domesticity, and affective dislocation rather than economic labor alone (Silvey 2006).

Yasmin's video diaries are among the film's most intimate and formally distinct sequences. Speaking directly to the camera, she records her daily experiences in a city that feels increasingly alien and isolating. Initially, she describes Mumbai with curiosity and cautious optimism, noticing neighborhood details and urban rhythms. But as her monologues continue, the tone shifts toward loneliness, abandonment, and emotional suffocation. The domestic apartment that should signify settlement becomes a space of confinement and silence.

Lighting in Yasmin's scenes subtly reflects this emotional displacement. Her apartment interiors are often dimly lit, enclosed, and shadowed, creating a visual atmosphere of emotional stagnation. The camera frames her through doorways, mirrors, and enclosed domestic compositions, emphasizing spatial entrapment. Unlike the kinetic movement of Mumbai's public spaces, Yasmin's domestic world is still, quiet, and claustrophobic. The contrast between the bustling city outside and the emotional emptiness inside underscores how migration does not guarantee belonging.

Sound again reinforces this tension. In several diary scenes, Yasmin's voice exists against ambient silence or distant urban noise filtering through windows—traffic, voices, city hum—reminding viewers that she inhabits a crowded metropolis while remaining emotionally isolated within it. The city is physically near but affectively inaccessible. Her eventual despair reveals migration as psychological displacement, where movement into a new urban environment produces not connection but estrangement.

Urban anonymity is one of the film's most persistent thematic concerns, and Rao visualizes this through the social separation of her characters despite their geographical proximity. Arun, Munna, Shai, and Yasmin inhabit the same city, yet their lives rarely intersect in meaningful ways. Their experiences of Mumbai are structured by class privilege, labor, gender, and mobility, demonstrating how urban space is unequally inhabited.

A significant example is the contrast between Arun's apartment and Munna's world. Arun's home is spacious, quiet, and visually curated, marked by muted lighting and artistic solitude. Munna, by contrast, occupies crowded public spaces, communal labor sites, and cramped informal environments. The city offers both characters movement, but not the same kind of belonging. Arun can withdraw into privacy; Munna must remain visible as labor while socially invisible as a person. This contrast reflects what urban theorists describe as unequal spatial citizenship, where access to comfort, privacy, and social recognition remains class-dependent (Lefebvre 1991).

Rao's use of trains, staircases, rooftops, and windows repeatedly reinforces urban anonymity. Characters are shown in transit, observing others without connection, passing through shared spaces without intimacy. These images resonate with Marc

Augé's concept of "non-places," modern urban spaces of transit that intensify solitude rather than community (Augé 1995). Mumbai in *Dhobi Ghat* is full of people, but emotional contact remains fragile and incomplete.

Formally, the film's fragmented narrative structure is central to its migration discourse. Rather than following a linear storyline, *Dhobi Ghat* unfolds through intersecting fragments, video diaries, partial encounters, observational sequences, and emotional silences. This narrative fragmentation mirrors the city itself—a place where lives overlap without coherence, where migration does not produce narrative closure but ongoing uncertainty.

The observational realism of the film further strengthens this effect. Rao often employs handheld camerawork, long takes, ambient sound, and minimal background score, allowing urban life to unfold without dramatic manipulation. The camera observes rather than dictates emotional response. Laundry workers at dawn, crowded trains, children playing in narrow lanes, rain falling on concrete surfaces—these moments create a documentary-like texture that grounds migration in everyday urban rhythms.

Mumbai itself ultimately becomes the film's central character. It is not merely the setting within which migration occurs but an active force shaping aspiration, loneliness, invisibility, and fleeting connection. The city offers possibility, yet it withholds belonging. It creates proximity without intimacy, movement without stability, and aspiration without guarantee.

Thus, *Dhobi Ghat* presents migration as an experience of urban fragmentation rather than simple relocation. Through Munna's precarious labor, Yasmin's emotional displacement, unequal social spaces, fragmented narrative structure, and observational realism, the film reveals the metropolis as a site of both aspiration and alienation. Migration in *Dhobi Ghat* is not represented as successful assimilation into city life but as a continuous negotiation with invisibility, class division, emotional estrangement, and fractured belonging. In doing so, the film transforms Mumbai into a cinematic map of contemporary urban migration—restless, unequal, intimate, and profoundly fragmented.

Emotional Migration and Urban Isolation in *The Lunchbox*

Ritesh Batra's *the Lunchbox* (2013) offers a distinct and subtle intervention into cinematic representations of migration by shifting the discourse away from overt economic displacement toward the emotional and affective consequences of metropolitan life. Unlike *Peepli Live*, which foregrounds migration as economic compulsion rooted in agrarian distress, or *Dhobi Ghat*, which examines urban fragmentation through labor and unequal social spaces, *The Lunchbox* explores what may be called emotional migration—a condition in which individuals inhabit the city physically but remain psychologically displaced, disconnected, and estranged from meaningful human intimacy. Migration in this film is not always represented through dramatic movement across visible landscapes; rather, it unfolds through routines, transit systems, domestic spaces, bureaucratic work

environments, and interpersonal silences that reveal how modern urban life can produce alienation even within proximity.

Mumbai in *The Lunchbox* is central to this affective discourse. The city is not represented through spectacular skylines or narrative excess but through ordinary rhythms—crowded local trains, office lunch routines, apartment kitchens, staircases, corridors, suburban homes, and commuter movement. These everyday spaces construct a city defined less by aspiration than by repetition and anonymity. The famous dabbawala system itself becomes an emblem of metropolitan organization: efficient, interconnected, and deeply impersonal. The mistaken delivery of Ila's lunchbox to Saajan Fernandes initiates the central narrative, but symbolically it also exposes the paradox of urban modernity—an intensely connected city where intimate human contact occurs only by accident.

The opening sequence of the film is especially significant in establishing migration within everyday metropolitan life. The montage showing the dabbawala network moving lunchboxes across trains, bicycles, handcarts, staircases, and office buildings is choreographed with rhythmic precision. Yet this movement is not celebratory; it emphasizes urban systems of circulation in which objects travel seamlessly while human beings remain emotionally disconnected. The city is shown as a network of transit rather than intimacy. Marc Augé's concept of "non-places" is particularly useful here, as trains, stations, offices, and delivery systems become spaces of movement that facilitate circulation but do not necessarily foster belonging (Augé 1995).

Sound design in this opening montage is crucial. Rather than overwhelming the sequence with music, the film foregrounds ambient sounds—train announcements, footsteps, bicycle bells, station noise, metal lunchboxes clinking, office murmurs—creating a sonic texture of urban routine. These sounds establish Mumbai as a city of systems, movement, and repetition. The absence of dramatic scoring allows viewers to experience the mundane rhythms that structure metropolitan life, subtly introducing the emotional isolation embedded within such routines.

Shaikh emerges as the film's most explicit migrant subject and functions as an important narrative link between literal migration and emotional belonging. A younger office worker assigned to train under Saajan, Shaikh is a migrant who has moved into Mumbai in search of employment and social mobility. Unlike Saajan, whose urban alienation is rooted in emotional withdrawal, Shaikh embodies the optimism and precarity of the migrant worker navigating a new metropolitan environment.

One particularly telling scene occurs when Shaikh enthusiastically tells Saajan about his background, his family, and his efforts to establish himself in Mumbai. His excessive friendliness initially irritates Saajan, but this contrast is central to the film's migration discourse. Shaikh's desire for connection reflects the migrant's need to build social networks in an unfamiliar city. His constant talking,

eagerness, and awkward attempts at friendship reveal a person resisting anonymity through sociability. The office itself visually reinforces Shaikh's precarious position. Unlike Saajan's solitary desk and emotional withdrawal, Shaikh occupies a bureaucratic environment that is functional but impersonal. Fluorescent lighting, paperwork, gray office interiors, and crowded workspaces emphasize metropolitan labor as repetitive and depersonalized. Shaikh moves energetically through these spaces, but his social mobility remains uncertain. He is present in the city yet still negotiating belonging, embodying what Appadurai describes as the aspirational dimensions of migration under modern urban capitalism (Appadurai 1996). Food becomes an important emotional motif in Shaikh's migration narrative. In one scene, Shaikh shares details of his cooking and eating habits, expressing domestic aspirations and emotional needs in a city where familial intimacy is absent. His humor and enthusiasm contrast with Saajan's silence, yet beneath this warmth lies a recognizable migrant loneliness—a desire to recreate familiarity in a city structured by impersonality. If Shaikh represents literal migration, Ila and Saajan embody emotional displacement within metropolitan life. Both characters inhabit Mumbai physically, yet neither experience genuine belonging in their domestic or social environments. Their migration is internal and affective rather than geographic—a movement away from intimacy, companionship, and emotional fulfillment.

Ila's domestic world initially appears stable: she lives in an apartment, cooks for her husband, and follows routine household rhythms. Yet the film gradually reveals that her home is not a site of belonging but one of emotional neglect. A particularly significant early scene shows Ila preparing an elaborate lunch in the kitchen, carefully selecting spices, cooking with attention, and following advice from her unseen upstairs neighbor. The camera lingers on close-ups of ingredients, steam, utensils, and cooking gestures, emphasizing care and intimacy as embodied labor. Yet this emotional labor goes unrecognized by her husband, whose indifference is communicated through absence rather than confrontation. The domestic space here becomes paradoxical. Though culturally coded as home, it functions as a site of emotional exile. Lighting in Ila's apartment plays a subtle role in reinforcing this condition. Natural light filters softly through windows, creating warmth, but the spatial compositions often isolate Ila within frames—alone in kitchens, sitting near windows, framed by doorways, moving through domestic interiors without companionship. The apartment is visually intimate yet emotionally empty.

Sound in Ila's scenes further intensifies this domestic isolation. Much of her life unfolds through silence punctuated by kitchen sounds—chopping, stirring, pressure cooker whistles, utensils clinking, distant neighborhood noise. Her conversations often occur with the unseen Auntie upstairs, whose voice drifts from another apartment, emphasizing both connection and absence. This off-screen relationship becomes significant because Ila's most emotionally meaningful

interaction initially occurs not with those physically present but with disembodied voices and eventually letters exchanged through the lunchbox. Saajan Fernandes, by contrast, experiences emotional migration through urban solitude and grief. A widower nearing retirement, Saajan inhabits Mumbai as someone socially present yet emotionally withdrawn. His apartment is quiet, dim, and sparsely populated with signs of routine rather than intimacy. One of the film's most revealing scenes occurs when Saajan returns home from work and moves through his apartment in silence—removing shoes, heating food, sitting alone, smoking, looking out the window. There is minimal dialogue, and the camera lingers on gestures rather than action. These routines reveal a life emptied of relational warmth. Silence becomes the emotional language of his existence.

Lighting is particularly important in Saajan's world. His apartment interiors are often dimly lit, with muted tones, shadows, and subdued artificial light, visually reflecting emotional withdrawal. Unlike Ila's warm kitchen tones, Saajan's spaces feel enclosed, static, and melancholic. The use of darkness and visual stillness creates a sense of psychological retreat, reinforcing his displacement within the city. Letters exchanged between Ila and Saajan gradually create a space of emotional migration in reverse—not movement away from intimacy, but movement toward connection through mediated communication. Writing becomes a form of relational travel, allowing both characters to cross emotional distances that physical urban proximity has failed to bridge.

A particularly significant scene occurs when Saajan reads Ila's letter on a train. Surrounded by commuters, noise, and urban movement, he occupies a moment of emotional stillness created by private intimacy. The crowded train—a classic urban non-place—briefly becomes a site of affective connection. The contrast between public congestion and private emotional awakening captures one of the film's central insights: intimacy in modern cities often emerges in unexpected interstitial spaces rather than traditional domestic or social settings. Loneliness and routine are perhaps the film's most persistent thematic structures. Both Ila and Saajan are trapped within repetitive daily rhythms—cooking, commuting, office work, eating, returning home. These routines initially function as mechanisms of emotional numbness. Yet the accidental correspondence interrupts repetition, introducing uncertainty, anticipation, and desire into otherwise mechanical lives. Ritesh Batra uses silence as one of the film's most powerful aesthetic strategies. Long pauses, quiet gestures, minimal dialogue, and understated reactions create emotional depth without melodrama. In many scenes, what remains unsaid carries greater narrative weight than spoken exchanges. This minimalist storytelling aligns with the film's exploration of emotional migration, where alienation is expressed not through dramatic conflict but through absence, repetition, and deferred intimacy. Transit spaces are equally important. Local trains, office corridors, lunch delivery routes, staircases, and elevators recur throughout the film, functioning as spaces of movement without attachment. Characters pass

through these environments daily, yet they rarely create lasting social bonds. These spaces reflect global urban modernity's paradox: constant circulation alongside emotional isolation. The film's conclusion resists closure, reinforcing migration as uncertainty rather than resolution. Saajan contemplates leaving Mumbai for Bhutan, imagining physical migration as a possible escape from urban loneliness. Ila considers leaving her domestic life in search of something unknown. Yet the ending remains open, refusing definitive union or escape. This ambiguity is central to the film's migration discourse: movement does not guarantee belonging, nor does emotional connection erase structural solitude. Thus, *The Lunchbox* expands the cinematic understanding of migration by exploring how metropolitan life produces emotional displacement alongside physical mobility. Through Shaikh's migrant labor subjectivity, Ila and Saajan's affective isolation, repetitive urban routines, transit spaces, silence, and minimalist realism, the film presents migration as an emotional condition embedded within everyday city life. In doing so, *The Lunchbox* reveals that in global urban modernity, individuals may remain physically connected through systems of movement yet profoundly isolated in their inner lives. Migration here is not only about changing locations; it is about navigating loneliness, memory, desire, and the fragile search for belonging within the anonymous rhythms of the contemporary metropolis.

Conclusion

Contemporary Indian parallel cinema has increasingly turned to migration as a critical thematic framework through which to examine the contradictions of post-liberalization India. In films such as *Peepli Live* (2010), *Dhobi Ghat* (2010), and *The Lunchbox* (2013), migration is not presented as a singular narrative of movement from one place to another, nor is it romanticized as a story of aspiration fulfilled. Instead, these films reveal migration as a layered and often contradictory experience shaped by structural inequalities, emotional dislocation, precarious labor, and fractured social belonging. Through realistic aesthetics, fragmented storytelling, intimate character studies, and attention to everyday spaces, these films transform migration into a cinematic lens for understanding the socio-economic and affective realities of contemporary India. A comparative reading of these three films demonstrates that migration in contemporary Indian parallel cinema cannot be understood through economic mobility alone. Rather, migration emerges as a structural, emotional, and political condition, operating across multiple registers. Structurally, migration is linked to agrarian distress, informal labor economies, urban precarity, and uneven development. Emotionally, it manifests through loneliness, nostalgia, fractured belonging, domestic alienation, and psychological displacement. Politically, it exposes the unequal systems that regulate visibility, citizenship, labor, and social recognition.

These films also collectively challenge dominant development narratives associated with neoliberal modernity. Since economic liberalization, urbanization

has often been celebrated within state and media discourse as a marker of national progress, modernization, and opportunity. Cities are imagined as aspirational spaces of mobility, while migration is framed as participation in developmental success. However, *Peepli Live*, *Dhobi Ghat*, and *The Lunchbox* resist this celebratory logic by revealing the hidden costs of such mobility.

In *Peepli Live*, neoliberal development is exposed through the abandonment of rural life and the conversion of agrarian suffering into media spectacle. Natha's invisibility as an urban laborer in the film's final sequence demonstrates how development depends on displaced bodies whose struggles remain unrecognized. In *Dhobi Ghat*, Mumbai's glamour is dismantled through images of labor fatigue, unequal spatial citizenship, and fragmented social encounters, exposing the city as a site of aspiration shadowed by exclusion. In *The Lunchbox*, the highly efficient systems of metropolitan life—trains, offices, delivery networks—are shown to coexist with emotional emptiness, suggesting that connectivity does not necessarily produce human intimacy.

In this sense, contemporary parallel cinema critiques neoliberal modernity not through overt political rhetoric but through everyday realism, affective detail, and intimate narratives that reveal what development discourse often obscures: the emotional and human costs of mobility. Migration is shown not as liberation from rural backwardness or entry into modern success, but as a precarious negotiation with invisibility, instability, loneliness, and unequal belonging. At the same time, these films do not reduce migrants or displaced subjects to passive victims. What emerges across all three narratives is a quieter discourse of resilience. Natha survives and continues laboring despite systemic abandonment. Munna persists in dreaming beyond his immediate conditions. Yasmin seeks expression through her video diaries even within emotional suffocation. Shaikh resists anonymity through sociability and optimism. Ila and Saajan create intimacy through letters despite their loneliness. These gestures may not overturn structural inequality, but they reveal the persistence of desire, memory, communication, and emotional endurance within precarious conditions.

Migration in these films therefore becomes a critical cinematic lens through which questions of identity, marginality, and resilience are explored in contemporary India. To migrate is not merely to change physical location; it is to renegotiate one's relationship with labor, memory, community, intimacy, and selfhood. These films remind us that migration is lived not only in movement but in waiting, repetition, longing, estrangement, and adaptation.

Ultimately, *Peepli Live*, *Dhobi Ghat*, and *The Lunchbox* demonstrate the capacity of contemporary Indian parallel cinema to move beyond policy-driven or demographic understandings of migration and foreground its deeply human dimensions. Through realism, spatial sensitivity, affective storytelling, and formal restraint, these films reveal migration as one of the defining experiences of contemporary Indian life—at once economic and emotional, political and

personal, painful and resilient. In doing so, they offer a nuanced critique of globalization and modernity while affirming cinema's power to render visible the intimate realities of displacement, marginality, and the enduring search for belonging.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/76**SILENCE AS EVIDENCE OF BROKEN BELONGING, NOT
EMOTIONAL HEALING IN ANUJA CHAUHAN'S BAAZ****VARSHINI PRIYA B.**Research Scholar, Department of English
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Auxilium College, Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore, India**Abstract**

This study examines the representation of displacement and the refusal to speak about home in *Baaz* by interpreting silence through the philosophical framework of Paul Ricoeur. In general, Migration narratives frequently portray displaced communities as sustaining emotional ties to their homeland through nostalgia and recollection. However, the novel *Baaz* presents a contrasting configuration in which refugees do not recount memories of their past or express longing for their homeland, suggesting that the experience of belonging has been destabilized by violence and forced migration. The refugee camp is depicted as a space of survival where individuals continue living in physical safety while remaining detached from the idea of home. This persistent silence surrounding the homeland can be understood through Ricoeur's argument that absence and forgetting are not merely losses of memory, but outcomes produced by historical processes that generate gaps in collective remembrance. Drawing on this perspective, the paper employs close textual analysis to examine how the refusal to speak about home functions as a strategic response to trauma rather than a sign of emotional recovery. The study argues that silence in the novel signals the erosion of social bonds and the loss of reference to homeland, revealing displacement as a condition of survival marked by absence rather than restoration. Thus, the paper contributes to migration and diaspora studies by demonstrating how contemporary popular fiction represents silence as a historically produced mechanism of endurance in the aftermath of forced migration.

Keywords: Broken Belonging, Displacement, Forgetting, Migration, Silence**Introduction**

War is a never-ending affair; it does not end just because of a cease-fire or a border crossing. For exiled communities, the violence that has ended can be the beginning of another kind of suffering shaped by exile, uncertainty, and emotional disconnection. In migration narratives, refugees are often portrayed as people who maintain their connection with the home country through 'nostalgia' and 'recall', in addition to the longing to return. Memory in these narratives acts as an affective

link connecting displaced individuals to lost spaces, cultural identity, and personal history. The homeland is maintained by stories and loving memories and idealized remembrance. However, trauma-induced displacement does not allow such healing forms of memory. In conditions shaped by genocide, forced migration and prolonged violence, the homeland itself may become psychologically inaccessible, transforming silence into a necessary mode of survival rather than an absence of feeling.

The issues concerning displacement, trauma, and memory occupy a central place within cultural memory and migration studies. Existing academic analysis about collective identity has largely focused on refugee communities' efforts to maintain collective identity through memory, testimony, and intergenerational transmission of memory. Similarly, trauma studies highlight narration and witnessing as significant mechanisms through which historical sufferings of trauma become public consciousness. Within these approaches, silence is often interpreted as repression, incompleteness, or emotional incapacity. Comparatively less attention has been given to the narratives that depicts in the opposite direction; stories in which the people who have lost their homeland willfully deny the urge to remember where they came from, because the country itself is too much a part of the violence and loss. Not being able to remember lovingly then may thus manifest not only emotional healing but the collapse of belonging itself.

This perspective is especially significant in the context of *Baaz*, which takes place during the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971 and the ensuing refugee situation. The novel tracks the lives of Ishaan Faujdaar, the Indian Air Force pilot, and Tehmina Dadyseth, the photojournalist, while also foregrounding the plight of the displaced civilians from East Pakistan who reside in refugee camps on the Indian side of the border. While there's military action and patriotic slogans, Chauhan repeatedly delves away from heroic nationalism and shifts towards the emotional aspects of displacement, disease, famine, and civilian suffering. More importantly, the refugee in the novel seldom nostalgically remembers their homeland or long for their return. East Pakistan's presence in the novel lies largely in the negative—the void, the unspoken, the unrepresented.

The present study looks at this silence from a philosophical perspective in the light of the works of Paul Ricoeur, more precisely in the light of his concept of forgetting, historical gaps and finally the “reserve of forgetting” in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004). Ricoeur contends that forgetting is not just the opposite of remembering but also a structural moment of memory, in which the absence and silence of trauma history persist and continue to influence consciousness. Through this framework, the present employs close textual analysis to examine how *Baaz* represents displacement through silence surrounding homeland memory. The study argues that the refugees' refusal to nostalgically remember home does not signify emotional recovery or narrative absence. Rather, the novel brings silence as a historical phenomenon, a way of

living through which the displaced person is emotionally alienated from the homeland. By analyzing how Chauhan reconfigures memory through absence rather than recollection, the study contributes to migration and diaspora studies by demonstrating how contemporary South Asian popular fiction represents fractured belonging in the aftermath of traumatic displacement.

Literature Review

Migration and displacement narratives occupy a significant place within cultural memory studies, particularly in discussions concerning trauma, homeland, exile, and belonging. Current scholarship often explores the significance of maintaining emotions, feelings, or memories of the homeland through such means as nostalgia, remembering, witnessing, and intergenerational memory transmission within the community of the displaced. Refugee literature is most frequently read in terms of frameworks centered on recollection as a healing process for persons who have been displaced in order to preserve identity in the face of geographical disconnection. Likewise, the field of trauma studies has been preoccupied with witnessing, narration, and memorialization as significant ways in which historical suffering has been brought to the forefront of cultural consciousness. But in comparison, little scholarly attention has been tending to narratives, where there is no nostalgic recollection, nor are people who are uprooted to such a degree that the homeland itself becomes emotionally distant. Despite its significance for the representation of belonging that has been fractured by traumatic displacement, the subject of memory has been under-explored, particularly in popular fiction.

Academic analysis on *Baaz* is still quite scarce and thematic in focus. Sunil Gatadi, Satyavathi vallabhapurapu and D. Srinivas's article "Echoes of War and Wings of Love: A Critical Study of Anuja Chauhan's Romantic Novel *Baaz*" discusses the novel's characterization, romance and the representation of war; it fails to address memory, displacement and narrative silence. Likewise, there is an equally important study by Arshdeep Kaur Chadha and Dr. Surbhi Saraswat, titled "Navigating Socio-Cultural Realities through the Lens of Modern Indian Womanhood in *The Zoya Factor*, *Those Pricey Thakur Girls*, and *Baaz*," which examines the gender and socio-cultural portrayal in Chauhan's fiction, but fails to discuss refugee memory or traumatic displacement. The present study fills this void by analyzing *Baaz*'s silence in light of the philosophy of forgetting developed by Paul Ricoeur, the concept of historical gaps, and the reserve of forgetting.

Theoretical Framework

In the present study, silence about homeland memory in *Baaz* is interpreted by the philosophical framework of Paul Ricoeur in his *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004). Ricoeur challenges the common conception of forgetting as an absence or a wiping away of memories. Rather he suggests that forgetting is a structural phenomenon within the process of remembering, and that any historical experience engenders absences, omissions, and gaps in the representation of the narrative. "Absence" is no longer a condition but something that is the product of

a historical process, and, as he puts it, “the real machine for producing gaps” (68). Silence is not, in this context, merely the absence of words or an attempt to suppress them but is rather a phenomenon that is the product of history and has its source in traumatic experience.

Ricoeur further introduced the concept of “reserve of forgetting” which can be a source of memory and history, not a loss. This is important in the context of traumatic displacement, in which immediate memory can be too painful. In this sense, forgetting may be a protective mechanism that enables persons and communities to withstand experiences that are too difficult to be fully integrated into the conscious narrative. Ricoeur also argues that silence will not heal trauma, that the trauma is present, but “have not been definitively erased but simply rendered inaccessible, unavailable” (416). Based on these concepts, the present study examines how the novel *Baaz* represents refugee silence, not as emotional healing, but rather a survival mechanism generated by displacement and violence. The framework helps the study to see the lack of nostalgic memories as evidence of a broken sense of belonging, and not as narrative deficiency.

Analysis

Set during the tumultuous period of the 1971 Liberation Movement of Bangladesh, *Baaz* combines violence and emotion, displacement and trauma, and the struggle for divided identity. Although the novel follows the lives of Indian Air Force pilot Ishaan Faujdaar and photojournalist Tehmina “Tinka” Dadyseth, Chauhan repeatedly shifts narrative attention away from military heroism toward the humanitarian crisis unfolding across the Indo-East Pakistan border. The novel begins with the war described in casual talk among Air Force officers, where political unrest seems remote and uncertain. Characters speculate the possibility of conflict, but goes on with their usual daily activities, events, and family life. This early conversation becomes structurally significant because it anticipates the change of war from being an abstract political uncertainty to an actual humanitarian emergency.

Chauhan slowly taints the aura of comfort in the Air Force family. The optimistic beats of marriage, parties, shopping and military brotherhood gradually give way to the harsh realities of political violence in East Pakistan. News of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s arrest and the military crackdown against Bengali civilians begins to intrude into everyday life (Chauhan 65). The “scores of thinkers, journalists and student activists are brutally killed on the night of 25 March” after Operation Searchlight, and “rape and death and the murder of babies” has permeated Calcutta (Chauhan 68). The violence isn’t presented in a dramatic way, but it’s presented in a fragmented way, through a few snippets, a few conversations, through the growing visibility of civilians entering the city from the war. This indirect representation is important as Chauhan does not romanticize suffering by giving it too much detail. Instead, trauma circulates quietly through atmosphere, interruption, and emotional unease.

The humanitarian crisis is more apparent when Tinka and Kainaz Dadyseth meet the refugees from East Pakistan. Refugees appear “stoic and emaciated,” carrying “terrible tales of atrocities” while Calcutta itself begins “groaning with the sicknesses they have bought with them” (Chauhan 68). The city becomes an extension of the war zone because of disease, displacement, and overcrowding. Most importantly, the refugees are portrayed not as individual stories, but through collective physical and emotional fatigue. Chauhan always subtly diverts from grandiose storytelling to the ethos of the aftermath of mass displacement.

The refugee camp itself is the epitome of this atmosphere. Chauhan describes the camp as:

“Rows of thatched bamboo tents are lined up as far as the eye can see. Blank-eyed women, many of them pregnant, sit before woodfires, stirring pots of boiling rice. Half of them carry fitfully crying, painfully emaciated babies in their laps. Their bony, angry-eyed menfolk lounge sullenly on string beds under the trees. There is a pungent smell - a mixture of rancid rice, rotting sewage and burning plastic.” (160)

The passage constructs displacement not just as a shift of location, but as a disintegration of emotions. What is visible in the camp are signs of normal everyday life: cooking fires, kids, communal gathering, and presence of family. However, Chauhan takes all the emotional warmth and stability out of these familiar activities systematically. The “blank-eyed women,” “emaciated babies,” and “angry-eyed menfolk” reflect a condition of psychological numbness rather than temporary suffering alone (Chauhan 160). They keep going on with the routines they need to survive biologically but are emotionally distant from their daily life and from the country they had to leave. The refugee camp, therefore, becomes the liminal space between life and home.

This sense of collapse is further heightened by the sensory images. The stench of “rotting sewage and burning plastic” turns the camp into a place that evokes decay, disease and fatigue, not refuge or restoration (Chauhan 160). Hunger, sickness, overcrowding, and exhaustion are the most prominent features of the environment. The refugees have not been left in the midst of war, but the aftereffects of war have left them in unstable mental and physical states. The camp therefore functions as a suspended space where survival exists without emotional recovery. Rather than allowing refugees to narrate detailed recollections of their homeland, Chauhan structures trauma indirectly through atmosphere, bodily exhaustion, and sensory imagery. The refugees are visible throughout the story, and their suffering is emphasized throughout by various illnesses, hunger, emotional numbness, and overcrowding in the camps. Yet the novel simultaneously withholds elaborate testimony about the homeland itself. The refugees seldom talk about their villages, family stories, or days of joy in the East Pakistan. This imbalance becomes structurally significant because Chauhan substitutes an emotional atmosphere for direct narration. Trauma is conveyed less in words than in silence, incomplete

words, exhausted bodies, and the suffocation of the refugee tent. The camp itself begins to function as a testimony. The sight of “blank-eyed women,” the presence of “emaciated babies,” and the smell of “rotting sewage and burning plastic” communicate the continuing psychological effects of displacement without requiring explicit narration of past atrocities (Chauhan 160). Silence therefore operates not as narrative emptiness but as an alternative representational mode through which trauma remains emotionally present while resisting complete articulation.

More significantly, Chauhan repeatedly avoids nostalgic reconstruction of East Pakistan. Conventional migration narratives often sustain belonging through memory, where displaced communities preserve emotional continuity by affectionately recalling villages, homes, family traditions, or moments of happiness associated with the homeland. But in *Baaz*, this sort of 'nostalgic recall' is conspicuously missing. Longing and emotional intimacy are rarely shown towards the past life of the refugees. The homeland's existence in the narrative is mostly in silence and emotional distance.

In traditional migration stories, nostalgia functions as a conduit of emotion for the displaced communities to their lost homelands. However, in *Baaz* the restoration becomes impossible, as the homeland itself has become a place of violence and persecution. Refugees can no longer recall their memories of East Pakistan with preference or affection because these recollections are connected to the events of massacre, displacement, sexual violence, disease, and great loss. As a result, nostalgia collapses under the weight of trauma, leaving silence as the prevailing mode through which the homeland persists in collective consciousness.

The emotional significance of this absence becomes clearer in the light of Paul Ricoeur's philosophical approach to memory and forgetting through his work *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004). Ricoeur asserts that “absence is then no longer a state but the result of a work of history, the true machine for producing gaps,” (366). This perspective is essential for understanding the emotional landscape depicted in *Baaz*. The silence of the refugees about East Pakistan is not an unwitting absence or lack of narrative. Rather, the violence stemming from displacement generates gaps in memory. The homeland becomes a space psychologically inaccessible due to genocide, forced migration, persecution, and social disintegration.

Throughout the novel, the refugees' sense of belonging to their homeland has been transformed. Their homeland still remains in their consciousness, but it is no longer a comforting emotional anchor. Although the refugees manage to survive physically, their emotional ties to home have been severely disrupted. Ricoeur's assertion that the trauma “have not been definitively erased but simply rendered inaccessible, unavailable” (416) powerfully sheds light on this condition. Trauma lingers in silence, even when it cannot be fully articulated. Emotional numbness

is apparent everywhere in the refugee camps, and so is the long-standing silence of suffering.

This condition is manifested especially in Tinka's ideological struggle against the nationalism of World War II. Throughout the novel, Tinka defies the emotional reasoning of patriotic hatred that is ubiquitous in military discussions. During a conversation with military officers and Mukti Bahini members, she asserts that “there is no such thing as a good war” (Chauhan 127). Later, when an old debate statement is republished in the newspapers, Tinka’s position becomes even clearer:

“People are just people. Before they are Indian or Pakistani or Hindu or Muslim. Any religion, any nation, or any person that seeks to elevate itself by denigrating another nation, religion, or individual deserves condemnation. I will proclaim Hindustan Zindabad a million times with full conviction, but even under duress, I will never say Islam Murdabad or Pakistan Murdabad.” (189)

Tinka’s refusal to engage in hatred stands in stark contrast to the emotional state fostered by displacement. Macho da, an undercover operative for the Mukti Bahini (the Bangladeshi guerrilla resistance movement) during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971 explains that wartime animosity itself serves as a mechanism for emotional cohesion, stating, “Abusing the dushman is a cherished ritual for us. It creates a bond and a common enemy” (Chauhan 191). Consequently, the suffering of refugees exists within a social environment where survival hinges not on restorative nostalgia, but on collective anger, silence, and emotional endurance. Ricoeur posits that “there also exists a reserve of forgetting, which can be a resource for memory and for history” (284). This concept is pivotal in understanding the silence of refugees in *Baaz*. Forgetting, in this context, does not imply total erasure. Instead, silence acts in a protective capacity, enabling those who are silenced to live their lives without repeatedly encountering trauma. The refugees refrain from nostalgically reconstructing East Pakistan because remembering comes with a danger to their psychological lives. Thus, silence emerges not as a means of emotional healing but as a survival mechanism born of traumatic displacement.

Simultaneously, Chauhan illustrates that trauma continues to shape consciousness below the surface of this silence. Even though they may have escaped physically, the refugees' emotional numbness, exhaustion and lack of nostalgic feeling of belonging shows that violence persists inside themselves. Because of its lack of significance, the homeland is never forgotten—but it remains emotionally elusive, for it has been bound up in suffering. Therefore, the memory of homeland lives on not because of love for those past memories but due to the powerful emotional impact of its absence.

The silence surrounding the theme of homeland memory in *Baaz* is not incidental but rather structurally embedded within the narrative form itself. Chauhan

continually emphasizes their distress as refugees without providing any emotional details of their country. This intentional imbalance transforms silence into a narrative technique that represents displacement not merely as a longing for return, but as a profound estrangement from the very possibility of returning. By eschewing restorative nostalgia, the novel prevents the homeland from becoming emotionally recoverable within the confines of narrative memory. As a result, silence functions not as a narrative deficiency but as a formal strategy that maintains the psychological instability of traumatic displacement.

Through these narrative techniques, *Baaz* challenges conventional migration narratives that equate displacement with nostalgic attachment and emotional continuity. Instead, Chauhan portrays displacement as a state of fractured belonging, where refugees physically survive while becoming emotionally estranged from their homeland. Silence here is not a space of emotional repair or a lack, but a historically produced space of endurance, transforming memory, belonging, and identity in the context of traumatic displacement. Ultimately, in *Baaz*, the inability to return to a nostalgic past is the strongest symbol of refugee trauma.

Discussion and Findings

The analysis of *Baaz* presents an intriguing departure from the prevailing migration narratives that often focus on emotional continuity through nostalgia and fond recollections of one's homeland. In contrast to the notion of displacement as a condition shaped by a desire to return, Chauhan focuses on the refugee experience through the subject of emotional disassociation, the inexpressiveness of silence, and the eventual breakdown of nostalgic attachment. In this study, the concept of homeland in *Baaz* is not found as a place of emotional recovery, but rather as a historically problematic absence, as a space that is psychologically never found by the displaced person.

One key finding of this study is that the silence in the novel is not a failure of the narrative but is a state that is historically formed. Although displacement has had a deep impact on the lives of refugees in the camp, they generally do not have recollections of their villages, homes, or happy times in East Pakistan. This lack of recollection holds significant meaning, as the narrative consistently highlights refugee suffering while concurrently omitting restorative memories of home. Instead of the witness statements, Chauhan's narrative creates an atmosphere of decay in the senses, a sense of numbness in the emotions, and physical fatigue. Trauma is conveyed not through detailed reminiscences but through the silence of surrounding experiences that can no longer be emotionally inhabited.

Furthermore, the study reveals that nostalgia itself tends to dissolve in the context of traumatic displacement. Memory plays a key role in the traditional migrant narrative as a means of sustaining a sense of belonging in the face of geographical estrangement but in *Baaz* the homeland is interwoven with experiences of genocide, persecution, disease and forced migration. To remember home

necessitates reliving violence, which complicates the refugees' ability to reconstruct their memories of East Pakistan through affectionate remembrance or emotional longing. In this sense, the novel is an attempt to undermine the idea of a thriving community that can always be sustained by a nostalgic attachment to homeland.

This narrative structure aligns with the philosophy of memory and forgetting articulated by Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur's perspective on historical "gaps" and a "reserve of forgetting" offer a way to explain silence as not simply blanking out, but act as a mechanism of survival in the wake of traumatic history. The refugees' reluctance to nostalgically remember their home reflects neither a process of emotional healing nor complete erasure. Instead, silence emerges as a protective strategy, facilitating survival without necessitating an ongoing confrontation with traumatic memories. Meanwhile, the undercurrents of this trauma are still structurally present and are sometimes expressed as emotional exhaustion, psychological detachment, and a broken sense of belonging.

One more significant aspect of Chauhan's *Baaz* is her conscious attempt not to turn 'refugee experience' into 'sentimental resilience' or 'nationalistic show'. While the novel does include elements of military heroism and patriotic discourse, it persistently challenges celebratory war narratives through Tinka's pacifist viewpoint and the persistent recognition of civilian suffering. The refugee camp is set as the emotional centre of the story, shifting the emphasis away from military success to psychological effects of displacement. In this way, *Baaz* recasts war not as a concluded historical event but rather as an ongoing emotional reality that endures within displaced individuals and fractured memories.

Overall, silence is a conscious thematic choice in *Baaz*, where the experience of displacement is represented as a means of survival without the ability to heal emotions. Memories of the homeland remain inherently present yet emotionally unreachable, leading to a situation where refugees continue to exist while becoming estranged from the notion of home. This article situates itself within the fields of migration and diaspora studies, arguing that the articulations of absence in contemporary South Asian popular fiction are not idealized nostalgic representations, but rather, an empathetic rendering of the absence produced in history, the fracturing of belonging, and the complexities of emotional return to the past.

Conclusion

Beyond the epic stories of heroism and nationalism, *Baaz* is a tender memorial to the consequences of the Bangladesh Liberation War. Rather than reveling in victory, the novel depicts a lesser-known sonorous aftertaste of violence: the grieving citizens of the ruins, who must deal with the aftertaste of war without being able to articulate the painful truths that lie within. The refugees have to make long journeys and seek refuge, yet their emotional ties to the homeland they left behind remain unhealed. Within them, there is a deep silence, a home, but not of

warmth or comfort. The past is not altogether ignored or brazenly deceived, but it exists in a liminal space between absence and presence, like a wound that bubbles through the surface of everyday life.

This research highlights that it is important to not mistake such silence as a healing of emotions or as a lack of story. Based on the philosophical ideas of Paul Ricoeur, it claims that forgetting is not simply the negative side of memory, but a multifaceted, history-coded phenomenon that creates gaps and absences within remembrance itself. In *Baaz*, these gaps are reflected in the unwillingness of the refugees to romantically reconstruct East Pakistan. The homeland becomes psychologically elusive, tainted by the weight of genocide, displacement, hunger, and profound loss. Here, silence acts as a mode of endurance, a finesse of living in a way that doesn't hurt, doesn't reopen the wounds that need to be left closed.

Chauhan's narration is significant because it deconstructs the idea of belonging that is tied to happy memories of home. The significance of Chauhan's narrative lies in the dismantling of the idea of belonging that is synonymous with happy memories of home. While many refugee narratives use nostalgia to forge emotional connections to the past, *Baaz* portrays a stark reality where traumatic violence disrupts the possibility of nostalgic belonging. The refugees continue, but in order to survive, they must move away from the homeland they once loved. Campfires still flicker, children's cries echo, and daily routines persist, yet beneath these visible signs of life lies a deep silence shaped by histories that are too heavy to fully inhabit.

In this sense, the novel transforms silence into a powerful language of displacement. Unspoken words are more revealing than detailed reports. Trauma does not fade away with constant retelling; it lives on in emotional numbness, in severed attachments, in the lack of affectionate memory of what home once was. So, the refugees in *Baaz* are in a state of lack and stuck: The homeland are so present that they hurt, and it's so distant that they cannot be reached.

The present study thus further deepens the understanding of migration and diaspora by providing a visionary example of how the South Asian fiction of the present is reshaping cultural memory through the means of silence, absence, and the total undoing of restorative nostalgia. It also builds on Ricoeurian memory studies by highlighting how "the reserve of forgetting" serves as a mechanism of survival rather than a mechanism of erasure in refugee narratives. Future research could follow up on this discussion by exploring the complex interplay between silence, displacement, and fragmented belonging in other narratives of the South Asian refugee, Partition, war, and postcolonial migration. Comparative analyses that explore issues of gendered trauma, intergenerational memory, and post-nostalgia in literature on displacement may help illuminate how silence continues to influence the cultural memory in the current literary representations of displacement.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/77**TEMPORARY MIGRATION: A STUDY ON TWO DISTRICTS OF WEST BENGAL****MS. SURAYA ROY**

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Abstract

This paper conducted a primary survey of 480 households from backward district (Cooch Behar) and advance districts (South twenty-four Parganas) of West Bengal to understand the factors responsible for large scale out migration from the state in recent years. It examines the role of socio-economic and demographic factors both at the household and individual level for this purpose. At the broader level, we observed that the incidence of short-term migration is low in rural West Bengal as migrants in both districts stayed at their destination for most parts of the year. Further, the outmigration from these districts is mainly towards the southern states of India. From the analysis we find that individual from the households with higher working population, higher debt burden and lower land holdings have higher probability migrate for work outside the state. At the individual level, the result show that young male married and less educated person choose to migrate more than others. The study also finds that outmigration led to convergence of work at the destination as most of the migrants are engaged in three activities namely construction, textiles and brick manufacturing. Outmigration further improved the economic condition of migrants by providing an opportunity to get employed and earn higher in comparison to their home.

Keywords: Out Migration, MPCE, Socio economic factor, West Bengal, Logit model

I. Introduction

Temporary internal migration for employment is a common form of mobility in rural India, and it is increasing over time. It could be of three forms depending on - the availability of seasonal employment at the place of origin, the availability of seasonal employment at the destination, and lastly those that is not associated with the seasonal factors. Numerous studies observed that temporary migration plays a significant role in the rural economy, serving not only as a survival strategy but also as an avenue for households to diversify their economic activity outside of the agricultural sector in order to obtain additional sources of income (Deshingkar and Akter, 5). In India, due to regional inequality and uneven development, workers from backward regions migrate either temporarily or permanently to the comparatively advanced regions. The states such as Bihar, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand witnessed a huge outflow of migration, which was mainly directed towards the better-off states like Maharashtra, Delhi, and Kerala (Rajan and

Sarkar, 356; Keshri and Bhagat, 87). West Bengal has also emerged as one of the states with a high temporary migration from both the rural and urban sectors. Therefore, an analysis of outmigration from West Bengal is important.

To understand the process of out-migration from West Bengal, one has to look into its earlier stages of development. It may be noted that West Bengal occupied the second position in terms of the per capita NSDP in the early 1960s. The presence of adequate infrastructure, including ports, an internal river transport system, and a well-developed communication and transit network, facilitated industrial expansion in the state at that time. Consequently, the process of urbanisation began in the eastern part of India, based on Kolkata (Dasgupta, 281; De Haan, 932). Hence, the industrial sector of West Bengal attracted a significant number of workers from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, and Chennai at that time. The jute industry, coal mines, and tea plantations were the main sectors where migrant workers found employment. Moreover, as a result of the fast expansion of the groundwater irrigation system, the production of rice started increasing. This made the agriculture sector an additional destination for migrant workers throughout the harvest and transplanting periods. According to Rogaly, 24, compared to the sugar cooperatives in Gujarat, the rice farming in West Bengal at that time offered more options to the migrant workers. Therefore, migrants from various regions of India gathered predominantly in the southern central districts of the state, where they received higher wages in comparison to what they used to receive in their home areas.

However, according to the data available from the Census of India, migration to West Bengal started declining rapidly and out-migration from the state started increasing from the early 1990s. In the industrial sector, the state (more specifically, Kolkata) started losing its status as ‘the hub of commercial industries’ from 1960 onwards. Post-1960, the state has not seen the same level of development in the labour-intensive industrial sector as it has in Maharashtra and Gujarat. Along with this, the rural non-farm activity patterns have changed structurally, and the non-farm sector expanded across the state. However, it was found to be inadequate to provide jobs for the substantial portion of the working population that is semi-skilled or unskilled (Ghosh and Ghosal, 1177).

Furthermore, according to the 2011 Census, the proportion of the working-age population is high in West Bengal compared to the rest of India signifying that the state enjoys the ‘demographic dividend’. With the presence of the demographic dividend along with the low level of industrial growth and insufficient employment opportunities in the rural non-farm sector, the working-age population’s immediate choice is to relocate to an area with a high employment rate. Evidence reveals that West Bengal is not only less appealing to migrants from other states, but it also struggles to provide adequate jobs to its own working-age residents. As a result, both in the rural and urban sectors, out-migration rates have risen.

Against this background, the paper uses primary data collected from 480 rural households in two districts of West Bengal to understand the nature of out-migration from West Bengal. The objective of the paper is (i) To look into the socio-economic background of the migrant workers vis-à-vis the non-migrant workers; (ii) To discuss the process of migration and the activity status of the migrant workers at their designation; and (iii) To identify the factors that determine the rural people's decision to migrate.

This study is structured in eight sections, including the introduction. Section two provides a brief review of the theoretical and empirical literature focusing on the rural out-migration. Section three describes the method of field data collection and the methodology followed for data analysis. The fourth section looks into the socio-economic background of the sample individuals in terms of their migration status (i.e., migrants and non-migrants). The fifth section examines the migration process. The sixth section analyses the activity status of the migrant workers. The seventh section seeks to identify the factors that influence individuals' decisions to migrate. The final section summarises the main findings and provides the main conclusion of the study.

II. Literature Review

Temporary migration, a common coping strategy among rural households, has increased in the last few decades. According to (Lewis, 1956), the dual nature of the economy (i.e., an economy that splits between the modern sector and the traditional sector) is the main reason for migration. As the modern sector expands in urban areas, employment opportunities also increase. Apart from expansion of employment opportunities in the urban areas, there are also a couple of push factors that are associated with the area of origin. In between the push and pull factors, there exists a range of individual barriers like distance between the residence and the place of migration and the number of dependents in the family, that influence the decision to migrate. Along with that, there are some personal factors such as personal contacts and an individual's knowledge about the destination play a role in shaping the choice of migration (Lee, 1953).

According to (Todaro, 1943), the expected wage differential between rural and urban areas is one of the primary motivations behind migration. The expected wage is the product of a higher urban wage and the probability of being employed in the urban sector. As a result of that, however, it is possible that increasing migration rates at the destination are accompanied by a rising unemployment rate, which in turn promotes the expansion of the informal sector (Harris and Todaro, 1943; Todaro, 1944).

On the other hand, some micro studies emphasised that family decisions about migration are made collectively rather than by individuals in order to maximise expected income, reduce risk, and partially compensate for a market that is absent or incomplete. According to the 'new economics of migration hypothesis', labour migration is more than an issue of short-term survival. It is a conscious decision

taken to improve one's standard of living. For some families, migration is a way to diversify their sources of income and assets (Stark and Bloom, 175; Stark, 372). Stark and Fan, 310, emphasised that seasonal migration is an endogenous assessment of cost-benefit, involving factors such as duration of stay at home and the temporary separation and return, along with wage differences between origin and destination by the migrant individual.

In the context of the Indian economy, the economic reforms in the early 1990s had a profound impact on rural-urban migration. Some scholars argued that the reforms would enhance the level of economic activities in the economy and generate employment opportunities, hence leading to an increase in rural to urban migration. On the other hand, others argued that the economic reforms would adversely affect the rural economy. For instance, in the agriculture sector, reducing subsidies for agricultural input resulted in higher cultivation costs, leading to rising household indebtedness and prolonged agrarian crises. This acted as a push factor for individuals to transition from the farm sector to the non-farm sector. However, the growth of the non-farm sector is not significant enough to absorb all the workers, resulting in a steady increase in rural-urban migration for employment.

Some other micro-level studies observed that the individuals also migrate to adapt to the anticipated seasonal variation in employment opportunities in rural areas. In areas with limited crop diversification, there is a lean season that lasts between the planting and harvesting. During this time, there is a scarcity of agricultural jobs, leading people to migrate in order to ensure food security and maintain their consumption level (Mosse et.al, 3030; Sucharita, 245). Along with this, acute shocks such as drought and floods in rural areas caused large numbers of individuals to temporarily migrate to the urban areas (Deshingkar, 94).

Furthermore, temporary migration has been seen as a response to diversifying the earnings portfolios of socially backward households (scheduled castes and scheduled tribes) with lower economic conditions, higher indebtedness, and a lower level of education (Deshingkar and Start, 26; Keshri and Bhagat, 87; Mosse et al., 76; Parida and Madheswaran, 9; Rogaly et al., 4752). Several studies pointed out that temporary migration is not only a survival strategy for the poor households but also part of the accumulative strategies of the relatively better-off households. Majumder, 23, observed that underprivileged migrants from Bihar and Jharkhand migrate to brick kilns for survival. Deshingkar and Start, 22, on the other hand, argue that migrants from Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh have significantly improved their standard of living by working as sugarcane cutters, earth workers, and agricultural labourers at their destination. They invest their savings in agriculture and education for their children.

As regards the nature of the employment of the migrant workers at the destination, it is found that there is a huge concentration of migrant workers in the informal sectors. For the migrant workers, the construction sector and brick kilns are

important sources of employment. They employ workers through the middlemen. The migrants rely on them to get employment in these sectors at their destination. Apart from that, the migrant's social networks also play an important role in getting employment in the informal sector. The social network is often based on relatives, neighbours, friends, caste, and religion.

In the post-economic reforms period, regional inequality in terms of per capita income has increased among states and the developmental gap between rural and urban areas has widened within the state. This resulted in inter-state migration from the economically backward states to the economically advanced states. According to NSSO data, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Jharkhand exhibited the highest intensity of migration.

In the context of West Bengal, Banerjee and Das, 142, observed that since 1991 there has been a rise in out-migration. This can be attributed to the disparity in economic development between the rural and urban areas of the state. The development in the state is mostly focused in Kolkata, Durgapur, and Asansol, whereas a substantial part of Bengal is characterised by underdevelopment. Those cities offered employment opportunities, but they have already reached a state of saturation. Some micro-level studies noted that in drought-prone and economically poor areas of West Bengal, males migrate due to a compulsion to earn and survive. In a recent study, Reja, 1148, examined the migration pattern of a particular religious group, namely the Muslims in Murshidabad district. While Debnath and Kumar Nayak, 218, have focused on the push factors that drive migration in the drought-prone area of Bankura district, Sarkar and Mishra, 1413, focussed on a particular stream of migration to the construction sector in Dakshin Dinajpur district. However, these studies have not looked into the overall pattern of out-migration in a state. This study attempts to bridge this gap by comparing the migration patterns in two contrasting (advanced and backward) districts of West Bengal.

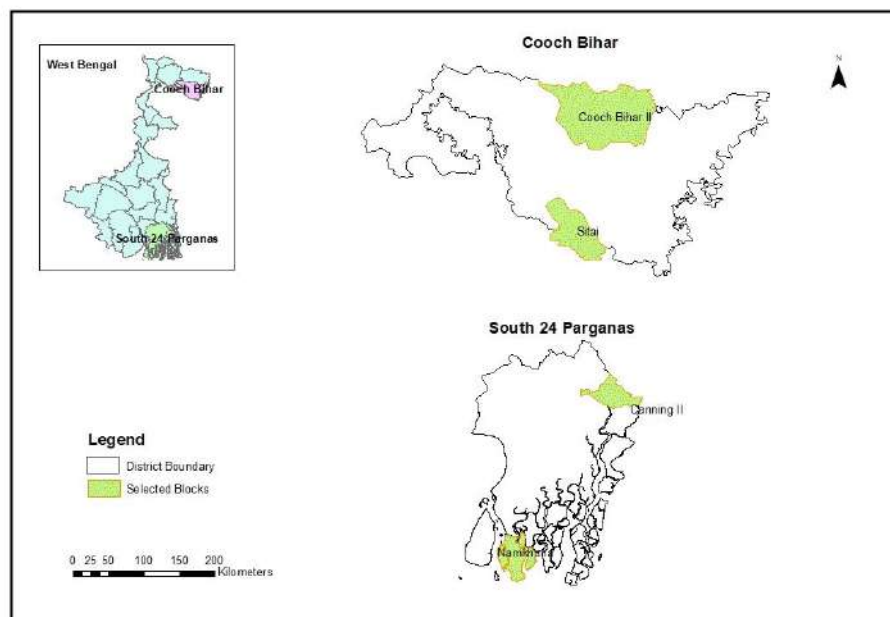
III. Data and Methodology

The primary data used in this study have been collected through a field survey during 1st June to 30th July, 2019-21 in two purposively selected districts of West Bengal that are South Twenty-four Parganas and Cooch Behar. While the former belongs to the southern part of West Bengal and has closer proximity to the city of Kolkata and is relatively advanced, the latter is in the northern part of the state and is relatively more rural and backward. However, both districts experienced the out-migration of rural people in search of employment in appreciable numbers mostly to other states in the recent years, as in many other districts.

From each district, we purposively selected two blocks such that they represent the overall features of the district. While the two blocks selected from South Twenty-four Parganas are Namkhana and Canning II, the selected blocks from Cooch Bihar are Cooch Behar II and Sitai. Following this, three-gram panchayats from each block and two villages from each gram panchayat were selected

randomly. Thus, we have selected a total of twenty-four villages – twelve from each district. For each village, a complete list of households was prepared, and the households were categorised as per their migration status - non-migrant households and migrant households. The non-migrant households are those that have no history of migration in the past or in which no member of the family has migrated in the last five years. Migrant households are those in which at least one member of the family migrated out for work for more than one month but less than eleven months in the previous year. We randomly selected 10 sample households from each of these categories in a village. Thus, we have a sample of 480 households (240 migrant and 240 non-migrant households) from 24 villages. For the analysis of field data, we mostly relied on tabular presentation of our results. However, we estimated the logit model to identify some determinants of out-migration in our study areas.

Figure 1: Map of the selected blocks of the selected districts



IV. Socio-economic Background of Migrants and Non-migrants

In Table 1, we have presented information on some indicators of socio-economic characteristics of the migrants and non-migrants in our study areas. Comparing the two groups, it is found that the individuals prefer to migrate at their early age. As clear from the table, in both the districts, the migrants belonged more to the lower age groups compared to the non-migrants. Thus, while almost 66 per cent of the migrants in the relatively advanced district (South Twenty-four Parganas) belonged to the first two age groups (15-24 and 25-34), 52 percent of the persons

from the non-migrant households belonged to the same age groups. In the backward district (Cooch Bihar), the shares of these two age groups among the migrant and non-migrant persons have been 65 and 53 respectively. Another point to note here is that there is an overwhelming preponderance of the males among the migrants in both the districts so that as high as 98 percent of them are males in the advanced district, which is 84 per cent in the backward district. It also appeared that the percentage of married persons is higher among the migrants compared to the non-migrants, in both the districts.

An examination of the educational background of the migrants and non-migrants seems to suggest that the relatively low educated persons migrate more in both the districts.

However, the information presented in Table 1 also indicates that perhaps a minimum level of education is required for an individual to venture into migration. This observation follows from the fact that almost 80 percent of the migrants in the advanced district belonged to the educational categories 'up to primary' or 'above primary and up to secondary', which in the backward district has been 78 per cent. In our study districts, there appears to be threshold level of education after which the motivation for migration falls, which is attainment of secondary education.

This might be attributed to the types of work (mostly unskilled manual work) the migrants are involved in the informal sector at their places of destination that doesn't require higher formal education.

When we consider the caste background of the migrants and non-migrants, it seems that there is no clear relation between their caste status and the migration status in our surveyed areas. Thus, while in one district the proportion of the SCs/STs is higher among the migrants compared to non-migrants, an opposite picture is observed in the other district.

Table1: Socio-economic Profile of the Workers in Sampled Households

Characteristics	Advanced District			Backward District		
	Migrant	Non-migrant	Migrant + Non-migrant	Migrant	Non-migrant	Migrant + Non-migrant
Age Group (% of persons)						
15-24	34.07	30.26	30.94	27.53	28.98	28.67
25-34	31.85	21.84	23.64	37.08	24.02	26.78
35-44	19.26	21.04	20.72	19.1	16.37	16.94
45-54	8.89	13.75	12.88	9.55	16.07	14.69
55-65	5.93	13.11	11.82	6.74	14.56	12.91
Educational Level (% of persons)						
Illiterate	12.41	21.65	20.03	21.35	23.02	22.67
Up to Primary	34.31	26.17	27.60	16.85	12.32	13.26
Up to Secondary	37.69	45.26	39.02	51.69	41.79	43.84
Up to Graduation and above	8.03	14.49	13.35	20.87	10.11	20.23
Average years of schooling	5.40	5.36	5.36	5.58	6.56	6.36
Social Groups (% of households)						
Scheduled Caste & Tribe	23.36	20.09	20.67	67.98	71.85	71.05
Other Backward Castes	38.69	39.41	39.28	20.79	20.67	20.70
General Castes	37.96	40.50	40.05	11.24	7.48	8.26
Landholdings (in bigha) groups (% of households)						
0.00-1.00	57.00	47.20	48.91	44.38	30.35	33.26
1.01-4.00	35.70	41.28	40.31	41.01	45.31	44.42
4.01-8.00	6.57	9.66	9.11	11.24	16.72	15.58
Above 8.00	0.73	1.87	1.67	3.93	7.48	6.74
Percentage of Males	97.81	44.08	53.53	84.83	46.33	54.30
Percentage of Married Persons	35.77	24.30	26.32	33.71	28.45	29.53
Worker-population ratio	51.89	48.59	49.00	58.00	48.00	50.00
Percentage of Indebted households	54.75	42.21	44.42	52.25	35.78	39.19
Monthly Per Capita Con Exp	1055.77	1165.91	1146.54	1151.59	1426.83	1369.86

Source : Field Survey

As regards the distribution of landholdings (owned land), it is observed that, compared to the non-migrants, the migrants are drawn relatively more from the lower landholding groups in both the districts. As shown in Table 1, in the advanced district, while 57 percent of the migrants belonged to the lowest landholding group (0.00 – 1.00 bigha), 47 percent of the non-migrants belonged to the same group. In the backward district, the percentages of migrants and non-migrants belonging to the lowest landholding group are 44 and 30, respectively. Table 1 also indicates that the worker-population ratio is higher among the migrant households (0.51 in the advanced district and 0.58 in the backward district) as compared to the non-migrant households (0.49 in the advanced district and 0.48 in the backward district). It implies that the availability of workers is higher among the migrant households that motivate some of them to migrant in search of employment opportunities elsewhere as such opportunities have been scarce locally.

Another notable observation from Table 1 is that the migrant workers' families have lower monthly per capita consumption expenditure compared to the non-migrant workers' families, in both the districts, thereby indicating poorer economic status of the former compared to the latter. Further, the incidence of indebtedness has been higher for the migrant families compared to the non-migrant families in both our surveyed districts.

V. The Process of Migration

Let us now look into the process of migration that is important to understand the ultimate outcome of migration. In the literature, it is suggested that the factors such as asymmetric information, social relations, and uncertainties may affect the process of migration (Mosse et.al. 2002; Mishra, 2020). Here we look into four aspects: (i) the percentage of migrant households that have just one migrant-member; (ii) the sources of information on the basis of which they migrate; (iii) destination of the migrants; and (iv) the duration of stay at the destination. Table 2 shows that there is a wide gap between the two districts with regard to the percentage of migrant households having only one migrant member. While in the relatively advanced district as high as 88 per cent of the migrant households are reported to have one migrant member each, the corresponding figure in the backward district is 69 per cent. The fact that multiple members of a family tend to migrate more in the backward district is understandable insofar as it lacked in earnings opportunities to a greater extent compared to the advanced district.

Table 2: Some Information about Migration Process in the Survey Areas

<i>Item</i>	<i>Advanced District</i>	<i>Backward District</i>
% of Household with more than one Out-migrant	12.5	30.83
Source of information for Out-migrants (% of cases)		
Relative	16.79	15.43
Contractor	54.01	67.43
Neighbour	7.30	5.71
Friend	15.33	6.29
Destination of the migrants (% of cases)		
Other State Urban	81.75	72.34
Other State Rural	1.46	5.85
Same State Urban	16.06	1.06
Same State Rural	0.73	0.53
Neighbouring Country	0.00	20.21
Total	100	100
Duration of Stay at Destination by Out-migrants (% of cases)		
Up to Six months	10.95	23.28
Six to Nine months	37.23	42.33
Nine to Eleven months	51.82	34.39
Source : Same as Table 1		

Table 2 also shows that more than half of the migrants in both the districts (54 percent in the advanced district and 67 percent in the backward district) moved and secured employment through labour contractors. It was revealed that the labour contractors contacted the prospective migrants a month prior to the actual migration day and advanced some money to secure their commitment to migrate. However, we observed that the functioning of the contractors varied depending upon the sector for which they were hiring. For instance, those contacting the workers to work in the construction sector (locally called *thikadars cum labour*

managers), belonged to the same or nearby villages. They give the workers some cash advances and accompany them to the site of work. They also help them in arranging accommodation. The payment to these migrant workers is done mostly on weekly or fortnightly basis after deducting the initial advances made. In the brick-kiln sector, the intermediaries (called *sardars*) take advances from the owners of brick-kilns that they, in turn, advance to the migrant workers. Here the amount of advance to the migrant workers varied between Rs. 15000 to Rs. 20000 that they are required to repay before returning home after completing the contracted work. These workers received payment at the piece rate.

Apart from the labour contractors, almost 32 percent of the migrants in the advanced district and 22 percent in the backward district sourced information about work from their relatives/friends. Apart from this, 5 to 7 percent of them obtained such information from the neighbours. It is also observed that 5 to 6 percent of the migrants migrated independently. Among them, individuals with a better education developed personal networks directly with employer to find employment, and the lesser educated ones searched for employment in the spot market or the labour market near railway station, tea stall, etc.

Table 2 also provides information regarding duration of stay at the destination by the migrants. It is evident that the incidence of short-term migration (less or equal to six months) is low in both the districts (11 percent in the advanced district and 23 percent in the backward district). The majority of the migrants (52 percent) in the advanced district migrated for a period of nine to eleven months. On the other hand, the majority (42 percent) of them in the backward district migrated for six to nine months. It is to be noted that those migrating for a shorter duration also work in agriculture in their villages in the *kharif* season and migrate in the slack (*rabi*) season when there is scarcity work at the local level.

As regards destination of the migrants, Table 2 shows that an overwhelming majority of the migrants from our survey areas migrated to the urban areas of other states (82 percent in the advanced district and 72 percent in the backward district). Apart from this, about 16 percent of the migrants from the advanced district migrated to the urban areas of the same state (mostly to Kolkata) and 20 percent in the backward district to the neighbouring country (Nepal and Bhutan).

We have also looked into the destination states of the migrants from our surveyed areas. Table 3 shows that 61 percent of the migrants from the advanced districts and 34 percent from the backward district migrated to the southern states of India. These states for the advanced district are Kerala (34.31 percent), Maharashtra (13.87 percent), Karnataka (5.84 percent), Tamil Nadu (4.38 percent), Telangana (3.65 percent), and Gujarat (2.19 percent). On the other hand, the southern states where they migrated from the backward district are Karnataka (18.52 percent), Kerala (8.47 percent), Telangana (5.29 percent), Gujarat (2.65 percent), Tamil Nadu (1.59 percent), and Maharashtra (1.06 percent). It also needs mention that a sizeable portion of the migrants from the advanced district also migrated to the

northern Indian state of Delhi (7.30 percent) and also within West Bengal (18.25 percent). Similarly, as high as 16.4 percent of the migrants from the backward district migrated to the northern Indian state of Rajasthan and another 12.17 percent to the neighbouring countries like Nepal and Bhutan.

Table 3: Choice of Destination States by the Migrants from the Study Areas (% of cases)

<i>Destination</i>	<i>Advanced district</i>	<i>Backward District</i>
Andhra Pradesh	2.92	4.32
Bihar	0.00	3.70
Delhi	7.30	3.17
Gujarat	2.19	2.65
Haryana	0.73	1.59
Karnataka	5.84	18.52
Kerala	34.31	8.47
Maharashtra	13.87	1.06
Odisha	5.11	1.06
Punjab	0.00	1.06
Rajasthan	0.73	16.40
Tamil Nadu	4.38	1.59
Telangana	3.65	5.29
Uttar Pradesh	0.00	0.53
West Bengal	18.25	2.65
North-Eastern States	0.73	7.94
Nepal	0.00	12.17
Bhutan	0.00	7.94
Total	100	100

Source : Same as Table 1

VI. Activity Status of Migrants

Let us now look into the activity status of the migrants both before and after migration. This will help us to know whether any occupational transition has taken place for them following migration. Table 4 shows that, in the advanced district, prior to migration, almost three-fifth of them worked as non-agricultural wage labourer, which is followed by agricultural wage labourers (21 per cent) and unemployed (16 percent). However, following migration, as high as 91 percent of them worked as non-agricultural wage labourers. In the backward district, the activity status of the migrants before migration differed slightly compared to the same in the advanced district. In this district, almost 41 percent of the migrants

were unemployed, 32 percent were non-agricultural wage labourers, 14 percent were agricultural wage labourers and 12 percent were cultivators. After migration, however, 96 percent of them got involved as non-agricultural wage labourers at their destination. This implies that there is a convergence of their occupations to a single activity after migration that is understandable insofar as they migrated to the urban areas of other states. There is also an element of occupational transition after migration for those involved in cultivation and agricultural wage work.

Table 4 : Percentage Share of Pre- and Post-Migration Usual Principal Activity Status of the Out-migrants (14<age<65) in Study Districts

<i>District</i>	<i>Usual Principal Activity Status</i>	<i>Before migration</i>	<i>After migration</i>
Advanced District	Agriculture Wage Worker	20.54	2.91
	Non-Agriculture Wage worker	59.30	94.10
	Cultivator	3.88	0.00
	Unemployed	16.28	0.00
	Regular Salaried	0.00	1.65
	Self-Employed	0.00	1.34
Backward District	Agriculture Wage Worker	14.53	0.52
	Non-Agriculture Wage worker	32.55	95.56
	Cultivator	11.63	0.00
	Unemployed	41.28	0.00
	Regular Salaried	0.00	2.18
	Self-Employed	0.00	1.74

Source : Same as Table 1

We have also looked into the various activities that the migrant workers are involved in at their places of destination. It is observed from Table 5 that majority of the migrants from both the districts worked as the 'construction worker' at their destination points. Thus, 77 out of a total of 131 migrants from the advanced district (59 percent) and 82 migrants out of a total of 172 migrants from the backward district (47 per cent) were involved in this sector. Next important activity for the migrants in the advanced district is 'textile work' (20 workers) in the advanced district and 'brick-kiln work' (31 workers) in the backward district. Apart from these activities, there are 34 workers that were involved in eleven different activities including as gig workers, restaurant worker, agriculture wage worker in the advanced district, and there are 59 workers that were involved in thirteen different activities in the backward district.

As regards the duration of stay at the destination points, Table 5 shows that for work in the construction sector, the migrants worked uninterruptedly for six to ten months, those in brick-kiln work did so for six to seven months, and those in textile work worked for eight to ten months. For all other activities, the duration of stay varied from a minimum of three months to a maximum of eleven months. Table 5 also reveals that for the major activities like construction work, the destination states for the migrant workers in the advanced district have been Kerala and Maharashtra (in order of importance); destination states for the same activity in the backward district have been Telangana, Arunachal Pradesh and the neighbouring country Bhutan.

Table 5: Economic Activities of the Migrant Workers at the Destination							
District	Activity	No. of workers	Duration of Stay (months)	Destination State*	Average Working Hours Per day	Earnings Per Hour [Rs.]	Years of experience **
Advanced District	Construction work	77	6-10	Kerala, Maharashtra	11	77	1-7'
	Brick-kiln work	1	6	Karnataka	12	42	2
	Furniture work	1	6-8	Kerala	12	63	8
	Textile work	20	8-10	West Bengal, Maharashtra	12	61	5
	Work in Plywood factory	0	-	-	-	-	-
	Electrical work	2	3-5	Maharashtra	9	63	3-5'
	Work in Plastic factory	0	-	-	-	-	-
	Worker at restaurant	6	8-10	Kolkata, Maharashtra	10	48	1-6'
	Gig worker	8	4-7	Kolkata, Delhi	11	47	1-2'
	Domestic help	2	10-11	Kolkata	8	16	2-5'
	Agriculture worker	4	6-8	Andhra Pradesh	8	78	0-5'
	Supervisory work	3	4-6	Kolkata	9	47	6
	Work in other sectors	5	6-8	Karnataka, Maharashtra	12	46	2
	Self-employed	2	7-9	Karnataka, Kolkata	12	43	6
Backward District	Construction work	82	6-10	Telengana, Bhutan	11	67	7
	Brick-kiln work	31	6-7	Nepal, Assam, Bihar	12	45	8
	Furniture work	4	7-10	Rajasthan, Assam	9	80	9
	Textile work	4	8-10	Karnataka	12	67	6
	Work in Plywood factory	7	7-8	Karnataka, Nepal	10	72	5
	Electrical work	7	7-11	Manipur Tripura, Delhi	8	79	8
	Work in Plastic factory	3	8-9	Karnataka	11	59	9
	Worker at restaurant	6	8-10	Rajasthan, Bhutan	8	61	10
	Gig worker	4	8-10	Tamil Nadu	11	50	3
	Domestic help	8	10	Rajasthan	8	28	7
	Agriculture worker	1	6-7	Punjab	8	63	5
	Supervisory work	5	4-6	Telengana, Delhi	8	80	7
	Work in other sectors	7	6-8	Assam, Gujarat	12	42	3
	Self-employed	3	8-10	Gujarat, Karnataka, Assam	12	45	8

Source: Same as Table 1

For textile work, the migrants from the advanced district either remained in West Bengal (in the areas surrounding Kolkata) or went to Maharashtra. On the other hand, the brick-kiln workers from the backward district went to Assam and the neighbouring country Nepal. The other migrants from both the districts are spread over a number of states and no clear pattern is discernible in this regard.

Regarding the hours of work, it is found that the migrants from both the districts involved in the brick kiln work, textile work, and the self-employed, have worked for 12 hours a day. On the other hand, migrants from both the districts involved in domestic help and agriculture work worked for eight hours a day. Additionally, migrants from the backward district involved in electric work, restaurant work, and supervisory work worked for eight hours a day. At destination, the mode value of hours of work by migrant workers from both the districts is found to be 12 hours.

Table 5 further reveals that while the average earnings per hour have been highest for the migrant workers involved in the construction sector in the advanced district, the same has been highest for the furniture work and supervisory work in the backward district. However, in both districts, average gross earnings per day have been the lowest for domestic workers. It is also noticeable that the earnings of 77 percent of the migrant workers from the advanced district and 69 percent from the backward district were above Rs. 50 per hour, and the earnings of the rest of the migrants varied from Rs. 40 to Rs. 50. However, there is a lack of uniformity with regard to average earnings per hour across various activities. While in the advanced district it varied between Rs. 77 and Rs. 16, in the backward district it varied between Rs. 80 and Rs. 28.

Wide variation is also observed regarding the work experience of the migrant workers in the respective sectors. For instance, migrants from the advanced district involved in furniture work accumulated eight years of prior work experience, whereas those involved in other sectors had two years of previous work experience. From the backward district, migrants engaged in restaurant work had ten years of prior experience, and those who worked as gig workers and those involved in other sectors had three years of experience.

VII. Determinants of Out-migration

This section identifies the factors that significantly influence an individual's decision to migrate. For this purpose, we have estimated the logit model, as mentioned above. In the logit model, the dependent variable is a binary variable that is assigned value '1' if the person is a migrant and '0' otherwise. The set of explanatory variables include both the individual-level characteristics and the household-level characteristics of the respondents. Table 6 provides the list of explanatory variables and their hypothesised relationship with the probability to migrate by the workers in our study areas. We hypothesise that the probability to migrate is higher for the males, younger, and married individuals. However, the relationship between the level of education and the probability to migrate is

hypothesised to be negative. Among the household-level variables, it is hypothesised that the lower caste people (SCs/STs and OBCs) are more likely to migrate compared to the general caste people. It is also hypothesised that the people from the lower landholding groups, and also those having lower monthly per capita consumption expenditure are more likely to migrate in our survey areas. Further, those drawn from the households with higher worker-population ratio and having loan burden are more likely to migrate according to our hypothesis. We have also used a district dummy to examine whether the probability to migrate differ between the advanced and backward district, and our hypothesis is that the persons from the backward district are more likely to migrate compared to those from the advanced district.

The results of estimated logit regression are presented in Table 7. The first point to note is that the estimated coefficients of all the variables have signs as per our hypotheses, except the caste dummies for which the sign is mostly reversed. However, when we focus on the statistical significance of the estimated coefficients, it is found that while the statistically significant variables in the advanced district are age, sex, marital status, indebtedness and MPCE, all the estimated coefficients (except those for two caste dummies) are statistically significant in the backward district. When we combine two districts, the estimated coefficients of all the variables, except caste dummies, again turn out to be statistically significant. It is also observed that the estimated coefficient of district dummy is statistically significant.

Table 6: List of Explanatory Variables Used in Logit Regression

Category of variable	Explanatory Variables	Definition		Hypothesized relationship
Individual-level variables	Age	Age of the person (in year)		+
	Sex dummy	A binary variable that is assigned value '1' for male and '0' for female		+
	Marital Status dummy	Marital status: A binary variable that takes value '1' if the person is unmarried and '0' otherwise		+
	Years of Education	Years of education		-
Household-level variables	Caste dummy 1	Social group dummy 1: assigned value '1' if the person belongs to SC and ST and '0' otherwise	Base Category: 'Others'	+
	Caste dummy 2	Social group dummy 2: assigned value '1' if the person is OBC and '0' otherwise	'Others'	+
	Landholdings	Landholdings in biga		-
	Worker-population ratio	Ratio of number of workers in the family to total family members including children		+
	Loan dummy	A binary variable that is assigned value '1' for currently indebted and '0' otherwise		+
	MPCE	Monthly per capita consumer expenditure (Rs.)		-
	District dummy	A binary variable that is assigned value '1' for the backward district and '0' otherwise		+

Source : Author's own

Overall, it appears that, in our study areas, the probability to migrate is higher for the males, younger, less educated, and married persons. Such probability is also higher for the persons belonging to the households with higher working-population ratio and debt-burden. The persons from the poorer households (as proxied by lower MPCE) as well as those from the backward districts also displayed a higher probability to migrate.

Table 7 : Factors Determining Out-migration from Study Areas: Result of Logit Regression

Explanatory Variables	Estimated Coefficients					
	Advanced District		Backward District		Combined	
	Equation 1	Equation 2	Equation 1	Equation 2	Equation 1	Equation 2
Intercept	-3.10*** (3.96)	-3.27 *** (4.27)	-0.19 (0.03)	-1.09* (2.17)	-1.37*** (3.20)	-1.89*** (5.00)
Age	-0.04*** (3.33)	-0.03** (3.28)	-0.06*** (5.53)	-0.05*** (5.01)	-0.05*** (6.36)	-0.04*** (5.93)
Sex Dummy (Male=1; Female=0)	4.25*** (7.15)	4.25*** (7.13)	2.36*** (9.29)	2.31*** (9.21)	2.80*** (13.44)	2.79*** (13.37)
Marital Status Dummy (Unmarried=1; Married=0)	-0.58 (1.86)	-0.63* (2.01)	-0.96*** (3.41)	-1.06*** (3.88)	-0.84*** (3.96)	-0.91*** (4.41)
Years of Education	-0.01 (0.61)	-	-0.09** (3.19)	-	-0.06** (2.90)	-
Caste Dummy 1 (SC/ST=1; Otherwise=0)	0.10 (0.36)	-	-0.40 (1.17)	-	-0.21 (.96)	-
Caste Dummy 2 (Other backward caste=1; otherwise=0)	-0.09 (0.37)	-	-0.15 (0.40)	-	-0.14 (0.70)	-
Cultivable Area (in bigha)	-0.12 (1.41)	-0.12 (1.48)	-0.08* (2.46)	-0.11** (3.12)	-0.10** (2.85)	-0.11*** (3.29)
Worker-Population Ratio	0.45(0.83)	0.48 (.89)	2.84*** (6.05)	2.83*** (6.17)	1.83*** (5.25)	1.84*** (5.33)
Loan Dummy (Currently indebted=1; Otherwise=0)	0.44* (2.03)	0.46* (2.14)	0.50* (2.40)	0.56*** (2.85)	0.47** (3.17)	0.49*** (3.39)
Monthly per capita consumption expenditure (MPCE) (Rs.)	-0.00 (1.82)	-0.00* (2.00)	-0.00*** (4.08)	-0.00*** (4.47)	-0.00*** (4.49)	-0.00*** (4.9)
District Dummy (Cooch Behar=1; South Twenty-Four Parga	-	-			0.65*** (3.57)	0.54*** (3.57)
Pseudo R2	0.27	0.27	0.25	0.23	0.24	0.23
Wald chi2	71.54	68.05	153.06	149.69	265.53	263.3
Prob > chi2	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Log pseudo-likelihood	-263.26	-263.60	-327.97	-334.49	-607.86	-612.40
Number of Observations	779	779	860	860	1639	1639

Source : Author's estimation using primary survey data

Note: ***, ** and * implies the level of significance at 1%, 5% and 10%.

Z values are reported in parentheses.

VIII. Conclusion

In our study areas, comprising of the two districts of West Bengal, migration plays an important role in providing employment opportunities to economically underprivileged individuals. Compared to the advanced district, the backward district exhibited a higher intensity of migration we found that an overwhelming majority of the migrants from both the districts migrated outside of West Bengal, particularly towards the southern states of India. Followed by this, a sizeable proportion of migrants from the advanced district migrated to the areas surrounding Kolkata, whereas those from the backward district migrated to the north-eastern states of India and the neighbouring countries of Bhutan and Nepal. This suggests that geographical proximity between the residence and the place of destination influenced their choice of destination. As regards the duration of the stay at the destination, our observation is that the majority of the migrants in both the districts stayed at their destination for most part of the year implying that the incidence of short-term migration is low in rural West Bengal. This conclusion is different from some studies conducted in other states (see, for example, Mosse et al., 75).

Comparing the activity status of the migrants before and after migration, we found that while before migration they participated in diverse activities at their place of origin, some kind of convergence in the activity pattern is established after migration such that a vast majority of them worked in three sectors that are construction, textiles and brick manufacturing. In order to secure employment at their destination, migrants mostly relied on middlemen or contactors, particularly those working in the construction sector and brick kilns. Apart from that, the social network of the migrants with relatives and acquaintances plays a significant role in securing employment.

The earnings of the migrants varied in response to the activity/sector in which they are employed. While earnings were highest for the migrant workers from the advanced district when employed in the construction sector, the earnings were highest in the furniture work and supervisory work for the migrants from the backward district. On the other hand, the earnings were the lowest for the migrants from both districts who were involved in domestic work. However, it was observed that more than 70 percent of the workers have been earning more than Rs 50 per hour at their place of destination, and the earning of the remaining 30 percent workers varied between Rs 40 to Rs 50 per hour. Thus, it appears that the migrants at their destination are better-off as they have been earning more than what they used to earn at the origin as also compared to the official wage rate for the unorganised workers. Perhaps motivated by the higher level of wage/earning at the destination, they worked for longer hours – for 12 hours a day in majority cases.

As regards the determinants of migration, our conclusion is that the probability of migration is higher for younger people, males, less educated, and the married.

Such a probability is also higher for households with poor economic conditions (as revealed by weak landholdings position and low monthly per capita consumption expenditure) and a higher debt-burden. This conclusion is by and large true for both the advanced and backward districts and is corroborated by the conclusion of several other studies (see Desingkar and Start, 25; Kesari and Bhagat, 86; Sucharita, 243).

On the basis of our findings, it may be concluded that migration served as a 'coping mechanism' for the impoverished household rural households in situation (at the origin) where the probability of getting employment for all adult members in the family in any case is low. However, migration also serve as important accumulation strategy for those who have the prior work experience in regarding field.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/78**PICKLING THE PAST THROUGH PROSTHETICS IN SUZAN-LORI PARKS' PICKLING****T. THAMARAI YAZHINI**Research Scholar PG & Research Department of English, Fatima College
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**DR. S. J. KALA**Associate Professor, PG & Research Department of English, Fatima College
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**Abstract**

Suzan-Lori Parks is a renowned American playwright, musician, and novelist, celebrated for her innovative storytelling approach and distinct theatrical style. With works pushing conventional theatre's boundaries, she has garnered widespread acclaim for her contributions to the contemporary drama. Among her various notable works, *Pickling* stands out for its unconventional narrative structure and evocative character development. *Pickling* is a short, poetic monologue play that delves into themes of memory, loss, and the passage of time. The play is centered around the character of Miss Miss, whose reflections on life, family, and the significance of food offer a rich tapestry for exploring deeper emotional and cultural connections. Her internal dialogue expressed through a blend of personal recollections reveals a sense of loss, longing and a quest for identity. In this work, Parks uses food not only as a literal component of the narrative but as a symbolic vehicle to convey complex ideas about heritage, identity, and remembrance. This paper aims to further analyze *Pickling* through the lens of prosthetic memory, uncovering how Parks' integration of food invites the audience to reflect on the power of memory in shaping individual and cultural narratives. Also, it intends to examine how food serves as a conduit between the past and the memory, preserving personal and cultural histories within the play's thematic landscape.

Keywords: Memory, Prosthetics, Identity, Food, Connection

The world in its wide and spread homes millions of individuals yet it is fragmented by human made divisions such as caste, race, class, language, borders and culture. These divisions displace individuals from their land, cultures and their memories. The manmade fissures lead to the destruction of peace and forced detachment from their home leading to the diasporic experience and fractured sense of belonging and identity. Diasporic consciousness is therefore deeply intertwined with memory, as displaced individuals continuously reconstruct connections to their origins through inherited stories, food practices, language, and collective remembrance.

Memory, in the contemporary literary discourse, has evolved into a significant area of inquiry as it shapes individual identity and collective consciousness. Memory is no longer considered as a passive recollection of past events but as an active and dynamic process through which histories are reconstructed, identities are negotiated, and cultural belonging is sustained. Literary texts often become spaces where suppressed histories, fragmented experiences, and erased voices are revisited and reimagined. Memory, for diasporic communities in particular, functions as a vital cultural mechanism that resists the erasure caused by displacement, migration, and assimilation. Individuals preserve emotional ties with their lost homes, using their memories, ancestral histories, and cultural roots that transcend geographical separation.

The recent research trends focus on the impact of the memory in the lives of people and also analyses how the memory shapes the identity of the community. Memory studies, as a theory, evolved with the publication of the three important works including *Matter and Memory* (1896), *History and Forgetting* (2004) and *Realm and Memory* (1996) of Henri Bergson, Paul Riceaeur and Jacques Le Goff respectively. The French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs is considered a national figure of memory studies. According to Halbwachs, memory is never purely individual. He states that a “collective memory exists embedded within the social frameworks in which individual though places itself is enriched by a plurality of references” (38). Thus, the idea of collective memory was first introduced by Halbwachs which was later developed by the French Historian Nora.

The rise of memory studies leads to the diverse perspectives in both the academic and psychological studies. With the advent of technology and globalization, memory studies further lead to digital cultural memory. Aleida Assman ideates that “the digital world is short lived, with trends, images and opinions changing rapidly, data being erased and the overflow of information creating new forms of ambiguity within the memory institutions” (97). Among the various cultural practices that preserve memory, food occupies a uniquely intimate and symbolic position. This intricate relationship between food, memory, and identity finds profound expression in the dramatic works of Suzan-Lori Parks, one of the most influential contemporary American playwrights. Parks’ plays are known for their experimental structures, fragmented narratives, and exploration of marginalized histories. Her dramaturgy often interrogates the absence of African American voices within official historical narratives while simultaneously reconstructing alternative forms of remembrance through language, repetition, music, and symbolism. Among her lesser-discussed yet deeply evocative dramatic pieces, *Pickling* emerges as a compelling meditation on memory, domesticity, emotional preservation, and cultural continuity. *Pickling* is a poetic monologue centred around the character Miss Miss, whose fragmented reflections move between the memories of love, domestic experiences, emotional longing, and sensory recollections associated with food. Through seemingly ordinary references to

cooking, beets, jars, and preservation, Parks transforms food into a symbolic medium through which personal and cultural histories survive. The act of pickling itself acquires metaphorical significance, representing humanity's desire to preserve experiences, emotions, and identities against the inevitable erosion of time. Parks' fragmented narrative style mirrors the unstable and associative nature of memory, where recollections emerge unpredictably through sensory triggers and emotional residues rather than through chronological order.

Numerous studies have been undertaken by many researchers on Parks' *Pickling* under the lens of postmodernism, postcolonialism and diaspora. Deborah in the work titled, *Suzan-Lori Parks* opines that "written early in her career, *Pickling* has been linked to a Beckett- inspired variation on the soliloquizing old-timer, also incorporating a reworking of the archetypal figures of the slightly demented church lady, an American topos (Geis 30). Parks' *Pickling* is also studied on memory by Marie Pecorari in the work titled, "Jarring Voices: Preserving and Releasing Memory in Suzan-Lori Parks' *Pickling* (1988)". She highlights that On a rhetorical level, Parks' works tend to rely not so much on metamorphosis and semantic transfer as on conflation and polysemy. In other words, transformations are more likely to be based on the opening up of a signifier to other signified to create an effect of semantic juxtaposition – in rhetorical terms, antanacsis, and its close, near-perfect relative, paronomasia – than on the association of different signifiers. (1)

Thus, Parks' plays are well-researched under postcolonial, aesthetics and linguistics. The literature review excavates the gap in the discourse where Parks' *Pickling* is not researched on the new framework of Memory studies and Prosthetic Memory.

This paper aims at a detailed analysis of *Pickling* through the critical framework of prosthetic memory, a theoretical concept developed by Alison Landsberg in her 2004 work *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*. Landsberg's concept posits that "memories can be transmitted across generational and experiential divides through cultural forms and mass media, enabling individuals to 'wear' memories of events they did not personally experience" (Landsberg 2). While Landsberg's original framework addresses mass cultural technologies such as cinema and museums, scholars have increasingly applied the concept to literary and dramatic texts, recognizing that narrative art forms are equally capable of generating the kind of immersive, affective memory-transfer that Landsberg describes.

The framework of prosthetic memory in Parks' *Pickling* offers a productive lens through which one examines how food functions not merely as a narrative prop but as a mnemonic vehicle, an object and practice through which personal and cultural histories are preserved, transmitted, and felt. Positioning food at the intersection of memory and identity, this paper aims to analyze how Parks provides an affective

encounter with Black American cultural history, family tradition, and the ongoing negotiation of selfhood in the face of loss and temporal dislocation.

The current research is qualitative in nature and it incorporates the methodology of library research. The study will present a panoramic view of prosthetic memory and its reflections with reference to Park's *Pickling*. The research is designed to give a pristine understanding of the prosthetic memory in the construction of diasporic consciousness. The research will begin with the introduction to diaspora, diasporic consciousness and memory.

The study will proceed to understand the evolution of prosthetic memory, its pioneers and its development from Landsberg's foundational formulation. The study further moves to examine the role of food and how it operates as a mnemonic device in the play by bridging Miss Miss to her past. It evolves to reflect on the role of food in constructing the prosthetic memory by illustrating from Park's *Pickling* Suzan-Lori Parks occupies a distinctive and celebrated position within American dramatic literature. Since the emergence of her work in the late 1980s, she has received sustained critical acclaim, culminating in her 2002 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Topdog/Underdog*. Her plays including *The America Play* (1994), *Venus* (1996), *In the Blood* (1999), and the monumental *365 Days/365 Plays* (2006) are characterized by "their formal experimentation, their engagement with African American history and experience, and their sustained interrogation of the relationship between language, identity, and the past" (Drukman 56).

Parks in *The American Play* has described her approach to drama as "the creation of 'new forms' that emerge from the specific needs of the stories she wishes to tell" (Parks 8). Her plays frequently resist linear narrative structures in favor of what she terms 'Rep & Rev' signifying "...Repetition and revision as a dramaturgical strategy in which phrases, images, and actions are returned to and subtly transformed throughout a play, accruing layered meanings over time" (Parks 9). This technique reflects Parks' deep engagement with African American oral and musical traditions, particularly the blues and jazz, in which "Repetition functions not as redundancy but as a mode of deepening and complicating meaning" (Young 2014).

Memory is a pervasive and structuring concern across Parks' body of work. *Pickling*, though smaller in scale than these major works, participates in the same sustained concern with memory, history, and the transmission of cultural identity. The play's focus is on a single character's interior monologue and its use of food as a central symbolic register gives it a particular intimacy and density. Miss Miss does not debate or dramatize history in the manner of *The America Play*; instead, she dwells in it, inhabiting a domestic space saturated with memorial significance. Parks' choice of the monologue form is itself significant, since it places the audience in a position of attentive intimacy with Miss Miss's consciousness, making them witnesses to a private act of remembering that carries broader cultural implications.

In *Pickling*, Parks draws on this understanding of food as mnemonic archive to create a play in which the act of preservation is simultaneously literal and figurative, material and symbolic. The concept of prosthetic memory, as formulated by Alison Landsberg, provides the primary theoretical framework for this analysis. In *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (2004), Landsberg argues that in modernity, particularly through the technologies of mass culture such as cinema, television, and theme parks, individuals are able to acquire memories of events they did not personally experience. Unlike what she terms “authentic” or “natural” memory which is limited to the experiences of a single individual's lifetime, prosthetic memory can be adopted by anyone who engages sufficiently with the relevant cultural forms.

Landsberg's concept draws on the image of the prosthetic limb, just as a prosthesis replaces a missing bodily part and, over time, becomes functionally integrated into the body's experience of itself, prosthetic memories are adopted and integrated into an individual's sense of their own past, even though they are not organically derived from lived experience. Landsberg further states that,

Prosthetic memory circulates publicly...and although they are not originally based, they are nevertheless experienced with a person's body as result of an engagement with a wide range of cultural technologies. Prosthetic memory thus become part of one's personal achieve of experience, informing one's subjectivity as well as one's relationship with the present and future tenses". (25-26) Thus, Landsberg ideates that prosthetic memory shall lead to the collective consciousness of an individual or a society.

Landsberg's concept has significant implications for the politics of memory and identity in diverse societies. She expresses that “The capacity of prosthetic memory to cross the boundaries of individual experience opens the possibility of what she calls 'empathetic politics': by enabling individuals to 'try on' the memories of others, mass cultural forms can foster cross-cultural understanding and solidarity” (Landsberg 149). This is particularly significant in the context of traumatic historical events, such as slavery or the Holocaust, where direct experiential memory is limited to survivors and their immediate descendants. Prosthetic memory offers a means by which broader publics can access and emotionally engage with these histories, potentially generating ethical commitments that transcend the boundaries of personal experience.

While Landsberg's original formulation focuses on mass cultural technologies, subsequent scholars have extended the concept to literary and theatrical contexts. Michael Rothberg (2009), in *Multidirectional Memory*, engages memory with related questions about the transmission of traumatic memory across cultural and generational divides, while scholars like Eyerman and Hartman of African American literature and theatre have drawn on Landsberg's framework to analyse the ways in which texts generate affective engagements with histories of slavery,

segregation, and racial violence. The concept has proven particularly productive in the analysis of dramatic texts, given that theatre, like cinema, creates an immersive, embodied encounter with represented experience that is well-suited to generating prosthetic memories in audiences.

Applied to *Pickling*, the framework of prosthetic memory enables to examine how Parks' deployment of food as a mnemonic vehicle invites audiences to engage affectively with histories and experiences that may be culturally remote from their own. Miss Miss's act of pickling, her memories of her grandmother's recipes, her sensory immersion in the smells and textures of preserved food, are presented not as exotic or alien practices but as deeply felt human, experiences that transcend the particularity of their cultural location. In this way, Parks' play operates as a technology of prosthetic memory, generating the kind of cross-cultural affective engagement that Landsberg's framework identifies as the distinctive contribution of modern cultural forms to the politics of memory.

Landsberg's original concept is developed in relation to commodified mass cultural forms including Hollywood films, museum exhibits, virtual reality experiences that operate within the circuits of consumer capitalism. Parks' theatre, by contrast, is a live, embodied, and explicitly politicised cultural form that stands in a different relationship to questions of commodification and accessibility. The intimacy and immediacy of theatrical performance, and the specific positioning of African American theatrical traditions in relation to questions of cultural survival and resistance, give the memory work of Parks' play a particular texture and political significance that Landsberg's framework must be adapted to accommodate.

The central action of *Pickling* concerns the act of pickling itself, the preservation of food through the application of vinegar, salt, and brine. This is not merely a domestic activity in Parks' play but a profoundly resonant symbolic act that condenses a complex of meanings related to memory, time, and cultural continuity. The process of pickling is to stop the process of decay, to hold a living substance in suspension between its living state and its dissolution, to preserve it across time so that it can be consumed and experienced in a different temporal moment. Parks voices that, "Each jar has a distinctly different sound. Not just uh sound that differs from their shape but. For example. Thuh milk jar: Mother's-oh: cold" ((86)). In this sense, pickling is a literal technology of preservation that functions as a metaphor of the work of memory itself. Miss Miss's engagement with the act of pickling is inseparable from her memories of the women who taught her this practice most significantly, her grandmother. The recipes and techniques she employs are not merely practical knowledge, but are embodied transmissions of cultural memory, passed down through generations of women who understood the preservation of food as a form of cultural survival. Anne L. Bower in the book *Recipes for Reading: Community, Cookbooks, Stories, Histories* opines that in communities whose histories have been marked by the violent disruption of family

and cultural ties as African American communities have been, through the legacies of slavery, migration, and urban displacement, the transmission of domestic knowledge across generations takes on a heightened significance as a form of resistance to historical erasure.

The grandmother figure in *Pickling* is not present in the play's action, she exists only in Miss Miss's memories and in the techniques and recipes she has transmitted, yet her presence is palpable throughout the play, mediated through the material objects and practices of food preparation. This is a characteristic mode of prosthetic memory, the absent past is made present through material culture, through the sensory engagement with objects and practices that carry memorial significance. Landsberg quotes that "Prosthetic Memories are adopted as the result of a person's experience with a mass cultural technology of memory that dramatizes or recreates a history he or she did not live" (28). Miss Miss does not need to have access to her grandmother's interiority or her historical context in order to remember her but the act of pickling, performed in the present, reactivates and transmits the memory of the past.

The sensory dimensions of food preparation are central to this mnemonic function. The smell of vinegar, the texture of vegetables being packed into jars, the sound of lids being sealed are not merely incidental details but primary carriers of memorial significance. Scholars of memory, from Marcel Proust's famous meditation on the madeleine to the recent neuroscientific research on the relationship between smell and memory, "work on food and on the senses has usefully converged through the concept of synesthesia (also spelled synaesthesia), or the union of the senses" (Sutton 217). Parks draws on this understanding of sensory memory in *Pickling*, deploying the specific sensory textures of food preparation as triggers for Miss Miss's memorial reflections.

This connection between sensory experience and memory is particularly significant in the context of African American cultural history, where "oral and embodied knowledge traditions have often served as the primary repositories of cultural memory in the face of the systematic suppression of written and public historical records" (Trouillot 26). The knowledge of how to make a particular pickle, how to season a dish in the way that one's grandmother seasoned it, how to read the readiness of a jar by the sound of its seal, all this embodied knowledge carries with it a whole world of cultural practice, social relationship, and historical experience that cannot be fully captured in any written record. Parks' play understands and dramatises this, positioning Miss Miss's sensory engagement with food preparation as a form of access to a history that might otherwise be inaccessible.

It is worth noting that the act of preservation is not without its ambivalences. The act of preserving is also, in a sense, to fix and to arrest, to hold something in place rather than allowing it to develop or transform. Miss Miss's attachment to the techniques and recipes of her grandmother can be read as a form of mourning, a

holding on to what has been lost rather than a full engagement with the present. Parks does not sentimentalise this attachment; her play acknowledges the tensions between preservation and change, between the comfort of memorial continuity and the necessity of living forward in time. This complexity gives *Pickling* its emotional depth and prevents it from collapsing into a simple nostalgia.

The relationship between food and identity has been a significant concern in cultural studies, anthropology, and literary scholarship since the 1980s. Scholars including Sidney Mintz (1985), in *Sweetness and Power*, and bell hooks (1992), in her essay “Eating the Other”, have demonstrated that food practices are never merely nutritional but are always implicated in complex structures of identity, power, and cultural meaning. It also decodes what one eats, how one prepares and consumes food, with whom one shares meals, and how one's food practices relate to those of one's ancestors and community. All these dimensions constitute to the food-based identity politics that Parks' play engages with directly.

For Miss Miss, the act of pickling is not merely the preservation of vegetables, rather it is an assertion of identity and a negotiation of heritage. She prepares food in the way her grandmother used to cook, by doing so, she affirms her membership in a cultural community that extends across time and space, connecting her to women whose lives were different from hers in many respects but who shared the same practices, the same knowledge, and the same understanding of food as a form of cultural expression and survival. This sense of connection across difference is one of the characteristic effects of prosthetic memory, as Landsberg understands it as “the capacity of cultural forms to generate a sense of belonging and identification that transcends the boundaries of individual experience” (149). Parks complicates this vision of straightforward cultural continuity. Miss Miss's identity is not simply given by her heritage but it is something she actively constructs and negotiates through her engagement with the past. The fact that she is performing the act of pickling in the present, in a context that is different from that in which her grandmother performed it, means that she is not simply reproducing the past but transforming it, adapting it to new circumstances and new needs. This is the dynamic of what Stuart Hall (1990) has called “cultural identity and diaspora” as “identity is not a fixed essence but a production, always in process, always constituted within representation and through it” (222).

Parks' plays also raises questions about the relationship between individual and collective memory in the formation of cultural identity. Miss Miss's memories are intensely personal that they are memories of specific people, specific occasions, specific sensory experiences, yet these personal memories are also always already cultural, embedded in a larger matrix of shared practices, values, and histories that give them their meaning. The act of pickling is meaningful to Miss Miss not merely because it connects her to her grandmother but because it connects her to a whole tradition of African American domestic culture in which the preservation

of food has been associated with the preservation of community, dignity, and cultural identity in the face of historical adversity.

This intersection of personal and collective memory is one of the features that makes *Pickling* particularly rich for analysis through the lens of prosthetic memory. Landsberg's concept is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between individual experience and collective history, and with the capacity of cultural forms to mediate between these two registers. In Parks' play, food functions as a kind of mediating form, enabling Miss Miss to access and inhabit a collective cultural history through the intensely personal act of preparation and preservation. At the same time, the play's theatrical form enables audiences to access Miss Miss's personal memories and, through them, to engage with the broader cultural history that those memories carry. One of the most distinctive features of Parks' engagement with memory in *Pickling* is her insistence on the embodied, somatic dimensions of memorial experience. Memory, in Parks' play, is not primarily a cognitive or intellectual activity, it is something that happens in and through the body, triggered by sensory experience and expressed in physical action. This understanding of memory as embodied and somatic is consistent with a significant strand of contemporary memory studies, associated with scholars such as Paul Connerton (1989), in *How Societies Remember*, and Gavin Lucas (2005), whose work on the materiality of memory emphasises the role of physical objects and practices in the transmission of social memory.

Connerton's work, *How Societies Remember*, is highly relevant as he argues that "A significant portion of social memory is stored and transmitted not in texts or monuments but in bodily practices, the habitual, repeated actions of everyday life through which communities reproduce their cultural forms and values across time" (Connerton 72). These practices, which Connerton calls "incorporating practices" are distinctive in that they are difficult to represent in propositional or verbal form; they are known in the body and transmitted through bodily imitation and practice, rather than through explicit instruction or written record. The knowledge of how to pickle, how to make the brine at the right concentration, how to pack the jars in the right way, this is precisely the kind of incorporating practice that Connerton describes.

Parks' theatrical representation of Miss Miss's pickling engages with this somatic dimension of memory in a distinctive way. The monologue form means that Miss Miss is simultaneously narrating and enacting her memorial experience, her words describe what her body is doing and feeling, creating a layered representation in which the verbal and the somatic are intertwined. This formal choice reflects Parks' understanding of the inseparability of language and body in the experience of memory, and her awareness of the specific resources of theatrical performance as a medium for representing embodied experience.

The somatic dimensions of food preparation are particularly significant in the context of African American cultural memory because of the historical

association between Black body labour, and food production. “The long history of enslaved Black women's labour in the kitchens of the American South, labour that produced a cuisine that has been celebrated and appropriated while the labourers themselves were dehumanised and exploited gives the representation of Black women's food preparation a deeply political charge” (Zafar 449). Parks’ play is aware of this history that Miss Miss's act of *Pickling* takes place against the backdrop of a larger historical narrative in which Black women's domestic labour has been simultaneously essential and invisible.

By staging Miss Miss's *Pickling* as an act of memory and cultural assertion rather than merely domestic labour, Parks reframes the meaning of this somatic practice. Miss Miss is not labouring for someone else; she is preserving something for herself, for her community, and for future generations. Her body is not an instrument of others' pleasure or profit but the site and vehicle of cultural memory and identity. This reframing is itself a form of political intervention, asserting the dignity and significance of practices that have been historically devalued and overlooked.

The relationship between memory and the body in *Pickling* also invites reflection on the gendered dimensions of food-based cultural memory. The tradition of food preservation that Miss Miss inherits is specifically a women's tradition, transmitted from grandmother to granddaughter through embodied practice and shared labour. This gendered transmission of cultural knowledge has been a significant theme in feminist scholarship on food and memory, with writers including Doris Witt (1999) and Psyche Williams-Forson (2006) examining the ways in which African American women's food practices have served as forms of cultural production and community- building that have been systematically undervalued in dominant cultural discourse. Parks’ plays participates in and contributes to this critical tradition, staging Miss Miss's food practices as a form of cultural work that deserves recognition and scholarly attention this is study has undertaken a sustained analysis of Suzan-Lori Parks’ *Pickling* through the theoretical framework of prosthetic memory, examining how the play deploys food as a mnemonic vehicle to explore themes of memory, identity, heritage, and loss. Through close attention to the play's central character of Miss Miss, its use of the monologue form, its engagement with the embodied and sensory dimensions of food preparation, and its complex negotiation of African American cultural history, the paper has argued that Parks’ plays operates as a sophisticated and ethically serious technology of memorial transmission.

The analysis has demonstrated that food functions in *Pickling* on multiple registers simultaneously such as as a literal practice of domestic culture, as a symbolic vehicle for the transmission of cultural memory, as a somatic medium for the experience of embodied heritage, and as a form of identity assertion in the face of loss and historical displacement. Positioning food at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, the material and the symbolic, the present and the past,

Parks creates a play in which thematic density far exceeds its modest length and scale.

The employment of the framework of prosthetic memory has elicited several viewpoints to understand how prosthetic memory helps and heals an individual to recover the past, live the present and link it to the future. The study also threw limelight on how Miss Miss's engagement with food preparation functions as a form of memorial access, a means by which she inhabits and transmits cultural memories that extend beyond the boundaries of her individual experience. It has also enabled to understand how the play's theatrical form generates similar processes of memorial access in its audiences, inviting them into an empathetic engagement with a cultural history and experience that may be distant from their own.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/79**BORDERS OF VULNERABILITY: BIOPOLITICS, CITIZENSHIP, AND
MIGRANT LIVES IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH ASIAN FICTION****SABEEL HUSSAN NAQVI**Master of Arts (M.A) In Politics Science
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University of Jammu, Jammu, India**Abstract**

This paper examines the politics of migration, citizenship, and belonging in contemporary South Asian fiction through the theoretical framework of biopolitics. Drawing upon Michel Foucault's concept of biopower and Giorgio Agamben's notion of the state of exception, the study explores how modern nation-states regulate displaced populations through borders, surveillance, and exclusionary citizenship practices. While migration is often treated in political discourse as a matter of security, legality, literary narratives foreground its human consequences by revealing experiences of displacement, precarity, and fractured identities among diasporic communities. Through a critical reading of *Exit West* and *Home Fire*, the paper analyses how borders function not merely as geographical divisions but as political mechanisms that determine mobility, recognition, and access to rights. The selected texts portray vulnerable subjects positioned within systems of state control where citizenship becomes conditional and unstable. The paper argues that these narratives critique political structures that produce exclusion, surveillance, and marginalization while exposing the unequal distribution of protection and recognition. The study further highlights how migration transforms personal identity into a contested political condition shaped by nationalism, securitization, and state authority in contemporary global societies. By integrating literary analysis with contemporary political theory, the study demonstrates how fiction critically interrogates border governance and exclusionary citizenship practices.

Keywords: Biopolitics, Migration, Citizenship, Surveillance, South Asian Fiction.

Introduction

Migration has become a central point on the political, cultural and humanitarian agenda of the 21st century. Forced movements of people worldwide are happening at a higher frequency as a result of factors such as globalization, armed conflict, economic disparities, political unrest, climate change and religious extremism. Millions of individuals are forced to flee their homes due to conflict, terror,

poverty or environmental disaster. Migration, therefore, is no longer an extraordinary, but indeed a characteristic feature of modern life. In an era of greater interconnectedness because of globalization, modern nation-states still maintain tight controls over movement inherent in border systems, surveillance technologies, detention centres, and citizenship regimes. As a consequence, migration has become extremely politicized and displaced persons object of suspicion, regulation and exclusion.

Migration has a historical and political nature in South Asia which is very complex. The legacy of colonialism and the trauma of Partition in 1947, ethnicity and religious nationalism have all had a significant impact on issues of identity and belonging in the region. The division of British India into India and Pakistan resulted in one of the largest forced migrations in history and widespread communal violence, displacing almost 15 million people overall. Since then, South Asian borders have been politically charged zones of militarization, nationalism, and disputed citizenship. The politics of migration, exile, displacement, diaspora, and fractured identity, thus, are recurring themes in contemporary South Asian literature reflecting the ways in which politics affects the individual lives and collective memory.

Rather than being discussed in humanitarian terms, migration has become a subject of legal and security debates in recent political debates. States use "national security" as an excuse to adopt excessive measures to deter immigrants, install walls and fences at their borders, and establish refugee camps in which to detain asylum-seekers. These types of political narratives create a twofold division of the populations: legal/illegal, insider/outsider, citizen/foreigner. Migrants are not only deprived of emotional histories but are also de-humanised, becoming administrative categories instead of having social identities. Political theorist Hannah Arendt believes that statelessness eventually leads to "the loss of the right to have rights" (Arendt 296). Those who lack citizenship do not enjoy political recognition or institutional protection. Refugees and migrants thus are in precarious positions in modern political systems as their presence undermines the territorial and ideological power of the nation-state.

These realities are examined critically in contemporary fiction, in which the emotional, psychological and existential implications of displacement are brought to the fore. In literary works, the narratives of migration are not just statistical or bureaucratic, but also are tellings of fear, alienation, memory, grief and survival. Literature makes migration human and shows us the violence in the structure of border control. A quotation from Edward Said's book *Reflections on Exile* says that exile is "strangely compelling to think about, terrible to experience" (Said 173). The phrase is representative of the catch-22 of migration stories, in which exile is revealed as a political predicament, and a personal tragedy at the same time. In South Asian literature the emphasis is on the dislocations of identity, family, and affective belonging caused by migration, as well as on the unequal

distribution of rights in modernity as it is lived within the context of nation-state structures.

This paper investigates the political process regarding migration, citizenship and belonging in the present South Asian fiction by using the theory of bio-politics. The study is mainly based on the theories of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben in studying the regulation of displaced populations by modern state. The later conception of biopower discussed by Foucault is to account for the new form of political power, which talked not only of sovereign violence but also of the organisation of human life. In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault posits that the states of the modern era have power by means of institutional, surveillance, legal, and disciplinary regimes of population. According to Foucault, “the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life” (140) makes up the power in the modern era. The concept of biopolitics thus designates the function of the state to monitor, classify and control humanity. Migrants are especially vulnerable in these systems because they are mobile, and aren't necessarily included in stable categories of citizenship and national identity.

Giorgio Agamben takes this argument further by drawing on the “state of exception.” According to Agamben, in times of crisis or emergency, sovereign power suspends the rules and turns some persons into what Agamben calls “bare life” (Agamben 8). People who do not have the full legal recognition and protection of a state are in this situation, such as refugees, undocumented migrants and stateless persons. Border areas, refugee camps, detention centres, and immigration checkpoints turn into areas where people are included and excluded – one and the same – at the command of political power. Citizenship thus becomes not only a state of being or a legal status but also a tool of power, by distinguishing one group of people from others, and deciding who can belong inside the nation-state.

The relevance of biopolitical theory for migration studies has grown to a greater extent than ever following 9/11 and the increasing securitization of the world. Migration is becoming synonymous with terror, crime, and indeed national security as seen by governments. This results in increased surveillance and suspicion of racialized groups, especially Muslim communities, in the political discourse of the West. Achille Mbembe goes further than biopolitical discussions with his notion of necro politics that looks at how “political systems decide who may live and who must die” (Mbembe 11). Modern-day migrants face all kinds of political violence, including dangerous border crossings, deportation policies, refugee camps and state abandonment. For that reason, literature becomes an important medium for representing these facts that it makes obvious the human experiences that are concealed behind the political rhetoric and the media representation.

The current study is on two significant contemporary South Asian novels, namely *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid and *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie. Both texts

critically address migration, nationalism, citizenship and state authority in a world that is more and more dominated by border surveillance and securitisation politics in the globalized era. Despite the different ways in which these novels are written and the emphasis placed on different themes, each reveals the ways in which citizenship rights and respective imagined nations are exclusive and compartmentalized in contemporary political systems.

Exit West (2017) imagines migration in the form of magical doors, which transport people instantaneously across borders. At first glance, these doors seem to take away the idea of geographic constraints and visualize free movement. Yet Hamid also shows that even if frontiers are gone, political and social boundaries remain. Host societies continue to face migrants with hostility, surveillance, segregation and economic precarity. The story of the novel is about two young lovers, Nadia and Saeed, who have to flee their unnamed city due to rising civil unrest. Then, as the fighting grows, they flee through magic portals to Greece, London and, finally, California. Along the way, Hamid depicts migration as a profound moment of personal metamorphosis, of turbulence, rejection and emotional dismemberment. Hamid's most impactful quote in the novel is the line "We are all migrants through time" (Hamid 2019). This declaration generalizes migration and displaces it as not just a refugee crisis, but a natural human condition. This is a metaphor that states that everyone has some kind of transition, loss, and impermanence in their life. But although the word migration can be used for everything, this novel shows that in reality, nothing is more universal than mobility inequality. Some bodies flow without impediment, others are criminalized, incarcerated or barred from crossing. Therefore Hamid problematizes the illusion of the openness of the world and uncovers how movement and belonging are still a product of state power.

The novel also emphasizes the feelings of migration. But Nadia and Saeed feel alone, nostalgic, uncertain and culturally displaced as they adjust to new societies. The bond between them slowly sours as displacement changes them. Saeed desires continuity, memory, and a connection with the past; Nadia desires mobility, reinvention. "In all the colours of the rainbow" (Hamid 121), Hamid says about migrants, highlighting the universal and diverse nature of displacement across the globe. Therefore, in the novel, migration extends far beyond geographical displacement, and becomes a mode of being-in-the-world that alters identity, intimacy and emotional belonging.

In the same vein, *Home Fire* explores the precariousness of Muslim identity and citizenship in post-9/11 Britain. Kamila Shamsie uses Sophocles' *Antigone* to re-imagine classical tragedy set in the modernity of surveillance politics. The novel is about the lives of three siblings of Pakistani origin - Isma, Aneeka and Parvaiz - who live in suspicion and under the state's control. They are British citizens but their identity as Muslims is precarious and contingent. Airports, interrogation rooms and border checkpoints are repeated motifs for political power in the story.

Eventually, Isma gets detained and questioned at the Heathrow Airport before she heads to the United States, in the beginning of the novel. From the beginning of the interrogation scene, the issue of surveillance of Muslim bodies in Western political discourse is set. Isma thinks back “how old she was before people like her were talked about as if there was a problem to be solved” (Shamsie 5). In this statement, the authors expose how ordinary citizens become targets of political scrutiny through racial profiling and Islamophobia.

The nature of Parvaiz also demonstrates the ill effects of exclusionary politics. Isolation and emotional insecurity lead him to be recruited by ISIS for the sense of achievement, belonging, identity and acceptance. But on his return to Britain he finds his citizenship is withdrawn and he is barred from re-entering the country. Parvaiz’s situation in this act is an example of what Agamben calls “bare life,” that is, life that has been excluded from political recognition and abandoned by the nation-state. His death outside the UK borders represents the extreme form of conditional citizenship. That even while dead the state refuses him belonging, refusing to return his body. As Aneeka strives to recover her brother's body, she is engaged in a symbolic battle for recognition, mourning and humanity vs. political systems that dehumanize the marginalized subject.

Judith Butler’s notion of precarious life goes deeper in the understanding of Parvaiz’s situation in *Home Fire*. Butler contends that political systems shape the sorts of lives that are publicly recognised as worth honouring and those that are not publicly mourned and thus not part of political recognition. Some are regarded as fully human and deserving of protection, others as threats, burdens or as disposable. In the novel, Parvaiz is denied citizenship and his body is denied back after his death, showing how the state denies recognition even after death. His structuring in the absence shows the unequal distribution of humanity and grievability in current securitised politics. Shamsie thus uncovers the way that modern nationalism regulates citizenship and belonging, mourning and remembrance.

Shamsie’s conception of citizenship confirms that one’s legal citizenship does not mean one has a sense of belonging to the nation-state. The vulnerability of Muslim citizens is due to the fact that belonging does not only have a legal dimension, but also a racial, cultural and ideological dimension in the form of narratives of nationalism. The novel challenges the current political rhetoric that uses the term national security as a tool for exclusion and minorities as threats. *Home Fire*’s tragedy is a revealing display of the way states exert control over identity through fear, surveillance, and political classification.

Exit West and *Home Fire* are interwoven to show us the various ways in which migration and citizenship are inextricably linked to the modern systems of political control. Borders are not only geographical but ideological and administrative means for deciding on where people can or should move, who they are recognised as, and who they belong to. Migrants and racialised minorities are

monitored and barred in structures which aim to maintain national identity and sovereignty. These novels question the prevailing political discourse by highlighting the human dignity of the 'migrants' and revealing the politics of violence in border control.

More than that, the current migration literature mirrors issues of globalization, hybridity, and transnational identity in general. Homi K. Bhabha claims that cultural identity is manifested in "third spaces" of hybridity, where any sense of nation and belonging are in flux (Bhabha 56). These liminal spaces are inhabited by migrants, who are negotiating multiple histories, languages and cultural affiliations at the same time. It is within the context of contesting the exclusionary citizenship practices and rigid nationalist frameworks that literature becomes a very important place to explore hybrid identities.

This study, in conclusion, suggests that present-day fiction in South Asia has a critical stance on those political architectures that engender exclusion, precarity, and marginalisation. The paper takes as its analytical model a combination of literary analysis and biopolitical theory, which reveals how fiction can problematise contemporary regimes of border control and citizenship control. These stories demonstrate that migration isn't just a reflection of geographical travels, but a profoundly political and existential one that is closely tied to state power, nationalism and global inequality. At the same time, the chosen texts defy dehumanisation, placing emphasis on the individual's experiences of love, loss, memory and survival. *Exit West* and *Home Fire* force a reckoning with prevailing notions of borders, citizenship and belonging in the modern world through the eyes of vulnerable lives.

Literature Review

Contemporary South Asian literature increasingly explores migration, displacement, exile, and political belonging. Scholars argue that migration narratives reflect the human consequences of globalization, nationalism, and forced displacement while highlighting alienation and fractured identity (Said 173).

Critical studies on *Exit West* focus on Mohsin Hamid's use of magical realism and transnational migration. Critics examine how the novel critiques anti-immigrant nationalism, globalization, and border politics through the metaphor of magical doors (Hamid 121).

Similarly, scholarship on *Home Fire* examines themes of Islamophobia, surveillance, Muslim identity, and post-9/11 securitization. Critics frequently analyze the novel as a contemporary adaptation of *Antigone* that critiques modern systems of exclusion and state control (Shamsie 5).

However, limited scholarship comparatively studies *Exit West* and *Home Fire* through the combined framework of biopolitics, surveillance, and conditional citizenship. This paper addresses that gap through the theoretical perspectives of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben.

Biopolitics, Borders, and the Regulation of Migrant Bodies

Biopolitics is a concept of understanding the relationship between migration and political power. In modern nation-states the population is no longer controlled merely by means of force or law, but by institutions such as surveillance, border checks, citizenship papers, detention houses, and administrative organizations. The modernisation of power is as described by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality*, moving towards “the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life” (140). The modern state thus has not only a forceful but a regulatory regime of vulnerable bodies and populations. Biopower is the power to monitor, classify and regulate subjects according to their political and social usefulness. The vulnerability of migrants and refugees lies in the fact that they are often not part of regular patterns of citizenship or national belonging.

As the movement of people questions the territorial force of the nation-state, one of the focal points of biopolitical control has been migration. Refugees, unregistered migrants and displaced communities often reside in precarious legal status, rendering them vulnerable to surveillance and exclusion. Foucault also goes on to say that “making live and letting die” is the principle at work in modern political systems, as it is the job of a state to determine which populations it is the duty to protect, and which it allows to die (138). These factors, such as access to mobility, health care, employment and citizenship then rely on state recognition. Individuals who move without political recognition are often reified as an administrative category – and not a human subject with emotional history and identity.

Isma gets stopped and questioned at Heathrow Airport at the start of the novel and then flies to the United States. Airports are biopolitical spaces in which itself becomes a visible space of surveillance and state authority. Isma remembers a time before she was “a problem to be solved” (Shamsie 5). However, this statement makes clear the fascinating way in which Islamophobia produces Muslim subjects as suspect being of a political nature. During these moments, Shamsie uncovers the racialization and regulation of circulation of Muslim bodies under the umbrella of the surveillance culture.

Parvaiz’s character also sentence is a testament to the violence of the practices of exclusionary citizenship. Once Parvaiz joins ISIS, he tries to re-enter Britain but his citizenship is stripped from his and he is denied entry. He is an illustration of Agamben’s “bare life” that is neither recognized politically nor protected legally. To this day, Britain will not return his body, exemplifying the control of the state – over life and over death. The story has provided a platform for Anand Kumar to raise the universal demand for dignity and humanity in a world in which systems are dehumanising marginalised people.

Comparative Framework of Biopolitical Regulation

Biopolitical Mechanism	<i>Exit West</i>	<i>Home Fire</i>
Border Control	Magical doors remove physical barriers, but migrants still face political exclusion and hostility.	Airports and checkpoints regulate Muslim mobility and reinforce suspicion.
Surveillance	Migrants are monitored in refugee camps and settlements through administrative systems.	Muslim citizens are subjected to interrogation, racial profiling, and surveillance.
Citizenship	Migrants experience unstable belonging and social marginalization.	Citizenship becomes conditional through state power and securitization policies.
Exclusion	Refugees are treated as threats to national identity and economic stability.	Parvaiz is denied re-entry into Britain and excluded from political recognition.
Identity Crisis	Nadia and Saeed experience alienation and fragmented identities after migration.	Muslim identity is politicized and associated with terrorism in public discourse.
State Power	Governments regulate migrant populations through policing and control mechanisms.	The state exercises authority through surveillance, citizenship revocation, and nationalist policies.

Both *Exit West* and *Home Fire* reveal how migration and citizenship are deeply connected to systems of political control. Borders operate not only through physical barriers but also through surveillance, ideological narratives, and legal classifications that determine belonging. Through their narratives, Hamid and Shamsie critique contemporary systems that reduce migration to a question of security and legality while ignoring its human consequences.

Citizenship, Identity, and the Politics of Belonging

Citizenship and identity have an uncertain relationship, often addressed in contemporary migration narratives. In this increasingly globalised world, people migrate between countries as a consequence of war, necessity, education or political churning. Nevertheless, in the age of globalization with its promises of interconnectedness, nation states still operate through clearly legal and cultural boundaries of belonging. Once citizens, the children's citizenship becomes 'more than a legal attribute'; it serves as a political tool which shapes children's access to rights, recognition and protection. In the literature the images of immigration

illustrate the experiences of migrants who are separated from their previous identities and who are part of communities that reject their own.

Belonging is a central theme of *Exit West* and *Home Fire*. These novels are ones in which the characters seek their places in societies that themselves deem migrants and minorities as outsiders. Through their experiences, they show how identity is not one, but rather is constantly being negotiated in political and cultural landscapes. Migration challenges traditional notions and ideas of home, of nationality, and of selfhood, placing people in situations where they are compelled to entertain such questions as memory, culture, language, and self.

Exit west portrays Nadia and Saeed as representing two different reactions toward the idea of exile and cultural assimilation. Saeed is deeply attached to his own country, his religion and his family experiences. This sense of cultural continuity is an expression of the emotional burdens of migrating: a fear of losing one's identity and sense of place. Then, Nadia is more open to change and mobility. She believes in adjusting to any kind of social set-up and wants to be freed from the stifling customs. They eventually build up emotional distance from each other because of their opposing opinions on migration. Through their friendship Hamid shows the effect migration can have on a person's identity. Not only does displacement involve changes in geographical directions, but it also changes emotional and psychological directions. Migrants live in liminality, in betweenness, in varieties of betweenness: past and present, homeland and host country, memory and adaptation. Migration thus challenges entrenched notions of identity and unveils the process of being rather than belonging.

The novel also challenges nationalists' intolerance of migrants. Migrant communities are seen as a threat – both economic and cultural – to native communities in London. Violent anti-immigrant groups arise wanting to expel migrants from public areas. These words speak to how immigration and demographic changes are discussed in the world today. It is the image of migrants as problems, as invaders, and not people fleeing for their lives. Hamid calls attention to “nationalist ideologies that create boundaries of exclusion that deny the common humanity of others.”

Meanwhile, *Exit West* envisions new co-existences and transnational communities. In spite of opposition and hostility migrants establish networks of solidarity and adaptation crossing the borders. The novel concludes on an optimistic note, implying that migration is the unavoidable reality of the modern world and that societies need to adopt new ways of viewing 'belonging' that are broader than ideas of nation states. Hamid questions the notion of identity and its sole association to both territories and nationhood. *Home fire* is very tied to political issues of “belonging,” in terms of race, religion and state surveillance. The novel also illustrates the racialization of Muslim identities and the politicization of religion in present-day Western societies. Isma, Aneeka and Parvaiz are British citizens but they are also susceptible to suspicion given that

their names do not entirely facilitate with prevailing nationalist narratives. The citizenship is not enough to feel at home, and cultural and religious difference continues to signify that they are outsiders.

One of the most striking points that Shamsie emphasizes is the inequity of recognition concerns in the nation-state. British Muslim politician, character Karamat Lone promotes assimilation and allegiance to the nation-state. In his opinion, being a Muslim entails a separation from the visual sign of difference for acceptance. But the novel demonstrates the flaws in such an assimilationist politics. Even as Karamat and his party rise to great political heights, his family faces their own issues of identity, loyalty, and exclusion. Finally, the state puts national security first, rather than family and personal consideration.

As illustrated in Parvaiz's tragedy, the exclusionary citizenship practices have serious consequences. Once he joins the ISIS he is a political expendable. Until then, his body is not even allowed to return to Britain: not even his death provides for a right to be returned to Britain. Aneeka's frantic efforts to return her brother's corpse are a metaphor for the battles of recognition and humanity. The denial of burial inside the homeland, an expression of the level of political exclusionist violence. Not only is the migrant or racialized subject denied citizenship, but they are denied dignity and mourn. Shamsie's novel also exposes the psychological impact of the watchfulness and suspicion. Muslims internalize fear and anxiety, knowing all their actions and words are being scrutinized and subjected to political analysis. These conditions result in fragmented self situations where a person's attempts to express themselves are reversed and a person must constantly negotiate between expressions of self and being accepted by others. This necessitates that people can be forced to show their loyalty to the nation-state, leading to psychological insecurity and alienation.

Both *Exit West* and *Home Fire* in this sense comment on the prevailing modes of nationalism and securitization, which establish a sense of belonging through the process of excluding. Everyone has diminished or uncertain citizenship, especially migrants and racialized minorities. Both of these novels portray the functioning of borders, both external and internal, with external borders being enforced through immigration policies and internal borders through cultural suspicion, surveillance, and discrimination. The migrant subject is at the same time present and absent in the nation-state.

The story of course focuses on the humanity of those displaced, particularly as related to the selected texts, which have the virtue of challenging dominant political narratives. The novels highlight individual migrant experiences of love, loss, fear, hope and survival over statistical pages of migrants and security threats. Literary narratives humanize migration, emphasizing its existential and emotional state and its influence by historic and political factors. The novels, which serve as a form of intimate storytelling, reveal the violence that lies behind the bureaucratic apparatus of border policing and citizenship regulating.

The idea of belonging is also politically charged in these texts, and speaks to other global truths. Today in many societies, citizenship codes are growing tighter and surveillance technologies are enlarging the state's area of control of movements. Detention, deportation and social hostility remain ongoing issues for refugees and migrants. In this context, literature is called upon to be a place of challenging established political ideologies and imagining other ways of community and of coexistence. This paper argues that migration by combining biopolitical theory and literary analysis is not only a social or economic problem, but also a political condition, which is preordained by the State's power. The borders, citizenship and the national project of today's South Asian fiction can be understood as structures producing exclusions and surveillance for the human. Meanwhile, these stories don't dehumanise, and they give voice to the emotions and dignifying complexity of the displaced. Fiction can thus be an invaluable tool for raising the ethical implications of contemporary policies of border control and exclusionary citizenship.

J.html Mateban and Ofsheibani's *Exit West* and *Home Fire*, respectively, are written in vastly different styles and discussions different themes, but both novels explore the themes of the condition of belonging within modern nation-states. While Hamid is at the centre of migration, displacement and transnational movement, Shamsie brings at the fore the issue of surveillance, citizenship and post 9/11 securitisation. But both texts show how boundaries are a processes not just a geographical place maybe and a political and ideological mechanisms for regulating mobility, recognition and access to rights. Migrants or racialized minorities are located in systems in which belonging is based in the context of nationalistic interests and not on the element of humanitarian ethics. Both novels thus reveal the unequal distribution of protection and citizenship in politics today and the emotional humanity of displaced persons.

Conclusion

Contemporary South Asian fiction critically interrogates the relationship between migration, citizenship, and political power in the contemporary world. Through the theoretical frameworks of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, this study demonstrates how modern nation-states regulate displaced populations through borders, surveillance systems, securitization policies, and exclusionary forms of citizenship. In both *Exit West* and *Home Fire*, migrants and racialized minorities are represented as vulnerable subjects whose belonging remains unstable and conditional. Mohsin Hamid critiques anti-immigrant nationalism by portraying the alienation, precarity, and fragmented identities experienced by displaced individuals even after crossing geographical borders. Similarly, Kamila Shamsie exposes the relationship between nationalism, Muslim identity, and state surveillance in post-9/11 Britain, revealing how citizenship itself can become conditional in the name of national security. Both novels therefore demonstrate

that borders are not merely territorial divisions but political and ideological mechanisms that regulate mobility, recognition, and access to rights.

At the same time, the selected texts resist the dehumanization of migrants by foregrounding intimate experiences of displacement, grief, love, memory, and survival. Rather than reducing migration to legal categories or bureaucratic statistics, the novels emphasize its emotional and existential consequences, exposing the violence embedded within modern systems of border governance. Through their representation of marginalized lives, these narratives challenge political structures that normalize exclusion, suspicion, and inequality while privileging nationalist ideologies and securitized forms of citizenship. Contemporary South Asian fiction thus emerges as a significant site of ethical and political intervention that questions dominant assumptions surrounding migration and belonging.

In an era increasingly shaped by refugee crises, border nationalism, digital surveillance, and restrictive citizenship regimes, migration literature remains politically urgent. By humanizing displaced communities and interrogating contemporary structures of state authority, *Exit West* and *Home Fire* challenge readers to reconsider conventional ideas of nationhood, identity, and political recognition in an interconnected yet deeply unequal world. Ultimately, these novels assert that migration is not simply a movement across borders but a profoundly human condition shaped by power, vulnerability, and the ongoing struggle for belonging.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/80**LANGUAGE LOSS AND EMOTIONAL UNTRANSLATABILITY:
MEMORY AND IDENTITY IN THE KASHMIRI DIASPORA****AREEN SHAH**

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the intersections of language attrition, mnemonic disruption, and identity fragmentation, particularly within the Kashmiri diaspora, focusing on the concept of emotional untranslatability as an analytical tool for examining affective dimensions of language loss. It establishes that the erosion of Koshur (Kashmiri language) in diasporic contexts includes more than just a sociolinguistic shift in code preference; rather, it identifies a systemic rupture in the transmission of cultural memory and the capacity for culturally situated affective expression. This paper positions Koshur as a semiotic repository of lived experience that encodes culturally specific affective registers, relational epistemologies, and mnemonic frameworks irreducible to dominant linguistic systems such as English or Urdu. This paper uses the concept of emotional untranslatability to account for the inability to translate of certain affective meanings, idiomatic constructions, and culturally embedded phenomenological experiences with equivalence. It also argues that language shift does not leave memory intact; rather, it fundamentally alters its articulation, thereby producing a condition in which the exactness and essence of mnemonic content slowly deteriorate generation after generation. This paper explains how the progressive erosion of Koshur leads to an identity marked by affective incompleteness, one in which belonging is negotiated through partial, translated, and semiotically weakened forms of cultural memory. It concludes that the loss of Koshur constitutes not just linguistic erosion in the conventional sense, but the ontological contraction of a distinct emotional world - a collapse of the affective infrastructure through which Kashmiri diasporic selfhood has historically been founded and sustained.

Keywords: emotional untranslatability, linguistic erosion, koshur, Kashmiri diaspora, displacement, essence, mnemonic disruption

Introduction

Language is not simply a tool of communication, but also a constitutive medium through which thought, memory, and affect are structured, sustained, and spread across time. Apart from functioning as a neutral vehicle for the expression of pre-linguistic content, language also shapes the very categories through which experience is organised, felt, and remembered. This foundational principle,

articulated most significantly in the Humboldtian tradition and subsequently elaborated across linguistic anthropology, cognitive linguistics, and affect theory, achieves particular importance when applied to communities undergoing language erosion particularly due to migration and displacement. For such communities, the erosion of a heritage language is not just a sociolinguistic phenomenon but also a psychocultural event that questions their sense of memory, belonging, and selfhood.

It is with this thought in mind that this paper situates its investigation into the Kashmiri diaspora and the growing erosion of Koshur (The native language of Kashmir). The decline of Koshur in diasporic settings cannot be understood simply as a straightforward shift in code preference or communicative convenience. Rather, it is rooted in a systemic rupture, one that disturbs the intergenerational transmission of culturally specific ways of feeling, remembering, and subsequent meaning-making. As Koshur recedes under the structural pressures and feasibility exerted by dominant languages such as English and Urdu, what is lost is not just a set of lexical and grammatical forms, but a sentimental structure - a semiotic repository of lived history that includes emotional registers, relational epistemology, and mnemonic frameworks that cannot achieve equivalence in other linguistic systems.

This paper embraces this emotional untranslatability as its central theme. The notion spreads across existing work in linguistic relativity, translation studies, and diaspora theory and thereby addresses a gap in the literature: the tendency to treat language loss primarily in terms of communicative or cultural impoverishment, while undertheorizing its consequences in terms of sentimental value and mnemonic capacity.

This interruption between inherited narrative and dismissal of sentimental value attached to a language is more prominent among second-generation diasporic subjects. Such subjects occupy a structurally ambivalent position - despite inheriting narrated concepts of homeland, familial memory, and collective loss, they remain distanced from it because of their linguistic formation in dominant languages. This results in a form of mnemonic mediation in which memory is received as content and lacks its original experiential register, thereby producing a gap between what is remembered and what can be felt or meaningfully reproduced.

The loss of Koshur has ultimately led to the shrinkage of an entire emotional world; a collapse of the affective and semiotic infrastructure through which Kashmiri diasporic identity has historically been formed, negotiated, and reproduced. To lose the language, therefore, is not only to lose a means of expression but also the experiential horizon within which certain feelings, memories, and modes of belonging become possible at all.

Emotional Untranslatability: Conceptual Grounding and Theoretical Lineage

The concept of untranslatability has a considerable history within translation studies, where it has been theorised as the condition in which particular words, idioms, or culturally embedded meanings are unable to be fully translated in a target language, not because of a lack of equivalent lexical items, but because meaning is inherently bound to the specific historical, social, and affective worlds in which it was formed. The foundational understanding here is that languages are not parallel systems encoding the same content in different linguistic structures; they are, rather, distinct structures of meaning-making whose categories, connotations, and affective qualities are incommensurable in ways that no act of translation, however skilled, can fully overcome. Umberto Eco captures this irreducibility when he characterises translation as the art of failure, establishing the unbridgeable gap between source and target that perseveres even in the most skillful translation, since meaning is inextricably rooted in the linguistic and contextual specificity of its original construction (Eco). Barbara Cassin's *Dictionary of Untranslatables* (2014) extends this concept to philosophical traditions, arguing that untranslatables are not simply words without equivalents but "symptoms of difference" between languages - terms whose resistance to translation marks the points at which distinct cultural and intellectual worlds diverge most fundamentally (xvii). For Cassin, the appropriate response to untranslatability is not to resolve it through estimate but to let the gap remain visible rather than paper over it with false equivalence.

Within this broader framework, scholars working at the intersection of affect theory and translation studies have started to come up with the concept of what may be called emotional or affective untranslatability, the condition in which not just content but feeling itself, in its culturally specific tonality and character, resists cross-linguistic equivalence. Kaisa Koskinen, in *Translation and Affect* (2020), argues that affective dimensions of language exhibit a particular adhesiveness, "sticking" to specific linguistic forms, cultural histories, and embodied associations in ways that render their movement across languages inherently precarious (Koskinen 42). For Koskinen, affect is not a free-floating emotional content that can be detached from its linguistic vehicle and reattached elsewhere; it is sedimented within particular forms, and its translocation essentially involves reduction or distortion. Lawrence Venuti's influential theorisation of the "foreignness" of translation is also relevant here: Venuti argues that domesticating translation practices, those that smooth the target text into idiomatic fluency, systematically suppress the cultural difference encoded in the source, producing an illusion of transparency at the cost of genuine alterity. This argument implies that the drive toward communicative equivalence in translation endorses exactly the kind of affective flattening that this paper identifies as central to language loss in diasporic contexts.

The psycholinguistic and practical dimensions of this argument are verified by a growing body of research on the affective weakness of cross-linguistic transfer. Studies in real-time interpreting and written translation consistently demonstrate that affect-laden content, emotionally charged testimony, expressions of grief, trauma narratives, and intimate address are excessively prone to loss, flattening, or distortion in the process of cross-linguistic mediation (Bontempo and Malcolm 74). Translators and interpreters, working under the double pressure of semantic precision and target-language fluency, tend to regularise affectively charged material, creating translations that are overall adequate but neutralized in their tone. This pattern validates the claim that affective meaning is not simply additional content inserted into structure, but is constitutively bound to the specific linguistic form through which it is expressed, and thus particularly weak when that form is displaced. Eva Hoffman's account of her own linguistic displacement in *Lost in Translation* (1989) offers a powerful phenomenological complement to these findings: Hoffman describes the experience of transitioning from Polish to English as producing a felt gap between word and world, in which the new language provides communicative adequacy while failing to replicate the affective density of the original "the connotations," that have "accumulated around words" through lived experience and cultural embeddedness (Hoffman 107). Scholarship on diasporic and exilic subjectivity has further illuminated the ways in which linguistic displacement reshapes the affective quality of memory across generations.

Building on these interconnected theoretical strands, this paper highlights emotional untranslatability as a refined critical framework specifically in the context of the Kashmiri diaspora. The concept brings into spotlight the structural condition in which Koshur's culturally specific affective lexicon resists equivalence in English or Urdu, not because equivalent expressions are absent, but because the affective force of Koshur terms is rooted in the historical, social, and sensory worlds in which the language developed and its native speakers were formed. Terms such as *shoosha* (beloved, with connotations of fragility and cherished intimacy in harmony with Kashmiri affective norms) or *gaasha* (light, carrying a luminous, tenderness that exceeds the descriptive range of English) are not simply vocabulary items waiting for equivalent replacement; they are affective formations whose tonal and semantic density cannot be separated from their cultural sensibility through which Kashmiri speakers have historically inhabited their world. When such terms are displaced by approximate English or Urdu equivalents, the result is not merely lexical substitution but the production of a structurally weakened contact with the memories, relationships, and modes of selfhood that those terms once made possible.

Language, Memory, and the Affective Archive of Koshur

As discussed, language operates not just as a system of signs but as medium of consciousness, perception, experience, and selfhood. In this broader academic

understanding, the Kashmiri language, Koshur, occupies a distinctive meaning: it constitutes what this paper terms an affective archive, a source in which memory and emotion are not just expressed but shaped. To speak Koshur does not just mean to simply communicate in a particular language, but to occupy a historically rich world of feeling, one in which experiences of loss, longing, belonging, and kinship are determined at the level of grammar, idiom, and everyday speech rather than residing as pre-linguistic content waiting for neutral transmission.

This concept stands in contrast to prominent accounts of language and translation, which treat linguistic systems as interchangeable codes whose primary function is the transparent conveyance of meaning. Such accounts, dominant in much of the sociolinguistic literature on language shift, however, underestimate what is at stake when a heritage language recedes. They assume a kind of affective portability, that the emotional content of experience can be transferred across languages without significant loss. This paper contests this assumption directly, arguing that Koshur does not merely replicate, but rather actively creates culturally specific styles of perceiving time, place, and personhood.

This is most prominently seen in the micro structures of Koshur - its idioms, proverbs, kinship terminology, and everyday speech. These linguistic forms are not decorative or secondary; they are the primary sites at which culturally specific emotional registers are determined and sustained. Kashmiri kinship terms, for instance, carry dense relational significances that cannot be found in its other counterpart languages like English or Urdu. Proverbs and idiomatic expressions contain in them collective memory, moral orientation, and communal feeling whose root meaning is inseparable from their specific linguistic form. When such expressions are translated, they may retain the overall content, but at the cost of root meaning and essence. This process renders certain Kashmiri modes of feeling not just underdescribed in other languages but also structurally untranslatable. It is exactly this phenomenon that the paper identifies as emotional untranslatability: the impossibility of reducing culturally rooted affect to cross-linguistic equivalence.

The consequences of this irreducibility become especially noticeable in diasporic contexts, where this language shift is not a voluntary artistic choice but a mechanical form shaped by the pressures of settlement, educational assimilation, and the dominance of metropolitan languages. As more and more generations of Kashmiri diasporic speakers shift toward English and Urdu, the affective meanings encoded in Koshur do not stay intact; they begin to weaken, slim, and eventually recede from the available collection of feeling. What is retained across this process of erosion is the bare architecture of memory - names, places, events, lineages, unfortunately stripped of the affective quality through which such memories were originally inhabited and spread. The diasporic subject may remember the intellectual content of the past, but it happens at the cost of losing

access to its emotional contours. They can recall that something happened but struggle to feel it in the way that Koshur would have made possible.

Gradual language erosion eventually leads to erosion of linguistic memory; it deeply reshapes its quality, thereby producing a state of affective diminishing in which memory becomes increasingly 'narrated' rather than felt, archived rather than inhabited. The affective archive of Koshur, therefore, is not simply a store of the past but a constant organization of feeling, and its erosion indicates not just the loss of a linguistic system, but the gradual reduction of an emotional world that cannot be fully rebuilt in translation.

Emotional Untranslatability and the Limits of Translation

It is important to note that emotional untranslatability is by no means a failure of linguistic skill or translation techniques, but a structural condition present in language itself; the resilient nature of some affective meanings that cannot be carried across linguistic systems without prominent modification or loss in meaning and essence. This concept does not refer simply to the absence of lexical equivalents (a phenomenon that is well-documented in comparative linguistics), but to something deeper: the irreducibility of culturally rooted affect to cross-linguistic replacement at the level of tone, indexicality, resonance, and socially ingrained meaning.

In the Kashmiri diasporic context, this structural condition shows the failure of dominant languages to sustain the tonal, idiomatic, and contextually rich weight of Koshur expressions. The language encodes grief, intimacy, deference, irony, and communal humour through inflections, address terms, proverbial registers, etc, whose affective richness is inseparable from the detailed social practices, historical experiences, and interpersonal worlds in which they are embedded. These are not just stylistic features that might be translated accurately through careful paraphrase, they are the very medium through which particular kinds of feeling are created and recognised. To translate them into any other dominant language like English or Urdu is not to reduce the same content in a different form but to produce content that is different and effectively diminished in essence altogether.

This diminishing becomes especially significant in the narration of diasporic experience. When Kashmiri speakers recount memories or even speak in dominant languages, the act of linguistic switch from their more frequently used, now dominant language tends to destroy qualities of experience thereby resisting smooth articulation. Though this may not result in a complete disappearance of memory, but it does lead to its reshaping, a process of affective destruction in which the past is rendered decipherable within a semiotically different and somewhat inadequate linguistic framework, thus producing versions of experience that are communicable but experientially weak. Memory thus becomes narratable without being fully inhabitable.

Emotional untranslatability, therefore, functions as more than just a descriptive category; it is a critical and analytical lens through which the deeper cracks in the field of language erosion and translation processes come under the spotlight. This concept of emotional untranslatability draws attention away from the mere communicative or informational dimensions of language loss, the inability of language and translation processes to convey certain words and concepts, and towards its affective and mnemonic consequences: the restructuring of what can be felt, how the past can be represented, and through what registers of experience diasporic selfhood can be constituted and expressed while retaining the essence of language. To study and analyse emotional untranslatability is to assert and acknowledge that what is lost in language loss is not just a system of representation but also a whole structure of feeling, one whose reduction and erosion leaves traces in the gaps between what diasporic subjects remember and what they are able to, in the languages available to them, feel fully and express.

Emotional Untranslatability in Practice: Kashmiri Idioms and Affective Gaps

The hypothetical claims laid out and discussed in the preceding sections of this paper find their most tangible and significant expression in the micro structures of Koshur itself; in the idioms, address forms, affective expressions, phrases, and speech acts through which the language encodes feelings and essence at a level of cultural exactness whose equivalence is near impossible to achieve in any available target language, no matter how good the translator is. It is at this minute and detailed level, rather than in broad superficial structural evaluation, that emotional untranslatability stops being an abstract proposition and becomes a lived, experienced, mundane condition of diasporic memory and expression. Every single act of linguistic substitution, every single moment in which a Koshur expression is paraphrased, approximated, or omitted to fit in the box of an English or Urdu equivalent, has a domino effect leading to subsequent loss of essence, and as this practice of fitting in continues, the accumulation of these micro events across generations and generations of diasporic speech acts like a sieve that filters out the essence of language, thus producing the larger condition of mnemonic estrangement that this paper seeks to theorise. Consider the expression *zuw chhum makleomut*, translatable, in its barest propositional form, as “I have become nothing” or “I am reduced to nothing”. In English translation, this phrase risks being perceived as a statement of pessimistic misery, an assertion of personal loss and emotional depletion. However, the affective register of *zuw chhum makleomut* in Koshur is significantly more complex and historically layered. The verb construction carries a precise touch of resignation, not a severe grief of loss but a slow, piled up weariness, a sense of having been worn down over time by forces larger than the self. Moreover, the phrase does not merely describe an individual emotional state, it includes the flavour of a collective historical experience of erosion, silencing, and dispossession that is woven within the expression itself. To

say *zuw chhum makleomut* is to invoke, indirectly but strongly, a horizon of resigned suffering, one shaped by decades of weariness. When the phrase is rendered in English as “I feel empty”, “I’m not well” or even “I have become nothing” the translation does retain propositional content while abandoning the essence of the words wired together to precisely express a certain feeling. What remains is personal interpretation; what is lost is the shared, historically sedimented aspect of feeling that the language carries and a Koshur would understand without effort or a need for clarification.

Another important form of untranslatability operates through kinship terminology, where the loss is not primarily that of historical character but of relational and affective precision. For instance, the Kashmiri term *maam* (roughly translated to the maternal uncle, more precisely the mother’s brother.) is not semantically equivalent to the English “uncle” despite their apparent referential overlap. *Maam* encodes a specific relational position within a matrilineal affective family, it carries connotations of warmth, sanctuary, kinship and a specific mode of intergenerational intimacy adjusted to the social and emotional hierarchies of Kashmiri family structure. Furthermore, the word *maam* is not specific to the mother’s brother. In the Kashmiri society, it is used more freely and interchangeably to refer to anyone considered as close as kin. The *maam* in Kashmiri cultural life occupies a distinct affective role that the generic English term “uncle” does not and cannot capture. To substitute one for the other in diasporic storytelling and translation is not merely to lose a word but to outrightly omit a relational world, thereby erasing a culturally specific affective position into a generic and universal familial category that carries none of its original emotional density.

Similarly, the expression *posh hish chakh*, roughly rendered as “you are soft” or “you are like a flower”, functions in Koshur as a term of endearment whose affective force doesn’t spring from its literal meaning but from its placement within a deeper context of Kashmiri affective expression. The term expresses softness, not as physical texture but as a moral and emotional quality - vulnerability, gentleness, and a kind of cherished fragility - that is deeply tied to specific modes of Kashmiri familiarity, particularly between an elder and a child or between people in moments of tenderness. The nearest English approximations, “you are sweet”, “you are gentle”, “you are kind”, do hint towards the same affective territory, but arrive there through completely different cultural pathways, carrying different connotations, different social registers, and different histories of usage. This result in a translation that communicates sentiment while lacking its precise emotional timbre.

Beyond specific expressions, the increasing effect of such switches in diasporic storytelling deserves certain attention. In the oral narratives through which Kashmiri diasporic communities generally transmitted memory and essence across generations, Koshur expressions are being routinely replaced, paraphrased,

or silently omitted as speakers shape themselves in harmony with the dominant languages of their speakers or their own children. While second-generation listeners may understand and comprehend the narrative content of these memories and traditions, the sequence of events, the names, the places, the outcomes, they also remain organizationally unable to access the affective texture through which those events were originally experienced and encoded. The story is still told, but something essential in the telling has been levelled over - the rough, culturally specific emotional essence that gave the original expressions their strength have been rendered comprehensible at the cost of their affective detailing and essence. This is the core reality of emotional untranslatability. It is not a dramatic rupture, but a quiet, fatal process of affective thinning, that happens slowly, one substituted phrase at a time, subsequently accumulating across generations into a condition in which diasporic memory becomes increasingly narrated, increasingly archival, decreasingly inhabited, and finally, lost.

Conclusion

The Kashmiri diaspora's growing experience of language loss cannot be reduced down to a simple shift in linguistic preference. Rather, it leads us to a deeper rupture in the affective and mnemonic structures through which identity is formed and sustained. This paper has drawn on and refined existing frameworks of untranslatability and affective transfer, developed across translation studies, diaspora studies, and the overall sociology of emotion, to centre emotional untranslatability as a concept to put into perspective what is at stake when Koshur erodes.

Theorists such as Umberto Eco have long established that translation works within certain limits, meaning is not just conveyed but also embodied, culturally situated, and resistant to complete equivalence. Contemporary scholarship on cross-linguistic negotiation covers this insight - emotional meanings are not only said, but they are lived, encoded in the rhythms, textures, and histories of a specific tongue. When Kashmiri idioms, kinship terms, and historically rich expressions are made to migrate into English or Urdu, much of their affective density is inevitably lost in transit. What remains are just narrated memories, while understandable, yet emotionally uninhabitable.

And the implications of this are significant. The erosion of Koshur is not just another case of linguistic erosion; it establishes a linguistic shrinkage - a narrowing of the distinct emotional world that the language makes possible, a question mark on the expressive ability of language. Koshur functions as an affective infrastructure, a structure of emotions and essence through which intimacy, memory, and relational selfhood are organised and expressed. As that infrastructure diminishes at the hands of attempted translation and loss of essence, so do the various diverse colours of Kashmiri diasporic identity, not suddenly or dramatically, but silently, word by word, phrase by phrase, idiom by idiom, generation by generation.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/81**MEMORY, VIOLENCE AND THE FEMALE WITNESS DURING THE CIVIL WAR: A STUDY OF SELECTIVE SRI LANKAN NOVELISTS****ARPITA ROYCHOWDHURY**State Aided College Teacher
Bhairab Ganguly College, West Bengal State University**Abstract**

This paper would discuss the entanglement of memory, violence, and identity of postwar Sri Lankan literatures through analyzing three current novels by Shyam Selvadurai *Funny Boy*, by Michael Ondaatje *Anil Ghosh*, and the *Seven Moons of Maali Almeida* by Shehan Karunatilaka. Using the postcolonial theory, queer phenomenology and trauma studies, the study places the female and queer witness to the forefront as a critical subject in the account of civil conflict. It claims that those suppressed voices disrupt mainstream masculine and national discourses by depicting narrative voices in such a manner as fragmentation, spectrality and spatial displacement. All the heroes Arjie, Anil, and Maali are placed in-between fluid, ambivalent locations that disrupt unitary notions of nationhood and memory. Literature as a source of counter-archive assumes the role of ethical witnessing to muted trauma and provides an imaginative path to justice and reconciliation; these things are identified in the analysis. Finally, the research confirms the extent to which literature has the potential to recover postwar national consciousness with the help of marginal vistas.

Keywords: Sri Lankan Civil War, Queer Witness, Postcolonial Memory, Female Subjectivity, Spectrality, Trauma Narrative, National Identity.

1. Introduction

The civil war in Sri Lanka (1983 to 2009) was not only the geopolitical tragedy but also a psychological and social disaster that left an indelible mark in the memory of the whole nation. It introduced breaks in family ties, national identity and interethnic relations, leaving a senseless self and the state. It is against this historical backdrop of nonending violence and historical erasure that literature offers a particularly important avenue in which memory, identity and trauma are both encountered and questioned. Literature produced in Sri Lankan Anglophone has been a very potent vehicle of expression of those who are marginalized within mainstream discourses, of which women and queer personalities are the most prominent ones. This paper focuses on the three recent novels written by Sri Lankan authors, namely *Funny Boy* (1994) by ShyamSelvadurai, *Anil Ghost* (2000) by Michael Ondaatje, and *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida* (2022) by ShehanKarunatilaka, so as to discuss how they are allotted to touch upon the

problems of memory, violence, witnessing contrasted with the role of the female and queer subject as the central witnesses of the civil war.

Pierre Nora claims that memory is not a simple recollection, but a so-called constructive process tremendously affected by trauma, ideology, and power (Nora 7). Memory, even more, gets politicized through the postcolonial circumstances with the country trying to cope with the legacy of colonialism, as well as the mess of post-colonial legacies. The post independent ethnic nationalism and British divide-and-rule that characterized the colonial experience of Sri Lanka directly contributed to the tensions and led to civil war. Literature, in this respect, acts as a counter-memory to state-sponsored erasures and silences of repressions. Each of the studied texts presents a different way of reimagining national trauma: through the prism of teenage queerness and ethnic insecurity (*Funny Boy*), the impersonal, but intensely personal point of view of a female forensic anthropologist (*Anil's Ghost*), and the surreal tale of a gay war photographer who goes on an afterlife journey (*The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*).

Funny Boy by ShyamSelvadurai is a coming-of-age semi-autobiographical novel that puts the foreground on the interplay between sexuality and ethnicity in pre-war Sri Lanka. The Tamil Arjie, as the main character, is alienated not only as a minority in the Sinhala-dominated Colombo but also by his own family in his instance of gender nonconformity. The novel is organized into episodes in which a wake up call, both on personal and political levels is emphasized, and it culminates in the 1983 Black July pogroms. Selvadurai develops the voice of Arjie who is one of the observers of not only the violence going on in the community of the society that he lived in, but also all forms of micro-aggressions that straight folks end up subjecting queer individuals to in such a conservative society. Judith Butler believes gender and sexuality to be in fact involuntary but performative, experienced as a result of repeated forms of social practices (Butler 179). This rejection of heteronormative norms destabilizes familial and national stories, and shows that the queerness displayed by Arjie is a political act. His outcastness is comparative to the outcastness of the Tamil group and the two axes of disenfranchisement problematize monolithic conceptions of Sri Lankan identity. Conversely, *Anil's Ghost* by Michael Ondaatje is within the center of the civil war that concentrates on the state-ordered violence forensic reconstruction. Anil Tissera is a Sri Lankan born yet Western-educated forensic anthropologist who goes back to the island as part of a UN investigation of human rights violations. Her character plays both an insider and outsider role, woman and professional, native and foreign trained, which hinders her objectivity of witnessing. In his prose, Ondaatje dissolves the boundaries between science and emotion because, as Anil is digging into mass graves, he faces the death of his loved ones. Her feminine nature is particularly important in a situation when the war narrations have traditionally promoted male heroism and martyrdom. The female subaltern, as GayatriSpivak posits in her famous article, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* has a dual

sense of being silenced, i.e. she first was silenced by the colonial patriarchy, then by discourse of nationalism later on (Spivak 287). Being a witness, Anil is thus faced with the ethical and epistemological problem: can truth be neutral in any way? But what is it to be a witness to crimes in a country that does not acknowledge its crimes? Anil is in fact a vehicle through which Ondaatje offers no real answers, but illuminates the cracks within knowledge and memory which the war has left open.

The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida by Shehan Karunatilaka extends the range of narrative mode and is told by the voice of a dead, queer war photographer who must avenge his own killing in seven days and reveal his notes that contain explosively political photographs. The late 1980s, the time of state terror, insurrection and mass disappearances, the setting of the novel, is a tribute to the chaotic postcolonial state, which is a blend of satire, ghost-story features, and political commentary. The plot of the story surrounds around Maali, being queer because that is a part of him, and it is not an identity that the author needed to prove or describe. Being a ghost and a queer man, he lives in liminal positions that resist status quo binaries, such as life/death, truth/lie, victim/perpetrator. The novel addresses what Sara Ahmed has referred to as queer phenomenology where queer lives are not characterized by being in straight lines of space and time (Ahmed 21). The excursion of Maali turns into an action of protest and a statement on the inefficiency of the institutes, media, politics, and justice systems to keep or even remember the lives in the war.

All three texts brought to the fore the concept of the witness as being not a mere witness to the action but ranging as an active agent whose presence is a challenge to the dominant stories. The female and queer characters then do not merely reproduce the events, they reconstruct them with the help of their experiences as embodied. This breaks the stereotypical masculinity that dominates the genre of the war literature, and where heroes are usually soldiers or rebels, and women either become victims or mourners. It is in these novels, however, where the female and queer subject is revealed as historian, interpreter and even spoiler to historical memory. This is in line with the works of Marianne Hirsch, who coins the term of postmemory to explain the experience of transferring trauma to the next generations, in particular via cultural texts (Hirsch 5). The memories that Arjie discloses in *Funny Boy* are determined by a silence of his family as well as a hidden desire; memory in *Anil Ghost* is dug out of the soil of the land; and in *Seven Moons* memory is made ethereal and becomes an image or a part of a story never completed.

The postcolonial theory also enhances the interpretation of such texts by placing them in a wider field of decolonialization, state-building and identity politics. The concept of the so-called third space put forward by Homi Bhabha comes in handy at this point, where he implies that the cultural identity is constructed rather than established but through the areas of collision and exchange (Bhabha 56). Arjie

between the Tamil and Sinhalese, Anil between the East and West, Maali between life and death all of these are such third spaces filled by the protagonists. The resulting mixed identities are then a locus of resistance against essentialist nationalisms which lead to civil wars. Their stories revolt against resolution, and require a reading ethics that has to agree to ambiguity, multiplicity, and fragmented truths.

Moreover, these novels are indictments of the institutional breakdowns that state violence brings with it- the judiciary, media or educational systems. Anil s Ghost is a minor attack on the global machinery of human rights and its shortcomings at the local levels. Seven Moons is a satire on the collusion of the journalists and politicians in concealing truth. Funny Boy shows that the family unit has not been able to defend the queer young people against strict conventions and ethnic intolerance. These critiques reveal how formal justice system failed to achieve reconciliation in postwar, even then the relevance of storytelling as avenue of alternative justice and remembrance.

The study, thus, tries to explore the issues as to how the literature of post war Sri Lanka explores these ambiguities of memory, violence, and identity inside the framework of the female and queer witness. It poses the question of How are the silenced voices narrativizing the histories of trauma? How do these stories challenge or rearrange national memory? And what do they do to the way the reader comprehends civil conflict, not as a historical after-thought, but as an active area of contestation over meaning, identity and belonging?

Placing Funny Boy, Anil s Ghost, and The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida in the overlap between the postcolonial approach to Sri Lankan literature, gender theory, and posttraumatic theory, this paper aims to make a contribution to the further elaboration of understanding of the way the problems of the postcolonial reality and gender issues in Sri Lanka are reflected in their literature. Bearing witness and, particularly, being in the margins is not merely a narrative process but an act of radical politics of reclaiming of voices and agency and truth under conditions of erasure.

2. Review of Literature

Postcolonial writing concerning the conflict, queerness, memory and identity has received a lot of critical gaze relating to the context of the Sri Lankan civil war. Academics have touched upon connections between gender, ethnicity, and displacement with the national trauma and narrative memory. These issues are evident in the ruling-out novels: Funny Boy by ShyamSelvadurai, Anil Ghost by Michael Ondaatje and the Seven Moons of Maali Almeida by ShehanKarunatilaka which all show these issues in the light of marginalized selves, queer and female voices in the particular. Applying the postcolonial theory, queer phenomenology, diasporic studies, and memory studies, this chapter surfaces some major theoretical points that have influenced this literary study presented in the following chapters.

The notion of queer phenomenology created by Sara Ahmed is important when it comes to figuring out how characters in the postcolonial conflict narratives cope with space, desire, and social orientation. Ahmed (*Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*) in her classic text claims that queer meanings are not only sexual but that the positionality of queer as a sexuality is indeed a position of disorientation within the heteronormative and nationalist orders. She states that, queer subjects are those who do not walk along the straight lineages of inheritance, family and reproduction (Ahmed 21). In the *Funny Boy*, disorientating of spaces is able to reveal the non-normative sexual identity of Arjie, his rejection in the male spaces, denial to join his family, and compelled to conform to the dominant norms of sexuality. On the same note, Maali Almeida in *The Seven Moons* goes through literal and metaphysical confusion, as the onetime dead in the afterlife, which metaphorically reflects the queer body being misplaced in the past and memories. The work of Ahmed assists in bringing queerness to these texts out of being an identity, but rather a means of defying the orientation of society.

Many works on postcolonial literature base their arguments on the theory of hybridity and ambivalence expressed in the work by Homi K. Bhabha. Bhabha refers to the way the postcolonial cultures form their cultural identities in the process of cultural negotiation of the meanings in the third space where binaries are disintegrated (Bhabha 175) in the article *The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: The Question of Agency*. Such nature of hybridity can be observed in the three novels. Arjie manages the Tamil and Sina vales and the Western and Sri Lankan values. Being a foreign-trained sleuth, Anil, the main character of Ondaatje novel has his or her voice neither local nor foreign, as he or she returns back to his or her homeland. Her power and identity are challenged, which means that she has found herself in the middle space. Maali Almeida being in between life and death turns out to be a literal example of postcolonial hybridity whose ghostly mobility transgresses both the political as well as sexual bipolarity and metaphysical. The theorization of Bhabha enables an interpretation of these characters not as confused, but symbolic of the variable and discontinued subjectivity that was formed during the postcolonial conflict.

Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation by Elleke Boehmer adds a feminine eye to postcolonial studies. By way of female narratives, she highlights how the national script has been broken by patriarchy, and the dominance of alternative narrative forms of storytelling has been brought to the fore. According to Boehmer, when women speak about the nation, it is not one nation and not chained in a linear chain anymore, but is multiplied, stratified, and tends to be contradictory (Boehmer 88). Anil is scientifically investigating something, and this is contrasted with his own interior struggle and moral conflicts, which we can observe in Anil in his *Ghost*. The fact that Anil is a female witness challenges the masculine narrative of war as the ultimate testosterone-charged genetic drives to procreate and kill. *Seven Moons* is no exception, in that,

despite the narrative focalization through a queer male voice, the narrative style is less linear and more reminiscent of the type Boehmer claims are attributed to gendered disruptions in national narration efforts.

Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures by GayatriGopinath is an extension of the connection between queerness, diaspora and postcolonial nationalism. She moves against the foreignness of queerness to South Asian cultures and instead states that queer diasporic writings, disorient heteronationalistic logic. Gopinath explains that the queer subjects in diaspora tend to speak of belonging to different imaginaries other than dominant state discourse of belonging, which are memory, exiles, desire (Gopinath 11). This is evident in the story of Arjie in *Funny Boy*: as a queer boy, Arjie is also alienated as a Tamil among Sinhalese citizens of Colombo. His feeling of exile is not physical; it is emotional and cultural too. Such queer diasporic experiences are acceptable under the framework created by Gopinath as politically powerful and not marginal.

In his article, *Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora*, RajagopalanRadhakrishnan underlines that the postcolonial identities are not characterized only by homeland and origin but by the motion, disorientation, and bargaining. He says that ethnicity as it exists in its diasporic state is being redefined continuously in the presence of rival identifications (Radhakrishnan 109). This observation is the main theme of *Anil Ghost*, in which Anil herself forms her identity through her experience with outlaw in foreign land, and her struggle to find her relationship with her past identity as a Sri Lankan and her advanced education by global means through studying forensic science. On the same note, Maali in *Seven Moons* bargains his Tamil, homosexuality, and political consciousness in a piecemeal afterlife. Radhakrishnan point affirms the identity constructed on not settling on the characters of the postwar narratives but portraying the transient qualities of the subjectivity of the subject in the contemporary world.

Finally, Marianne Hirsch's "Connective Arts of Postmemory" gives us a way to think about how trauma and memory work in these writings. Hirsch says that postmemory is how the "generation after" deals with the trauma of their predecessors—not by going through it themselves, but by using their imagination and feelings to connect with it (Hirsch 172). *Anil's Ghost* is a good example of this idea since Anil finds mass graves and tries to put together a history that the government has tried to hide. Her employment as a forensic scientist is a way for her to tell stories again. In *Seven Moons*, Maali's effort to share his pictures and reveal truths becomes a ghostly version of postmemory, with a dead man fighting to stop everyone from forgetting. Hirsch's work supports the premise that literature connects the past that has been hushed with the present that is questioning. These six scholars work together to give us the important framework we need to look at modern Sri Lankan novels that deal with conflict, queerness, memory, and gender. Their views support the idea that literary texts may be used to document national

traumas, give expression to queer and feminine identities, and make politics very personal. The following analysis will show how the chosen novels help to change the way we think about nationhood after violence by using queer theory, postcolonial hybridity, diasporic identification, and memory studies.

3. Theoretical Framework

The current work has been based on an interdisciplinary theoretical approach to which the following theories have been applied postcolonial studies, queer theory, feminist criticism, diaspora studies and trauma theory. These frameworks allow carrying out a sophisticated examination of the way representations of memory, identity, violence, and marginal subjectivities in Sri Lankan civil war literature are represented. We can view the chosen novels, *Funny Boy*, *Anil Ghost*, and *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*, through these prisms to get closer to the social, political and psychological undertones to the stories.

Disorientation in space, identity, and movement can be viewed through the lens of the theory of queer phenomenology offered by Sara Ahmed which is composed of a basic understanding. The argument that Ahmed presents on queerness claims that it is not just about being sexual, but it also depends on the deviation of the straight lines of cultural inheritance and normal belonging (Ahmed 21). The spatial and emotional dislocation of queer characters, Arjie and Maali, in the novels under consideration, is indicative of their sexual margins as well as their opposition to heteronormative nationhood.

The concept of hybridity and the third space developed by Homi Bhabha is very crucial in explaining literary figures that are present somewhere in-between cultural locations. Bhabha argues that postcolonial identity is not fixed but is in fact a process of negotiation which occurs, through contradiction and difference (Bhabha 175). All three of them Arjie, Anil and Maali live in unclear space-between ethnicities and between life and death, between home and exile- which is why they are at the centre of such a discussion on contested national memory and fractured postwar identity.

The notion of queer diaspora introduced by Gayatri Gopinath is of special importance to such characters that got their identities formed under the influence of dislocation and marginalization. Gopinath claims deeply that in *Impossible Desires* queer diasporic subjects can criticize the idea of Western approaches to sexuality and South Asian heteronationalism (Gopinath 11). In her framework, the level of a critical reading of the queer subjectivity of Arjie and Maali can be received as the political insertion into a realm of violence, repression, and historical erasures.

The feminist postcolonial theory of Elleke Boehmer in *Stories of Women* facilitates the discussion of gender discourses of the narrative structure of postcolonial countries. Boehmer demonstrates the disruption of the logic of national identity enforced by patriarchal voices by female and marginalized ones (Boehmer 88). Anil, the female protagonist of the story, does not only investigate

war crimes, but also involves her personal emotions and ethical foggyiness, therefore, being a representative of another type of national witness, both forensic and affective.

The theory of postmemory proposed by Marianne Hirsch finds important application in realizing how literature can become an instrument of passing the trauma over successive generations. To Hirsch, the concept of postmemory describes the connection of the second generation to the experience of trauma of the first one having been lived through a process of imaginative investment instead of direct experience (Hirsch 172). The novelists introduce characters (such as Anil or Maali) that follow this pattern - they reclaim the narration, voices and the documentation that the country has tried to reclaim or forget.

The comments by Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan on the issues of ethnicity among the diaspora bring even more colors to the perception of characters whose identity is formed by the clashing loyalties. According to him, the issue of diasporic identity is an instable issue that is continuously negotiated on both sides of the border (Radhakrishnan 109). All of the three cases in the book, Anil returning to Sri Lanka as a diasporic and ethnic one, Arjie having Tamil ethnicity in a Sinhala setting and Maali being stuck between worlds, all point to this theory of ethnicity disintegrating in the presence of civil war.

These theories in combination offer a complete perspective with the help of which to consider the way the chosen novels represent violence memory, queerness and gender in nationhood. They can enable the multi-layered reading of postwar Sri Lankan literature to see how individual trauma works, how the personal and collective history intersect, as well as how marginal voices can testify to what the official narratives or histories fail to acknowledge.

4. Research Objectives

1. To explore how the themes of memory, violence, and identity are represented in the selected Sri Lankan novels and how they contribute to the construction of postwar national consciousness.
2. To analyze the portrayal of queer and female protagonists as witnesses to civil conflict, and how their marginal subjectivities challenge dominant historical and political narratives.
3. To examine the use of narrative techniques such as fragmentation, spectrality, and spatial dislocation in reflecting the psychological and emotional dimensions of trauma and displacement.

5. Research Hypotheses

H1: The selected Sri Lankan novels represent memory, violence, and identity as interlinked themes that not only reflect individual trauma but also reconstruct postwar national consciousness through literary narrative.

H2: The portrayal of queer and female protagonists as witnesses in the selected texts challenges dominant patriarchal and nationalist historiographies, offering alternative perspectives on civil conflict and its aftermath.

H3: The use of narrative techniques such as fragmentation, spectrality, and spatial dislocation in the novels functions as a metaphorical device to express the characters' psychological distress and the lingering effects of displacement and trauma.

6. Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical research approach to closely read and analyse three Sri Lankan Anglophone novels: *Funny Boy* by ShyamSelvadurai, *Anil's Ghost* by Michael Ondaatje, and *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida* by ShehanKarunatilaka. We get secondary data from peer-reviewed journals, books, and critical essays that are on postcolonial literature, queer studies, and trauma theory. The study looks at storytelling methods including fragmentation, spectrality, and geographical dislocation to see how they relate to memory, identity, and psychological trauma. Scholars like Sara Ahmed, HomiBhabha, GayatriGopinath, Marianne Hirsch, and EllekeBoehmer have created theoretical frameworks that help us understand queerness, hybridity, diaspora, and postmemory. MS Word and Excel are examples of tools that can be used for annotating and organising themes. The study only looks at English-language fiction and focusses on how LGBT and female characters are portrayed in stories set in Sri Lanka after the conflict.

7. Result and Analysis

Objective 1: To explore how the themes of memory, violence, and identity are represented in the selected Sri Lankan novels and how they contribute to the construction of postwar national consciousness.

In *Funny Boy*, Selvadurai's story mixes personal and political memories to show how both internal and external turmoil influence who we are. As ethnic tensions rise in Sri Lanka before 1983, Arjie's gay identity changes as well. The main character grows up during a time when civil war is on the horizon, and the Black July riots of 1983 are the end of it all. This is a turning point in Arjie's life, but it's also the end of a multicultural illusion, which is replaced with dread and being displaced. Selvadurai uses memory as a way to fight back and heal, showing how personal stories go against clean portrayals of history. *Anil's Ghost* deals with memory through its forensic structure, bringing back realities that have been buried both physically and figuratively. Anil, an investigator trained in the West, goes back to Sri Lanka to find out about state-sanctioned atrocities by looking at skeletal remains. Ondaatje shows memory as broken, hard to find, and full of political meaning. Memory in *Anil's Ghost* doesn't make things clearer; it shows the quiet that follows violence. This fits with Hirsch's idea of postmemory because Anil's efforts to find forgotten stories are similar to what the second generation is doing to deal with historical trauma that has been buried. Memory becomes ghostly in *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*. Karunatilaka shows us a narrator who is already dead and is going to the afterlife to show us war crimes that were caught on camera. The ghostly voice of the main character is both funny and scary

as the character thinks on his past choices and how the country hasn't dealt with its violence. Maali's memories, which are kept in pictures, are proof that people don't forget. The book makes Hirsch's idea of postmemory real: Maali's trip in the afterlife is a metaphor for a country that is haunted by realities that have not been resolved.

Objective 2: To analyze the portrayal of queer and female protagonists as witnesses to civil conflict, and how their marginal subjectivities challenge dominant historical and political narratives.

In *Funny Boy*, Arjie's queerness goes against what the family expects and the nationalist talk that defines Tamil identity as being different from the Sinhalese Other. Using Gopinath's idea of queer diaspora, Arjie becomes a symbol of resistance not by doing something, but by not doing what everyone else does. His passion for another boy is not seen as deviant but as a type of freedom that goes against the strict rules of gender and ethnicity. The book uses queer identity as a way to criticise state violence and cultural conservatism. *Anil's Ghost* shows us a different form of marginal witness. Anil is both a woman and a returnee. She is stuck between what people say about human rights around the world and what really happens in her own country. Her experience as a woman affects her research, not just as a forensic technique but also as a fundamentally moral act. Boehmer's ideas about gender and national narrative help us understand how Anil fits into the story as a threat to the masculine state. Her efforts to speak for the dead who have been silenced fit with Spivak's idea that it is our moral duty to speak for the subaltern.

In *Seven Moons*, Maali Almeida is a homosexual war photojournalist who utilises his position as a closeted gay man and a ghost to criticise the corrupt connections between politics, journalism, and religion. Maali is sexually active and politically vocal, which is different from Arjie. Ahmed's queer phenomenology fits here: Maali's queerness isn't just about sex; it's also about being lost—being stuck between life and death, reality and myth. His role as a queer witness in the afterlife makes fun of how silly Sri Lanka's political violence is, but it also calls for accountability through art and testimony.

Objective 3: To examine the use of narrative techniques such as fragmentation, spectrality, and spatial dislocation in reflecting the psychological and emotional dimensions of trauma and displacement.

Funny Boy is made up of episodes, which is like Arjie's broken path of self-discovery. Each chapter shows a time of personal progress or loss against a background of worsening social and political conditions. The disintegration shows Arjie's inner struggle between allegiance to his family and his own reality. The idea of the "third space" that Bhabha talks about fits here because Arjie lives in a mixed space that makes both Tamil and Sinhala stories less stable. *Anil's Ghost* is also not linear. To show how chaotic civil war is and how hard it is to find the truth, Ondaatje uses changing points of view, time gaps, and symbolic

repetition. The ghost metaphor is there, but it's more abstract—it's in the trauma that stays in landscapes, bodies, and silences. The way the work is written makes it hard to end, which shows how hard it is to fully understand history. *Seven Moons* by Karunatilaka is the most experimental in terms of form. It combines elements of ghost stories and noir satire, and it tells the story in the second person, making the reader feel like they are part of it. There is both stylistic and thematic fragmentation here: memory is unreliable, identity is unstable, and the line between what is genuine and what is not is always changing. The spectrality is real: Maali's ghost moves through a bureaucratic afterlife, showing how ridiculous Sri Lanka's governmental problems are. The story turns into a ghost story about a country that can't bury its dead or forget about its past.

8. Discussion

The results of this study show how Sri Lankan civil war literature employs stories to deal with memory, trauma, and identity after conflict. *Funny Boy*, *Anil's Ghost*, and *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida* are the works that show how personal and political memories overlap, often through the voices of those who are not in the mainstream. These books disrupt mainstream histories by putting female and queer witnesses at the centre of their stories, which are broken up into several parts that provide us different ways of remembering. The novels show how war and being forced to move can make people feel confused and lost by using narrative strategies like fragmentation, spectrality, and nonlinear temporality. Ghosts, broken timelines, and dual identities are both real and symbolic ways to show trauma. Using ideas from queer phenomenology and postmemory, the study shows how characters like Arjie, Anil, and Maali deal with violence not just as victims, but also as truth-tellers, resisters, and people who do ethical memory work. In this way, the books are like counter-archives, which are literary places that keep alive what state narratives try to hide. By doing this, they not only show trauma, but they also take part in the cultural and political reckoning of it. Literature becomes an important way to heal, testify, and revise history after the conflict.

9. Conclusion

This research shows that the chosen Sri Lankan novels critically look at the complicated issues of memory, violence, and identity through the eyes of queer and female witnesses. Instead of telling trauma tales in a straight line, the texts use broken frameworks, ghostly voices, and non-normative main characters to challenge official histories and highlight experiences that are often left out. Using theories from several fields, such as postcolonial hybridity, queer diaspora, and postmemory, the research shows how literature may bring back stories that have been silenced and change the way people think about their country. Arjie, Anil, and Maali are not just passive victims; they are strong witnesses whose voices challenge patriarchal and heteronormative norms. Even though their stories are made up, they do an important job of remembering the past and changing the

present. The novels this study looks at not only show the scars of war, but they also help people imagine ways to bring about justice and peace. In the end, this study shows that literature may change things by breaking the silence after a battle and helping people heal together.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/82**PARTITION AND ITS ARTEFACTS: DELVING INTO THE INDIAN
PARTITION THROUGH THE LENS OF “MATERIAL HISTORY” AND
“ORAL HISTORIOGRAPHY”****DEVASHREE NARAYAN**St. Xavier's University
Kolkata, India**Abstract**

Following the decision of a new country i.e., Pakistan and Radcliffe's map, the 1947 Indo-Pak partition left behind not only just tangible goods but also the memories that these materials 'left behind' were associated or related to. The official historiography of the Partition of 1947 often subsumed the micro narratives leading to an incomplete narration of the cataclysmic event. Oral historiography through the search of the memory of the witnesses delved deeper into the buried experiences giving us a counter discourse of the existing body of research on the Partition. The newly formed India not only carried the remains but also buried the remains of people. This dissertation aims to delve into the accounts of oral histories incorporating what was left behind, i.e., 'the tangible parts' by the ones who fled or tried to flee (but lost their lives or ended up in refugee camps) to the other side of the newly formed Nation – Pakistan. The aim is to dig deeper in vision into tangible parts left behind and reminisce the brutal time of the '*Division of India*'. Considering the vast history of the 1947 Partition, this paper aims to consider mainly two books i.e. *Remnants of a Separation: A History of the Partition through Material Memory* by Aanchal Malhotra, which is a non-fiction book that delves into the accounts of tangible parts that people carried with them in hope of establishing life again. Another important non-fiction book is *Partition Voices: Untold British Stories* by Kavita Puri that delves into the Indian migration to Britain after the partition. The book notably mentions the tangible parts in its accounts including stories of people like Bashir Maan.

Keywords: Oral history, Material history, Non-fictional accounts, Memory, Britain, Divided India, Artefacts

Introduction

The history of both the countries although preserved in the archives and documents could not comprehend the stories of people that came along with their displacement. These records consisted of the facts and data but what remained concealed underneath, were the stories of the people who suffered during the Partition. This is where 'Material History' and 'Oral Historiography' steps in. Dealing with the accounts of personal experience of the people, Material History

constituted of materials that belong to the particular timeline and helps to trace the history associated with it.

Oral Historiography deals with narratives that were/are recorded and has the real-life accounts of the people who were the Partition survivors. Oral historiography casts light upon the told narratives. These narratives constituted of abduction, rape, lost land, alienation, violence, ethno-centric riots, displacement, alienation etc.

Weaving its focus around the Indian Partition, this paper aims to delve into bringing limelight upon the importance of oral narratives and material history that led to tell the traumatic experience of the people. Through the means of recorded oral narratives and the accounts of material history, this paper aims to trace the history of Indian partition through a different path i.e. through personal experiences of the people. The objective is to analyze the Partition through the lens of personal experiences of the commoners' materials that were recovered later or that they carried along, holds a vital role. The focus is to shift from the political aspects to a more personal narrative whereby the accounts given by the different partition survivors lead to analyze the havoc created by the Partition.

Carrying on the same aspect but with a similar lens, chapter 1 deals with Kavita Puri's viewpoint in her *Partition Voices: Untold British Stories*, which deals with the importance of oral narratives in understanding the Partition. Puri creates a world of narratives, narrated timelessly but end up creating the universe of experiences and sufferings.

Chapter 2 discusses the Partition with what Aanchal Malhotra in *Remnants of a Separation: A History of the Partition through Material Memory*, quotes "Migration is often accompanied by a feeling of unavoidable disorientation, and the circumstances of 1947 would have pronounced this feeling. In most cases, it would have created an involuntary distance between where one was born before the Partition and where one moved to after it, stretching out their identity sparsely over the expanse of this distance. As a result, somewhere in between the original city of their birth and the adopted city of residence, would lay their essence – strangely malleable." The aim is to cast light upon the importance of material history and the oral narratives that they carried along through the analysis of stories woven in her novel. Serving as the testaments of the struggle, sacrifice and losing, Malhotra weaves the plot around these tangible parts.

Chapter 1: Understanding the Partition through oral narratives

Based on collections of oral narratives of the Partition survivors, Kavita Puri writes "*Partition Voices: Untold British Stories*" focusing on documentaries presented on Radio 4. Starting from the time of British India, Puri weaves the narrative as her father being a lad of twelve. Puri cites Urvashi Butalia's from "*The Other Side of Silence*" where Butalia notes:

I have come to believe that there is no way we can begin to understand what Partition was about unless we look at how people remember it. I do

not wish here to carry out a literal exercise of Partition and then attempt to penetrate their narrative for its underlying facts to arrive at an approximation of some kind of 'truth.' Instead, I wish to look at the memories themselves, even if they are shifting, changing, unreliable. (Butalia 11)

Beginning from the time of colonial India, Puri casts light on the history of Indians during the British rule, weaving narratives. She begins by going down the memory lane of Pamela Dowley-Wise. Pamela spent most of her childhood with her 'coloured' AngloIndian nanny, Bessie Smith and ayah Marie, a Tamil. Their bond establishes the essence of one-ness, while sharing different cultural beliefs. Perhaps this preserves the essence of living together in a secular country like India. Hereafter, Pamela describes the situation of India where it started with breaking colonial rule but later took a communal turn creating a tension between communities i.e. Hindus and Muslims. Pamela recalls (about the 1946 riots),

There were terrible riots, and terrible killings," and records "You'd see dead bodies lying all over the place. I never got used to it. Perhaps after a riot I knew there'd be dead bodies, so I wouldn't go to the market. We used to go in the car to the Tollygunge Club where we would have tea and sit peacefully whilst father played golf or tennis. We still carried on our life as best we could. (Pamela 21)

Under the subheading 'Hurt the British!' Puri notes the story of a twelve-year-old lad, Ramen Banerjee (a Hindu Bengali) who believed it to be his responsibility of getting India rid of the Britishers and that too by following a different path from what Gandhi had preached. People like Ramen had started despising the idea that the country was being ruled by the Britishers.

Bashir Maan's narrative comprises of his life in India when he was young, he would mock at the Pathans little did he know that same would happen with him after the Partition. Hindus and Sikhs were leaving with whatever little they could carry. They took whatever little they could. The looters would loot the vacant houses at night. Most of the remains were collected and stored in a Sikh temple that acted as a storehouse. These amenities would come into use of those families who would be migrating from India and needed these as basic requirements for starting life again in a new land.

Gurubakhsh Garcha's tale describes how the tradition of distributing sweets came into existence in schools on achieving Independence. He witnessed the Partition as a lad of twelve who used to live in Dhandari Khurd in Punjab. He recalls an incident where a Muslim woman with her two children fell off the train and how Sikh women protected them in an abandoned building, protecting them till they were made to reach a safe camp. His narrative gives account of a very disturbing sight where when his grandfather and him noticed that the crops seemed lushier as previous years to which his grandfather made a note that it was because the

crops had been fertilized by the human bodies of the refugees who died on their way.

Harchet Singh Bains's narrative is a narrative that we come across from a perspective of a person who had his home in Pakistan and had to travel to India. He remembers his journey how they had to travel on foot and had to abandon even the little things since it rained and became hard to carry anything other than clothes that they wore. He recalls how they had to survive by eating tender leaves and how his sister used to rub chilly leaves just to have some flavor. He recalls how they once found dead bodies in well and so were further made to drink muddy water from puddles for further journey.

While the other narratives remain at a longing to get back to their native land, the narrative of Mohindra Dhall acts as a hope and sets an example for migrants. His narrative is that of recollecting his visit back to his village (Lyallpur) in Pakistan. His narrative is a reflection of how people had no option other than migrating and the ultimate end was to migrate even though it meant reluctantly. Very happily, Mohindra shows a rose-colored brick that he had brought back from his home in Pakistan when he went to visit his house, decades later after the Partition.

Haroon Ahmed's narrative frames the life of a wealthy Muslim family. Since, Haroon's father was a liaison officer, his family managed to settle well in Pakistan. However, Puri weaves how Haroon's mother never felt homely in Pakistan while his father never wanted to return back to India. The uncertainty of being abandoned away left Haroon's mother so affected that she would always carry a large handbag with her jewelries and cash for just in case if the ever had to flee again. His narrative also deals with racial oppression that he had to face after he moved to England. Haroon sets an example of how refugees wanted their family members and people to hear their side of their story of the Partition which led him writing a memoir to be read after his death.

Maneck Dalal's narrative is unique as it is one from the mouth of minorities i.e. from a Parsee. He noticed how people would often offer their everything to get flights arranged to Pakistan since it wasn't just about migration, it became a question of life and death.

Iftkahr Ahmed's narrative describes how he thought life would be normal even after the Partition. The Muslims thought of taking shelter in Jama Masjid and therefore walked in groups. At the Qila, he recalls women desperately selling themselves in need of food in return to feed their children. When he reached the Lahore station, he momentarily felt safe since he thought Pakistan was a land of Muslims and since he was a Muslim, everything would be right for him. As soon as he reached the station, he dozed off only to wake up to some wetness which he later found out was the blood of the dead bodies that were surrounding him. When he entered the city, he found Lahore was all burned just like cities of India were burnt. Both the countries had same outrage for the other religion. Iftkahr notes how he never wants to remember it since everything feels like a nightmare and

this was the reason he never told his narrative to anyone except his wife and later to his sons.

Raj Daswani's narrative itself is a microcosm of everything that the Partition survivors went through. He had to settle in military barracks but the condition was terrible. There were hardly any doors, windows, proper ventilation and even toilets yet they had to survive there. The conditions of the camp were terrible. There were only a few toilets and that too had no locks. Raj would often accompany his sister to the toilet for this reason. The government provided free rations but all the supplies were rotten. He describes how no known personality never visited and worked to curb their poor conditions. He says, about them "We were left just like orphans". He preserves his feeling of homeland by singing Sindhi songs, essays and poetries about Sindh. Although, his wife too migrated yet she refrains from tracing her roots by going back to her house where she grew up. She believes going back to the place would be suffering again by opening her wounds. His narrative highlights how Sindhis felt abandoned and did not get any province to themselves.

Under the division, Rootless, Puri traces the narratives of Amar with help from Veena. Amar had never talked about her roots and it was later after her death, her daughter, Veena found her writings. Amar's writings are the only surviving narratives of Amar which she never spoke of. Amar was married to Amar Singh Dhillon and just after the day of their first night, they had to flee in the morning. While Dharam never talked about the Partition, Amar did similar thing but she instead jotted everything. Her writings contain the essence of racism that migrants suffered since her father was denied of promotion because the English men refused to work under Indians. Veena, after reading her mother's writings feels rootless since she never belonged to the place which her parents belonged. But conversations with Puri made her long to trace her familial roots.

The final section of Puri's narrative collection is that of her father's, Ravi Dutt Puri's narrative. He was born in Lahore. His narrative tells how when he was a teenager, he joined RSS, a Hindu right-wing organization but later backed out due to rise in communal violence with the people he knew, being killed. Puri's father had nothing that was tangible from his native land. This was the reason that he later on used to click pictures a lot. Puri's father's death is symbolical as she highlights how people from different religions performed their prayers for her father, who was very dear to them.

Chapter 2: Delving into the Indian the Partition through Material History

Beginning with the mention of a 'Gaz' and a 'Ghara', Malhotra delves into artefact preserved by Y.P. Vij (relative of Malhotra from her maternal side) which belonged to his parents and were brought from Lahore before the Partition happened. Clenching delicately, he told them that his mother used to 'Ghara' to churn lassi when they were kids. Malhotra gives a description of physical appearance of the 'Ghara' (highlighting the parts getting rusted as well) to

establish a sense of antiquity. Then, talking about the ‘Gaz’, her granduncle tells her that it was used to measure fabric since they had a clothing store. Although these artefacts were once normal objects of domestic household yet they held importance in memories associated with it even by simply touching it.

Under ‘The Pearls of Azra Haq’, she traces back Azra Haq’s life in Ludhiana through her black velvet pouch containing a golden tinted chained pearl necklace and a pair of earrings, both made of Basra pearls. She describes how she got the antiques in her possession from her father’s elder brother, Mian Ehsan-ul-Haq who had great connections with the British officials and the Maharaja family. Her necklace and earrings symbolize a transformation of life from luxury to struggle after migration. Azra, wearing the necklace during the interview symbolizes how migrants found relief and held onto things that somehow traversed them back to the memories of the past.

The third section, deals with utensils of Balraj Bahri from times when he lived in Malakwal where he describes how riots had started and he had to flee with his parents and siblings. They had packed some clothes and her mother had carried some utensils from her kitchen since rations would be provided to refugees. So, they carried the lassi glass in order to quench thirst from any source which they would find. The lassi tumbler had an inscription of initials of Balraj’s father, D.L.M i.e., Daryayi Lal Malhotra. Then his wife told them how large utensils were for men as compared to that of women of the family and would often come as dowry with the inscriptions of the husband’s name. T, highlighting the importance of utility, this brings into notice how important basic utility became, during the Partition.

The shift focuses again from utility to prized possession which forms the section “The Maang-Tikka of Bhag Malhotra”. The narrative brings out another aspect of refugee camps where women and girls were trained to protect themselves from assassins either by putting chilli powder all the time on their index fingers or by carrying a small ivory handled foldable knife all the time with themselves, to either kill the attackers or themselves. Even years later, Bhag Malhotra had it in possession even though it had got rusty and she still used it to cut stems and aloe vera plant. Her narrative gives vivid descriptions of escaping abduction where women cut off their breasts, jumped into the well, killed themselves to protect their dignity since dignity was above everything at that time. The Maang-Tikka became the only existing evidence of her memories of marriage after losing her husband, house and native land. Even though Bhag’s mother initially planned to sell it to survive but she never parted from it. Her narrative weaves a relationship between the Maang-Tikka and her roots.

The section of Mian Faiz Rabbani focuses on a stone plaque. Rabbani begins his narrative admiring the sole picture that he had of his father. He recalls how he would watch Dussehra celebrations from his terrace and tells how at his time there was no feeling of contempt and hatred between the two communities. He recalls

he hadn't faced any clash between the two until he attended Aligarh Muslim University where he encountered people who supported the formation of Pakistan. He points out the stone plaques that were fixed to his house.

Professor Sat Pal Kohli's artefacts included a variety of things starting from a silver cigarette case, a silver soap dish, silver Patiala glass, gulab dani and her jewelleryes. Kohli highlights how none of these were truly considered to be her mother's since the patriarchal society laid emphasis on men being the bearers and somehow all of these were gifted to her mother as her wedding gift. Kohli then highlights what truly was his mother's. It was a pair of scissors which had been oxidized and the edges had turned blunt, he highlighted it as it was the only thing that her mother used a lot which was to make clothes for her children.

Sumitra Kapur's relic consists of Guru Granth Sahib that was given to her by her mother. Her narrative attached to the book is that of peace and solace that she found going through the pages. This turned to be the reason why she would read some pages of it every day. Her relic is significant as it forms a religious aspect of the Partition in a positive way. While communities killed each other, she found it was through her religion that her pain could be eased.

Conclusion

This dissertation aims not only to mention oral narratives as records but also gives account of material history that has its own narrative bringing forth the narratives that lay hidden below the surface. The dissertation has records of all the stories while mentioning and analysing the importance and impact of each narrative associated with the Partition survivors. Dealing with particularly two books, *Remnants of a Separation: A History of the Partition through Material Memory* by Aanchal Malhotra and *Partition Voices: Untold British Stories* by Kavita Puri, the findings were as under mentioned.

Oral narratives not only present histories but with the personal experiences of people where textual, statistical, and historical data fail. Giving a more ground level experience records and the aim of recording oral narratives from people who do not occupy any corner in museums. Puri also highlights how, while documenting these narratives, interviewees would often pose questions like "Why would you want to hear my story? I am not Nehru, Jinnah or Gandhi". This highlights how migrants assumed their lives meant nothing more than quotidian and did not see as worthwhile looking at or reflected upon. At times, the relics cannot be relied upon. This is where recording the experiences from the survivors' plays an upper hand.

Findings from Chapter 1 included delving into motive behind why Puri mentions the whereabouts of Pamela and every other narrator's location and whereabouts today, to establish the sense of reality to the narrative of Pamela. Not only is this but Pamela's house embellished with pictorial representations, artefacts of her time. Pamela's narrative not only acts as a story that can be read in books but she celebrates her Indian-ness by inking her life and time in India; in her books. Her

story is a replication of perspective of the Britishers who found home in India and even after so many years, longed to get back their roots but since they could not, it was memory and their narratives that kept them going. Ramen's narrative would have never come out if he had been dead or assassinated. Ramen's role might have been underground but reveals how troops worked confidentially. Not only this but his narrative also depicts how even children were easily misled and were involved in horrific activities. The present scenario of longing for his Muslim friend, Shamsuddin depicts how Ramen's act was driven momentarily by the activities taking place around him and not because he solely wanted to carry out such missions. Ramen's longing for India before the Partition never dreamt of the Indian Partition rather it believed only in Independence. His story is a perfect example of how people differentiated between Independence and the Partition and how they supported Independence but not the Partition. This would have never been considered if Ramen's story had never been recorded. His story establishes the essence of how his country was his home but his home could never be in his country. Maan's narrative not only acts as a tale of life but imparts the essence of racism that came along with migration. Maan is just an example, he recalls how children shouted, "There is a darkie, Johnnie the darkie, hello Mister Darkie, here comes a darkie, darkie, barkie." In Bashir's house, there hangs a letter from the Queen awarding Bashir who first worked as a pedlar then became the first Muslim city councillor then a district judge. This not only acts as a tale of survival but also becomes evident of how people strived to relive a life of dignity in a land that once oppressed them. His narrative tells the story of discrimination, not just post partition but also during the partition; within communities. Although attaining everything that Pakistan could not give Bashir, Bashir still goes back to Maan to relive the memories of his past. This is symbolical of how the migrants even though after surviving the horrific situations and trauma that the Partition gave; longed to stay connected to their roots. Besides this, Bashir also expresses how neither him nor any Muslim expected the Partition to happen at such a rate and only wanted a reputed place in the country; i.e. in India. He relived his memories writing books about the Partition which acts as an important repository of memories of people like him. Ken's narrative of being reminiscent of mustard oil that her ayah used to put, would never find a place to be mentioned rather than fictional stories. Ken's remembrance of her adds how oral narratives capture the essence of minute things and details of everyday lives. His schooling journey reflects what Anglo-Indians faced at that time. His narrative also imparts the essence of how he, as a child was unbothered about the Partition but as he grew up, he realized what the Partition was. Gurbakhsh's and Swaran Singh Rayit's tale also gives accounts of abduction and rape of women and how women were married off to anyone. Some learned to adjust while others suffered in disguise. His tale also mentions how the dominant population harassed the other just as an incident is mentioned where an elderly Sikh man tried to feed pork (not literally,

it was meat) to his Muslim wife (whom he had abducted), to establish his supremacy. His narrative also has the essence of personal loss as towards the end of his narrative he mentions how despite being protected by his family, he lost his teacher because he was a Muslim. In fact, Karam Singh Hmdard's narrative mentions how his father and others made a peacemaking committee to avoid disputes between the two communities. Both of their narratives do not celebrate Independence since they believed both the communities could survive mutually agreeing to live together.

All the narratives have something in common that is nobody ever thought the Partition would create such a havoc. The narratives are not just tales of relocation but highlights how people migrated with whatever means they could i.e. airways, waterways, by trains, by carts or even on foot. Haroon died two months later after Puri recorded his narrative. It is important to note that Haroon had his time to tell his narrative to others while others didn't. For decades people refrained from telling their side of the Partition story. Iftkahr's narrative also shows how the second generation of the Partition survivors had to suffer racism while the first tried to forget the reality they faced. It was due to this that his son Nick changed his surname from Ahmed to Yearwood (taking his mother's surname) to survive. His son's attempt of helping his father weave the memoir of the Partition acts as an aware behavior to learn history through personal memories. The narratives not only describe horrific experiences but also recall how they were helped by people and kindness and humanity still prevailed even though the country was divided. Many narratives came out on surface because they feared they would fade into oblivion, if not narrated to reliable people. Puri has intentionally included picture gallery of the migrants/ narrators to establish the essence of authority of the oral narratives that were told. While the books and records contain the factual data of events that happened during the Partition, Puri has intentionally brought stories from broken houses, alienated families, and life thriving narratives.

Findings from chapter 2 included why Malhotra gives account of analyzing Material History, acts as a gadget for the Partition survivors to time travel back to the days they remembered associating with the artefact. Malhotra's book analyses Material History not only as studying the artefacts but it blends Oral Historiography while keeping the materials associated as the central aspect. While people prioritized fleeing safely to a location, many artefacts remain buried, lost and even destroyed. Not only, did this dissertation highlighted the importance of Material History but it also highlighted how heirlooms of their owners preserved it making them priceless possessions. The artefacts highlight the timeless nature of objects and how it retained memory. Malhotra blends the difference of Material History and Oral Historiography as she associates tracing history associated with the artefact further following the track of events leading to narratives of the Partition. The recollections of memories associated with the artefacts under study, provides a liminal space where people connected their present with that of their

past finding solace in the earlier lived moments while relinquishing the artefacts' present importance in their lives. The materials in possession like that of Y.P. Vij's mother's 'Ghara', Azra Haq's 'Pearls', John Grigor Taylor's photographs, Uma Sondhi Ahmad's 'Trunk' bring memories of their 'childhood across border'. Mian Fiaz Rabbani's narrative recalls his luxurious childhood as well. These narratives long their childhood. Sitara Faiyaz Ali's collectives talk about similar household items and act as a connection to the lost past. The recollections were never that of sweet memory for people who had to flee. Although they tried to recall memories of sweetness but it always that they felt a heaviness while narrating their story just as in case of Balraj Bahri.

This dissertation hence opens various perspective related to study Oral Narratives of the Partition literature. While historical studies, geographical demarcation, gender studies, ethnocentric studies, violence, and trauma have been dealt in earlier works. Racism is a scope that can be dealt in more detail. This leads to analyze the Partition through a Marxist lens as well; not only after the Partition but also from the times of Colonial India i.e. how the narratives of Britishers portray their economic position. Not only just the Britishers but the narratives of people like Bashir Maan also reflect how there was a shift in position of people and their strata in economic ladder got affected after the Partition. Another aspect that opens for the Partition reading is analyzing it through linguistic approach. While there was a shift in country, people still used their earlier dialects and that was evident in their recitation.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/83**AN ANCIENT MEITEI MAYEK MANUSCRIPT TEXT REFLECTING
LINGUISTIC, SOCIO-POLITICAL AND LITERARY STRUCTURES
WITHIN SOUTHEAST ASIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE****MUTUM SURJAKANTA SINGH**Department of Umanglai Haraoba, M.A. Alumnus
Manipur University of Culture, Palace Compound, Imphal, India**Abstract**

This study examines an ancient Meitei Mayek manuscript in Manipuri language and analysed its linguistics, socio-economic, political, and literary significance within Southeast Asia's cultural heritage. Historically, Manipur was an independent kingdom with its own language, script, religion, and identity, which underwent transformation in the 18th century under Hindu influence. The ancient text analyse in this study provides rich evidence of the Manipur people's engagement with governance, socio-economic practice, ethical and moral values, and literary expression, demonstrating how language served as a both cultural repository and a medium of societal thought. The study also addresses contemporary challenges, including language conflicts and informed over the socio-political status of Scheduled tribes, which highlight on-going negotiations of identity, equality, and cultural preservation within Manipur. By analysing linguistic features, narrative structures, and socio-political content, this research illuminates the interplay between language, culture, and governance in both historical and modern contexts. This finding contribute to deeper understanding of Southeast Asia's cultural diversity and offer insights for addressing contemporary socio-political and cultural challenges in Manipur. The research adopts a mixed-method, interdisciplinary approach to study the manuscripts and their continuity in contemporary society, highlighting the Meitei Mayek script's role in preserving governance, moral values, and literary expression. The study also considers Meiteilon's recognition as classical language and evaluates criteria for scheduled Tribe status, understanding its enduring importance as a repository of Manipuri culture, heritage, and collective memory.

Keywords: Manuscript, Language, Culture, History, Manipur, Meitei Mayek.

Introduction

Ancient written texts serve as invaluable repositories of human knowledge, preserving the linguistic, socio-economic political and literary structure of past civilizations. Within the broader culture landscape of Southeast Asia, the Meiteilon language-spoken by the Meitei community of Manipur—occupies a distinctive and historically significant position. (Meiteilon) Manipuri is the native language of the Meitei community of Manipur belongs to Tebeto Barman

linguistic and has historically served as a common lingua franca among various indigenous communities of the region. Previous finding supports the claim as noted by Meitei, Ningombam, and Purkayastha, “Hence it is regarded as lingua franca of Manipur state, since 20 August 1992 Manipuri become the first Tibeto-Brahman language to receive recognition as a schedule VIII language of India” (Ningombam, and Purkayastha 3423). Ancient Manipuri written texts, originally composed in the indigenous Meitei Mayek script, offer profound insights into the cultural heritage and civilization development of Manipur within Southeast Asia. These texts reflect a complex linguistic system shaped by indigenous traditions and sustained interaction with neighbouring culture of Southeast Asia. The grammatical structure, vocabulary, stylistic, features, and modes of expression found in early Manipuri manuscripts demonstrates the language’s antiquity, adaptability, and literary sophistication. As such, they contribute significantly to the understanding of linguistic evolution within the Tibeto-Burman language family and the broader Southeast Asia linguistic sphere

Beyond language, ancient Meitei Mayek script texts document the socio-economic life of the Meitei society, including agrarian practices, trade systems, social stratification, customary law, and religious institutions, royal chronicles, ritual texts, and poetic composition provide evidence of organized political systems, monarchical governance, and diplomatic relations with neighbouring kingdoms. These writing illuminate how power, authority, and social order were constructed and maintained within the historical context of Southeast Asia. Literarily, own language and script texts encompass a rich tradition of mythology, oral narratives, epic, poetry, religious hymns, and historical chronicles. Works such as royal genealogies and sacred manuscript reflect a deeply rooted literary consciousness and an indigenous aesthetic tradition. These literary forms not only served artistic purposes but also functioned as instruments for preserving collective memory, moral values, and cultural identity.

Historical accounts indicates that a significant number of ancient Meitei manuscripts were destroyed during religious transformations, leading to the loss of literary, historical, and cultural knowledge. Despite this destruction, surviving texts, oral traditions, and later manuscripts continue to reflect the linguistic, socio-economic, political, and literary structure of pre-modern Meitei society. This study examines ancient own language and script written texts as cultural artefacts that embody linguistic evolution, socio-economic organisation, political authority, and literary traditions. By situating these texts within the broader context of Southeast Asian cultural heritage and the constitutional framework of India, the research highlights the cultural status of the Meitei community relative to other indigenous tribal group and underscores the enduring legacy of the Meitei civilization.

Research Problem: Manipur, once a sovereign kingdom, presents distinctive socio-cultural and political paradox. It developed advanced indigenous institutions, with Meiteilon and Meitei Mayek reflecting a rich literary tradition.

Despite the 18th-century adoption of Hinduism, local populations retained continuity in traditional beliefs and identity. Prior to its merger with India, society lacked rigid hierarchical classification such as castes or tribe. Under the modern constitutional framework, many communities were categorized as Scheduled Tribes or Caste; while Manipur's broader historical identity remained under acknowledged. Contemporary movements seek comparable recognition and advocate classical language status, generating tensions between constitutional categories and historically grounded claims.

Objective: This study examines ancient Meiteilon manuscript and their continuity in contemporary society to understand their linguistic, socio-economic, political, and literary dimensions. It further aims to analyse the cultural and constitutional status of the Meitei community in relation to others indigenous tribal communities under the Indian constitution, with particular attention to its historical identity, language and social position. The study seeks to argue that Meiteilon, with its long literary tradition and script deep historical roots, fulfils the established criteria for inclusion among the Indian classical Languages, and that the Meitei community possesses historical, cultural, and social characteristics that support its recognition as equivalent to other indigenous communities, including consideration for scheduled Tribe status.

Methodology: This research used a mixed-methods, interdisciplinary approach using primary and secondary sources. Primary data are collected through interviews, observation, and questionnaires, while secondary sources are obtained from books, journal, and ancient text manuscripts along with other textual records. These sources are used to trace developments from ancient language traditions to presents- day societal changes and to highlight the current status of classical language recognition criteria and the condition of Scheduled Tribes after their merger into India.

Literary Structures in Pre-18th Century Language Manuscripts

Ancient texts Written in Meitei Mayek provide invaluable insights into the socio-economic, political, and literary structures of early Manipur. Produce by the Meitei community, these manuscripts served not only as literary expressions but also as records of social norms, governance practices, and cultural values. They reveal how language, script, and literature reflected societal organisation, the responsibility of rulers, and the role of the public in maintaining harmony and balance within society. The *Wakoklon Heelel Thilel Salai Amailon Pukok Puya*, often shortened to *Wakoklon Puya*, is one of the oldest scriptures of Sanamahism and a foundational text for the Meitei writing system. Traditionally dated to 1398 BC, it explains the philosophical and cosmological origins of the script, where letters symbolically derive from human anatomy, progressing from the head to the navel, integrating body, knowledge, and spirituality. Another manuscript, *Hijing Hirao*, complements this by presenting ethical, social, and political dimensions

through the ritual of crafting a ceremonial boat for Lai Haraoba, emphasizing consent, environmental respect, corporation, and moral governance.

Furthermore, *Ningthou Kangbalon* is an ancient Meitei Mayek manuscript (Puya) that records the genealogy and deed of King Ningthou Kangba, an early ruler of ancient Manipur (Kangleipak). According to records, his birthplace is identified as a cave on Mount Koubru, ruled over *Tilli Koktong Leikoilel*. King Tangja Leela Pakhangba and Queen Sinbee Leima's son, kangba, recorded to have ruled from 1405 BC-1359 BC.

The manuscript describes the lineage and expansion of early Meitei society, reflecting their worldview of population and territory. King Kangba is credited with introducing Sagol Kangjei, an early form of polo that became central to Manipuri culture. Played with a mallet (kangjei) and ball (Kangdrum) on a field called Kangjeibung, the game organized players into teams (Pana KangluP), promoting unity discipline, and social coordination. This highlights the link between governance, physical training, and cultural life. Ningthou Kangbalon preserves both royal history and cultural traditions. Another manuscript, Loiyumba Sinyen, outline ritual practices, administrative duties, taxation, and judicial roles, revealing a structured legal and political system rooted in ethnic and social order. Cheitharol Kumbaba, the royal chronicle from 33. A.D. records political social and cultural events, emphasizing that governance was deeply tied to moral responsibility, ritual duties, and public welfare in ancient Manipur. This interconnectedness also reflected in other Meitei manuscripts like Hijing Hirao, Loiyumba Sinyen, and Ningthou Kangbalon.

Finally, *Numit Kappa*, written in pure Meitei Mayek script, narrates a story emphasizing the balance between public welfare and political authority. During the period described the kingdom had dual rulership, where two sons of the same lineage shared power. The Younger brother Numit Kaitee Ngamb had fearer, while the elder brother Yoimyai Taotanpa (Tauhuireng Ahanpa) Survived but feared to rule effectively, leaving society in a state of uncertainty. According to Bhogeshwar, "I, Taohuireng, fear to rule the society because of attacks with sharp and forceful weapons. How can I rule there? I can't go to rule anymore" (Bhogeshwar 34), a heroic archer, khwai Nungjeng Piba, representing a revolutionary figure from the public, trained rigorously in archery, with his wife assisting by carrying a water pot on her head while he aimed arrows through her earring and finally struck the pot itself. Once trained, he targeted a king, but only in the public interest, not for personal gain. This reflects early Meitei belief that authority must serve society rather than individual ambition. Nungjeng Piba intervention ensured the rightful king ascent, guided by the public welfare and mediated by the female priest Chakpa Lamlang Amaibi. Through ritual, moral, and ethical agreement, order and reconciliation were restored, showing that legitimacy depended on ethical conduct, public interest, and religious mediation, not just heredity. Some scholars describe Numit Kappa as myth or folklore, but

this reduces it to tradition and overlooks its ritual and historical memory. If it is only myth, why is it still ritually performed and remembered as real? In this tradition, Moirang and Samurou are linked through shared ritual history, especially the Pena tradition and the movement of royal authority. This connection preserves the event through oral practice, performance, and living memory.

Together, these six manuscripts - *Wakoklon Puya*, *Hijing Hirao*, *Ningthou Kangbalon*, *Loiyumba Shinyen*, *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, *Numit Kappa* and others many more. – demonstrate the Meitei community's emphasis on linking language, ritual, religious, ethics, Justice, public welfare, and political governance. They provide a sophisticated model for understanding how early before 18 century Manipur integrated linguistic philosophy, moral responsibility, Social Corporation, and political authority, reflecting the border cultural connections of Manipur within Southeast Asia.

In 18th Century to 21st Century Manipuri Language and Literature

The 18th century marked a crucial turning point in the history of Manipuri language and literature due to the forceful religious conversion to Hinduism led by the Hindue monk Shantidas Gosai, under the patronage of king Charairongba. During this period, a large number of ancient Meitei manuscripts were burned in front of Kangla, resulting in an irreparable loss of indigenous literary heritage. This period also witnessed the formal division between Hill and valley peoples, assisting them different social and political statuses, which created distance in moral and ethical perspectives through Hindu caste system and weakened traditional social relations. Khetrimayum states that: "In India, Untouchability is originally associated with the institution of caste. Its rigid form is an outcome of a peculiar notion of pollution sanctified by religion and codified by the Brahminical discriminative laws". (. Khetrimayum 4). Following this, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were marked by continues administrative conflicts recorded in the royal chronicles, leading to political instability in Manipur. At the same time, the East India Company had established its presence in Kolkata and was expanding colonial control across the region. Manipur faced multiple external and internal challenges, including conflicts with the Burmese kingdom, most notably the seven years' Devastation (Chahi Taret Khuntakpa). During and after the forced religious conversion, the Meitei script was replaced by the Bengali vocabulary increasingly interned Manipuri language usage. Place names, temple names, and indigenous deities with the title of the native peoples adding Shri in the prefix, Singh and Devi as Suffix words under Hindu philosophical and cultural frameworks.

As a result, most of the Meitei population was converted to Hindu Vaishnavism from Sanamahism, and new socio-political and religious manuscripts were composed based on Hindu ideology.

Previous studies have shown in Misra, It may be noted here that there was neither any class nor any cast in the Meitei society before the introduction

of Hinduism till early part of the 18th century. But the influx of the terminologies, Brahmanas and Kshatriyas to Manipur, and the mass conversion to Hinduism in the time of Garibniwaj led to the formation of two distinct social classes- Brahmanas and Kshatriyas (Misra 279).

Several texts were rewritten or newly produced in this period, reflecting Hindu philosophical influence. Classical Manipuri dance forms, especially Rass Lila, were systematized and institutionalized based on the worship of Radha and Krishna. Although the social, political, economic, and literary systems appeared Hindu in form, much of the ritual material, performance structure, and philosophical foundation remained deeply rooted in ancient indigenous Meitei knowledge systems. Manuscript records during this phase were largely written in the Bengali script.

During British colonial intervention, particularly after the Anglo-Manipuri war of 1891, there was a renewed interest in documenting and preserving certain indigenous traditions. According to T.C. Hodson, "The religious festival, such as the Lai Haraoba (or making merry with the gods), are occasions when the sumptuary laws are a little relaxed, and women don their gayest apparel without let or hindrance" (Hodson 16). Even the British had not included it in their records. Moirang Thangjing still observes the day of conflict every year as Resistance Day, organised by the management committee of Moirang Thangjing.

Until independence, Manipur was geographically and culturally oriented towards Southeast Asia. After its merger with India on 15th October 1949, it became part of South Asia. In the twentieth century, movements emerged to revive indigenous religion, culture, language, and the Meitei Mayek script. Though revived in a 36-letter form, its use remained largely ritualistic, while Bengali script dominated education and administration. Modern Manipuri literature saw key figures like Dr. Lamabam Kamal Singh, who's novel *Urirei Madhabi* (1930) explored romance, social life, and women's emotional growth, portraying *Madhabi* as a symbol of sacrifice. Another important work, *Laman* (1953) by Hijam Guno Singh, addressed themes of slavery and social oppression within community life. During this period, Manipuri literature was largely written in Bengali script and reflected the social, cultural, and political realities of the time.

On August 20, 1992 Meiteilon was approved as an official language of the state of Manipur and was included in the Eighth schedule through the seventy-first constitutional Amendment Act.

Evidence from Singh, the movement for the inclusion of Manipuri language into the ES of Indian Constitution can be divided into two Phases. The First Phase Movement (1953-1987) and the second Phase Movement (1987-1992). And as a result of the movement, it was included in the ES (Singh - abstract).

In the late twentieth century, Meitei civil society organizations, particularly MEELAL, led the movement to revive the Meitei Mayek script, starting on 18th

August 2003. Before this, Manipuri language was recognised within the Constitutional framework of Indian. The campaign succeeded in replacing Bengali script with Meitei Mayek in education, including at the university level. Ancient and their rewritten copies helped preserve Manipuri cultural identity. The original eighteen characters were expanded to twenty-seven, with nine modified letters. This revised script was officially approved on 16th November 1978 and is now used in education and administration.

According to Singh, Articles 345 permit the states and union territories to have their own official language that could be used for all official purpose of the State. The policy was intended to encourage the citizen to use their mother tongue at certain levels and domains outlined through a gradual process, but the stated goal of the policy is to help all languages become adequate communication vehicle in the areas designated language regardless of their nature or status as major, minor or tribal languages (Singh 603-04).

In the above examine manuscript text written in Meitei Mayek 18, 27 and 36 scripts in Meiteilon language. The writing system had begun from left to right and up to down. The character structure is similarity to Japanese, Chinese, and Korea, pronunciation is also similar. Food and lifestyle are almost similar to China, Thailand, and Japan like Bamboo shoot and Soybean traditional fermented food products. Culturally language is the central backbone in every society and script is the art of language identity of the culture. The Meitei Mayek script is an indigenous writing system of the Meitei language which is belongs to Tibeto-Burman language group. Here shown respectively, According to Table 1. The original script consisted of 18 consonants and 7 ending signs, making a total of 25 symbols. As described in Table 2, the script was later expanded by adding 9 new consonants, bringing the total consonants to 27. In Table 3, here shown respectively and the 7 ending signs, the modern Meitei Mayek consist of 34 symbols. Table 4 shows that in the 18th century, the Bengali script (30 consonants+ 11 vowels= 41 symbols) replace Meitei Mayek for official and literary purposes. Today, Meitei Mayek has been revived, preserving its original, independent identity.

Table No. 1. Ancient Meitei Mayek script 18 original consonants and 7 suffix letters

ᱠ	ᱡ	ᱢ	ᱣ	ᱤ	ᱥ	ᱦ	ᱧ
ᱨ	ᱩ	ᱪ	ᱫ	ᱬ	ᱭ	ᱮ	ᱯ
ᱰ	ᱱ						
ᱵ	ᱶ	ᱷ	ᱸ	ᱹ	ᱺ	ᱻ	

Table No. 2. The ancient Manipuri script originally had 18 consonants, to which nine newly constructed letters were later added, making a total of 27 consonants, including seven suffix letters.

𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜁𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜃𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜄𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜅𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜆𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜇𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜈𑜂𑜆𑜇
𑜉𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜊𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜋𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜌𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜍𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜎𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜏𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜐𑜂𑜆𑜇
𑜑𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜒𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜓𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜔𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜕𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜖𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜗𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜘𑜂𑜆𑜇
𑜙𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜚𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜛𑜂𑜆𑜇					
𑜜𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜝𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜞𑜂𑜆𑜇					

Table No. 3. Manipur script 18 original consonants, 9 newly constructed consonants and semi-consonants, and 7 suffix letters, totalling 34 characters.

𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜁𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜃𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜄𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜅𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜆𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜇𑜂𑜆𑜇
𑜈𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜉𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜊𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜋𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜌𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜍𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜎𑜂𑜆𑜇
𑜏𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜐𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜑𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜒𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜓𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜔𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜕𑜂𑜆𑜇
𑜖𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜗𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜘𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜙𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜚𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜛𑜂𑜆𑜇	
𑜜𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜝𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜞𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜟𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜠𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜡𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜢𑜂𑜆𑜇
𑜣𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜤𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜥𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜦𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜧𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜨𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜩𑜂𑜆𑜇
𑜪𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜫𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜬𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜭𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜮𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜯𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜰𑜂𑜆𑜇
𑜱𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜲𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜳𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜴𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜵𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜶𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜷𑜂𑜆𑜇
𑜸𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜹𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜺𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜻𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜼𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜽𑜂𑜆𑜇	𑜾𑜂𑜆𑜇

Table No. 4. Shows the use of the Bengali script, which was employed to write an Indo-Aryan language, in 18th-century Manipuri.

ক	খ	গ	ঘ	ঙ	চ	ছ	জ	ঝ	Bengali alphabet for Manipuri									
ka	kha	ga	gha	nga	cha	chha	ja	jha										
[k]	[kʰ]	[g]	[gʱ]	[ŋ]	[tʃ]	[tʃʰ]	[dʒ]	[dʒʱ]										
ঞ	ট	ঠ	ড	ঢ	ণ	ত	থ	দ	Vowels & diacritics									
nya	ta	tha	da	dha	na	ta	tha	da	অ	আ	ই	ঐ	উ	ঊ	ঋ	এ	ঐ	
[n]	[t]	[tʰ]	[d]	[dʰ]	[n]	[t]	[tʰ]	[d]	া	ি	ী	ু	ূ	্ব	ে	ৈ	ৈ	
ধ	ন	প	ফ	ব	ভ	ম	য়	র	a	ā	i	ī	u	ū	r	e	ē	
dha	na	pa	pha	ba	bha	ma	ya	ra	[ə]	[a]	[i]	[iː]	[u]	[uː]	[r]	[e]	[eː]	
[dʱ]	[n]	[p]	[pʰ]	[b]	[bʱ]	[m]	[j]	[r]	ও	ঔ	অং	অঃ						
ল	ব	শ	য	স	হ													
la	wa	sha	sha	sa	ha													
[l]	[w]	[ʃ]	[ʃ]	[s]	[h]													
									ো	ৌ	ং	ঃ						
									o	ou	am	ah						
									[o]	[ou]	[am]	[ah]						

Photo source from Omniglot Manipuri language and alphabet (accessed 6 February 2026).

According to Meitei Mayek expert committee reported to the government headed by founder of Meitei National Front, Mr. Chingsubam Akaba Meitei. The 27 alphabets script had been approved to replace in place of Bengali script. The government of Manipur had notice on Gazette Notification on dated 16th November 1978 as under.

E-Pao.net (n.d) provides, No. 1/2/78-SS/E- The Governor, Manipur is pleased to approve the report submitted by the Meitei Mayek Experts committee constituted vied Government order of even number dated 16th November, 1978 on the re- introduction of the study of Meitei scripts numbering 27 (Twenty-seven) alphabets and its supplement (used of Lonsum, Cheitap -Cheikhei, khudam and Cheising etc.) as per annexures as

recommended by the committee in the educational institutions in Manipur (E-Pao.net).

Table. No.5. Showing similarity of script construction and writing flow

Scripts in Tabular Format with Arrows and English Vocal Translation		Arrow	English Vocal
		→	ka, sa, la, ma, pa
Script	First 5 Alphabets		
Meitei Mayek	ꯀ ꯁ ꯂ ꯃ ꯄ	→	g/k, n, d, r/l, m
Korean Hangul	ㄱ ㄴ ㄷ ㄹ ㅁ	→	k, kh, kh, ng, j
Thai	ก ข ค ง จ	→	a, i, u, e, o
Japanese Hiragana	あ い う え お	→	yi, er, san, si, wu
Chinese Horizontal	一 二 三 四 五		
Japanese Kanji Vertical	水 火 木 金 土	↓	mizu, hi, ki, kane, tsuchi
Chinese Vertical	人 山 川 木 火	↓	ren, shan, chuan, mu, huo

Note. Table 1-5 are attached as image because the Meitei Mayek text may not be preserved during transfer due to lack of font technical support on other systems. In the above given script graph shown Horizontal arrow (→) is to indicate left-to-right writing. Vertical arrow (↓) is to indicate top-to-bottom progression of lines. Each arrow indicates a separate script for comparison: Japanese Hiragana, Chinese Characters (Hanzi), Thai script, and Meitei Mayek. The layout demonstrates that Meitei Mayek writing follows the same horizontal orientation and vertical arrow progression as the other Asian scripts. Now the Meitei script is officially approved and used in higher education in Manipur up to M.A. M Phil and PhD level.

Previous research by Singh, Manipuri has been the state language of Manipur since 8th century A.D. Coins were struck, royal chronicles were recorded, royal firmances and edicts were issued in this language. During the British regime (1819-1947) its status as a state language continued. It was decided by the Manipur State Constitution (Act 1947, section 58) that the court language of the state would be Manipuri or English (Singh 129). Manipuri language is also recognized in Assam as an official associate language under official Gazette Notification. Teaching the Manipuri language with Meitei Mayek has progressed across and beyond the state. The teaching methodology is similar to Japanese and Chinese script instruction. Thai script differs from Japanese, Chinese, and Meitei Mayek, but its writing flow (characters horizontal, lines vertical) is similar in principle.

The Meitei Mayek script, despite being officially recognised and taught in schools and universities, has seen very limited use in computation and advanced technology. There are few or no widely available academic tools, software, or AI applications that fully support the script, which means tasks such as plagiarism detection, document processing, and language computing remain difficult.

In a study conducted by Devi and Purkayastha, Manipuri language is a less computerized and there is not much work available on the web as compared to the language. Manipuri language being less computerized language, a very few works on Natural Language Processing (NLP) applications has been covered so far (Devi and Purkayastha 8).

Although Unicode encoding exists, digital fonts, keyboards, and input tools are only limitedly developed, forcing most digital use to rely on Romanized transliterations or manual processes. This lack of technological infrastructure has kept Meitei Mayek largely at the grassroots level in modern digital society, limiting its integration into academic research, AI, and computer applications. Developing robust digital fonts, keyboards, input tools, and computational resources, along with supporting research and AI datasets, is essential to ensure that Meitei Mayek can be effectively used in modern technology and academic contexts.

In the context of Indian languages, Manipuri –popularly known as *Meiteilon*–is recognised as official language of Manipur state and is included in the eighth schedule of the Indian constitution. Similarly, several Indian languages have been accorded the status of classical languages of India based on specific scholarly and historical criteria. Manipur language also fulfils comparable criteria required for inclusion as a classical language. The criteria for the inclusion of languages in the Indian classical language category are set out as follows:

According to Narayanan, Criteria in 2024, the following criteria were set by the sahitya akademi:

1. High antiquity of its earlier texts/ recorded history over a period of 1500-2000 years.

2. The body of ancient literature / texts, which is consider a heritage by generations of speakers.
3. Knowledge texts, especially prose texts in addition to poetry, epigraphically and inscriptional evidence.
4. The classical languages and literature could be distinct from its current form or could be decontinues with later form of its offshoots (Narayanan a166).

Previously, six Indian languages Tamil in 12 October 2004, Sanskrit in 25 November 2005, Telugu in 31 October 2008, Kannada in 31 October 2008, Malayalam in 8 August 2013, and Odia in 1 march 2014 were granted classical status at different points in time. In recent development Bengali, Marathi, Pali, and Prakrit and Assamese were reportedly included as classical language in 4 October 2024 by a union cabinet decision chair by the prime minister of India and this brought total number of Indian classical languages increased from six to eleven. The recognition of Indian Classical Language status is not only on literary richness and historical heritage. Political advocacy by regional and national parties strongly influences the process. For example, Tamil gained classical status early due to Dravidian party support, while Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Odia achieved recognition largely through state – level lobbying. Thus, political and administrative factors often play a decisive role alongside scholarship in determining classical status. In comparison with other Indian languages, Manipuri possesses no fewer qualifications for classical recognition, yet it remains outside official consideration.

Manipur is an ancient language with along and continuous literary tradition originally written in the indigenous Meitei Mayek script. Its literature exists in both prose and poetry, reflecting a high degree of internal meaning, cultural identity, and narrative depth. The language demonstrates unique structural, stylistic, and thematic features that distinguish it from other Indian languages.

Furthermore, according to Priya and Thampi, a classical language is a prestigious and often ancient language with an independent literary tradition and a significant body of ancient written literature. These languages are typically associated with a “golden age” of cultural and literary achievement, often serving as models for subsequent languages and literary traditions. The classification of a language as classical aims to honour its historical and its role in safeguarding Bharat’s rich cultural and intellectual legacy. The languages have played a crucial part in maintaining and sharing India’s ancient knowledge, philosophies, and values over thousands of years by recognising language as classical encourage scholarly research, preservation, and the revitalisation of ancient texts and knowledge systems, which are essential to India intellectual and cultural identity (Priya and Thampi, 6575).

In the above suggestion for the inclusion of a language as classical, Manipuri literature demonstrates a distinctive literary tradition when compared to many other Indian languages. Its rich corpus of prose and poetic works, including *Hijan Hirao*, *Leirembi Paosa*, *Tilluk*, *Khencho*, and over 100 others manuscripts, illustrates both antiquity and continuity. Manuscript dating back 3000 years further attests to the long-standing nature of this literary heritage. Unlike other literary traditions that have often drawn extensively from external sources, Manipuri works are entirely indigenous and maintain a unique identity, characterized by narrative techniques, traditional model of storytelling, and culturally specific worldviews. Furthermore, the state of Manipur has historically contributed to the preservation, and transmission of traditional knowledge, philosophies and values, thereby safeguarding Indian rich cultural and intellectual heritage. To this day, Manipuri literature continues to thrive, preserving its distinct style and legacy, and stands as a living testament to the intellectual and artistic achievement of the region.

Thus, considering its antiquity, original script, rich prose and poetic traditions, and unique linguistic identity, Manipuri (Meiteilon) meets the essential criteria for recognition as a classical language of India.

Discussion

Ancient manuscripts of Manipur reveal a rich intellectual, social, and political heritage. Texts such as *Wakoklon* reflect a structured knowledge system, while *Hijing Hirao* highlights ethical governance and environmental respect. King *Kangba Lon* records the origins of *Sagol Kangjei* (Polo), illustrating Social Organisation. *Loiyumba Sinyen* codifies administrative duties, and *Cheitharol Kumbaba* documents royal, social, and political events. *Numit Kappa* emphasizes public accountability and conflict resolution, with Amaibi priestesses playing key mediating roles, demonstrating the active influence of women in governance and society.

The Meitei and Meitei Mayek remain widely used in Manipur, yet recognition as a classical language of India is delayed amid debates over scheduled Tribe Status. Historically, Manipur lacked rigid caste or tribal divisions, reflecting a unified indigenous civilization across hills and Valleys. Colonial and constitutional frameworks later imposed fixed identities, creating structural inequities. Comparable tribal communities across India retain linguistic and script traditions alongside ST status. Thus, demand for classical language recognition and reconsideration of ST status reflects the need to preserve identity and ensure fair constitutional recognition.

Conclusion

Study of Manipuri language and literature demonstrate deep intellectual, cultural, and social heritage of the indigenous community. Ancient manuscripts reflect ethical, moral, political, and social structures, showing governance, coordination, and respect for human and environmental resources.

Despite eighteenth-century disruptions, the resilience of the indigenous community ensured the survival of traditional knowledge, enabling revival movements in modern times. Efforts by organizations like MEELAL have successfully restored the Meitei Mayek script, integrating it into education and reaffirming cultural identity.

The evolution of Manipuri language and literature illustrates a remarkable journey of adaptation, resilience, and revival. From ancient scientific philosophy to colonial challenges and modern activism, the indigenous community has preserved its linguistic heritage while ensuring cultural continuity. This strengthens ethical, moral, Political and social cohesion and highlights the rightful recognition of Manipuri language, literature, and community identity in Southeast Asia and India.

Finally, I strongly recommend that the Indian government to recognise Manipuri (Meiteilon) Language in the classical language of India. It has immense literary, historical, and political significance, with a heritage of manuscripts over 3,000 years old. The language is actively spoken and written in their own script of Manipur and neighbouring countries, including Bangladesh and Myanmar. Manipuri already qualifies for classical status if the government implements inclusive language policies and respects the state's contribution under the union Territory framework.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/84**DEFINING THE SELF: THE LIVES OF THE URDU-SPEAKING
COMMUNITY OF BANGLADESH THROUGH POETIC EXPRESSIONS****ANANNYA DAS**

Independent Researcher

Abstract

“I am nowhere, have no identity, not Bihari, not Bangladeshi, nothing”- this was said by one of the residents of the Geneva camp in Mohammadpur, Dhaka. This camp is among the 116 camps across the districts of Bangladesh which are home to the Stranded Pakistanis. The Stranded Pakistanis are the Urdu-speaking community of Bangladesh who migrated there during the 1946 Bihar riots or the 1947 Partition of British India. Although the members of the community are known as Biharis all over Bangladesh, they migrated not only from Bihar but also Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and several other states of India. At the time of migration thought themselves to be following the same path as Prophet Muhammad’s followers (Muhajirs) who accompanied him to Medina committing the holy act of *Hijrat*. Their language was akin to the one used by the ruling government in West Pakistan; hence they were given preferences in every sector during the Pakistani era. However, the growing linguistic nationalism in East Pakistan and the consequent Liberation War made this community an ‘other’ in the new nation-state. Some parts of the Urdu-speaking community were active supporters of the Pakistani army during the war. After the creation of Bangladesh, this act became the primary and pejorative identifier for the community as a whole. They fell prey to a series of oppressions. Some of them were repatriated to Pakistan but the people who did not, grapple with a sense of identity crisis and are victims of many prejudices across Bangladesh. As a separate ethno-linguistic community, they have their distinct cultural practices among which their poetic endeavours are a significant part of their identity. As an anomaly in their homeland, their cultural expressions embody their sense of uprootedness, instable identity and experiences of camp life. This paper offers a study of the Urdu poetic expressions of Ahmed Ilias to portray how these issues come up in them. By taking up the method of narrative analysis, this article aims to foreground this community’s voicing of their sense of identity and belongingness.

Keywords: Bihari, Self, Identity, Migration, Cultural Expressions

“I am nowhere, have no identity, not Bihari, not Bangladeshi, nothing” (Redclift 29) - this was said by one of the residents of the Geneva camp in Mohammadpur, Dhaka. This camp is among the 116 camps across the districts of Bangladesh which are home to the Urdu-speaking community there. The Urdu-speaking community of Bangladesh are a migrant community in the nation-state who went

through the process of migration twice. First, following the 1946 Bihar Riots and the Partition of British India, second during or after the 1971 Liberation war. The first migration towards East Pakistan from India was considered by many of them to be analogous to the holy act of *Hijrat* (journey to the Promised Land) originally after Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina. Hughes gave four other definitions of *Hijrat*, one of which states the act of a Muslim leaving their country (545). This leaving was further elaborated to mean migration from *Dar-al-harb* (a place of non-believers) to *Dar-al-Islam* (an abode of believers) to protect one's *deen* or belief. Pakistan or the idea of Pakistan was endorsed by the Muslim League as such a place which will be a *Dar-al-Islam* for all the Muslims of India where Muslims would be able to practise their faith comfortably. Some parts of the Urdu-speaking community were active supporters of the Pakistani army during the Liberation War of 1971. After the creation of Bangladesh, this act became the primary and pejorative identifier for the community as a whole. Every Urdu-speaking Muslim migrant throughout Bangladesh was marked as *razakar*-imposter to the new nation- who were behind the genocidal killings of the Bengalis during the war of 1971. Labelling and persecution of one whole community because of the choice of some was exactly something that happened to the Urdu-speaking community. The second migration was an internal migration where the people of this community moved into camps made for them by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in order to save their lives from the attacks by some of the Bengali-speaking community. There are, to this day 116 camps across the districts of Bangladesh, which since 1971 has remained the residence of most the community. Of the nearly 600,000 persons who had registered for 'repatriation' with the International Committee for the Red Cross, 178,069 were 'repatriated' between 1973 and 1993 (qtd. in Siddiqi 164). Those who opted to be repatriated but were never taken lived as "stateless in situ" (Bloom 36) until 2008- the year they were officially recognised as citizens of Bangladesh after a long legal battle. Even though they hold voting rights, they are still looked down upon by the Bengalis and have to go through various kinds of oppressions in their hands. Previous research on the community has paid considerable attention to the complexity of their position as citizens/ stateless of Bangladesh (Ennals; Redclift; Akhter). They have analysed the sequestration (Sen), obliteration (Siddiqi) gender based double marginalization (Saikia) blanket branding (Rahman and Van Schendel) and violence (Saikia; Hashmi) that the community has been a victim of in Bangladesh. The community's exercise of the politics of the powerless (Dasgupta) or the desire for capital acquisition for social mobility have been dealt with along with other socio-political aspects like the community's strategies of acculturation and its hindrances (Haque and Khatun). However, existing research has not adequately dealt with the identity formation/ representation of their identity in the larger Bangladeshi society through cultural methods. The handful of studies on their literature has been very factual or an attempt to confine it into

one or the other genre. Mofajjar Hossain has considered the Urdu-speaking community's literature as a diaspora literature where expressions of identity oscillate between not two but three countries- Bangladesh, their ancestral land India and a dream land (Pakistan) to which they want to belong. Kasifur Rahman has given very statistical study of Urdu literature being practiced in Bangladesh. Ruksana Rahim Chowdhury describes the use of Urdu in literary activities after the creation of Bangladesh as a process of resistance against the othering of this community. This resistance is also seen as a process of holding onto a self which is at the threshold of extinction. However, a detailed study of any genre of their literature to look for the representation of displacement and crises of migrant identity is yet to be done.

This study aspires to examine how the poetry of Ahmed Ilias has portrayed his migrant self and fraught identity. It also aims to investigate how in his poetic expressions the perspectives, the socio-cultural struggles as well as the crisis of identity and resistances of the whole community has been mirrored.

Article 9 of the Bangladesh Constitution states that - "The unity and solidarity of the Bangalee nation, which, deriving its identity from its language and culture, attained sovereign and independent Bangladesh through a united and determined struggle in the war of independence, shall be the basis of Bangalee nationalism." It explicitly asserts the Bengali language and culture as the sole basis of the identity of the 'Bangalee nation' i.e. Bangladesh. This proclamation shoves the other ethnicities of Bangladesh and their language and cultures to the margins. Article 28 (1) of the Bangladesh constitution states, "The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth". This article prohibits the state to treat any sex, caste, religion differently. However, it does not mention the word language or language group making discrimination on the basis of language not an unconstitutional act. It is ironic how a nation which has a historic language movement behind its inception has been suppressing an ethnic group based on language. The Language Movement of 1952 was the culmination of the Bengali speakers' resistance against the forceful shoving of Urdu on them. This attempt of the West Pakistani authorities to impose in order to curb the Bengali cultural autonomy and the various measures taken by them to do that were etched in the minds of Bengalis. The post 1971 environment was not at all conducive to the Urdu language and its speakers. Urdu schools were closed down; Urdu as an optional paper in higher studies was also dropped. Urdu journals and newspapers ceased publication, regular Urdu news broadcasts and Urdu plays stopped being broadcast. The Department of Urdu and Persian continued to exist at the University of Dhaka, but more students opted for Persian than for Urdu. All these were done as Urdu was marked as the language of the enemy Pakistan and its supporters. The Bengali nationalism, as mentioned before, was born out of the fight against the forceful shoving of this very language. In the minds of the Bengali Speakers, Urdu was also synchronous with the Islamic

nationalism that Pakistan was based upon. Thus, Urdu became antithetical to the identity of Bangladesh. The speakers of Urdu who chose East Pakistan after 1947 felt like outsiders in this situation. Their language did not align with the fundamentals of the new nation. This polarization in Bangladesh is based on its foundational myth of creating a nation based on Linguistic Nationalism. According to Tahmina Rahman - "The conflict is about what Bangladesh stands for, what its founding goals are, and what defines and distinguishes its people from other nationalities. It is about embracing either religion (Islam) or ethnicity (Bengali language) as the core component of national identity of its people—an unfinished project of nation building that has been ongoing since Bangladeshi independence in 1971." (174). In this hostile environment for Urdu, the practice of Urdu in the social and cultural arenas face a blow as well. The Urdu literature steeped in the themes of ostracization as well as rejection of their language and in that way its speakers as well.

As the Urdu language is labelled as an other in Bangladesh through its nationalistic historiography, the speakers of this language have little scope in representing who they are. The little representation that is found in the literary space is through many restrictions and limitations. The Urdu literature of Bangladesh is not given a space under the umbrella of Bangladeshi literature, because Urdu is not accepted as one of the core languages of Bangladesh. An amalgamation of this rejection by mainstream society and its consequent loss of identity is traced within the poems of Ahmad Ilias - the most prominent writer representing the community as well as the Urdu language in a politically hostile and linguistically alien environment.

Ahmed Ilias himself mentioned – "In the three main countries of South Asia, nobody wanted the Biharis." (*Loving, Writing, and Being 'Bihari' in Bangladesh | Migration Diaries*). Ilias was born in Taltala (a neighbourhood in Central Calcutta) in the year 1934 to an Urdu-speaking family. From very early in his life, he started earning his own bread on the commands of his stepmother. The long-working hours as a hawker did not let him time for his studies. However, with scholarship aids he continued his primary education. Unfortunately, the Partition of India shifted the scholarship he got to students of the newly created East Pakistan, and he was forced to stop his education again. In 1950 he got a letter from his friend in Dhaka saying, "because you are a Muslim and Pakistan is a Muslim country. So, there will be no problem to get education free here." That was Ilias's first migration from his birthplace. However, lack of refugee card forced to come back to Calcutta as a returnee. He then migrated to East Pakistan again in 1953 and from then made it his permanent home. He passed his matriculation exams from Dhaka and after working for the Geological Survey of Pakistan for a few years. But Ilias was always a lover of writing and liberal endeavours. Progressive Urdu poet and journalist Salahuddin Mohammed got impressed with his writing and offered him a job at the Dhaka Press Club in 1958. There, he associated with many activists and journalists who were pro-liberation

for Bangladesh and against the oppressive policies of the West Pakistani authorities to the Bengali cultural autonomy. Not only that from that time only, Ilias started to consolidate the Urdu-speaking community and worked on their representation. He wrote in many progressive magazines on all these issues and joined the Urdu newspaper *Pasban* in 1964. But after the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 he was also not exempt from the atrocities meted out against the Urdu-speaking community. He lost his job at the press club as well as the magazine. He joined the NGO HEED on their project on the Urdu-speaking camps. This was the beginning of this man devoting his life for the cause of his community. After the NGO moved onto from the camps to some other project, Ilias took over and created Al-Falah in 1980. The NGO has “pledged in its Constitution to work for the Urdu speaking to rehabilitate them socially, economically and culturally in the mainstream of the Bangladeshi society”. When nobody understood the importance of assimilation with the Bengalis the far-sighted Ilias understood that repatriation was not the right choice- for the Urdu-speakers and encouraged his community to accept Bangladesh as their homeland. Through his NGO he worked relentlessly towards the upliftment of the community by providing them with education, health aids and much more. Along with this, he took the cause of his community worldwide by writing the seminal work Biharis, *The Indian Emigrés in Bangladesh: An Objective Analysis* in which he depicted the history, gradual fall and present scenario which brought the issue international attention. Through his other works he accentuated the history of the forlorn language of Bangladesh. His poetry reflects and foregrounds the various phases of the trials, tribulations and feelings of the community. Asad Chowdhury believes that the greatest contribution of Ilias was working towards the formulation of a concrete identity for his community (147). The Bangla-Urdu Sahitya foundation is a platform for the practice of Urdu language and literature in Bangladesh. It was presided by Asad Chowdhury until his death in 2023. It was created in 2007, at a time when Urdu as a language had almost become non-existent across Bangladesh. This literary foundation, since its emergence in 2007, has been working towards Urdu-Bangla literary solidarity. It offers patronages to writers who practice in Urdu and also translates works of Bangla literature into Urdu and vice-versa. In one of its anthologies, *Awaaz* (Voice), there are poems and Ghazals written both in Urdu and Bangla.

The article has used the qualitative method of narrative (textual) analysis to see how Ilias’s own and his community’s experiences are reflected in the literary texts produced by him. This was chosen as this methodology is concerned with understanding and analysing experiences and my study aimed at investigating the experiences of the community through one of their cultural practices. The *Nazms* of Ahmed Ilias with the above mentioned themes are taken up for this study. Urdu poetry expresses existential anxiety with their ability to portray complex emotions through lyrical value. *Nazm* is genre of Urdu poetry refers to a structured poem

with a specific theme or narrative. While *Ghazals* are the popular form for its treatment of love and longing, *Nazms* offer the scope of dealing with themes other than love. The *Nazms* of Ilias deals with themes like displacement, search for an identity; stability etc.

In his *Nazm* titled 'A Piece of Paper' he writes-

"Whenever I see a piece of paper/ My fingers automatically start to move/ then I start drawing lines on the paper/ I start creating a home of my dreams./ I build walls on the paper/ I build doors/ windows, decorate the verandah/ I make flowers bloom on my frontyard./ Then, the image of my house alarms me/ I have lost my own home/ Have lost my land and the sky above/ What if the piece of paper is lost too/ And I am rendered homeless again." (Ilias 30). These lines depict the trauma of being uprooted from one's home and homeland. Ahmed Ilias as well as the people of this community had lost their homes and its associated identity forever after 1971. Ilias beautifully captures that predicament.

In another poem titled 'Identification', Ilias writes- "I asked, 'tell me, who am I?'/ I never got an answer. /I asked around to find out who I am. /Nobody said anything. /Then I asked the mirror, /It remained silent as well. /Finally, I asked myself- Who am I? /What shall I say? I, too, remained silent." (38). These exemplifies the massive identity crisis that the people of the community go through in Bangladesh. The older generation concurred with the idea of Pakistan and even after the creation of Bangladesh could not accept the fact that they were not East Pakistanis anymore. Their *Muhajirin* identity of which they were so proud of was snatched away from them and a new identity was thrust upon them. All the identities of this community - Muhajir, Bihari, Razakar, Dalaal, Stranded Pakistani, citizens without rights, have been imposed forcefully. The same theme is portrayed in the poem- 'To My Other Twin Brother' where reads like: "What is written down on the door? Can you read it? / Silence. / Can you hear me? Silence. / Are you afraid of the truth? / Silence. / Are you mute? Silence. / Or deaf? / Silence. / Then he gradually opens up, / And then I understood: / He is neither deaf nor mute; / He has everything/ What he lacks is language." (Chowdhury 29).

In 'Search' he writes "Where has life brought me now? / I have nothing around / I have no language of my own/ I have no words of my own/ What am I searching for?" The language of this community was seen as the primary reason of their ostracization in Bangladesh. In order to get acceptance, many Urdu-speakers are forced to shove their mother tongue. The newer generation embraces Bengali for social as well as economic purposes and the use of Urdu among this community is slowly evaporating among them. This piece by Ilias encapsulates that.

Through this article it is seen how cultural expressions depict the psyche of the migrant self. This article demonstrates some of the examples of the poetic expressions of Ahmed Ilias which portrays the Bangladeshi Urdu-speaking community's conflicts of identity and migratory self. This paper aspires that the

community will not be perceived only as a political issue and the other elements of their distinct culture like- food, embroidery, festivals will be studied as well.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/85**AT THE INTERSTICES OF MATERIALITY AND MEMORY:
MATERIAL OBJECTS AND THE LEGACY OF PARTITION
NARRATIVES****ZOHRA KANTH**

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Abstract

Partition studies have flourished in recent decades, with the domain's interrogation of the political and socio-economic factors that led to the 1947 division of India and the human costs of displacement and violence. Existing scholarship often borrows heavily from written sources, historical documents, and fictional narratives, neglecting the role of material culture in preserving, transmitting, and shaping memories of the event. This research project seeks to extend beyond the media above by analyzing material objects as sites of memory in the context of partition. It aims to focus on museums across India, specifically the Delhi Partition Museum and a potential Partition Museum collection in Kolkata. The selection criteria will emphasize objects that illustrate the varied experiences of partition across different regions and communities. The artefacts will be studied for their material and design elements (such as fabric, wear and tear, inscriptions for clothing, composition) and their historical context, including potential date, origin, and the experiences they represent. Additionally, provenance, or the details about the object's history before arriving at the museum, will be briefly looked at along with two interviews conducted with first and second generation witnesses who migrated to Kolkata. The works of Pierre Nora, Arjun Appadurai, and Jone Andrews offer further insights into community narratives about partition and their engagement with the trauma of the past through material culture. This paper also hopes to stimulate further discussions about the ethical responsibilities of museums in representing complex historical events.

Keywords: Partition, Material Memory, Museum, Remembrance, Provenance, Ekphrasis.

Material Memory and the Life Narratives of Partition

The acclaimed Urdu poet Josh Maleehabadi thusly laments the aftermath of Partition in his verses:

Ai ham nafas! Fasana e Hindustan naa pooch
Apna gala kharosh e tarranum se phat gaya
Talwar se bacha, to rag-e gul se kat gaya
O friend, don't ask me for the tale of Hindustan
Our throats were torn by the scratching of our songs

When we escaped the sword, we were beheaded by the veins of the rose
— Translation by Rakshanda Jalil.

The partition of India in 1947, resulting in the formation of India and Pakistan, was a cataclysmic event that lacerated—figuratively and literally terrestrially—the subcontinent, leaving deep scars of violence, displacement, and trauma, touching millions of lives and forever changing the region’s social, cultural, and political environment. There are multifarious methods to approach the tragedy and yet lacunae persist in deciphering the facets that, amidst rigid academic anatomies, slip through its cracks. A simulatory scenario would not be amiss to explicate the essence of this paper's arguments.

Imagine you step into the Partition Museum, surrounded by remnants of a tumultuous past. As you navigate through the exhibits, a glass case catches your eye. Inside, a simple, worn duppata (long scarf) lies folded, accompanied by a small plaque (Exhibit 14) Duppata of Rajeshwari Devi Donated by Her granddaughter, Sunita Date: August 1947 Location: Lahore, Pakistan.

As you gaze at the dupatta, you notice its faded embroidery, threads bare in places. The fabric seems to remind one of stories of its owner, who wore it during her perilous journey from Lahore to Amritsar; memorially a kind of transposition is at work, from the museums tranquility dissipates, replaced by the sounds of 1947:

Gunfire echoes.

Screams pierce the air.

Footsteps hurry.

You imagine Rajeshwari Devi, clutching her duppata, fleeing her home amidst chaos. The fabric, once a symbol of elegance, becomes a makeshift carrying cloth, holding precious belongings.

The dupatta transforms into a tangible connection to Rajeshwari’s story. It transcends its materiality. It embodies memories and experiences of pain, loss, and resilience. The museum’s silence returns, but the dupatta's evocations linger. You feel a deep connection to Rajeshwari Devi and the countless others who endured similar struggles. This scenario illustrates how a ‘non-living’ object, like a dupatta, can entail ‘lived’ experiences and tends to offer a reconciliation between past and present. Material entities possess potential to evoke a visceral cycle of memory and remembrance.

As are its constituents dissipated, so are the methodologies: fractured and slippery. The vantage point I propose for understanding Partition is that of Material Memory. It would be useful to unpack these two terms individually to eventually understand memory, materiality, and the confluence of both in the context of partition studies.

The inception of memory in the analysis stems from one core question: how much can history hold? That is, can history in truth and how much so, encapsulate an event and all that is associated with it? When examined closely, there are notable

lacunae in the historical epistemological framework, giving away certain visceral points of examination vis-à-vis the partition.

Although memory has been a subject of scholarship since antiquity, by the dawn of the twentieth century it featured extensively in analytical dialogues. The genesis of Memory studies as a field stems from the catastrophic events that have been witnessed over centuries such as the World Wars and the Holocaust, to ameliorate and capture in academia the affective slippages of a collective trauma, of loss, and of rootlessness. Urvashi Butalia, from her recollection of Partition's lived experiences in *The Other Side Of Silence*, conjectures this overlooking of subjective sensibilities in the objective framework of historiography as an act of deliberate denial: "Was this just historiographical neglect or something deeper — a refusal, on the part of historians to face up to a trauma so riven with pain and grief, that there needed to be some distance before they could confront it?" (Butalia).

Whether this act of overruling the minute sentimentalities—the specks of the unsung stories, the profoundly jittered mundane amid the tumult—to the 'bigger picture' or the political and social costs of partition was inadvertent, is a whole arena of scholarly deliberation in itself. Notwithstanding, Memory studies can here become a significant tool for amelioration as a discipline that seeks to approach the lived history through memorialization. The acts of remembering, un-remembering and re-remembering are inextricably interlinked. As Louis Brunel remarks, "You have to begin to lose your memory, if only in bits and pieces, to realize that memory is what makes our lives" (Mullally et al.).

Etymologically engendered from the Latin *memor* which loosely translates to '[being]mindful' or 'remembering,' memory apportions between its two enmeshed strands of individual and the collective or the autobiographical and the cultural. Individual memory has been the preoccupation of psychologists and behavioural scientists to decipher the neural mechanisms of the brain in storing recollection of memory. Just as individual or autobiographical memory is almost automatically associated with theory formation in the area of psychology, collective memory, since the early twentieth century, has been the privileged domain of sociologists, historians, and cultural theorists (Van Dijck). The collective memories account for how we make sense of the others in relation to selfhood which thereby shapes our sense of identity within a community. Jane Assman further allocates memory into three intermediated strata at the inner or neuromental, social, and cultural levels as individual memory, communicative memory, and cultural memory. Assmann perceives cultural memory as a long-term memory that can span thousands of years. It's based on past events, called "figures of memory," that are preserved through cultural institutions and communication (Assmann and Czaplicka). Cultural memory is a stabilising force that helps unify a common identity across generations.

In that sense, remembering is designated as a fairly healthy communal practice. But are we able to with certitude position this claim in context of partition memory? There have been notable contestations over dealing with the unforgettable preference of memory and (oft-)repressed oblivion. Should it be remembered and commemorated for the loss and ceaseless sufferings or should it be put to oblivion for its utterly unsettling and traumatic unfoldings? Krishna Sobri sees it as a phenomenon that is “difficult to forget but dangerous to remember” (Batra). Perhaps this precarity of remembering led to a conscious forgetting by the post-partition generations of 1947 and 1974—that is, a self-inflicted amnesia, a futile attempt to evade the ineludible historical and emotional baggage. Yet the memories of partition continue pursuing the descendants. Being an event that is so undeniably essential it then becomes imperative to memorialise the event through re-remembrance—an act that simultaneously acknowledges the horrors of the subcontinental bifurcation while also reclaiming the fractured past which continues to inform our present. In the words of Ritu Menon, “one must guard against opening wounds that may have healed by constantly recalling the trauma, and also against denying that a terrible trauma occurred” (Bedi and Rai). Correspondingly, Ananya Jahanara Kabir in her work *Partition’s Post Amnesia* calls for reconciliation of memories and reclamation of the unusherred sentiments. Post-amnesia advocates for an “intergenerational movement from amnesia to a retrieval of cultural and affective connections that amnesia denied” (Kabir). However, locating partition within memory awaits one with an analytical dilemma—is the individual experience given to the collective memory, or is the collective memory set to historical amnesia by individualising it? If and how can both the individual and the collective in the study of Partition memory be delineated? To establish this balance, material culture and the material memory thereof come as an interestingly useful site of reevaluation. Memory isn’t something that exists only in the abstract but can be materialised. Material objects come as melting pots between individual and the collective, between the forgotten and the constantly remembered. It is riveting to examine how the non-human can endow essentially human experiences and emanate memories. Sophie Woodward traces the history of material culture as an academic discipline back to the 6th century BC, through archaeological activities, anthropological analyses, to the systemic exposition of objects, for instance, the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in 1857 (Woodward). Objects as mundane as a dining table, clock, pen or a photograph, are modes of sensory engagement and transmission. Memories, experiences and therefore history—including the nascent shades of it that go unnoticed—are condensed and interfaced within and with these objects.

Jone Andrews has diagrammatically expounded this relationship (Andrews).

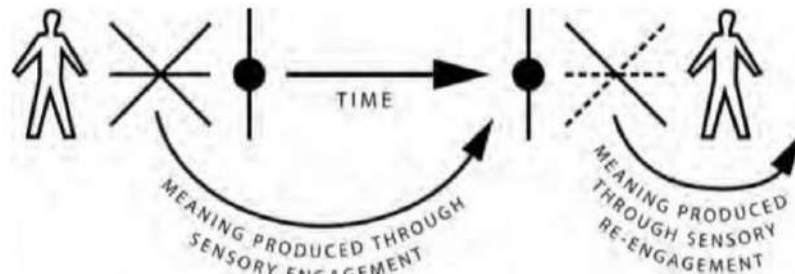


Figure 1: Relationship between People and Objects

Amid the utterly turbulent milieu of partition, such objects rise from their everydayness to become something profound: they become testaments of the displacement, loss, and perpetual trauma. They unfold as (dis-)arrays of a lost relatively unruffled past while also being simultaneously the witnesses and victims of its distortion. A watch used as diurnal time-keeping paraphernalia, for instance, when seen in a museum where it has lost that purpose, properties, and proprietor, is now host to a montage of memories—of the function it used to perform at an ‘ordinary’ time, of the exile its owner it had to live through. The latter ultimately brings to mind the plight of several others who migrated across borders and the costs of separation they paid. Therefore material memory consequently moves from individual to the collective; the autobiographical memory inevitably echoes the cultural memory. There have been attempts to explore material culture as a domain for deciphering Partition remembrance. For instance, Anchal Malhotra in her book *Remnants of Separation* places 21 objects carried by refugees who migrated across borders during Partition to underscore the nostalgic and unsettling memories of the unsettlement. She remarks, “In the case of the Partition, Material Memory remains an incredibly important way of understanding personal and collective histories” (Malhotra).

Museums function as rich sites of recollection and re-engagement of partition memories. In her work *Museums and Memory*, Sunane A. Crane declares museums to be “more than familiar cultural institutions and showplaces of accumulated objects; they are the sites of interaction between personal and collective identities, between memory and history” (Crane). Looking at partition, the material memory through museums comes forth as an interdisciplinary endeavour where domains such as anthropology, ethnography, quantitative study, and more converge. Bringing together various nuances, the objects can be analyzed for the geographical (un)privilege: why is a certain museum in Kolkata

or Delhi—what relevance does the place bear to the casualties of partition? Not only the objects such as clothes, letters, souvenirs et al can be looked at for their materiality and memory but also the broader sites where these are situated—the museum itself as a historical monument and the geographical place—the city that hosts it. These, though often overlooked, too are tangible material objects that inform the social intercourse of partition memory and therefore must be seen as elemental subjects of analyses in partition scholarship. The land—soil, sites in the city—are themselves what Pierre Nora named as “places of memory” (*lieu de memoire*) which may be inferred as “any significant phenomenon, materialized or intangible in nature, which by human will or under the influence of time has acquired the meaning of a symbol in the memorial heritage of a community” (Nosova). In “Toba Tek Singh,” for example, the man and the land are synonymised by Manto and the readers in equal measure. Both the spatiality of materials and materiality of space then become equally relevant for understanding these experiences.

Ekphrasis, or the descriptive (often artistically evocative) writing of a visual artefact, is also a key aspect. The particularity of the material thing matters in terms of the relationship one confirms with it. That necessitates examination of the sensory, tangible, and ergo the pliable features of the object—its object-ness and materiality. The usage, association, and ‘dealings’ of the object are of significance. It is not only through our own imposition or association of meaning with them that they imbibe a memory—a part of it is also dedicated to the objects’ own physiognomy and functionalities. Thus, an object isn’t a passive recipient of hermeneutic relationships but rather has its own role to transact the same. Therefore, the wear and tear, colorant, inspirations on fabric, design, architecture, backdrop of photographs et al ought to be looked at.

The historical context and perseverance, including the potential date, origin, and the experiences the object might represent, may be examined. The objects, albeit devoid of the biological sense of the adjective life, are suffused with what one may convince as social life. Arjun Appadurai in *The Social Life of Things* argues for every material entity to possess what he calls a “social history” and “cultural biography” of its own, constituting its interceptions and interactions, its uses and reuses, its orientation and reorientation amongst other ‘lived’ factors (Appadurai). Igor Kopytoff argues for a holistic perusal of the object for its essence and value as traced from its usefulness and eventually the lack thereof. One might ask questions such as “What, sociologically, are the biographical possibilities inherent in its ‘status’ and in the period and culture, and how are these possibilities realized? Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized ‘ages’ or periods in the thing’s ‘life,’ and what are the cultural markers for them? How does the thing’s use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness?” In museological parlance,

this interrogation of how objects were acquired and collected is known as provenance. A possible examination of the state of the object helps in positioning it in a certain historical epoch or event, herein the Partition.

The artefacts and artworks can bifurcate into primarily two trajectories of reading: first, objects which have been carried across borders and therefore are both vessels of memories and survivors of the experience; and second, materiality—more so in terms of sensory aura—of the artworks and installations that have been created to express and memorialize the excruciating repercussions of the partition. For the purpose of this study, two cities—Kolkata and Delhi—will be exemplified cursorily to locate the hitherto explicated methodology.

Kolkata

These lines are etched in a plaque that holds the statue of a refugee family, in Netaji Nagar Kolkata:

“Bastur tagide srishtir karigor, tomaderi srishti ajker ei nogor”
[Compelled to create a home you became the creators of today’s city]
(Bhattacharya).



Figure 2: Golden Sculptures of a refugee family

The golden tinted sculpting features a man carrying a child, accompanied by a woman. It speaks of the massive destruction and displacement that Kolkata has witnessed. As a city bearing the influx of refugees across borders, Kolkata stands as a site where the (hi)stories of partition lurk in every corner. Thousands of refugees from East Pakistan made Sealdah their home in the 1950s and 1960s. The station became a focal point for refugees, with numbers fluctuating based on the daily flow of refugees. Within three years of the partition, 150 squatter colonies had sprung up in and around Kolkata. Refugees occupied every available space, including pavements, airfields, empty houses, and even the verges of railway tracks and sewers. Kolkata had several refugee colonies, including Gandhi, Netaji Nagar, Asutosh Colony, Sucheta Colony, Suryanagar, Katju Nagar, and Shahidnagar Colony (Sengupta).

There have been various attempts to memorialize the partition over the years. KPM online is a virtual repository of partition memories. It was conceived in 2016 at a conference on hhjn and established in 2018. Rituparna Roy, one of the

founding members of the Kolkata Partition Museum, has noted the relevance of materiality in memorization and its lack in curatorial spaces. Extracted from art galleries such as Aakar Prakar, the museum virtually hosts various art forms created by artists whose lives have been tainted with memories of the partition. Dr. Sourin Bhattachariya who migrated from East Pakistan at around the age of 10 recalls that his was the first batch of the now prestigious Jadavpur university, when the university of Kolkata was celebrating its centenary (Kanth, “In Conversation with Prof. Sourin Bhattachariya”). He taught in the latter and retired as Professor in 1990. His narrative is a personal account of his family’s experiences during Partition. His mother’s memories of their ancestral home in East Bengal, now Bangladesh, are vivid and evocative. The description of the “thalas” (plates) that his mother carried with her as a reminder of their past life serves as an attestation of the emotional attachment people had to their belongings. Bhattacharya’s own lack of nostalgia for his ancestral home is contrasted with the strong emotions felt by others, including her friend who felt nostalgic during Durga puja. His wife, Reeva Bhattachariya alias ReevaDi, mentioned about her high school in present Dhaka, called the Kamaru Nisa High School. She vividly remembered the pervasive presence of a gigantic banyan tree outside and a pond that faced the school. One is reminded of the DD national aired show ‘Neem Ka Ped’ written by Rahi Masoom Razaa where a refugee experiences nostalgia towards the Neem tree in his village. Reevadi’s family had to flee in August 1951, leaving behind her childhood dream of pursuing medicine from Sir Salimullah Medical College (SSMC) or the Mitford College. As the couple stated, while migrating across the border people brought their ornaments and idols they worshipped.

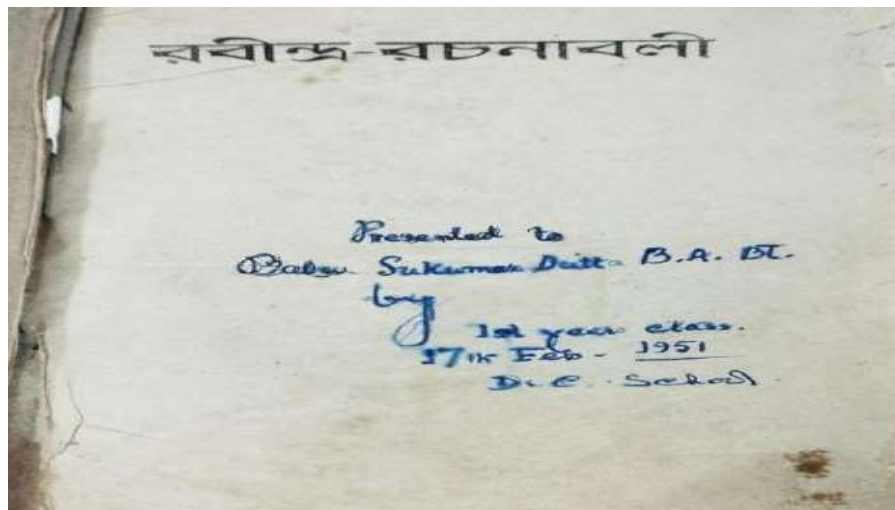


Figure 3: Sukumar Dutta’s copy of Rabindra Ratnavali

Soma Dutta, presently teaching at George college Kolkata, recounts her grandfather's pain as he migrated a week after his retirement from the University of Dhaka. He was presented an anthology of Rabindranath Tagore's anthology—a book that she still has preserved as wished to be called as her “family heirloom.” The book is stitched in a burgundy binding. The threads are torn and can be seen to have come apart. Binding is weathered therefore making the book board a mosaic of red and burgundy and beige. The surface is rough and almost rocky. The very first page is unevenly cleaved, from perhaps the burden of time and of being carried away in utter haste and chaos. The page bears in smeared blue ink the following scribing:

Sukumar Datta

February 1951

The same week, their family was ostracized from East Pakistan and he had to leave “overnight, with 12 children and 2 sisters.” She recalls how Sukumar always yearned to know if he would ever be remembered by his students after his retirement. From the University of Dhaka to Sukumar Datta, and then passed on to Soma from her parents, she emphasizes, “My grandfather read it, our parents read it, we have read it, and so will our future generations. We have retained this tattered torn book because this is our connect to Dhaka. It reminds of the atrocities and the way they were forced to vacate overnight” (Kanth, “In Conversation with Dr. Soma Dutta”).

Such instances of remembrance and recollection offer a space for multivalent deliberations on the subjective nature of nostalgia and how it can be influenced by personal experiences and circumstances.

The Delhi Partition Museum



Figure 4: Entrance, the Delhi Partition Museum (Courtesy: Photo by Nimrat Mehra)

In September 1947, 30,000 people were housed in 24 refugee camps across Delhi. Many more sought shelter in makeshift camps on streets or found refuge in private homes. Homes, hospitals, shops, and refugee vehicles were targeted. Thousands of Muslims were massacred, and monuments, mosques, and historical structures suffered damage. Notable examples include the desecration of Mehrauli's Moti Masjid and the destruction of Shah Alam's grave in Wazirabad. Refugee colonies like Lajpat Nagar, Rajendra Nagar, Patel Nagar, Jangpura, and Nizamuddin Extension were established and later gentrified (Rajput and Lidhoo). The Partition Museum in Delhi now preserves these memories through oral histories, photographs, and objects, capturing the trauma and resilience of those who lived through these events. These historic locations stand as witnesses to India's undivided past and its struggles during Partition.

Set between The Kashmir Gate and the Chandni Chowk, the museum narrates the stories of independence, migration, and rehabilitation through eight curated sections. These artefacts from Partition bear a stark witness to a time of profound upheaval, displacement, and resilience. Examination of these objects explores their material features, origins, and historical significance, uncovering the human stories they hold. Each artifact serves as a tangible connection to a past marked by trauma and survival, and offers both personal and collective insights into one of history's most transformative events.

Among the first necessities for displaced families were makeshift shelters and practical tools for survival. A beige, tattered tent tied to rusty steel rods, its edges frayed and inner side faded white, housed multiple families during their journeys to uncertain futures. Inside this modest shelter, items like a black trunk, an earthen vase tied with a rope, and a pot symbolize the minimal possessions refugees could carry. These objects, despite their simplicity, tell of lives uprooted and rebuilt amid adversity. Nearby stands a small golden bowl, tarnished with black spots where its original sheen has faded. This artifact, donated by Ashok Talwar, was purchased by his family after their migration from Chakwal, Pakistan, as they settled in a Delhi refugee camp. The bowl represents a new beginning, a small yet significant step toward stability in an unfamiliar land.



Figure 5. Blanket gifted to Jyoti Pang's family (Source: Partitionmuseum.org)

Textiles often evoke a sense of home and belonging and can be read as powerful symbols of memory. A checkered blanket in shades of red and yellow was a gift from Bijli Pehlwan, a humanitarian in Amritsar known for his relief efforts. Donated by Wing Commander Jyoti Punj, the blanket offered warmth and comfort to his family as they journeyed from Sialkot to Delhi, and thus embodies the kindness extended during times of crisis.

Utensils as well serve as pertinent memorabilia. The modest iron vessel carried by Sudershan Kumar Arya's family on their journey from Multan was used to store water—a basic but vital resource during migration. Similarly, a sewing machine belonging to another family underscores the necessity of portable tools that could sustain livelihoods during uncertain times. In the same vein, a tea set and camera salvaged by Gautam Anand's grandparents from Lahore also carry layered meanings. These items, once part of everyday life in a bustling city, were transported first to Amritsar and then to Delhi. They bear the ethos of continuity, of traditions, memories, and community, amid the pathos of dislocation.



Figure 6: Bedposts from the Museum exhibits
(Courtesy: Photo by Antara Baruah for ThePrint)

These bedposts, donated by Paramjit Singh Madhok, once belonged to a bedstead carried from Gujar Khan during the tumultuous period of Partition. Carved from wood, their weathered surfaces reveal a history of use and survival. The posts feature a central baluster-like design, with rounded segments tapering at intervals. The upper section includes a rectangular hollow, likely a functional joint to secure the structure. The cracks and aged patina suggest prolonged exposure to time and possibly harsh conditions during transit and later storage. Despite their simplicity, these posts hold significant provenance, as they embody the journey of a family uprooted by Partition and their effort to preserve fragments of their past. Now

preserved in the museum, they serve as artifacts of migration, memory, and resilience.

A wedding card from February 23, 1947, recalls the marriage of Satya Devi and Om Prakash Malhotra in Lahore. Dubbed “The Last Peaceful Wedding,” it represents the hope and joy of a time soon overshadowed by Partition’s turmoil. The card’s delicate paper, faded ink, and torn edges speak to the fragility of life during this period. Accompanying photographs of the couple and their baraat offer glimpses of celebration but also hint at the rupture that followed, as the family fled across the border, leaving their home behind.

The Khalifas of the Dilli Gharana preserved their legacy through medals that adorned the family’s women as necklaces. These pre-Partition accolades, shared by Vusat Iqbal Khan, testify to the continuity of artistic traditions even as physical and cultural landscapes were irrevocably altered.



Figure 7. Zuljanah by Veer Munshi.

Figure 8. Fallen House by Veer Munshi.

(Source: Partitionmuseum.org)

Partition also inspired poignant artistic expressions, often bearing tinctures of melancholy. Krishen Khanna’s “Refugee Train – 16 Hours Late” captures the anxiety of waiting for loved ones during a time of mass violence. Veer Mushi’s installation, Zuljanah, portrays a papier-mâché horse carrying bones, evoking the trauma of displacement. Named after Imam Hussein’s horse in the Battle of Karbala, it draws parallels between historical suffering and the collective grief of

Partition. Another installation, *The Fallen House*, by Munshi, embodies the memories of remnants of the event—upturned houses, relations, and lives. It stirs viewers to simulate the detrimental history of demolition and disorientation. Blurred newspaper clippings and haunting headlines, displayed on greyish-black walls, capture the urgency and despair of the time. Reports like “Delhi Almost Quiet,” “Women Jump into Wells to Avoid Capture,” and “16 Punjab Towns in Darkness” lay bare the atrocities that marked Partition. These papers, though faded and worn, are chilling reminders of the chaos that gripped the newly independent nation.

Contemporary installations like Debasish Mukherjee’s “Re-settling: Settling” reimagine Partition’s trauma in abstract forms. A rusted cycle placed under collapsing black rods evokes the physical and emotional damage of migration, while stark red borders signify the loss of safety. Such works bridge the past and present, inviting viewers to reflect on the contemporary struggles with displacement, migration, and refugee experience. A copper-plated tea set, utensils, and medals represent hope amidst loss. These items, donated by families who rebuilt their lives in Delhi, narrate the efforts of individuals to forge new communities and serve as an testimony to the lives they left behind.

Conclusion: Curatorship and Enculturation

Each object—from a tattered tent to an ornate medal—offers a lens into the lives disrupted by Partition. Displayed in museums and galleries, these pieces not only preserve history but also prompt us to remember and reflect, ensuring that the human stories of Partition remain alive for future generations. There need not be something profound, consciously produced to become the subject of partition studies. It can be something as ordinary as household memorabilia which becomes a host of tales redolent of the homelessness. Notwithstanding the conscious effort of creation, the ethical imperative in curation by museums is of earnest eminence. They serve the purpose of what Allan Merriam termed Enculturation. The exhibition “Parted Crafts” at the Indian Museum, Kolkata, curated by Archi Banarjee, showcases the impact of the 1947 Partition on Bengal’s handicrafts. Hosted at the Bengal Gallery, Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR), Kolkata, it highlights the displacement of artisans, loss of traditional raw materials, and disruption of cultural exchange networks, leading to the decline of Bengal’s handicrafts industry. This exhibition comes forth as an attempt to preserve the material culture of partition, providing a nuanced understanding of the complex consequences of Partition. A notable exhibit is a tangail sari crafted by Iti Biswas from Phulia, a town in Nadia renowned for its traditional tangail weaves in cotton and silk, which originated in Tangail, Bangladesh. Iti has woven the story of her life into the ‘anchal’ or free end of the sari, an extraordinary tale of separation, longing, deprivation, and triumph (Chakraborty). The historical—memorial and cultural reverberations and ramifications of the Partition oblige perpetual remembrance albeit in what one may call as ‘healthy’ spaces. Museums,

both virtual and on-site through exhibitions and curatorial practices, offer such liminal spaces—of collection and recollection, and of going back and carrying forward.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/86**WRITING KILVENMANI AS POLITICAL PRAXIS: POSTMODERN
HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE SUBALTERN ARCHIVE IN MEENA
KANDASAMY'S *THE GYPSY GODDESS*****B. DHARANI**Research Scholar, The Research Centre of English
Fatima College**DR.A.ROSELIN MARY**Associate Professor and Head (Retd)
The Research centre of English, Fatima College**Abstract**

This paper examines Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014) as a historiographic intervention that transforms narrative form into political praxis. Revisiting the 1968 Kilvenmani massacre, in which forty-four Dalit agricultural labourers were burnt alive in Tamil Nadu, the novel rejects linear realism and deploys metafiction, fragmented chronology, direct authorial intrusion, documentary pastiche, manifesto rhetoric, satire, and polyphonic dialogue. This study argues that such formal disruption is not aesthetic excess but a deliberate strategy aimed at challenging the epistemological frameworks through which caste atrocity is archived, sanitized, and forgotten. Drawing upon Linda Hutcheon's theory of historiographic metafiction, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's formulation of subaltern speech, Ranajit Guha's critique of elitist historiography, Michel Foucault's concept of the archive and power/knowledge, Mikhail Bakhtin's heteroglossia, and B. R. Ambedkar's analysis of caste hierarchy, the paper demonstrates that Kandasamy constructs a subaltern counter-archive that resists state-sponsored erasure. By foregrounding narrative mediation and refusing smooth closure, the novel exposes the violence embedded within official historiography and nationalist memory. In the novel *The Gypsy Goddess* it redefines literary experimentation as political praxis, an act of resistance that transforms storytelling into a mode of subaltern historiography.

Keywords: Meena Kandasamy; Kilvenmani massacre; political praxis; historiographic metafiction; subaltern archive; Dalit literature; caste violence.

Introduction: Recovering Kilvenmani from Historical Amnesia

The Kilvenmani massacre of 25 December 1968 marks one of the most brutal episodes of caste violence in post-Independence India. Forty-four Dalit agricultural labourers, men, women, and children were locked inside a hut and burnt alive by upper-caste landlords in the East Tanjore district of Tamil Nadu following a dispute over agricultural wages. Despite the enormity of this violence, Kilvenmani occupies only a marginal position within mainstream Indian

historiography. It surfaces intermittently in agrarian studies, labour histories, and left political narratives, yet rarely assumes central prominence within national memory.

This marginalization is not accidental. It reflects the structural logic of what Michel Foucault calls the archive: the system that determines what may be said, remembered, or rendered intelligible within official discourse. When caste atrocity is archived through police records, court judgments, and bureaucratic documentation, its moral and political urgency is frequently diluted. Violence becomes data. Murder becomes case file. The historical event is absorbed into administrative language.

Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* interrupt precisely at this juncture. Rather than offering a conventional realist reconstruction of the massacre, Kandasamy disrupts narrative coherence itself. The novel rejects chronological linearity, destabilizes authorial authority, and employs satire, manifesto, documentary insertion, and polyphonic voices. The text refuses the smooth transparency traditionally associated with historical fiction.

This paper argues that Kandasamy's formal experimentation constitutes political praxis. The novel doesn't just retell the events of Kilvenmani; it questions the very ways of knowing and understanding that allow such a tragedy to be forgotten or erased.

Through postmodern historiographic strategies, Kandasamy constructs what may be termed a subaltern counter-archive. Narrative form becomes an act of resistance. This strategy aligns with Spivak's insistence that ethical representation requires recognizing the limits of representation. The novel's metafictional interruptions therefore function as safeguards against appropriative realism. By exposing the scaffolding of narration, Kandasamy refuses to naturalize her authority.

Foucault's concept of the archive deepens this analysis. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault describes the archive not as a simple collection of documents, but as the underlying system that determines the rules of what can and cannot be expressed. Archives regulate discourse by determining which statements are legible, credible, and preservable. In the Indian context, the archive of caste violence is mediated through bureaucratic documentation, police reports, judicial verdicts, compensation registers. These documents transform massacre into case number. They translate communal trauma into administrative language. Such translation is not neutral; it is a technique of governance.

Through this lens, Kilvenmani becomes not only an event but a discursive formation. It is intelligible only insofar as it conforms to legal categories such as "riot," "arson," or "labour dispute." What disappears in this process is the structural violence of caste. Foucault's notion of power/knowledge clarifies how knowledge systems produce subjects through classification. Dalit labourers are

rendered as “agricultural workers,” “agitators,” or “victims,” categories that obscure their location within a graded caste hierarchy.

Kandasamy’s novel intervenes in this archival regime by constructing what may be termed a counter-archive. Instead of relying solely on institutional documentation, she integrates oral memory, satire, manifesto rhetoric, and metafictional reflection. This heterogeneous assemblage destabilizes the authority of singular documentation. The counter-archive does not claim objective purity; rather, it multiplies perspectives in order to resist administrative reduction. In this way, the novel performs what Foucault would describe as a “counter-memory” a mode of remembering the past that pushes back against and unsettles dominant historical narratives.

Ambedkar’s analysis of caste as a system of graded inequality provides the political foundation of this intervention. In *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar argues that caste is not merely a division of labour but a division of labourers, enforced through religious sanction and social exclusion. Caste produces hierarchy not only economically but symbolically and spatially. It structures who may own land, who may draw water, who may enter temples, and who may be burned without consequence. Without recognizing caste as a structural system of social and symbolic domination, the massacre risks being reduced to economic conflict between landlords and labourers.

Ambedkar also insists that social democracy must precede political democracy. Formal legal equality cannot dismantle caste hierarchy without radical social transformation. Kandasamy’s novel reflects this insight by exposing the gap between constitutional ideals and lived reality. The massacre occurs two decades after Independence, revealing the persistence of feudal power within democratic India. Through Ambedkarite critique, the novel reframes Kilvenmani not as aberration but as structural outcome.

Finally, the concept of praxis synthesizes these theoretical strands. In Marxist philosophy, praxis denotes the unity of theory and action reflection that transforms material conditions. Praxis is not abstract contemplation; it is intervention. When Kandasamy transforms narrative form into critique of historiography and caste, she enacts literary praxis. The novel becomes both analysis and action: it interrogates the archive while simultaneously reconstructing it.

Through these intersecting frameworks Hutcheon’s historiographic metafiction, Guha’s subaltern historiography, Spivak’s ethics of representation, Foucault’s archive theory, and Ambedkar’s critique of caste *The Gypsy Goddess* emerges as a complex negotiation between narration, archive, and political intervention. The novel doesn’t just narrate the story of Kilvenmani; it questions the very circumstances that make such a story possible to tell. By doing so, it turns fiction into a space where theoretical ideas and political tensions are actively contested.

Historiographic Metafiction and the Destabilization of Truth

From its opening pages, *The Gypsy Goddess* foregrounds narrative construction. The narrator confesses uncertainty about how to tell the story:

“There go all my titles, and any effort at sincerity. Now I am out of choices. So I settle on the curiously obscure and mildly enchanting choice, *The Gypsy Goddess*. I have a great title. I have a great story.” (Kandasamy 41)

The ironic tone unsettles expectations. The massacre is described as a “great story,” exposing the discomfort of aestheticizing atrocity. The admission foregrounds narrative artifice, preventing readers from mistaking fiction for transparent historical recovery. Instead of beginning with solemn historical exposition, Kandasamy begins with hesitation and irony. This refusal of reverential framing signals the novel’s resistance to conventional historical fiction, which often relies on immersive realism to create the illusion of authenticity.

Chronology itself is mocked. Linear progression cannot adequately represent structural violence. The profanity is deliberate; it rejects the decorum through which atrocity is sanitized. By collapsing the language of literary critique into the language of bodily violation, Kandasamy suggests that temporal neatness is complicit in moral evasion. Structural violence unfolds not as a contained event but as an ongoing condition. A linear timeline, beginning, escalation, climax, resolution, risks domesticating the massacre into narrative inevitability.

Fragmentation thus becomes an ethical strategy. By refusing seamless chronology, Kandasamy disrupts the reader’s desire for narrative closure. The broken structure mirrors the broken archive. Rather than presenting Kilvenmani as a singular catastrophic moment, the novel disperses it across digressions, anticipations, and retrospective commentary. The massacre hovers over the narrative, deferred yet omnipresent, refusing to be consumed as spectacle.

Linda Hutcheon argues that historiographic metafiction problematizes the notion of historical objectivity by revealing the narrativization of the past. In *The Gypsy Goddess*, this problematization takes on specific political urgency. The question is not merely whether history can be known, but who controls the narrative of violence. When the narrator repeatedly interrupts herself, anticipates readerly impatience, or comments on narrative strategy, she destabilizes the authority traditionally associated with the omniscient narrator. This destabilization parallels the novel’s interrogation of institutional historiography. Just as the narrator refuses to claim omniscience, the novel refuses to grant unquestioned authority to state archives.

Kandasamy also lays bare how storytelling is always selective. When the narrator admits, “I have a great story,” the statement carries an uneasy tone because it reveals that what counts as a “story” is shaped and constructed rather than natural. A massacre becomes something that can be told only when it is arranged within

familiar literary patterns. By subtly undercutting this process, Kandasamy makes readers aware of how suffering can be packaged and sold within literary markets. At the same time, the novel questions the global demand for trauma stories that make marginalized pain understandable and consumable for distant, urban audiences.

This reflexivity complicates the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. Traditional realism often seeks to honour victims through detailed representation, yet such representation can risk voyeurism. Kandasamy's fragmentation disrupts voyeuristic immersion. Readers are denied the comfort of seamless access. The text demands intellectual engagement rather than passive empathy.

The uncertainty around truth is also evident in the novel's shifting voice. The narrator moves between sarcasm, lyricism, a documentary style, and the tone of a political manifesto. These changes in register disrupt the idea that there is one stable or authoritative perspective. Instead, readers must move through contrasting tones and viewpoints, coming to understand that no single way of speaking can fully capture the complexity of the massacre. This range of voices recalls Bakhtin's idea of dialogism, where meaning arises not from a single, dominant claim to truth, but from the exchange and tension between different voices.

Importantly, the novel does not descend into relativism. It does not suggest that all interpretations are equally valid. The massacre is unequivocally condemned. What is destabilized is not moral judgment but epistemological certainty. The novel insists that historical truth is mediated through discourse, yet it simultaneously affirms the material reality of violence. This balance prevents the text from collapsing into postmodern skepticism detached from political accountability.

Kandasamy's metafiction also interrogates the genre of historical fiction itself. Conventional historical novels often reconstruct the past through immersive detail, minimizing the distance between reader and event. *The Gypsy Goddess* instead foregrounds distance. The narrator repeatedly reminds readers that they are encountering a constructed narrative. This strategy aligns with Bertolt Brecht's concept of the alienation effect, which seeks to prevent emotional absorption and encourage critical reflection. By refusing narrative transparency, Kandasamy transforms reading into analysis.

The destabilization of chronology further reinforces this critical stance. The massacre is announced early, yet its full depiction is deferred. This delay creates a temporal disjunction that mirrors the historical marginalization of Kilvenmani. Just as the event is postponed within the narrative, it has been postponed within national memory. The reader's impatience becomes analogous to historiographical neglect. Through this structural parallel, the novel enacts its critique formally.

Additionally, the narrator's confrontational tone challenges the reader's complicity. When she mocks expectations of chronological order, she implicitly

questions why readers desire narrative neatness. Is the demand for order a demand for comfort? Does chronological coherence provide psychological containment for traumatic history? By frustrating these desires, Kandasamy forces readers to confront their own positionality within systems of consumption and interpretation. The use of profanity plays a significant role in this destabilization. Obscenity punctures the veneer of academic and bureaucratic language that often surrounds discussions of caste violence. It introduces corporeality into discourse. The massacre is not an abstract historical episode but a visceral act of burning bodies. The narrator's coarse language resists euphemism. In doing so, it exposes how polite historiography can function as a mechanism of erasure.

Furthermore, the novel destabilizes the distinction between fiction and documentation. Documentary fragments are interspersed with imaginative reconstruction, yet their boundaries remain deliberately blurred. This blending challenges the hierarchy that privileges archival document over literary narration. By placing manifesto rhetoric alongside metafictional commentary, Kandasamy collapses the opposition between factual record and imaginative interpretation. Both are shown to be discursive constructions shaped by ideology.

This collapse does not equate fiction with falsehood. Instead, it elevates fiction as a legitimate mode of historical inquiry. If official archives are themselves structured by power, then fiction can serve as a corrective space of a site where suppressed narratives re-emerge. Historiographic metafiction thus becomes a tool for epistemic intervention.

Ultimately, the destabilization of truth in *The Gypsy Goddess* serves a double function. On the one hand, it dismantles the illusion of transparent historiography. On the other, it asserts the necessity of ethical remembrance. The novel refuses to provide closure because closure would imply resolution. Kilvenmani remains unresolved not only legally but structurally. Caste hierarchy persists. Agrarian inequality endures. To narrate the massacre as completed tragedy would be to betray its ongoing relevance.

By destabilizing narrative authority, chronology, and genre conventions, Kandasamy transforms historiographic metafiction into political critique. The novel exposes how history is written, who writes it, and whose suffering is minimized in the process. In doing so, it challenges readers to reconsider their relationship to the past not as passive recipients of documented fact, but as participants in the politics of memory.

Historiographic metafiction in *The Gypsy Goddess* is therefore neither ornamental nor abstract. It is a deliberate strategy of resistance. Through fragmentation, irony, and self-reflexivity, Kandasamy destabilizes not truth itself but the monopolization of truth by dominant institutions. The novel insists that to retell Kilvenmani is not merely to recount an event; it is to contest the authority that has long dictated how that event should be remembered.

Archive, Power, and Epistemic Violence

Foucault defines the archive as the system governing “the law of what can be said” (*The Archaeology of Knowledge* 129). Archives do not merely store events; they regulate intelligibility. Within official archives, caste violence is translated into bureaucratic language, FIRs, court proceedings, compensation records.

Such translation produces epistemic violence. The emotional, communal, and symbolic dimensions of massacre are flattened into administrative fact. Guha’s concept of “elitist historiography” illuminates this process. Subaltern deaths are acknowledged but rarely centered. They are absorbed into narratives of agrarian reform or political mobilization.

Kandasamy disrupts this archival logic by embedding documentary fragments and revolutionary pamphlets within the novel. The inserted Marxist declaration reads: “RED SALUTE!

Harvest is the season where patriotic myths come to die.” (83)

The pamphlet interrupts narrative continuity. It resists smooth realism and foregrounds political rhetoric. The novel thereby constructs a counter-archive, one that acknowledges ideological struggle rather than neutral documentation. This counter-archive does not claim purity. Instead, it exposes the ideological nature of all archival practices.

Caste, Class, and Structural Violence

A central achievement of *The Gypsy Goddess* lies in its refusal to collapse caste into class. The massacre emerges from a wage dispute, yet its violence exceeds economic conflict.

The novel notes: “In East Tanjore, the party was patronized only by the Pallars and Paraiyars and other outcastes” (124). This observation reveals caste specificity within class mobilization. Ambedkar insists that caste cannot be subsumed under class analysis because it structures social hierarchy beyond economic relations. The landlord Gopalakrishna Naidu declares: “If they want to stay on our land, they should obey our rules... Otherwise I will have to intervene and teach a lesson...” (54). The possessive pronoun “our” reveals feudal logic. Land ownership is intertwined with caste sovereignty. The threat implies not merely eviction but annihilation. By staging this intersection, Kandasamy challenges Marxist universalism. Class struggle is necessary but insufficient. Caste operates as an autonomous axis of domination.

Subaltern Speech and Ethical Mediation

Spivak’s warning about intellectual ventriloquism remains central to any attempt to narrate subaltern suffering. Kandasamy addresses this directly through intrusive authorial commentary.

She writes: “Now, the Nicki Minaj within the novelist must be laid to rest...” (68) The irreverent self-characterization destabilizes authorial seriousness. The narrator anticipates criticism and stages mock interrogation. Such gestures foreground positionality. Rather than claiming to recover authentic subaltern

voice, Kandasamy dramatizes the difficulty of representation. She acknowledges mediation and insufficiency.

This reflexivity becomes ethical praxis. The novel does not presume to speak for the subaltern; it exposes the conditions under which speech becomes audible

Heteroglossia and Discursive Struggle

Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, the coexistence of multiple social languages within the novel, illuminates Kandasamy's stylistic strategy. *The Gypsy Goddess* incorporates bureaucratic classification, revolutionary manifesto, satirical commentary, and feudal speech.

Consider the hierarchical taxonomy:

“Landlords – Mirasdars... Rich Peasants... Tenant Cultivators... And, at the bottom... Pallar, Paraiyar, Chakkilyar.” (69–70)

The list resembles sociological documentation. Yet the narrator mocks academic precision: “The education will be immediate, procedural and perfect; it will not display any of the haughty haphazardness of this novel.” (70)

Classification is parodied. Knowledge systems are revealed as reductive. Foucault's insight into power/knowledge is relevant here. Knowledge produces subjects through categorization. By exposing this process, Kandasamy resists epistemic containment. The novel becomes a site of discursive struggle.

Narrative as Political Praxis

Praxis, in Marxist thought, signifies the unity of theory and transformative action. It is not mere reflection but reflection that intervenes in material reality. For Marx, philosophy must move beyond interpreting the world to changing it. In *The Gypsy Goddess*, narrative itself becomes such action. Kandasamy does not separate aesthetics from politics; instead, she reconfigures literary form as a site of intervention. The novel does not simply describe structural violence—it enacts resistance against the structures that render such violence narratively manageable. The novel refuses to aestheticize massacre. Fragmentation unsettles the reader. Direct address implicates the audience. Satire destabilizes moral complacency. These strategies collectively prevent passive consumption. Rather than inviting sentimental identification alone, the text demands intellectual discomfort. The reader is forced to confront the instability of the narrative and, by extension, the instability of official history.

This is where praxis becomes visible. The transformation occurs not only at the level of content but at the level of reception. By disrupting conventional storytelling, Kandasamy disrupts habitual reading practices. The reader cannot glide through a seamless narrative arc; instead, she must pause, reassess, and reflect. This interruption mirrors the interruption that caste violence represents within the national narrative of democratic progress. Reading becomes an act of critical engagement rather than emotional absorption.

Political praxis here does not reside in explicit ideological instruction or didactic preaching. The novel does not offer a programmatic manifesto for revolution.

Instead, its politics operate through formal disruption. The refusal of linear chronology challenges teleological models of history that presume inevitable progress. The intrusive narrator exposes the mechanics of representation, thereby unsettling the authority of historical narration itself. The blending of satire with tragedy prevents sanctification while resisting trivialization. Through these techniques, Kandasamy transforms narrative into a mode of critique.

Furthermore, the novel redefines remembrance as active labor. To remember Kilvenmani within this fragmented structure requires effort. The reader must piece together dispersed fragments, navigate tonal shifts, and hold contradictions in tension. This labor mirrors the political labor required to confront caste hierarchy. Memory is not a passive inheritance but an active reconstruction. In this sense, the novel performs what Paulo Freire might call conscientization: the awakening of critical awareness through dialogic engagement. Although Kandasamy does not overtly invoke pedagogical theory, her narrative method compels readers to recognize their position within broader systems of knowledge and power.

Narrative praxis also operates through refusal- refusal of closure, refusal of consolation, refusal of sanitized language. Closure would imply resolution; yet the structural conditions that produced Kilvenmani persist. By denying narrative reconciliation, the novel resists transforming massacre into completed tragedy. Instead, it leaves the wound open, insisting on the continuity of caste violence within contemporary India. This refusal is itself political action. It denies the state and dominant historiography the comfort of containment.

In transforming narrative form, Kandasamy transforms reading into political encounter. The novel becomes not merely a representation of struggle but a site of struggle. The archive is contested within its pages. Authority is interrogated. The reader is implicated. Through formal experimentation, *The Gypsy Goddess* enacts praxis: it converts literary technique into a mode of resistance, demonstrating that storytelling, when self-conscious and disruptive, can intervene in the politics of memory and justice.

Memory, Trauma, and the Refusal of Closure

The refusal of closure is central to the novel's political force. Traditional historical fiction often resolves trauma through narrative reconciliation. Kandasamy resists such consolation. The massacre is not redeemed through martyrdom narrative. Nor is justice theatrically restored. This refusal aligns with trauma theory's insistence that certain violences resist narrative integration. Kilvenmani cannot be domesticated within national progress narratives. The novel's fragmentation thus mirrors historical rupture. Memory remains unsettled.

Dalit Feminist Interventions

Although primarily concerned with caste atrocity, *The Gypsy Goddess* also foregrounds gendered vulnerability. Women and children constitute a significant portion of the massacre victims. Dalit feminist scholarship insists that caste and patriarchy intersect. The burning of bodies carries symbolic dimensions of purity

and pollution. Kandasamy's insistence on naming and recounting women's suffering disrupts patriarchal historiography. Violence against Dalit women becomes central, not peripheral. Thus, political praxis extends to feminist critique.

Conclusion: Literature as Archival Resistance

By writing Kilvenmani through postmodern historiographic strategies, Meena Kandasamy constructs a subaltern archive that resists erasure. Her narrative techniques dismantle the authority of official historiography while exposing the violence embedded within systems of classification, documentation, and memory. Rather than reproducing the massacre within the language of state record or nationalist sentiment, *The Gypsy Goddess* disrupts the epistemological frameworks that have historically minimized caste atrocity. In doing so, the novel reclaims narrative space as a site of political struggle.

What emerges from this intervention is not simply an alternative account of Kilvenmani, but an alternative mode of historiography. The novel challenges the assumption that archives are neutral repositories of fact. It demonstrates that archives are structured by power by decisions about what to preserve, what to emphasize, and what to forget. Against this logic, Kandasamy assembles fragments: satire, manifesto, metafiction, classification, interruption. These fragments do not aspire to seamless unity. Instead, they embody resistance to closure. The very incompleteness of the narrative becomes its political strength.

In *The Gypsy Goddess*, literature becomes political praxis. Storytelling becomes archival resistance. Fragmentation becomes ethical refusal. The novel refuses to sanctify suffering through aesthetic solemnity, yet it equally refuses to trivialize it through narrative entertainment. By foregrounding mediation, Kandasamy prevents the reader from mistaking representation for recovery. Kilvenmani cannot be fully restored through narrative; it can only be persistently confronted. This confrontation carries implications beyond the specific historical event. The massacre of 1968 stands as a node within a longer continuum of caste violence in India. By resisting narrative closure, the novel insists that Kilvenmani is not an isolated tragedy but part of an ongoing structural reality. The archive of caste atrocity remains unfinished. Each act of remembrance must therefore be vigilant against institutional forgetting.

Moreover, Kandasamy's intervention expands the possibilities of Dalit literary politics. While Dalit writing has often been associated with testimonial realism, *The Gypsy Goddess* demonstrates that experimental form can be equally, if not more, radical. Postmodern techniques frequently criticized as elitist or apolitical are here mobilized in the service of subaltern memory. The novel thus unsettles rigid binaries between realism and experimentation, between political urgency and aesthetic innovation. It reveals that formal disruption can amplify rather than dilute political commitment.

The ethical dimension of this project lies in its refusal of comfort. Readers are denied catharsis. There is no redemptive arc that restores moral equilibrium.

Instead, the novel leaves us with unease a recognition that justice remains incomplete. This unease is productive. It resists the commodification of trauma as consumable narrative. It compels continued reflection on the structural conditions that enable caste violence.

Kilvenmani is not merely remembered; it is re-inscribed as unfinished struggle. The act of narration does not close the wound but keeps it visible. In this sense, Kandasamy's novel aligns with the notion of counter-memory: a form of remembrance that contests dominant histories and sustains marginalized voices. The subaltern archive she constructs is not fixed; it is dynamic, contested, and open to reinterpretation.

Narrative, here, is justice-in-progress. It cannot substitute for material transformation, but it can challenge the epistemic frameworks that legitimize inequality. By destabilizing historiographic authority and exposing the politics of archival production, *The Gypsy Goddess* affirms the power of literature to intervene in public memory. It reminds us that how we tell history shapes how we imagine justice. Through fragmentation, irony, and relentless self-reflexivity, Kandasamy transforms the novel into a space where remembrance becomes resistance and where the struggle against erasure continues.

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DABEER SI/SF & MA/87**CULINARY PRACTICE AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION: A STUDY ON THE PORTRAYAL OF THE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF THE INDIAN CHINESE COMMUNITY IN SELECTED FOOD VLOGS****KANKANA GHOSH**Research Scholar, Department of Mass Communication
Assam University, Silchar, India**Abstract**

Food and culinary expression are crucial parts of human lives for their survival. Food serves as a cultural bridge within a society. Additionally, culinary expression also plays a pivotal role in society as a means of communication to portray the cultural identity of specific communities. The current study examines the culinary practice of the Indian Chinese community in Kolkata as a means of communication. Highlighting the vibrant food scene of India's oldest Chinatown, this research study explores the culinary expression of the Indian Chinese community in Kolkata. This study also showcases Chinese food and culinary expression by analysing visual representation and narratives of Kolkata's selected food vlogs. The analysis describes how the culinary practice of the Indian Chinese community expresses and conveys the community values and cultural identity for their survival in Indian society. This research employs a qualitative methodological approach by conducting content analysis of selected Kolkata-based food vlogs to illustrate the importance of food and culinary expression in the process of preservation of the cultural identity of the Indian Chinese community in Kolkata. The study contributes to the comprehension of the culinary practice of the Indian Chinese community as a medium of communication in multicultural settings for preserving cultural identity and cultural heritage.

Keywords: Culinary Practice, Indian Chinese Community, Food, Communication, Cultural Identity

1. Introduction**1.1 Background of the study**

The Indian Chinese community in Kolkata has a long history of being a unique cultural community and the community's culinary traditions are essential to the legacy's transmission and preservation. From the study of Biswas (459), it has been identified that one of the most important ways in which Chinese and Indian cultures have expressed their identities is through the blending of their culinary traditions. This mixture which is specifically referred to as Indian Chinese cuisine illustrates the process of transferring cultural ideas through food connecting Chinese immigrants' original cultural customs with their assimilation into Indian society. Generations of people transmit cultural values, customs and memories

through the use of culinary arts. A sense of cultural continuity and belonging is upheld by the Indian Chinese community through the preparation and consumption of food in addition to basic needs. Cantonese and Hakka cooking traditions were the main culinary traditions that the Chinese settlers brought to Kolkata when they arrived mostly in the 18th and 19th centuries (Biswas 388). Still, once they made their home in Kolkata their food started to take on the tastes and local ingredients of the Indian population resulting in a distinct hybrid style of cooking. Recipes that have gained popularity across India such as Manchurian chilli chicken and Hakka noodles are examples of this cultural transfer. Indian tastes for strong flavours and spices have been incorporated into these dishes which have been inspired by Chinese cooking methods giving them a unique culinary character (Biswas 204). The adaptation of these recipes demonstrates how immigrant communities manage a fundamental part of their identity while navigating their cultural heritage in a new setting. In Kolkata's Tangra neighbourhood popularly referred to as Chinatown restaurants and eateries founded by the Indian Chinese community have developed into hubs for cross-cultural interaction. Indian Chinese cuisine has been spread not only throughout the community but also to a wider segment of the Indian population due to these culinary establishments. Because of this, Chinese food has been able to enter Kolkata's wider culinary scene and contribute to the city's growing appreciation of its cultural diversity (Roy 113). Food festivals and festivities—particularly those held in conjunction with the Chinese New Year—are essential for the community's culinary traditions to continue. Younger Indian Chinese generations are taught about traditional Chinese cooking methods, ingredients and the symbolic meanings attached to particular dishes through these festivals. Chinese heritage has been preserved in different parts of Kolkata considering the spread of Chinese cuisine but cultural fusion has also resulted from it. With time the Indian Chinese community embraced Indian cuisine incorporating regional spices, ingredients and cooking techniques (Roy and Basu 19). Indian Chinese food was created as a result of this fusion and has since spread throughout India surpassing its original ethnic boundaries. Cultural transmission through food is one way immigrant communities such as the Indian Chinese community in Kolkata adapt to their new environment and preserve elements of their identity while simultaneously influencing and being influenced by the broader cultural milieu.

1.2 Statement of problem

The culinary traditions of the Indian Chinese community in Kolkata have played a significant role in expressing and conserving their rich cultural legacy. As local Indian ingredients and traditional Chinese flavours have been combined over time Indian Chinese cuisine has developed into a unique aspect of Kolkata's culinary culture. For the Indian Chinese community, food serves as a communication and cultural transmission tool, but this function is still poorly understood. Additionally, food vlogs have become a powerful medium for communicating and

representing cultural identities as digital platforms have grown in popularity (Nag 222). The way in which these vlogs portray the cultural and communicative significance of the culinary traditions they frequently feature—especially when considering the Indian Chinese community—has not been thoroughly examined. The goal of this study is to examine how the Indian Chinese community in Kolkata communicates and portrays their culinary customs through food vlogs. This study looks into the ways that Indian Chinese culinary customs serve as a vehicle for identity and cultural expression as well as how these practices are portrayed in digital media with a special emphasis on food related videos. The study sheds light on how these food vlogs convey the identity and cultural meanings associated with Indian Chinese food as well as whether they fairly represent the community's legacy or help to commercialize it (Samanta and Chattopadhyay 3634). Since digital content is becoming more and more influential in forming cultural perceptions it is crucial to comprehend how food vlogs depict these elements in order to appreciate how they either preserve or modify cultural narratives.

1.3 Significance of the study

The current study is quite significant as Kolkata is famous for a variety of Food and the Indian Chinese Community is sharing its cultural heritage in Kolkata through culinary practice. The Indian Chinese Community in Kolkata shares their cultural identity through culinary practice in both old and new Chinatown. The Tiretta Bazaar and Tangra area in Kolkata are very famous for Chinese cuisine. In this context, the current study is significant because it helps to analyse the representation of the cultural identity of the Indian Chinese Community in different food vlogs considering the culinary expression.

2. Literature review

2.1 Culinary expression as a means of communication

Culinary expression is considered a powerful and effective tool of communication for transcending cultural barriers and language. In order to convey emotion and share tradition, food is one of the significant ways in society (Stajcic 77). Culinary expression is also helpful in building a connection with people in society. A deep significance of culture is carried by ingredients as well as dishes. It also helps to foster a sense of love and belongingness. Culinary expression is also a way of sharing history and heritage with people. Different types of spices carry a deep value of regional significance. Recipes are passed down through traditional customs and values. For this reason, culinary expression of a specific community can be a means of communication to portray intercultural identity. In the sphere of culture, food plays a pivotal role in people's lives. Culinary expression helps to bring people together by igniting conversation. Additionally, it is also effective to bridge the gap among people. Culinary expression has become one of the profound ways of communicating with people and making people engaged in the societal process. With the help of culinary expression, a community can convey its message to people in the society. Food can function as a symbolic aspect as a

means of communication for the purpose of sharing messages with others (Food as a Form of Communication).

2.2 Concept of Cultural Identity

Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity highlights the idea that identity is dynamic and shaped by social historical and cultural contexts rather than being set in stone. He contends that both personal experiences and common cultural heritage shape cultural identity which is a dynamic process of becoming (Hall 392). According to Hall, there are two ways to think about cultural identity: the first is a collective shared history that gives a group a sense of cohesion and unity while the second recognizes the discontinuities and differences within identities which are constantly changing in response to outside factors and power dynamics. Hall's theories are evident in the way Kolkata's Indian Chinese Community navigates its cultural identity. Chinese immigrants brought their traditions, food and customs with them when they came to Kolkata more than 200 years ago. The celebration of Chinese holidays, the use of the Chinese language in the community and the distinctive culinary customs of the Indian Chinese community particularly in Kolkata's Chinatown neighbourhoods are examples of the ways that the Indian Chinese people have preserved a collective cultural legacy over time that ties them to their Chinese origins (Bhandari 102). The Indian socio-cultural environment has nevertheless also influenced and changed this identity. For example, Indian Chinese cuisine is a metaphor for its hybrid identity since it combines traditional Chinese cooking techniques with Indian spices and ingredients. Hall's second idea—that identity is the result of ongoing interaction and adaptation—is reflected in this blending. The historical discontinuities that have shaped the community's identity include political tensions during the Sino-Indian War that resulted in marginalization. This dual aspect of cultural identity is demonstrated today by the way Indian Chinese culture is portrayed in Kolkata's food vlogs which highlight both the legacy's continuity and the identity dynamic evolution shaped by the local context.

2.3 Restaurant business as an occupation of the Indian Chinese Community

Chinese in Kolkata are mainly well recognised for the restaurant business. Kolkata is famous for its food and different types of culinary expressions draw the attention of people. In this regard, it can be stated that the restaurant business is one of the primary sources of income for Indian Chinese in Kolkata. Chinese eateries have been available in Kolkata since the 1900s. In the Bowbazar area of Kolkata, there was a renowned Chinese restaurant named Nanking. Earlier British officials visited this place frequently (Roy and Basu 285). The popularity of Chinese cuisine in Kolkata is one of the reasons to flourish the restaurant business. Mostly Indian Chinese people who were associated with the tannery business, have started the restaurant business later due to the popularity of Chinese cuisine. Additionally, Indian Chinese people who have dropped out of their school, get associated with the restaurant business because it needs a little to no education.

2.4 Representation of the Cultural identity of the Indian Chinese Community through culinary practice

As a potent tool for cultural representation and adaptation, the culinary customs of Indian Chinese residents of Kolkata vividly convey and express their cultural identity. From the study of Shum (624), it can be stated that being among the city's oldest immigrant groups the Indian Chinese community has managed to preserve a unique identity by fusing Indian and Chinese influences. Their culinary traditions are where this hybrid identity is most evident as food serves as a medium for cultural fusion and communication in addition to serving as a symbol of cultural preservation. Often referred to as Indian Chinese, the Indian Chinese food that has developed in Kolkata is a fusion of Indian spices and flavours with Chinese cooking methods giving it a distinct gastronomic identity from either traditional Chinese or Indian cuisine (Nair 221). The Indian Chinese community in Kolkata uses food as a means of sharing its culture, history and adaptation. Dishes like chili chicken, Hakka noodles and Manchurian which combine the flavours of two cultures are served at restaurants in the city's Chinatown neighbourhoods like Tangra. More than just food, these dishes tell a cultural story about how the Indian Chinese community has negotiated its identity in a foreign country by preserving and transforming its heritage through food. Furthermore the representation of Indian Chinese culinary customs in Kolkata's food vlogs and other media outlets aids in spreading awareness of this distinctive cultural identity among a wider audience (Reddy and van Dam 104). In order to demonstrate how food serves as a link between the community's Indian experiences and Chinese heritage, food vlogs frequently highlight the rich history, customs and tales that go into the dishes. By using food as a living symbol of their hybrid identity the Indian Chinese community is able to make their presence known in Kolkata's cultural landscape.

2.5 Theoretical framework

Considering the theoretical aspects of the portrayal of culinary expression in media, certain theories can be aligned with. George Herbert Mead as well as Herbert Blumer developed a theory of Symbolic Interactionism (Nickerson 221). This theory describes how communication can be done by creating meaning with the help of different symbols. Food plays a vital role in conveying shared meanings within a community (Al-Gabry et al. 511). In order to communicate the cultural identity of a community, culinary expression acts as a symbol. Through this symbol, interactionism is possible for sharing the values of a specific community. The media plays a crucial role in sharing the symbols of the community through culinary practice by preparing and consuming traditional dishes. It helps to symbolize the identity of a group or community in society. Social status as well as values of a community such as the Indian Chinese Community is represented through culinary practices in Kolkata. Certain foods are also used in different rituals or festivals of a community which portray the

cultural identity. In the case of the Indian Chinese Community, Chinese cuisine in Kolkata represents the cultural identity and heritage of the Kolkata people which is a key aspect of their survival after the migration from China. This shared culinary practice, the Indian Chinese Community reinforces the cultural identity and group solidarity.

On the other hand, Social Identity Theory is also aligned with this research study. People may define their identity through culinary practice in society. This theory states that in order to express the membership of a group, food and culinary expression are the key aspects. Unique as well as ethnic identity is created through culinary practice (Perry et al. 202). Preparing certain foods reinforces social cohesion. It helps to strengthen the sense of love and belongingness of the Indian Chinese Community in Kolkata. According to this theory, ethnic groups can align themselves with the collective identity of their specific community through food and culinary practices. For this reason, Social Identity theory can be linked with this research study.

2.6 Research gap

From previous literature, a detailed comprehension of cultural identity is generated. In addition to this, culinary expression is also used as a means of communication for analysing the cultural heritage of a community. However, previous literature does not describe the illustration of culinary expression by different food vlogs considering the representation of the cultural identity of the Indian Chinese Community in Kolkata. For this reason, this research focuses on the culinary practices of the Indian Chinese community as a means of communication in Indian society to preserve their cultural identity. Moreover, the representation of the Indian Chinese community through culinary expression in different food vlogs has not been found in previous studies. In the context of the Indian Chinese community in Kolkata, the study examines the connections between culinary customs, cultural identity and digital representation in an effort to bridge this research gap.

3. Research questions, Research objectives and Research methodology

3.1 Research question

The research questions of this study are furnished below:

RQ1: How does the culinary practice of the Indian Chinese Community represent their cultural identity?

RQ2: What is the role of culinary practice in communicating the cultural identity of the Indian Chinese Community in Kolkata?

RQ3: How do food vlogs portray the cultural identity of the Indian Chinese Community in Kolkata?

3.2 Research objectives

The objectives of the study are listed below:

- To understand the concept of cultural identity of the Indian Chinese Community in Kolkata

- To analyse the importance of culinary expression of the Indian Chinese Community as a means of communication in Kolkata
- To illustrate the role of food vlogs in portraying the cultural values of the Indian Chinese Community in Kolkata

3.3 Research Methodology

3.3.1 Research philosophy

Research philosophy is known as the assumption of belief that focuses on the way of conducting the entire research study. It basically helps to underpin the process of research including data collection and analysis for getting an outcome at the end of the study (Mbanaso et al. 81). Research philosophy is also useful to help the researcher in formulating research questions. Research methods are also decided through the proper selection of research philosophy. There are mainly four types of research philosophies. These are interpretivism, positivism, realism, post positivism and pragmatism. Interpretivism philosophy is often used for qualitative study for generating an in-depth understanding of the entire phenomenon by observation (Kirongo and Odoyo 202). On the other hand, positivism philosophy is based on a belief that information should be objective. For this reason, this philosophy focuses on quantitative data which is believed to be trustworthy. In order to understand the societal aspects by analysing the underlying structure of observable phenomena of the society, realism philosophy is effective (Mauthner 76). Additionally, the post positivism philosophy deals with the influence of subjectivity as well as interpretation and context. For solving any specific kind of problem, pragmatism research philosophy is used. In this research, interpretivism research philosophy is chosen. This is because this philosophy of the research helps to generate an in-depth understanding of the concept of cultural identity and the representation of the cultural identity of the Indian Chinese Community in food vlogs by considering culinary expression as a medium of communication in Indian society.

3.3.2 Research approach

The deductive, abductive and inductive approaches are three distinct research reasoning and conclusion-drawing techniques each with unique traits and uses. With the inductive approach particular observations are followed by more comprehensive generalizations and theories. This method involves first gathering data after which researchers search for trends or regularities (Mulisa 113). They formulate hypotheses or theories based on these patterns. Qualitative research is frequently linked to inductive reasoning because it stresses the investigation and comprehension of phenomena without beginning with preconceived conceptions. When knowledge on a subject is scarce and the objective is to develop new theories rather than test pre existing ones the inductive approach is employed. The deductive method on the other hand starts with an established theory or hypothesis and measures it empirically. It entails applying general reasoning to specific situations. Researchers begin with a theory, develop hypotheses and then collect

evidence to support or contradict the theories (Taherdoost 53). Quantitative research which aims to test theories and hypotheses in various contexts is frequently associated with this approach. The abductive method begins with insufficient observations and proceeds to the most plausible explanation. Abduction as opposed to induction or deduction is concerned with determining the most plausible explanation for a collection of observations or phenomena especially in cases where there is uncertainty (Roy and Uekusa 383). It is applied when observations cannot be explained by current theories and new information is required to produce an explanation. Although it can be used in mixed-methods studies abductive reasoning is frequently used in qualitative research. In this research inductive approach is useful to be followed for conducting qualitative research. For analysing the cultural identity of the Indian Chinese Community, this research approach is effective.

3.3.3 Data collection and analysis

In a research study, data collection is one of the crucial aspects for meeting the research objectives at the end. There are mainly two types of data used in research study such as quantitative data and qualitative data. In order to analyse the aspects of cultural identity, qualitative data is used in this study. Secondary qualitative data is effective here to generate in-depth understanding of the representation of cultural identity through the culinary practice of the Indian Chinese Community in Kolkata. For analysing qualitative data from selected food vlogs, content analysis is conducted in this research study. From the selected food vlogs, the researcher has chosen a certain code for developing key themes to meet the research objectives.

3.3.4 Sampling process

Sampling is a process of selecting participants or samples for the purpose of data collection. There are mainly two types of sampling processes such as probability sampling and non probability sampling. If the samples are chosen on a random basis, the researcher considers it as probability sampling. On the other hand, if the samples are chosen based on a non random process. Here, each participant does not get an equal chance to be selected for the research. In this research, purposive sampling is used. This sampling process is a part of non probability sampling. It is chosen because, with the help of this sampling process, the researcher can get the samples that have the characteristics which the researcher may need in the research. For this reason, based on a specific purpose like understanding the cultural identity of the Indian Chinese Community through culinary practice, the mentioned sampling process is selected. In this research, two food vlogs are chosen. Two vlogs are about old and new Chinatown in Kolkata. One video was published on 10th January 2024 and another one was published on 18th November 2023. So the sample interval is two months. Two videos have been chosen based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined below:

Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Food vlogs are selected which have the content about Chinatown in Kolkata	Food vlogs are excluded which do not have content about old and new Chinatown in Kolkata
Food vlogs are included if the language of content is in English	Food vlogs other than English language are excluded
Food vlogs are chosen which are verified by the Youtube platform	Food Vlogs are excluded which are not verified by Youtube

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Unit of analysis of this study are visual elements, language, interaction and locations represented in the food vlogs. The sample size of this study is 286 minutes as two vlogs are selected which have a duration of 11 minutes and 13 minutes respectively. The content of the selected two vlogs is analyzed to find out common aspects of Chinatown Kolkata and the lives of the Indian Chinese Community. The research is conducted only for academic purposes. Through content analysis, in this research, the representation of the cultural identity of the Indian Chinese Community in food vlogs is described.

4. Result

4.1 Food vlog of Sinful Foodie

The vlog was published in January 2024. In this vlog, the narrator has stated that the exploration of morning breakfast in Tiretta Bazaar is one of the most awaited factors. This food vlog has begun its presentation by wishing good morning to its viewers as this vlog is about morning breakfast (Untried Morning Street Food in Chinatown, Tiretti Bazaar, Kolkata). This video has narrated the exploration of street food in Kolkata for enjoying authentic as well as unique blend of Chinese influenced breakfast (Untried Morning Street Food in Chinatown, Tiretti Bazaar, Kolkata). The representation of Tiretta Bazaar (old Chinatown) in the vlog is like a place that awakens people with aromas of unique Chinese food including meatball soup and sticky rice. The host in this vlog has used the term ‘Chinese inspired breakfast’. It means the breakfast offered by the Indian Chinese Community is inspired by their cultural identity which is Chinese. According to Severin Kuok, the cultural identity of Chinese people living in India is Chinese whereas the political identity of them is Indian (Chinese Indian or Indian Chinese). In this video, the cultural identity of the Indian Chinese Community is represented by saying unique Chinese-inspired breakfast. Auntie’s meatball soup is very famous as per the host of this food vlog (Untried Morning Street Food in Chinatown, Tiretti Bazaar, Kolkata). The vlog has also focused on the portrayal of the garnishing process of food that is offered by the Indian Chinese Community in Tiretta Bazaar. Different types of culinary expression are portrayed in this vlog by using the close shot of the food such as sticky rice which is wrapped in bamboo

leaves and chicken shumai (Untried Morning Street Food in Chinatown, Tiretti Bazaar, Kolkata). These are unique and authentic Chinese food available in old Chinatown. According to this vlog, there are certain unexpected finds such as sesame balls and savoury churros which not only have unique names but also have unique tastes that portray the cultural identity of the Chinese community in Kolkata (Untried Morning Street Food in Chinatown, Tiretti Bazaar, Kolkata). In this context, it can be stated from the mentioned food vlog that as per the point of view of the host or narrator, Tiretti Bazaar is a hidden gem, especially in the morning because it buzzes with flavours and energy. This place and the community basically blend with Chinese influence and local needs. Street food is one of the common local aspects in Kolkata for food lovers. On the other hand, sticky rice as well as meatball soup indicate the Chinese influence in Kolkata. In order to preserve the cultural identity of the Indian Chinese Community in Kolkata, they offer diverse street food in Tiretti Bazaar which is known as a breakfast market. The vlog has also described that the culture of morning street food in Tiretti Bazaar reflects the culinary heritage of the Indian Chinese Community which blends with the city's rich culinary expression. This food vlog also showcases the uniqueness and craftsmanship of local Indian Chinese vendors which represent their way of communication.

4.2 Food vlog of Khaane Mein Kya hain

The vlog has given a headline where the channel has mentioned a phrase i.e. original Indian Chinese in Kolkata. It indicates the cultural uniqueness and cultural identity of the Chinese community in Kolkata (Vijayakar, Kunal). This video is about Indian Chinese food available in the new Chinatown i.e. Tangra. Unique dishes blend with Chinese and Indian flavours to represent the cultural heritage of the Indian Chinese Community. The food vlog has stated that the culinary charm of the Indian Chinese community remains unchanged even after 15 years. Beijing restaurant in Tangra (new Chinatown) has been one of the culinary landmarks for more than 20 years. In order to evoke nostalgia, Chili chicken is one of the must-try dishes in the restaurant. Chinese cuisine in India has been very popular for over 300 years which started in Tangra. This aspect is described in this food vlog for analysing the cultural heritage of the Indian Chinese Community in Kolkata. In order to assimilate with the culture of India, the Indian Chinese food has evolved from traditional Chinese cuisine distinctly (Vijayakar, Kunal). In order to explore different Indian Chinese culinary delights, Chinatown is an option. The key aspects that have been found from this food vlog are an analysis of the culinary heritage of the Indian Chinese community and the popularity of Chinese food among people in Kolkata. The blend of Chinese culture with Indian society has created a unique gastronomic identity. As per the owner of Beijing restaurant in the new Chinatown, Chili chicken is served to the people of Kolkata which showcases the local preferences of flavour and spices. Food preparation as well as food consumption act as a means of non-verbal communication (Jurafsky 214).

Cooking style and culinary practice highlight the value of a specific community. This is the main factor in serving Chili Chicken among the people of Kolkata considering their preferences of flavour and spices as well. Additionally, the study of Jurafsky (214) also shows that culinary practice plays a crucial role in fostering connections between community members by sharing meals with people. It transcends the verbal language also. The Indian Chinese Community portrays cultural narratives through culinary expression. It is because culinary tradition reflects the cultural narratives and identities (Food for Thought: Paul Rozin's Research and Teaching at Penn). For this reason, Chinese restaurants in Chinatown Kolkata play a pivotal role in reflecting the cultural identities of the Indian Chinese Community through culinary practice. In this vlog, Monica, the restaurant owner, has described the life journey from opening a small eatery to running a renowned restaurant in Chinatown. It is also illustrated in this food vlog that Monica's journey considering the cultural assimilation in society, challenges and opportunities to establish the restaurant in Kolkata is a contribution to the preservation of the culinary heritage and tradition of China. At Beijing restaurants, Momos are served by exemplifying the way of refining traditional recipes. For those people who dislike this dish, the refined recipe of Momo is helpful to revive the communication by providing a fresh take to them (Vijayakar, Kunal). Indian Chinese food is one of the appeals that has widespread already to communicate the cultural identity of Chinese living in Kolkata through food. The vlog focuses on the sense of nostalgia through food and culinary expression. The distinction between authentic Chinese cuisine and Indian Chinese cuisine emphasizes the regional adaptation for catering for the local taste in Kolkata. This has helped to generate a new culinary niche in Chinatown (Vijayakar, Kunal). This vlog has portrayed the cultural identity of the Indian Chinese community, their survival stories and setting up new businesses to survive in a new society. The visuals of this video portray the culinary heritage of Chinese food in Kolkata to analyse the communicative aspects of the Indian Chinese Community.

5. Discussion

There are certain common keywords have been found to develop themes:

Codes	Theme
Indian Chinese Cuisine	Theme 1: Preservation of cultural heritage of Indian Chinese community
Cultural heritage	
Culinary practice	Theme 2: Culinary practice reflects the cultural identity as a means of communication
Culinary practice	

Table 2: Content analysis

Theme 1: Preservation of cultural heritage of Indian Chinese community

From the above two food vlogs, it can be analysed that the history of Chinese cuisine in India reflects the cultural heritage of the Chinese community living in India. Representation of Chinese cuisine illustrates the deep root of historical and cultural heritage in Kolkata and the traditional cooking practices of Chinese cuisine with the touch of Indian preference convey the meaning of cultural fusion. Close up shots have been used to portray the dishes such as momo along with chili chicken which basically emphasise the significance of the cultural heritage of the Chinese in Kolkata. The culinary tradition has been continued and passed down through generations as a means of communication to sustain the identity of the Indian Chinese people in the Indian society (Bonnerjee 201). The portrayal of food vlogs represents the process that the Chinese community follows in Kolkata for preserving its cultural heritage for assimilate with Indian society. Additionally, the personal stories shared by Monica Liu show an emotional reflection of deep-rooted rich history of China and Chinese culture (Vijayakar, Kunal, 2023). Different visual elements such as photographs of family gatherings and old photographs of Chinatown enhance the view of the restaurant of Tangra. These are also some important elements of reflection of cultural heritage. This sentimental depiction highlights the relationship between identity and food showing how for the Indian Chinese community culinary experiences act as a link to the past.

Theme 2: Culinary practice reflects the cultural identity as a means of communication

Two selected vlogs describe the landscape of Chinese culinary practice in Kolkata and the local adaptation of the same. Communication through culinary practice helps to reflect the cultural identity of the Indian Chinese Community. Kunal's observations on the Chinese food scene in Kolkata provide a rich representation of cultural identity through food highlighting the ways in which Indian Chinese people communicate through their culinary customs (Vijayakar, Kunal). Chinese cuisine in Kolkata has a history that spans more than three centuries and its development shows both the adaptation to local tastes and the preservation of traditional elements. Not only do famous restaurants like Monica Liu's Beijing serve food but they also serve as cultural landmarks where specialities like chili chicken and distinctive momos come to represent a hybrid identity. These dishes represent a blending of cultural influences and a sense of nostalgia demonstrating how the community has embraced and changed its culinary heritage. Tiretta Bazaar's lively ambience which is infused with the scents of various cuisines serves as another example of this cross-cultural exchange (Untried Morning Street Food in Chinatown, Tiretti Bazaar, Kolkata). Kunal's passion for lesser-known treats like sticky rice wrapped in bamboo leaves and Aunties' meatball soup emphasizes the value of individual tales and ties to the community in culinary encounters (Vijayakar, Kunal; Untried Morning Street Food in Chinatown, Tiretti

Bazaar, Kolkata). These foods are stories that honour the Indian Chinese identity; they are more than just meals. Delightful surprises in dishes like savoury churros and chicken shumai also highlight how this culinary fusion is always changing, allowing both locals and tourists to interact with a vibrant culture. The Indian Chinese community uses food as a vital tool to convey its history values and identity in this context fusing innovation and tradition to create a diverse range of flavours.

6. Conclusion

It can be concluded that the culinary practice of the Indian Chinese community in Kolkata communicates the tradition, history and heritage in an effective manner. The food vlogs help to understand the role of the cultural identity of the Chinese community in India by considering its culinary expression as food is one of the core mediums for illustrating the cultural expression in the society. Additionally, the food vlogs focus on the culinary expression of the eateries and restaurants in Chinatown by using close up shots of food. The hosts of each food vlog have portrayed the uniqueness of Chinese food which blends with local preferences in Kolkata. It can be stated that food vlogs provide a vibrant platform that not only highlights the Chinese community's culinary legacy in Kolkata but also captures their changing identity. These vlogs capture the community's inventiveness and tenacity in maintaining their cultural heritage while also welcoming regional influences by showcasing traditional recipes, cooking techniques and the backstories of these dishes. A greater awareness of cultural identity is fostered by this interaction between tradition and innovation underscoring the importance of food as a means of expression and connection in a multicultural society. In the end, these vlogs support a larger story about cultural diversity and the continuous discussion between tradition and modernity.

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